

Emerging Themes from Interviews on Transforming Capitalism

Summary

Following summary captures the emerging themes from interviews conducted by Presencing Institute (PI) Transformation of Capitalism (ToC) group. So far ToC action-researchers have interviewed 6 thinkers and leaders who are pioneering green, regenerative economy. Among them are Gar Alperovitz, Jakada Imani, Ted Nordhaus, Martin Ping, Michael Shellenberger and Anthony Thigpen. This is Work In Progress and will be updated as and when more interviews are conducted.

1. Symptoms: how does the current economic crisis show up in your personal experience?

In personal life, impact is experienced as fear, doubt, insecurity at all levels- family, finances, future etc

In work life, experience is diverse, including:

- **struggle** (limited resources, & funds, cutbacks, leadership getting tactical than strategic),
- **hope** (possibility to alternative frameworks to emerge) and
- **resilience** (in eco-centric, local, farm-based life-style)

2. Root cause: what do you consider the most important root causes of the current economic and societal crisis?

Externally, **Market fundamentalism** based on political/ ideological dominance of capitalist ideals:

- **greed**: Overwhelming drive for growth
- **de-regulation**: limited government/public intervention
- **power inequity** between globalized corporate power and declining labor movement
- **government failure** to understand and invest in public goods

Internally, **Egotism** (inability to see beyond their own isolation) and **lack of collective consciousness**

3. Blind spot: What is the blind spot in our contemporary economic thought?

- **Structural assumption of fundamental capitalism**
 - o normalcy would return without any Long-term systemic change
 - o economy is about company (capitalism) not people/community
 - o 'get bigger or get swallowed up' [AT] (cf. competition & free market will govern itself/ survival of the fittest)
- **Consumerism**- a deficiency based mental model
- **Limitation of economic models** to interpret the socio-ecological whole and complexities of imperfect markets

4. 2012: What is your prediction for 2012-14: what will the US and what will the world look like in 3-5 years?

Most interviewees find it hard to predict 2012. Some see 3 possibilities (cosmetic reforms, systemic crisis or systemic reforms), that can be grouped as following two:

1. Cosmetic reforms while Systemic crisis deepens:

- Current strategies (stimulus package or climate policy) without addressing underlying economic thought & systemic issues may lead to normalcy in day to day life (unlike depression) but decaying trends in:
 - o environment (inflexible policy framework, arbitrated investments but no real change)
 - o income distribution & poverty (poor would be most impacted)
 - o restrictions on public expenditures
 - o crippled economy- fear of borrowing

2. Leveraging the opportunity for Systemic reforms:

- *Choice is up to us. We have brief opportunity for systemic reforms- in global economy & social structures.*
- *Regional and local politics will become even more important. Grass root movement.*

5. Strategy: what transformation strategy could address the root issues and shift the social field to a more sustainable, just and collectively creative path?

- **Addressing Social inequity** (long term, global approach) through:
 - o *Bottom up reconstruction of **new forms of ownership and politics** (quasi-public, worker-led, community-anchored ownership)*
 - o *meaningfully engaging people in powerful and **sustained social movements***
- **People & planet centered economics.** *E.g. Farmer markets that nurture relationships and food.*
- **Rethinking governance** by reconstitution of a responsible left and taking health care, climate, education off the market-driven approach
- **Inner transformation** to develop **alternate world view** that is collectively conscious, integrated, systemic, long-term & progressive. *Learning from transformative stories like Slow City in Uberling, Germany & Virtual communities of youth.*

6. Action: if you were to advise Barack Obama today, what three actions steps would you suggest him to take?

2 paradoxical themes for action are emerging:

1. **Address the immediate crisis** by: *providing employment opportunity, securing basic services (health, education etc), nationalizing the banks, and investing in clean & cheap energy and healthcare through partnerships*
2. **Social transformation:** *Going beyond the tactical & focusing on strategic, societal issues by:*
 - **re-defining democratic values** by:
 - o *re-writing a declaration of 'inter'-dependence*
 - o *active civic engagement and movement for collective problem solving*
 - o *institutionalizing department of peace*
 - **transforming institutions for addressing socio-economic inequity** and power imbalance by:
 - o *accelerating bottom-up, community/public anchored institution building*
 - o *striking corporations' right to personhood*
 - o *re-kindling debate on equitable taxation*
 - o *re-thinking environment and healthcare strategies*

7. Way forward: How does the essence of your work address what we can do to move forward?

Providing a thought framework for global action:

- *Developing policies for alternative reform strategies*
- *Focusing the discourse on breakthrough alternatives. Making plausible solutions available for channelizing energy for collective action*

Engaging communities in political movement:

- *Engaging people in deeper values (beneath policies/programs) by building on the grass-root campaign movement.*

Inner transformation & social change

- *Inner work (transforming from within) and staying in dialogue to co-create the emerging consciousness*
- *Developing socially just, spiritually connected communities*

8. **Questions: What are the most important questions for future research that we should focus on?**

Future research questions can be grouped in 4 broad areas:

- **Re-structuring financial & banking sector:** *These questions inquire about the political challenges in developing a shared response to the current crisis, the nature of alternate banking/regulatory institutions for nationalizing banks and managing capital allocation process, and the role of markets and government.*
- **Re-thinking organizational forms:** *Focuses on democratic processes for making large institutions accountable, questions the viability (and management of threat) of large enterprises and explores new democratic forms of organizations (beyond non-profits/ political parties)*
- **Re-generating alternate economic systems:** *This set of questions focus attention on post-industrial, globalized economy and issues related to of public goods, equitable distribution and shared prosperity. It inquires into the structural girders for alternate economic systems like alternative, ecologically sustainable cities.*
- **Bringing transformative change:** *These questions focus on 'how' to bring fundamental shift in values and worldview and develop collective consciousness and ownership. What frameworks, processes, insights would enable this?*

Themes from question 9 (recommended people) is being summarized separately and question 10 (any other comments) are incorporated in above document.

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