

'Every single social and global issue of our day is a business opportunity in disguise.'

*Peter Drucker<sup>1</sup>*

# Business as an Agent of World Benefit

## *Transformative Innovations for Mutual Benefit*

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More and more businesses are now discovering the truth of this statement from the renowned management scholar, Peter Drucker. Research consistently shows a dramatic increase in corporate leaders concern for linking business activities with social and environmental issues. For instance, in a recent survey of 1200 top-level U.S. business executives, 81% said that it was vitally important for business to address social and environmental issues and 84% said that this was linked to economic profitability (Center for Corporate Citizenship, 2005:5). Over 60% said that business has an obligation to act as a 'societal steward,' 73% said that such activities are an expression of their 'traditions and values.' Almost all large corporate organizations (98%) engage in activities intended to create societal or environmental benefit (Center for Corporate Citizenship, 2005; Economist, 2005a).

Such data point to a fundamental shift in assumptions regarding the role of business in a global economy. Business organizations are increasingly focused on promoting innovation in their social and environmental policies (Smith, 2000). This trend has been characterized in terms such as corporate social responsibility, corporate citizenship, or sustainable value creation. Even critics of these traditions acknowledge that investing in the public good is 'good management' (Economist, 2005b: 6,10).

In this article we wish to make sense of an initial inquiry into how businesses are becoming agents of world benefit - how are they coming to be able to create mutual benefit to business and society.<sup>3</sup> We are most interested in innovations that are generative; that is, they not only pose breakthrough ideas, but they also evidence an engagement of stakeholders who exhibit the energy through their actions to sustain some initiative that creates benefit to the business and to society. We call these transformative innovations for mutual benefit. After looking into the nature of transformative innovations for the mutual benefit of business and society, we will raise implications and challenges for the Human Resource Development field in hopes of stimulating research and action to elevate and extend HRD to join as agents for world benefit.

### **THE CALL FOR BUSINESS AS AGENT FOR WORLD BENEFIT**

On June 24, 2004, Case Western Reserve University announced the opening of its new Center for Business as an Agent for World Benefit (BAWB) with a fundamental mission to discover, amplify, and perpetuate innovations in organization practice and management education that create mutual benefit for business and society. One of the important voices that inspired this new venture was that of Willis Harman, a noted futurist and forecast analyst, and author of volumes

such as Global Mind Change and Creative Work: The Constructive Role of Business in Transforming Society. Harman predicted, albeit reluctantly, the epic shift we now see in the social consciousness of business. He was hugely concerned when examining the negative patterns visible in 1987 – ever-multiplying signs suggesting that the modern world was at the end of its tether – of irreversible, manmade climate change; extinction at a horrific rate; deforestation and desertification; growing scarcity of fresh water; accumulations of toxic chemicals; chronic poverty and hunger in large portions of the planet; the seeming inevitability of growing terrorism; the instability of debt-ridden world economy; and the ever present threat of a nuclear accident or unimaginable war. His analysis of the future, 20 years ago, was uncanny. After systematic observation and analysis, as well as his intuitive reading of the signs, Harman came to a major – and radical – conclusion, one he and his colleagues had not expected. He said that we need to spread as widely as possible the image of business as one of the great creative forces on the planet. Rather than choosing a conservative skepticism with regard to the massive array of planetary challenges and a widely shared view of business as self-serving, greedy and not-to-be-mixed-with-social issues, Harman decided to explore the optimistic hypothesis that business could be a positive force. He posited that with the most adaptable organizational forms ever invented and with its agility, its innovative capacity, its potential for dignified and meaningful work, its reach and connective technologies, and its penchant for pragmatic entrepreneurship and continuous learning, business could contribute to the well-being of many.

Harman's inspiring challenge was enacted in the first major project of the Center for BAWB which involved helping UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to launch a multi-stakeholder learning process with over 500 CEOs, civil society executives and citizens, and nation-state leaders. The Leader's Summit, as it was called, was the largest of its kind ever held at the UN and unprecedented (and controversial) in the inclusion of business leaders. The Secretary General's own words to open the summit – words that have now catalyzed over 4000 corporations and institutions to sign on to the United Nations

Global Compact and pledge to incorporate the UN's Millennium Development Goals into their corporate strategies and business models – echoed Willis Harman's call:

'Let us choose to unite the strengths of markets with the power of universal ideals. Let us choose to reconcile the creative forces of private entrepreneurship with the needs of the disadvantaged and the requirements of future generations.'<sup>4</sup>

The leader's Summit focused on a cross-cultural search for the best in 'the other' in terms of breakthroughs, innovations, best practices, new solutions and higher visions of business as an agent of world benefit. Stories filled the room; architects designing green factories and buildings in ways that give back more clean energy to the world than they use; bottom of the pyramid strategies demonstrated how business can eradicate poverty through profitability; and powerful stories of business as a force for peace and reconciliation in high conflict zones. Discussion ensued on how to globally scale-up micro-enterprise innovations. As an example of a generative outcome of these discoveries, twenty of the world's largest financial houses, holders of pension funds, mutual funds, stock exchanges such as Goldman Sachs and Brazil's Bovespa came together after the summit to issue an impressive financial report documenting the importance of managing the triple bottom line, entitled 'Who Cares, Wins.' The Leader's Summit, in part, was the beginning of a key BAWB initiative called the World Inquiry, a global search for the best transforming innovations that produce mutual benefit for both business and society.

#### **THE BAWB WORLD INQUIRY**

The World Inquiry is a story collecting and sense making initiative sponsored by the Center for Business as an Agent of World Benefit (BAWB) at Case Western Reserve University (<http://worldbenefit.case.edu>; [www.worldinquiry.org](http://www.worldinquiry.org)). The project is a worldwide initiative that uses Appreciative Inquiry to inspire face-to-face dialogue about the role of business in society and to discover important business-in-society innovations taking place all over the world.

The project is designed to gather stories through a network of volunteer interviewers who scout out stories of social innovation where business (or business practices) played a substantive role. Using an appreciative inquiry interview protocol designed by the BAWB World Inquiry, each volunteer writes and submits a brief article, highlighting a story of innovation. The stories are submitted to the World Inquiry via an electronic submission process.

An editorial group of six individuals, headed by the author, reads and evaluates each submission to determine and assess the function in the story of business as an agent of benefit. Those deemed to exhibit transforming innovations for mutual benefit of both business and society are then profiled and housed in the Innovation Bank for public dissemination. Over the past four years, the team has screened over 1000 stories submitted and nearly 200 are now profiled on the BAWB website.

Through an iterative process, we track the emerging evaluation criterion in use during the editorial team discussions. The results of this process suggest that business as an agent of mutual benefit is multidimensional and encompasses many possibilities. Common societal concerns serve as a target for innovative, novel business activity that may catalyze generative action. For instance, the following themes exemplify what we find in our coding schema:

- *Business Builds Self-Sufficiency.* The mechanism of business (in terms of methods or practices) is explicitly used as a force to create economic self-sufficiency or create societal change. For instance, the Sager Foundation (Center for BAWB, 2004) promotes peace-building in Rwanda through a micro-lending initiative in which Hutu and Tutsi women are required work together as business partners in order to receive micro-loans.
- *Business Strengthens Disadvantaged Populations or Communities.* Existing businesses may decide to pro-actively target an under-privileged population or community, or a new business is created specifically to reach the needs of these populations or communities. As an example, Chase Home Lending (Center for BAWB, 2005) opens access to home loans for lower income populations, who have previously been excluded from the home lending system,

even though many were already credit worthy. The action opens up the opportunity for home ownership to millions of people, especially immigrant and minority populations.

- *Business Fosters Exceptional Management.* Existing businesses may reshape their internal policies in an intentional effort to benefit or create a meaningful shift in communities where they operate. Nissan in South Africa (Center for BAWB, 2005), for example, realized it had an aging labor force. The company presented the problem to the workforce, asked older workers to recommend new workers from among family members and then retired the elders with full benefits after they trained their replacements. The community impact is significant because continued benefits are extended to retirees, and younger workers find jobs in a depressed market. Younger workers also help to care for their elders.
- *Business Promotes Exceptional Philanthropy.* Philanthropy is a common practice, yet some forms are highly unusual in that the people in the company are intimately involved in the process of carrying out the social action, which produces a transformational effect on the organization (or business organizations that form unusual partnerships) that clearly have a transformational effect on society. A great example is of The Dave Thomas Foundation (Center for BAWB, 2005), sponsored by Wendy's, which promotes adoption. Instead of simply transferring monetary resources to a separate non-profit agency, Wendy's employees are an integral part of the process. In addition, the company has created partnerships to produce an annual television show. These efforts have fostered a 60% increase in the number of children adopted in the United States.

In all of the above forms of activities, the mechanisms of business serve society when the participants act in harmony with a concern for society, environment, and profitability. Some approaches aim to alleviate poverty at the 'bottom-of-the-pyramid', noting that those who live in deep poverty have a collective buying power that rivals that of the developed population in the world (Prahalad, 2004; Hart, 2005).

Similar tactics include Fair Trade initiatives, Sustainable Enterprise, and Business-and-Peace efforts, among others (Moore, 2004; Anderson, 2005; Fort & Schipani, 2004).

Though specific strategies do vary, there are several common outcomes when benefits accrue to both business and society. Individuals gain greater self-sufficiency, more empowerment, and/or improved health. Organizations are strengthened in resiliency and in their capacity to grow. Communities or nations resolve societal issues, creating greater security and prosperity. Societal stakeholders are positively impacted, and business gains return on investments.

### **GENERATIVE DIMENSIONS OF TRANSFORMATIVE INNOVATION**

Our analysis of these stories led us to consider the dimensions of these innovations that are potentially sustain generativity. Transformative innovation, as we call it: (1) produces change in degrees of benefit to both business and society; (2) It includes an enlargement of scale in the numbers of people involved and affected; and (3) it creates transformational shifts in the espoused values and assumptions of organizations.

#### *1. Expansion of Mutual Benefit*

Two dimensions describe how business activities may generate differing degrees of mutuality (Jackson & Nelson, 2004). First, benefit to business is the economic growth of an organization, where the focus is to maximize returns for shareholding owners. A concern for the economic self-interests is a constant strategic imperative: Unprofitable free-market businesses generally do not long survive, and therefore, benefit to business is usually seen as a priority. It is a necessary condition for sustainable mutual benefit.

In contrast, benefit to society is the extent to which business activity has an impact on non-shareholding stakeholders, including organization members and employees, local and global community constituents, industry partners, regulatory bodies, among others (Jackson & Nelson, 2004, Freeman, 1984; Freeman & Philips, 2002). Essentially, this is a concern for stakeholders who are external to the organization (Free-

man, 1984). The scale of benefit to society is intrinsically tied to how much an organization incorporates concerns for social and environmental issues as an integral part of its strategic operations and value-structure. Together with the necessary condition of profitable growth, benefit to society is a necessary condition for mutual benefit.

Our BAWB stories of innovations indicate that it is possible to demonstrate different degrees of concern for the interests of business and society and/or environment. In essence, mutual benefit exists where business organizations are both profitable and functional for the common good – a position of integrated strategic focus on both organizational self-interests and stakeholder interests. Figure 1 shows three modes of mutual benefit that arise when the dimensions of business benefit and societal benefit interact. A zone of mutual benefit is where an organization's social and or environmental values mesh with economic values in practice.

In the first mode of mutual benefit the dominant self-interest focuses on compliance and meeting imposed regulations. The goal is 'to do no harm,' or to avoid doing anything that is perceived as wrong. Safeguards against legal or ethical lapses are a primary concern. Ethical and moral issues may be seen as important, but tangential to economic considerations which nearly always take precedence. To the extent that business complies with legal regulations, society benefits because the organization is meeting its minimally defined social obligations. Business benefits because it avoids legal sanction and a rupture in public trust (Godfrey, 2005).

In a second mode of mutual benefit, a business organization is concerned not only with legal/ethical compliance, but also with pro-active initiatives. Social responsibility refers to initiatives where an organization strives to make community contributions and to be seen as an active contributor to the communities in which it conducts its operations. 'Sustainable enterprise' takes these initiatives one step further, creating as an objective the balancing of consequences such that an organization's 'footprint' gives back at least as much as it takes from society and environment (Hart & Milstein, 2003; Jackson & Nelson, 2004). The primary differentiator of this mode is an inherent focus on doing what society

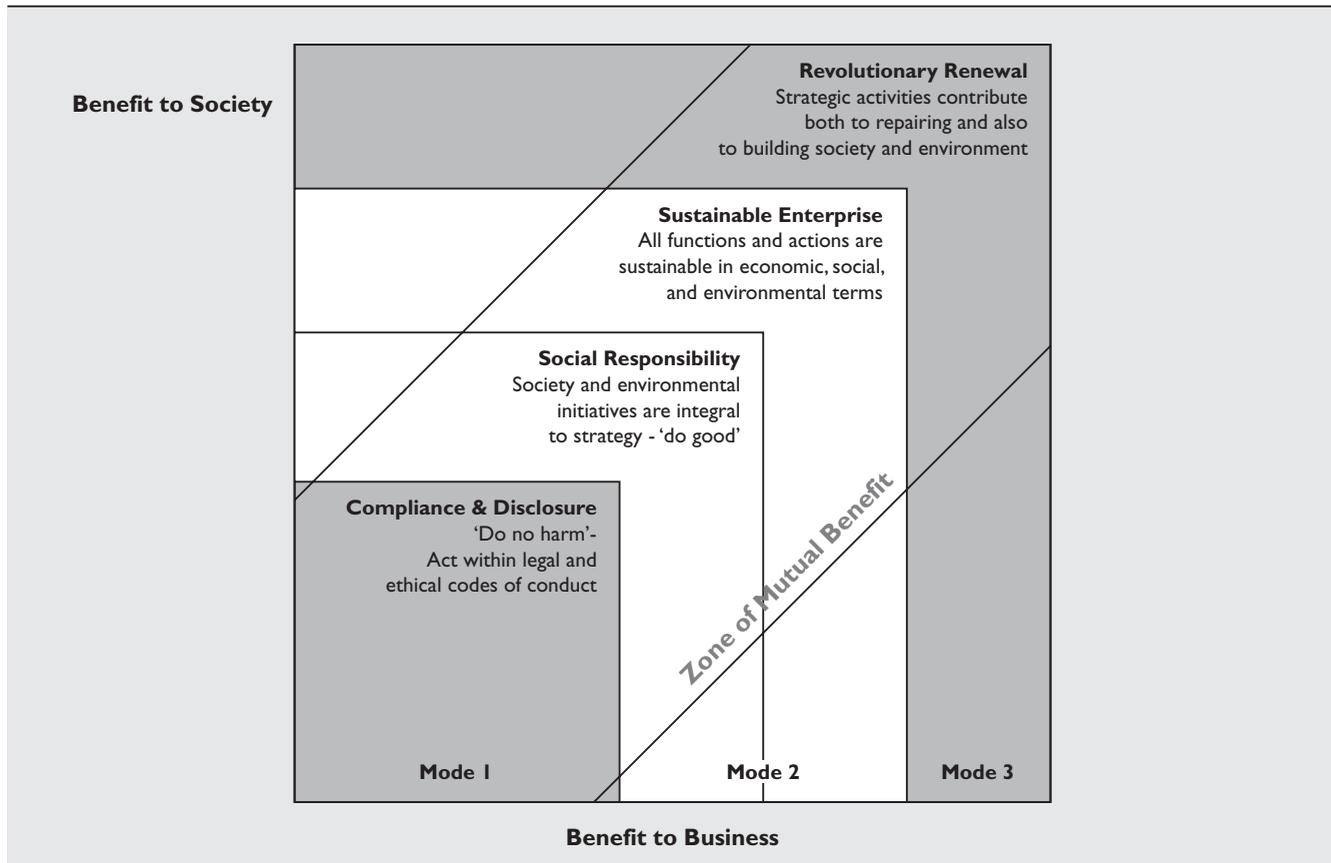


Figure 1: Mutual Benefit – The Integration of Benefit to Business and Benefit to Society.

deems as important, and therefore, it is an attempt to respond to the implied societal requirements that give organizations license to operate.

Finally, at a third level, the business organization creates deep mutual benefit, reaping significant profits because it is creating deep, lasting contributions to society. Here, the mantra might be 'make the world better than we found it,' leading not only to balanced sustainability in the present tense, but also to a building of a future society and environment. It is a degree that Mirvis and Googins, 2006, equate with the transformational level of citizenship, in which corporate activities are changing the very structure of relationships, or 'the game' between business and society or environment (Prahalad, 2004). The defining characteristic of this mode is the organizational intention to be pro-active rather

than reactive, and in the process, create lasting change on the relationship of the business to society and environment.

The literature on corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility is rich with examples of strategies for fostering transformative innovation in these different modes of mutual benefit. For example, Interface, an international carpet company, has made mutual benefit a key part of its business strategy (Center for BAWB, 2005, 2005; Amodeo, 2005; Anderson, 1998). In the mid 1990s, CEO Ray Anderson realized that his company was creating significant damage on the environment through its wasteful practices and inefficient processes. Like many other industrial leaders, Ray had assumed up to that moment that waste was an inextricable part of the production process. However, he challenged his

organization to change their cultural mindset toward an incessant quest for total environmental sustainability, or what he calls 'sustainable enterprise.' In line with the modes outlined in Figure 1, he directed employees to first focus on reducing environmental degradation (Mode 2), and later, he challenged employees to focus company efforts to improve the environment as well (Mode 3). One interface initiative is called QUEST (Quality Utilizing Employee Suggestions and Teamwork; Center for BAWB, 2005), organized in 1995 to create a local capability for employees to contribute and implement their ideas regarding sustainability. The program has created a transformation in the consciousness of company employees, where they think holistically about the impact of each company function. The results have been quite dramatic in terms of a reduction of environmental footprint, a benefit to society – for instance, water usage is down, electricity usage is down, the kinds of raw materials that are recyclable is up to over 90% of the content in products, and so forth. Equally as important, however, the company has also benefited significantly in a financial way: as of 2004 the estimated cumulated avoided costs were \$262 million since 1995.

The QUEST project indicates how the objective of 'revolutionary renewal' in mode 3 spawns continuing innovation – generative action. CEO Anderson has used the possibility of a zero-carbon footprint and environmental renewal to challenge employees to think in terms of a very long time horizon. These objectives, seemingly impossible when the process was initiated, have spawned cycle upon cycle of transformative innovations. Each improvement appears to move the company toward its lofty goals, and anecdotal evidence indicates that employees are truly invested in continuing the efforts.

We suggest that the idea of revolutionary renewal builds generativity because it represents the ultimate 'positive core,' or that force that 'gives life' to organizing. Indeed, it may be that the achievement of revolutionary renewal is only possible to the extent that people perceive a connection between an organization's activities and their own deepest sense of self-actualizing purpose.

## *2. Transformation of Scale*

The process of scaling up business operations to achieve significant increases in mutual benefit requires a shift in the scope of the enterprises and numbers of stakeholder groups that are involved. For instance, Wal-Mart's supply chain of over 25,000 organizations gives it an ability to create a large-scale paradigmatic shift across entire industries. In clothing alone, their commitment to 100% organic cotton-based clothing can mobilize a global supply chain, not to mention competitors' supply chains to change the world textile industry in a paradigmatic way.

Recently, CEO Lee Scott and other Wal-Mart leaders held several closed-door sessions where they held searching conversations about the identity and role of the organization. The result was a redefinition of Wal-Mart's mission to emphasize environmentally friendly, socially responsible initiatives (Scott, 2005; Fortune, August, 2006). One company initiative was a focus on raw materials in the apparel industry. Conventionally produced cotton has dominated its product line, yet the processes that are used to produce cotton are extremely toxic to the environment. World-wide, approximately 25% of agricultural chemicals are used to produce the world's cotton crops each year, yet cotton accounts for less than 2% of all agricultural activity. Moreover, the herbicides, pesticides, defoliators, and fertilizers used in cotton production are a significant threat to human health and safety, particularly in the communities closest to the fields.

Armed with these observations, Wal-Mart convened a meeting of suppliers, announced its intention to eventually move its entire apparel production to organically produced cotton, and provided a process whereby suppliers could obtain preferential treatment with they were to provide these more environmentally friendly products. To support the effort, which at large scales will require a significant shift in the supply infrastructure, the company had already sequestered millions of pounds in organic product from fields in Turkey for its suppliers.

This is but one example of how the enlarging scope of one company's activities to include more stakeholder representation can produce transformations across an entire industry,

creating change on the scale of super-macro systems. First, the change just within Wal-Mart's own supply chain could be enormous considering the hundreds of millions of pounds of cotton required to supply the company's current sales. Secondary, indirect effects may also be substantial if Wal-Mart's rivals realize that they may need to take similar actions to remain competitive.

### *3. Transformation in Beliefs and Assumptions*

Transformative innovation also creates a shift in dominant beliefs and assumptions. This effect is rooted in the theoretical idea that behaviors are artifacts, a reflection of intrinsic values, beliefs and assumptions that exist at all scales of human organization. The most superficial depth is expressed and seen through actions and language, while more profound depths affect the beliefs and assumptions.

The emergence of the Nobel Prize winning Grameen Bank (Center for BAWB, 2005), a well-known microfinance organization, over the last three decades is an excellent example of change in depth. The idea for the Bank emerged when founder Mohammed Unis, an economist from Bangladesh, observed that people living in poverty were being exploited through oppressive small-value lending practices. For instance, a peddler might borrow \$10 at a 20% daily rate so that she could purchase raw goods, manufacture a small product, and then sell it on the street. After paying the loan, she might have a subsistence amount of money, but in this situation she could never lift herself from poverty.

Beginning in the late 1970s, Unis organized small groups of women to learn about saving and borrowing. The model of borrowing and lending depended on small-value loans, regular payments, and loyalty to a group of peers who provided encouragement and training in the art of money-management. These groups were organized to link together the existing strengths in communities : for instance, that women play a key, often overlooked role in supporting poverty-stricken families. The groups became a source of reinforcement for participants as they developed a strong connection and identity with one another. Further, a proven ability to depend upon one another, a source of com-

munity strength, qualified them to receive increasing amounts of loans. By 2005, the Grameen Bank had outstanding loans totally nearly \$500 million, disbursed to over two million bank-owning members, mostly women, in over 50,000 villages in Bangladesh.

By most accounts the Grameen Bank, as an innovation, has been an enormous success, and it has also created a fundamental shift in the beliefs and assumptions about the poor. Where the belief was that the poor could not be trusted with a loan, they have demonstrated an impressive propensity to repay all loans: the default rate is less than 1% in most regions. Where the assumption was that the poor could not, and would not, save, these groups of women have proven otherwise. Others thought that the power structures in rural villages would ensure the quick demise of the bank, but members have embraced the initiative, precisely because it provides them with more self-sufficiency and empowerment. Through these challenges to basic assumptions, the Grameen Bank has spawned untold numbers of similar micro-finance organizations worldwide, including many that are attracting major financial services players (Wall Street Journal, 2006) and some, like the Bobby Sager Foundation who are using the model to affect peace and reconciliation in the most difficult areas such as Rwanda.

Another example is much smaller-scale story from Good Nature Organic Lawn Care (Center for BAWB, 2006) located in northeast Ohio in the United States. For decades in the US it has been assumed that a green, weed-free lawn is only possible through the use of strong chemical applications. The company's founder, Alec McClellan, became convinced as a young teenager that there had to be a better way. After completing his education in Civil Engineering, he began doing research on organic alternatives for lawn care, and after three years he created a 'chemical free' process for lawn care. The company opened in 1999, growing dramatically in a short time and now counts many locally distinguished organizations as clients. Alec's efforts are educating people to focus on lawn health, rather than sole-

ly on lawn appearance, and this shift in assumptions has the potential to encourage dramatic reductions in the use of potentially dangerous agricultural chemicals.

In both the forgoing cases, generativity creates a shift in fundamental beliefs and assumptions. In both instances, the generative idea sparks energy and action in a key individual. As they implement these ideas, using the mechanisms of business, the possibility of a sustainable model for growth arises. In Unis' case, he began with loans to a few individuals in small social experiments that evolved into a business model.

McClennan spent three years in research, striving to identify a viable process and business model. In both cases, the viability of the model became quickly apparent, and thus fed generativity in others. In part, this seems to occur because a pressing impossible societal challenge is addressed. When prior, intractable assumptions are disproved, many seem to rejoice in the breakthrough, the universe of potentially generative ideas expands, and people are energized to carry these possibilities forward.

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

As organizations re-purpose themselves and move from the margins to the mainstream in sustainable value creation – beyond social responsibility to sustainability and revolutionary renewal (see Figure 1), Human Resource Management and Development (HRD) will need to be a voice at the table. Clearly the more traditional issues of talent acquisition, deployment and retention, performance management, performance culture, etc. will need to be fully represented in those strategic explorations and decisions. What more can be brought from HRD, based on the transformative innovations that are surfacing through BAWB and other recent works? In their recent volume, *Beyond Good Company: Next Generation of Corporate Citizenship*, Googins, Mirvis and Rochlin (2007) assert from their analysis of stories of transformative innovations that citizenship matters to employees and they go on to suggest that social responsibility begins within the firm and then generates engagement beyond the work context.

#### **CITIZENSHIP MATTERS**

One of the biggest reasons for a business to adopt a sustainable strategy is not altruistic or philanthropic. Employees favor working for organizations that are truly pursuing sustainability. The Reputation Institute finds that 75-80% of those polled in some twenty-five countries would 'prefer to work for a company that is known for its social responsibility'<sup>5</sup> Another study found that 65% say that their employer's social and environmental activities make them feel more loyal to their company.<sup>6</sup> Googins et. al. (2007:148) also note that this is not just a western or 'developed economies' view. The appeal of corporate citizenship to employees is even more important (compared to US) in India, South Africa and China. GlobeScan finds that nine out of ten employees worldwide are interested in participating in the CSR initiatives of their companies.<sup>7</sup>

#### **ENGAGING EMPLOYEES AS CITIZENS**

Leading companies in sustainability recognize that their employees can bring a representation or microcosm of the markets and societies in which the firm operates. For example, IBM through their web-based Innovation Jams and Nokia with their World Map exercise regularly consult with employees on social trends and use these ideas for corporate social investments, business innovations and overall sustainability agenda. Underlying practices such as these is an important key to moving further toward sustainable systems and revolutionary renewal as an organization: when employees find that their company welcomes the full range of their interests and aspirations, including for instance a personal desire to serve society and protect the planet, they feel welcome to bring their 'whole selves' into the workplace. This yields more commitment to one's work, a deeper connection to a company and a broader sense of meaning to one's work (Googins, et. al. 2007:149). This, in turn, ties in closely with factors that lead employees to report high engagement at work, a central cause of high performance. The more people are able to exercise their strengths and passions in their workplace, the more engaged they feel and the more productive and effective they perform. Finally, engaging the 'whole person' produces social capital.

Employees whose aspirations to live and work responsibly are fulfilled through their companies thereby serve as effective brand ambassadors for their firms through word-of-mouth and webs of positive relationships that connect their firm's good work to society at large.

#### **EXPANDING SERVICE TO SOCIETY**

Embracing this employee-as-citizen philosophy may be the most important agenda for HRD to support and steer as any organization moves toward sustainable systems and revolutionary renewal. While initially tapping into a voluntary ethic as part of everyone's self identity, it appears to hand in hand with those companies that are creating mutual benefit (profit and social/ecological good). It does not seem just a coincidence that employees at Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, globally recognized for pioneering innovation in fair trade coffee and award-winning for sustainable practices, are encouraged to take a half-day per month for community service of their choice or invited to accompany company purchasing trips to interact directly with their Central American coffee growers. Similarly, IBM's On Demand Community of volunteers and Nokia's Make A Connection campaign encourage employees to pursue their passions and to bring their 'whole self' to a service activity. Ford and PriceWaterhouseCoopers regularly deploy executives, for up to 90 days in the case of PWC's Ulysses program, to troubled global areas or communities to bring all their business and personal talents to bear on a local issue. While the direct expenditure of this time and resource may not reap profits, the learning and development of the business leaders ignites the mind with possibilities and new ideas when it comes time to re-position the business in the direction of mutual benefit. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, such employees who feel empowered as full citizens produce social value through their service, their jobs, products, and services, and the enriched understandings of corporate citizenship that re shared with friends, debated among colleagues and critics, and ultimately passed on to their children (Goggins, et. al. 2007:150).

In sum, there is also a mutual benefit proposition for human resources. As the examples above demonstrate, it is clearly

possible and arguably desirable to enable any employee to more fully explore and express their identity as citizens while in the workplace, and in so doing, create more engagement with their work, more service to society, and more ideas for sustainable futures. This can fuel the transition from a compliance or philanthropic orientation toward sustainability toward one of true mutual benefit where sustainability is at the core of the business model and throughout the organization systems.

#### **CONCLUSION**

In this article we have used BAWB as a context to cast an affirming and appreciative eye on transformative innovations that produce positive benefit for both business and society. As Buckminster Fuller once remarked, this viewpoint may not be politically correct, nor popular, but it is nonetheless hopeful and generative:

'There are very few men today who are disciplined to comprehend the totally integrating significance of the 99 percent invisible activity which is coalescing to reshape our future. There are approximately no warnings being given to society regarding the great changes ahead. There is only the ominous general apprehension that man may be about to annihilate himself. To the few who are disciplined to deal with invisibly integrating trends it is increasingly readable in the trends that man is about to become almost 100 percent successful as a occupant of the universe.' (Mau, et. al. 2004:19)

We need to continue to make the invisible visible. By changing our questions and searching for stories of mutual benefit, BAWB seeks to change the direction of business and society interface to one of transformative cooperation (Piderit, et al. 2007). And the essence of the change is in altering our conversations about the role of business in society. Since we find and enact that which we seek, inquiry drives change. Our stance therefore is to inquire about the best examples of innovations for mutual benefit – to bring Fuller's 99 percent invisible into the public discourse – so that we, indeed, move more in that direction.

Now is a unique and compelling moment for this work. Nearly 15 years ago, my colleagues and I predicted that sustainability might well transform management education, let alone the global organizational landscape, more than anything that has come before (Bilimoria et al., 1995). It took a bit longer than we had anticipated, but in 2008, we are here. Business has the technologies to redesign the world energy economy and stabilize climate change. It has the capacity to eradicate extreme poverty within a few generations. There has never been a time when students, corporate partners and faculty have been so excited. Management education is on the world stage with a strategic role to play.

The noted historian, Arnold Toynbee, in his 1957 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, said that, ‘The 20th Century will be chiefly remembered by future generation not as the era of political conflicts or technological inventions, but as an age in which human society dared to think of the welfare of the whole human race as a practical objective.’<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this is a privileged time; businesses have the capability, students and faculties have the interest, employees value service, society has opened the door for partnering (e.g. United Nations Global Compact), and technical solutions are evident. Now we face the toughest question – and a fundamentally human one. To paraphrase the work of Bruce Mau and his associates (2004) in summing up their epic analysis of the history and current trajectory of technological innovation, ‘Now that we can do anything, what will we choose to do?’

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#### NOTES

- 1 Quoted from interview transcript with David Cooperrider, March, 2003.
- 2 Portions of this article are adapted from a working paper with my colleagues, David Cooperrider and David Bright, 'Transformative Innovation as Generativity in Action: The BAWB World Inquiry,' to appear in forthcoming *Advances in Appreciative Inquiry*, Volume 2.
- 3 For our purposes, we assume that benefit to society includes the concerns of maintaining or repairing the natural environment.
- 4 See Secretary General Annan's comments on a video summary of the Leader's Summit on the BAWB website: <http://worldbenefit.case.edu>.
- 5 See The Reputation Institute, 'Rep Trak Pulse 2006: Social Responsibility Report' at [www.reputationinstitute.com](http://www.reputationinstitute.com).
- 6 See 'The 2006 Cone Millennial Cause Study (October, 2006)' at [www.coneinc.com](http://www.coneinc.com).
- 7 See Globescan Corporate Social Responsibility Monitor (2006) at <http://globescan.com>.
- 8 Quoted by Lester B. Pearson and cited in Mau, B and Associates, *Massive Change*. (2004) New York: Phaidon Press, pg. 15.