Surviving and Thriving

John Burgoyne

Summary

In this article I put forward the idea that humans survive and thrive though a process of co-evolution with the environment as part of an increasing unit of survival. They survive through a process of survival.

To survive means to exist. This equates to Maslow's lowest level in his hierarchy of needs. Thriving means progressing to Maslow's higher levels of need.

Co-evolution means a combination of Darwinian thought, as in adapting to the environment, and changing the environment to survive, such as developing villages, towns, cities and countries.

The call for contributions requests 'from ego to eco', I believe that my argument here fits this requirement.

I propose critical realism as the ontological background to doing this. This combines changing individual and collective beliefs as in social constructionism and taking action in and on the material world in an engineering sense.

This contributes to ego to eco, the theme of these articles.

Main Argument

Maslow's hierarchy (A. H. Maslow 1943), though it has its critics, states that there are levels of human needs. The first two levels concern the basic needs of individuals, what I am referring to as survival. The remaining three levels refer to meeting the needs of social life, friendship, self-esteem and self-actualisation, what I refer to as thriving. In order to survive and thrive we ensure those needs are met through a process of co-evolution with the environment as part of an increasingly large unit of survival.

 The process of co-evolution is a combination or synthesis of classic Darwinian evolutionary theory (Charles Darwin 1859) – adapting to the environment and changing the environment. For example, humans may adapt themselves to a shortage of water by moving nearer to a water source such as a river. An example of changing the environment would be installing wells and water pumps to supply water to buildings, i.e. adapting the environment to ensure survival.

We can see this co evolution in organisations and companies. Successful firms do both, by adapting to current trends but also innovating new products within them.

Being part of a larger unit, such as family, tribe, village, town, city, country and unions like NATO may help humans to survive. This is because larger groups can do better than individuals and smaller ones, partly because they can specialise, and because they can operate 24/7. Large organisations can be cumbersome, and may be better treated as networks of smaller ones.

The eco crisis requires us to do both too, and to address this crisis as individuals and in larger units, if we wish to survive. We must adapt ourselves, through such things as recycling, using virtual meetings, being aware of resources, reducing travel etc. In addition, we need to change the environment through things such as developing green energy and innovating to avoid plastic waste.

The above is based on critical realism (Burgoyne 2008, Fleetwood 2005), a synthesis of logical positivism and social constructionism. By this I mean that this is a realist view of the world that allows for social constructions with the view that some of these are truer than others.

Logical positivism works better with physics and engineering, social constructionism with the social and political aspects of life. Organisations have both, management science deals with the former, organisational behaviour with the latter, so critical realism is particularly appropriate. Logical positivism takes a 'hard' view of reality, while social constructionism takes a 'soft' one. In the extreme any view is as true as any other. This combination is important as a view on how to take action on systems that contain hard and soft elements.

This ontological position provides a basis for moving from ego to eco. Ontology is about what exists.

The critical realist and pragmatist positions provide a basis for doing this. If the issue was just a social construction it would be a matter of changing individual and collective beliefs. If it were purely a material issue it would require engineering solutions.

Actually we need both: a change in beliefs *and* a way of acting on this in the material world.

References

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About John

John Burgoyne is Professor of Management Learning in the Department of Management Learning in the Management School, University of Lancaster, of which he is a founding member. He is a Visiting Professor at University Campus Suffolk (jointly owned by the Universities of East Anglia and Essex), and an Associate of Ashridge Management College and Henley Business School.

A psychologist by background he has worked on the evaluation of management development, the learning process, competencies and self-development, corporate management development policy, career formation, organisational learning, knowledge managing, the virtual organization and leadership.

He is concerned to apply ideas from research to the practical reconstruction of contemporary organisations through management, leadership and organisation development, and the evaluation of initiatives in this area.

He is particularly interested in working with organisations that wish to use the formulation and implementation of Corporate Management Development Policy, and the evaluation of its implementation as a cornerstone of their efforts to create their futures. His research interests have recently returned to evaluation, and his current focus is evaluation led management education and development policy and practice. He has been, and still is, interested in learning organization approaches, and at the moment this includes the application of network theory in all these areas.

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A note about AMED

Sadly, so far, nobody has expressed a willingness to take over from the outgoing AMED Council. So in the circumstances, the EGM on 26 May is likely to confirm that AMED will finally cease to operate as an educational charity by the end of 2022 at the latest.

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Our purpose is to serve as a forum for people who want to share, learn and experiment, and find support, encouragement, and innovative ways of communicating. Our conversations are open, constructive, and facilitated.

Through AMED, we strive to benefit our members and the wider society. Exclusive Member benefits include excellent professional indemnity cover at a significant discount, free copies of the quarterly journal *e-O&P*, and discounted fees for participation in a range of face-to-face events, special interest groups, and our interactive website. We aim to build on our three cornerstones of **knowledge**, **innovation** and **networking** in the digital age. Wherever we can, AMED Members, Networkers and Guests seek to work with likeminded individuals and organisations to generate synergy and critical mass for change. www.amed.org.uk, or contact **Linda Williams**, our Membership Administrator, E: amedoffice@amed.org.uk, T: 0300 365 1247