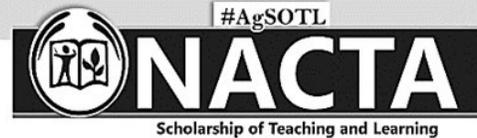


Book Reviews



Leading from the Emerging Future: from Ego-System to Eco-System Economies

Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer. 2013. Berrett-Koehler Publ. Inc., San Francisco.
Paperback (287 pp)

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The authors begin with a description of the “Age of Disruption” which they characterize as a time of excessive consumption of materials, growth of economies and wealth perceived as desirable and inevitable, and a near-total focus on how each of us can maximize our individual gains. They conclude that we are in a time of “organized irresponsibility, collectively creating results that nobody wants” [p.1]. Without delving in detail how this came about, Scharmer and Kaufer propose that we shift gears from an “ego-system awareness” that rewards the individual and foments a greed mentality to an “eco-system awareness” that goes beyond each of us to focus on societal wellbeing. The need for change is worthy of examination, and even a necessity in a time of near-uncontrolled capitalism, and the authors provide difficult though feasible solutions.

Moving from egosystem economics, and in fact an egosystem-driven approach to life and to business, is not a trivial transition. The egocentric approach is so engrained in our minds and decision making that it permeates many facets of U.S. society. The impacts range from competing for the highest grade in class to seeing winning as the major goal in youth sports. Many economic systems in more developed countries in the North are built on the “winning paradigm”, with limited concern for distribution of benefits, and short-term financial success at the expense of long-term sustainability and economic justice. In *Leading from the Emerging Future* the authors challenge this world view and develop a rationale for a more sustainable alternative.

In Chapter 2 the characterization of societies in a progression of domination from 1.0 state-driven, to 2.0 free market-driven, to 3.0 stakeholder-driven, to 4.0 ecosystem-driven provides an ongoing conceptual framework for the book. The matrix describes primary challenges to society in each step 1.0 to 4.0, plus coordinating mechanisms, primary authority and sources of power, dominant ideologies, and primary states of consciousness. A similar matrix is used throughout the book to describe economic evolution, changes in property rights, social evolution and personal assessment, and levels of stakeholder communications. These changes establish a foundation on which to build institutional transformation in government, health care, education, banks and other private companies, and non-profit organizations. The matrix further provides a consistent and logical tool, applied through the book to support the thesis of moving from “ego” to “eco” focus for individuals and institutions.

An intriguing book that provides ample practical ideas and examples on how to view the world and become active in seeking to improve equity of benefits and a sustainable future,

Leading from the Emerging Future provides a “green print” for how to view society and ourselves. The book is rich in metaphors, a valuable tool to communicate ideas and consequences of current and potential future directions. At times repetitive, the book leads these reviewers to suggest that a volume half as long could convey the same message and have greater impact with a wider audience as a trade book with a compelling introduction or overall summary up front. It could also be proposed that the evolution of a sustainable society should not stop at 4.0, but could be extended a least to a “5.0 society” that might be termed eco-futurism.

For most people in any society to embrace an ecosystems attitude would require massive cultural change, perhaps essential to deal with emerging complexity and uncertainty. While the authors may not provide detailed specifics for dealing with the enormous problems in our future, nevertheless they do articulate a basic reasoning foundation that may be critical to effective societal response down the road, particularly as humanity the world over must deal with effectively managing the “global commons”. Therefore, it is a most valuable resource for the education of future leaders. Leading from the Emerging Future is a must-read book, not only for educators who are involved in guiding our next generation to thoughtfully consider the current direction of development, but for anyone who is seeking to understand and participate in the pursuit of a more sustainable future. That task must include designing a resilient and sustainable future farming and food system, one critical component of a broader “ecologically-oriented economy”. The book would be suitable for both undergraduate and graduate students, in fields of agriculture, food systems, political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and international development. We hope the authors seriously consider writing a trade version of this important volume.

Submitted by –

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