

Ethic of Interdependence as a Basis for Ethic of Social Responsibility and Sustainable Society

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Sustainable society is based on sustainable enterprises. Their social responsibility is high, based on ethic of interdependence rather than individualism; it implies systemic thinking by holistic perception, thinking, decision-making, and action.

The selected problem and viewpoint of our dealing with it

A 20%-part of humankind established entrepreneurship and innovation by freeing the individual initiative and competition instead of previous monopolies of guilds, clergy, and nobles. It became the world's advanced part. The other 80% of humankind did not do so or did not do so then. (Rosenberg, Birdzell, 1986). In World Bank data the span of national per capita incomes grew from 3:1 before freeing the individual initiative, to 100:1 in one century before 1970, and to +500:1 now. This process changed the prevailing knowledge and ethic. Individualism prevailed. Specialization grew along the growing amount of humankind's knowledge. Besides their good consequences, individualism and specialization make people think narrowly. After 1950, this dangerous habit caused establishment of systems theory; its practice is still too limited for humankind to avoid current problems. Now, knowledge and ethic of sustainable development enhance it by ethic of interdependence, social responsibility, and sustainable society.

One-sidedness, general systems theory, sustainable development paradigms

One-sidedness of knowledge and ethic of humankind reached a very dangerous triple pick in 1914-1945: two world wars and the economic crisis. People kept dying in millions in wars etc. later on, too, due to one-sided decisions of the influential ones. Scientists, who lived in these terrible times, offered humankind systems theory to prevent re-appearing of such crises.

The General Systems Theory was first, now there are many systems theories and cybernetics (Francois, 2004). Many disciplines that have emerged from them tend to forget their roots (Umpleby, 2005). Not all systems theorists/cyberneticians accept that Bertalanffy (1979, VII) has created systems theory against over-specialization, not as one of many disciplines, but as culture of holism and methodology supporting it. Other pioneers also created 'the science of synthesis' (Hammond, 2003). Elohim (1999) quoted the reason: 'to survive, people must behave as citizens of the entire world and consider the entire biosphere; the world is full of interdependences'. United Nations, the humankind's highest political body, supported this attitude: sustainable development links care for socio-economic development and nature (UN, 1992; WBCSD, 2004, 2005; WCED, 1987/1998).

Systemic thinking and sustainable development are poorly accepted for three crucial reasons:

1. People are unavoidably narrow specialists to know something about a selected profession and topic. They mostly apply systems theory to describe their selected topics from their own single selected viewpoint; few use systems theory as the culture and methodology of holism by interdisciplinary creative co-operation. (Mulej, 2006).
2. Market and democracy replaced the solidarity of many millennia and feudal monopolies. But the 20th century crises showed expectations are too optimistic. Market experiences many more interventions, than the first authors expected. Democracy practices changing of one-sided parties in power, less a society-wide holism and creativity enhancer.
3. After the 2nd World War the speed of development and innovation, supporting survival in competition exceeds human capability to adapt to changing conditions.

Figures 1-3 illustrate points 1-3.

After WWII, competition keeps causing lower cost, including a poor care for nature, if short-term and one-sided views prevail in ethic and action. Costly eco-remediation, health care, organizational, managerial, business and technological innovation concerning e.g. emissions in air and water and their prevention under ISO 14000, become necessary. Therefore, the sustainable enterprise is the best solution in economic terms (Ecimovic et al., 2002; Knez-Riedl et al, 2001; Potocan, Mulej, 2006). It enables development toward the sustainable society where requisite holism will include ethic of interdependence of specialists, needing each other.

Thus, ethic of interdependence is replacing ethic of individualism and social irresponsibility of individuals, companies, and countries. Earlier, interdependence and solidarity lost ground, because the most individualistic people created prevailing values, culture, ethics, and norms. Ethic, supported with 'external economics', which makes people forget about the broader social consequences of their actions helped them in a short term only. For selfish reasons one may not be too selfish.

Global economy demands enterprises to innovate worldview toward corporate citizenship (McIntosh et al, 1998: 4, 61) with its rather holistic combination of managers' competences and sensibility for problems that used to be found unimportant for business.

Humankind has, for the first time in modern history, a strong and broadly accepted feeling that things will not turn better and we have no exit (Chomsky, 1997: 294). Humankind must face its own individual mortality and possibility of its collective death (Keane, 2000: 134).

There is no need to wish, that a citizen would be either too good or too subjective, nor too senseless or too realistic: "He or she must act by considering oneself, subgroups and society. This moral is eternal; it is common to most developed societies, societies of near future, and less developed societies, as much we can imagine them. Those are bases." (Mauss, 1996: 141). We find them close to what we call ethic of interdependence. Globalisation keeps requiring it. Managers, who consider

Decade	Market & Social Requirements	Enterprises' Ways To Meet Requirements	Type of Enterprise
1950	Covering of post-war conditions (lack of goods, rebuilding)	Supply anything; supply lower than demand	Supplying
1960	Suitable price (customers judgement)	Internal efficiency, i.e. cost management	Efficient
1970	Suitable price X ¹ quality (customers judgement)	Efficiency X technical & commercial quality management	Quality
1980	Suitable price X quality X range (customers judgement)	Efficiency X technical & commercial quality X flexibility management	Flexible
1990	Suitable price X quality X range X uniqueness (customers judgement)	Efficiency X technical & commercial quality X flexibility X innovativeness management	Innovative
2000	Suitable price X quality X range X uniqueness X care for nature (customers judgement)	Efficiency X technical & commercial quality X flexibility X innovativeness X care for nature	Sustainable

Figure 3 *From a supplying to a sustainable enterprise*

- Lead in complicated and confused surroundings,
- Lead over geographical limits,
- Understand individuals' values and the fact that we are all involved in business with values.

This is why Figure 3 exposes sustainable enterprise; it is a step to sustainable society.

This is where the notion of social responsibility enters the scene. But beware: promotion of interdependence, including social responsibility, faces serious difficulties (Midgley, 2004; Mulej et al, 2004) despite of old roots of the notion of interdependence (Smith, 1759, 1776). Social responsibility must not be fictitious or old-fashioned, e.g. writing nice codices of conduct per professions without following them, forgetting about the tacit rules of behaviour in any profession or situation, etc.

Social responsibility in practice

We tried to define social responsibility in practice at two conferences (Hrast Mulej, Knez-Riedl, eds., 2006; Rozman, Kovac, eds., 2006). Selected outcomes:

- It requires decisive persons to 'think globally, while acting locally' and 'to do good in order to do well'. One should do so to prevent consequences of one-sidedness – oversights that can hit the one-sided person back with bad consequences, which can be prevented with more systemic thinking, covered under

social responsibility. (Knez-Riedl, Mulej, Dyck, 2006).

- It requires balancing of several alternatives such as:
 - * Individuals, who do not buy avoidable cloths, cars etc., do good for nature, but not for employment.
 - * Individuals, who do good by subsidizing fire-brigades, sport and culture associations, do good for the quality of leisure-time of people, but endanger their own investment, innovation and competition capability. Then, they cannot support the said activities.
 - * It is bad, if youngsters must work in e.g. factories in less advanced countries for a rather small pay. But it is even worth, if they have nothing to live on.
- Several professions developed their codes of ethics.
- Smaller enterprises meet social responsibility by donating time and money to local actions.
- Practice of 'fair trade' helps marginalized producers in developing countries etc.
- More education and communication about social responsibility practice is needed.
- 'Social Accountability Standard' exists since 1997, based on conventions of the International Labour Organisation, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN convention of the Rights of the Child.
- The motive spans from economic, legal, ethical, to philanthropic backgrounds.
- Individuals can fight socially irresponsible behaviour: (1) as consumers they make their choices, (2) as citizens they can conduct and/or join protests, boycotts, etc. Such actions can make the influential persons more requisitely, causing more social responsibility. (Knez-Riedl, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2004).
- Unpleasant press, detecting and publicising bad behaviour, abuse and misuse of influence and power can help humankind develop social responsibility. There are many misuses around (Rant, 2006).
- Perhaps corporate social responsibility provides excuse for one-sided behaviour of the influential ones (Tavcar, 2006), rather than a way to better life of all (Potocan, Mulej, 2006).

Conclusions

Sustainable society grows from sustainable enterprises and individuals. If they lack ethic of interdependence, they tend to lack social responsibility and feel/think in too narrow horizons for humankind to survive.

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Notes

[1] X denotes interdependence. No attribute is avoidable. The original (Bolwijn, Kumpe, 1990) did not contain X, but +. Experience shows summation is an oversimplification. Decades of 1950 and 2000 were not contained.