

THE GENUINE INDIVIDUAL WITHIN THE ICT ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The Post-modern era of the 21st Century differs significantly from the previous time because many traditional conventions that seemed steady become unclear and uncertain. The Author examines four issues: 1) whether future communities have Vision and Goals and how they affect their life? 2) How does a consumer community match social and cultural desires? 3) What are the traits and expertise required from the national or local leadership? And 4) whether nations have Updated strategy for the future and who promote it? The Author argues that at the Post-modern era a prosperous society should be a creative and a knowledge one. It should combine trust with faith, individual strive with social accountability, self-esteem with curiosity, deep commitment with inspiring vision. At these tumultuous conditions and in order to minimize youth unemployment, so wide spreading at present, higher education systems should prepare better youngsters for nowadays challenges. But, for qualifying for that mission they must to change. They have to change their teaching methods and reshape the traditional student-professor relationships and make them more student-oriented. Professors are required to act as coaches, performers and facilitators. In sum, nations that want to prosper should strive for innovation and invest resources for identifying the appropriate people for these missions. They are usually those individuals who are dissatisfied with the current state of affairs, have a deep sense of curiosity, an opened-mindedness, a creative thinking and mostly are non-conformists.

Key Words: Creativity, Innovation, Higher Education, Post-Modernism

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1. Introduction

Living at the 21st Century's second decade confronts thinking people with some key issues that have accompanied mankind for many, many years. This 20-30 years period, named as the "Post-modern Era", is distinguished from the two or three hundred years of "Modernism" that came before it. The use of such a different term is justified because of the significant changes and substantial developments that occurred during this period. The transformation from Modernism to Post-modernism in Social Sciences was partly explored (Avny 2012) and described by three major phenomena: Technological breakthrough, Democratization and Globalization.

The technological advancement during the last decades was so fast and intensive that it surpassed the hundreds of years of progress before it. It bridged over countries and continents' discrepancies and converted today's world into a veritable small village. Almost everything could be seen and heard in real time, at just about every point over the globe. However, the impact of the sophisticated technology exceeds by far the technological world. The severe competition between the world largest ICT firms and the intensive fight over markets shares continuously expands the number of new devices and gadgets

introduced into the markets. People are compelled to make fast decisions and purchase new instruments just because they are influenced by public opinion.

Since the impact of technology at the 21st century is so significant it raises an old but familiar issue of man-machine relationships. The question is: who affects whom? Does a human being create and direct the machine, or rather, does the machine direct and steer human life? The continual race for improving the smartphones and their applications just demonstrates the excessive effort multinationals invest in introducing less needed and redundant gadgets. Ironically one can argue that as much as the smartphone would be smarter, so can its user be more naïve and less competent.

Democracy became during the said period the most popular form of Government. Although it has adopted several forms of ruling, in general it promoted the idea of general elections and some kind of people's representation. It is obvious that the advanced communication measures and the sophisticated social networks have substantially contributed to the growing impact of public opinion and demands for influencing governance. In the Post-modern Era there are very few autocratic rulers who can allow themselves to ignore democracy or to reject it openly.

Globalization, as the third affecting power, had tremendous effect on the division of wealth between the industrial and the Less-Developed Countries (LDCs). The globalization that had commenced with a modest move of manufacturing facilities and production lines from the industrialized nations to LDCs has reached its peak with China becoming the second largest world economy. This enormous industrial change has affected also the economies of all the Asian neighboring nations and ignited India's sleeping economy. But in addition to the economic impact, the globalization, assisted by the growth of communications technology, has had momentous influence on people and communities all over the world. People and organizations, in different parts of the world, eat, drink, wear and use the same products and similar services. Multinational organizations gain more and more power and influence on millions of the world's citizens.

Following the above developments, it is easy to comprehend that the 21st Century's Post-modern Era is a period that significantly differs from the previous ones. This difference that evolved from tangible changes results in many intangible expressions. Additionally, many of the innovations and the improvements that originally were aimed to bring concrete assistance and better wellbeing have yielded questionable outcomes. In the following pages, the Author analyses and explores these issues.

2. The Nature of a Thinking Community

A traditional Jewish proverb teaches that "wisdom of elder thinkers should be delivered in tranquility." The apparent rationale for such a recommendation was that in the past, elders were the main source for collecting and preserving accumulated wisdom. At that time, it was also understood that the old people show the way, set the tone and decide on proper behavior. Thus, communities were led by elder individuals according to their guidance and pace. The nature of historical communities rested therefore, on tradition, conventional behavior, self-esteem and respect. Wisdom and knowledge were thus delivered accordingly. Similarly, learning, teaching, and studying were carried out within a relaxed and stress-free atmosphere.

Since the social conditions and the living atmosphere of today completely differ from that of the past, it is legitimate to examine what are the desired conditions for maintaining an advanced knowledge-seeking society at present. This is also the background for examining the role and the position of gifted individuals.

Modernism came to its peak, as a course of action and as a social structure, toward the end of the 20th Century. Symbolically, Post-modernism commenced with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist Bloc as a philosophy and as a political-economic entity. At its first steps, Post-

modernism tried to follow the Neo-liberal Capitalist perspective and had behaved accordingly. But within 20 years, at the time of the 2008 Financial Crisis, many of its supporters have realized how disappointing the old greedy Capitalism was and how it failed to provide a satisfactory perspective to most countries. The impact of the triad powers of change was therefore, more than welcomed by the former communist or semi-communist countries and they joined others in search of a better course of action.

Obviously, the Post-modern revolution has promoted good ideas and endorsed a more just social structure. It has empowered common people by opening before them more and new information sources and increasing their political power by enhancing the influence of social networks and public media. However, one may argue that in part this Post-modern revolution also had considerably contributed to convert the general public into a consumer community. It had built avenues and constructed political-economic structures for meeting instantly people's demands and desires. This development raises the following principle issues:

- 1) Vision and goals of future societies – what are they and how they affect?
- 2) The consumer community – does it match the desired vision?
- 3) The required leadership – its required traits, character and competence
- 4) Updated strategy for Developing nations – how to foster it and by whom?

Exploring those questions will assist in understanding these issues and clarifying future prospects.

2.1 Vision and Goals of Future Societies and Nations

The vision and goals of free, developed and advanced nations are best summarized by The Preamble of the US Constitution as quoted below:

"We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, established Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessing of Liberty."

It is possible that some of America's opponents will reject this statement, because it does not reflect US behavior today. Nevertheless, it is still an appropriate banner and a spiritual lighthouse for many freedom fighters of today. Symbolically, it still represents a national vision and regime aspirations despite the fact that it was drafted over two hundred years ago.

2.2 The Nature and Character of the Consumer Community

This is, in principle, the core of the discussion. Current technology enables citizens to express freely

their opinions, to claim their desires and to demand their immediate fulfilment. Apparently such an arrangement seems to be the ultimate form of democratic life since equal opportunities are opened for everyone. However, such a consumer society reflects only one side of the social-economic equation. This is because it expresses citizens' wishes by a non-committed verbal manifestation. It does not examine citizens' willingness and ability to create and contribute something positive to the communal assets. It does not deal with the supply side of life. In a way it has also shed some light on the Post-modern evolving reality, which favors and advances verbal expressions and communication skills over implementation hardships. Unfortunately, one should admit that up to now, the Post-modernism's new paradigm has shaken up the former social-economic equilibrium by empowering the general public and increasing its democratic power. The greater involvement of people in politics, the growing impact of social networks and the popular use of verbal expression cannot conceal the fact that they circumvent basic changes. Very few of the critics and protestors really refer to the phenomena that too many industries left the industrialized nations causing a growing loss of good-paying jobs. The flocks of unemployed young university graduates, which characterize many of Southern European nations, must change their attitude and be prepared to be more creative, ready to work harder and be more flexible in the search for jobs.

Modernism, in principle, was based on some kind of the old perspective of "division of labor". Almost everyone and every social group has known and agreed to fulfill their role in the given social structure. Social mobility was enacted and accepted, but for its execution in practice one was required to have a strong character, a willingness to invest time and money and to be consistent with this move. In the previous period, living seemed to be materialistic harder, but the rules were clear and easy for understanding and following. In the Post-modern era, however, the democratic, easygoing and continually demanding social environment makes everything and more complex. The rules of the game are not clear, there are almost no preliminary requirements and in essence, everyone is a legitimate member of such a boundaries-less community. When all wish differently, when desires must be fulfilled immediately and when public regulators (an old-new term for bureaucrats) are in charge of the execution, a rational solution is almost impossible. Usually, even in the richest nations, means are short of desires. Governments, therefore, must have some kind of rational provision order and a clear preference policy. An elementary guiding rule teaches that resources must meet execution costs, and a sound financial program should support every social initiative. Wishful thinking and even much love cannot replace a shortage of supporting means. History teaches that a

gradual and consisting advancement, even if it is not so spectacular, usually is favored and preferred on a very illusionary but unrealistic dream.

By departing from the "division of labor" principle and allowing everyone to express his/her opinion on everything, social activists claim that they promote equality and justice. Even if they are right in doing so, they encourage and endorse mediocrity. Thus, Post-modern social advocates, knowingly or unknowingly, downgrade the image of the competent individuals and lessen their position in society. Furthermore, by promoting the value and the power of verbal and electronic expressions, which are so popular at present, few give thought to the creative effort and the hard toil needed for creating and building something concrete. As an example, one should note that research and development is carried out by a small group of competent scientists. Similarly, sophisticated high-tech industry depends on gifted creative engineers; advanced public medicine rests on talented physicians; inspiring music and arts are created by talented individuals; while culture and literature are produced by smart producers. The "division of labor" rule and the "specialization" outcome that is derived from it represent a conventional wisdom that was accumulated during many years of human history. The contemporary trend of deviating from it and giving all people the same will not last too long. Every individual should be supplied in accordance with his/her needs, which above a certain level are different.

Throughout history human, advancement and progress originated and were endorsed as joint ventures of genuine, hard labor and continual efforts of individuals and communities. It is logical to foresee that future leaders will be forced to reestablish similar socio-economic balance. The recent complicated relations between the EU and Greece provide a good example for demonstrating this case. For the past two decades, Greece was a living example of a consumer's society where most of its attention was directed toward pleasing its members and giving them an easy life. Over the past fifteen years, Greek governments and public institutions were busy getting loans from foreign banks and other sources to finance their public and private desires. It was a democracy that pleased the majority of its members. Relatively little attention was given during that period to the need for building local industries and developing economic enterprises. Consequently, when the payment date came, Greece was short of resources to repay its debts. The debt repayment agreements Greece was forced to sign with the EU and other international institutions have imposed a very painful austerity regime, which the Greek people will suffer from for years to come. On the other side are the German political individuals, who led the country successfully during the same period. Naturally, they led the EU negotiations with Greece

and were stiff and firm enough to force on the Greek government to embrace a more responsible policy¹.

2.3 The Role and Responsibilities of National Leadership

The former discussion well demonstrates the complicated task of the national leadership. When great parts of society are fascinated by the new opportunities opened to them by the promising Post-modern perspective, someone should bring them back to the ground. When irresponsible social activists mislead them to believe that by words alone the world could be changed, a responsible leadership should face people with reality. The three legged foundation of the Post-modern movement has opened new avenues and promising paths to prosperity, but these challenges can be met only through a consistent effort of creative thinking, research and development and professional and hard work supported by inspiring leaders. The well-known statement "there is no free lunch" that was relevant in the past, will also remain relevant in the future.

The case above demonstrates quite clearly the role of individuals in social life. Although the case refers to the political-economic system it is relevant to all walks of life. Trends, styles and fashions exist and inspire many nations and millions of people. As a rule of thumb, it is right to claim that dreams are greater than capabilities and desires surpass aptitudes. Consequently, individuals tend to misevaluate their potentials. Similarly, societies and nations frequently fail to assess their strengths. This is the main reason for demanding able, gifted and talented people to take the commanding post. Within the open and spontaneous societies that many of the developed countries are, it is not so easy to justify the need for competent or talented individuals. Within a democratic society where everyone sees him/herself as the know-it-all person, as the ultimate Salvatore and the most gratefulness individual, it is quite difficult to convince of the need to support gifted and talented people.

2.4 An Updated Strategy for Developing Nations

Many nations in Europe⁷² today face a stand-still situation. Two major issues that seriously threaten their future development—namely, the emigration from Africa and Asia and their own demographic worries—are subject to the central EU authorities and are beyond the scope of this discussion. Thus, we intend to explore and focus on examining some aspects of the development issue and identify factors that may boost it.

⁷² I mention Europe since I am familiar with major problems of many of them. However most of the recommendations are also relevant for other nations.

Many national leaderships understand today the critical role of science and research in advancing the development of their nations. Most leaders understand that elevating their citizens' standard of living, alleviate poverty and accelerating their nation's advancement is quite a complex undertaking. This comprehension notwithstanding, the actual policies and actions taken frequently miss these stated goals. The Post-modern development process differs from similar efforts carried out during the second half of the 20th Century because more known and unknown variables take part in the process. In the past, during the de- or post-colonial period, development was relatively simple. The agencies involved aimed to improve the already existing colonial education system, concentrating on constructing critical infrastructure ventures and focusing on building a variety of key development projects. Most projects and programs were relatively simple since they came to meet concrete needs and known requirements, usually defined by international agencies.

The situation today, in the 21st Century, is different. First of all, the goals and the objectives of the development efforts are not clear. Beyond general statements and ambiguous declarations, most policies fail because they either promise everything to few, or promise nothing to all. Even reaching a consensus on the requirements or defining them quantitatively is often complicated and unattended. As previously explained, the Post-modern revolution opened the ears and the eyes, the mind and the imagination of many that wish and expect unlimited satisfaction.

Post-modern economic development encompasses an internal dialectical conflict. It requires saving present means and using them as resources for attaining long term objectives. In short, it seems that the consumer society, a community that looks for easy and immediate satisfaction and people who seek easy solutions are not the adequate promoters of development policy. Only few of them will be ready to be modest at present in order to promise future prosperity. Implementing an active development strategy, in a Post-modern democracy, requires the establishment of a significant nurturing atmosphere of trust and support. Facing the suspicious and doubtful atmosphere prevailing in many western countries at present, attaining such objectives is almost impossible. In addition one may ask: if people are so busy with their instantaneous phone communication, when do they have the time for thinking? Unfortunately, the answer is quite simple: in most cases they do not have the lust to think thoroughly.

Another aspect of the complicated Post-modern society is the contradicting relations between the majority, the general public, and the cultural minority, or the pace-giving elites. Here also relations were simpler in the past when status and rules were historically determined by external forces. The

democratic structure of today's society promotes equality and allows people to disregard qualitative differences. Here again arises the discourse on society's description. Some, traditional writers continue to claim that "all people are the same." The Author, however, argues that "people's mind and behavior differ as their faces and physical appearance vary." Consequently human society should use the Normal Distributing Equation (or the Bell shaped Curve) for describing its structure. So the question in this regard is how to convince most of the people, resting within the left side of the Bell Curve, on the critical worth of the qualitative elite, resting in the Curve's right far end.

A nation that wishes to promote and advance its development, and seeks an adequate strategy for doing so, faces a guiding policy constructed of two channels. This two-pronged effort recommends carrying out the execution in parallel. One move entails the reshaping of the public mood and creating a positive atmosphere that supports the required change and promotes advancing innovation. The second parallel move should concentrate on reorganizing the education system. This topic will be discussed later in the following section.

A strategy that intends to change the social surroundings should start with reconstructing positive behavior and rebuilding public trust and hopes. A credible relationship between the people and the government, a reliable process of public service and an effective mechanism of administrative functionalism are among the central building blocks required for reforming the national spirit. An unreliable government cannot portray a promising future and of course cannot induce people to follow it. As in similar cases, rebuilding the national image is a dialectical process. On one hand it should strengthen the national self-esteem, but on the other hand it should encourage skepticism, critical evaluation and free thinking. On one hand it should provide a safe and reliable basis for take-off, and on the other one it should encourage creative innovative thinking and unconventional solutions. All in all, the new spirit that is required for reshaping a creative society, should combine trust with faith, individual strive with social accountability, self-esteem with curiosity, deep commitment with inspiring vision. However, these contradictory feelings and emotions cannot remain general. They must be transferred to and instilled in the hearts and minds of the concerning individuals. It is required because in general, social advancement depends on the talent, skills and capabilities of its members.

Reestablishing trust, setting up faith and inducing hopes are first of all the main undertaking of the national elite and its leaders. National leadership, in all the relevant fields of politics and economics, science and technology, arts and culture, should always be able to set an example. The best and most effective way for prominent and gifted leading

individuals to get influence and attain goals has always been, and still is, becoming role models and living examples for their followers. This short analysis simply reemphasizes the crucial role and the heavy responsibility that rests on the shoulders of the national elites.

3. The New Process of Learning

Over the past centuries, maintaining an ordinary and productive process of academic education was based traditionally on three essential assumptions:

1) The students - the learners who sought higher education, have willingly admitted that they do not know the learning material.ⁱⁱ

2) The teachers, lecturers and professors - the knowledge providers, were publicly and academically prepared, trained and qualified for providing the required education.

3) The universities, colleges and the academic surroundings have been recognized by both parties, students and teachers, as the adequate bodies responsible for teaching and providing higher education and knowledge.

This principal set of assumptions has worked for years, and has successfully contributed to increasing research, developing science and setting in motion a permanent process of knowledge accumulation. The academic traditional course of action enabled the higher education establishments to flourish while becoming a legitimate goal of many individuals and societies.

Thus, toward the end of the 20th century, provision of higher education to their citizens became an official strategy of both developed and less-developed nations. Democracy that had become so popular in many countries was applied also to higher education. More and more people, from all walks of life, saw themselves eligible for acquiring higher education. The democratization process of the academic world gained power and started to threaten many of the old traditional institutions

However, the tri-faceted move to Post-modernism, discussed previously, has changed also some of the basic cornerstones of higher education. First of all some of the education's leading targets had changed. No longer were vague desires of being an intellectual or a respectful member of the academic community sufficient. On the eve of the 21st Century, being an intellectual or a gifted thinker did not suffice in providing a prestigious or a respectful living. As higher education became popular, it was forced to add two major objectives to its curriculum. First, it was demanded to increase the teaching of concrete and practical fields, such as law, medicine and business. Secondly, it was forced to open more universities and colleges to enable an easier and greater recruitment of new students.

In this way, higher education that was historically established as an instrument for preparing

and training academic elites became at the turn of the 21st Century a much more popular establishment aimed at educating common citizens. The EU for example, seeking ways to accelerate its members' economic growth, decided in 1999 to support and promote a policy of hastening the provision of higher education to its youths. Many hopes and bright prospects were unfolded before higher education assuming that it will continue to proceed along the same track and led by the same wider term of reference.

But unfortunately, a new technological-driven threat appeared and seemed to endanger many of its intellectual achievements. This new danger evolved from the smartphone evolution that emerged from the communication revolution, and ended up with the domination of the mobile-phone systems as the leading global means of communication. Smartphone are at present available in every country, and in some cases their number surpasses the population's size. Although there are many advantages to such an impressive quantitative growth, with regard to learning and education it is followed also by some risks and perils.

The first and perhaps the most crucial manner in which the smartphone revolution challenged the higher education system was its rejection and denial of the three basic learning assumptions. Most young people refuse to admit that they know little, since the smartphone provides them with abundance of information in no time. Similarly they refuse to accept the academic authority of their teachers and recognize them as an information source, since they can gather much data freely and rapidly from the global networks. And lastly, many doubt the importance of universities and academic libraries, since knowhow and information could easily be collected from alternative sources. As such, when the ideological basis of the higher education system is challenged, its foundations become unstable, its usefulness doubtful, and the prospects for the future are dim and unclear.

4. The Genuine Individual in the ICT environment

The genuine individual is the main player and the key holder of all the above undertakings. All the former regimes that, by force or other coercive measures, have tried to subdue their citizens and use them as less-respectful individuals had failed. In general, progress mostly is endorsed by free people, such as thinkers, artists, educators, scientist and similar creators, who are the prominent members of today's turbulent society.

Over the hundreds of years of Western⁷³ cultural history, along many breakthroughs and significant

innovations, advancement was carried out by brave thinkers and gifted individuals. From Galileo and Copernicus, through Newton and Einstein, from Michael Deangelo and Leonardo de Vinci to Picasso and his contemporaries, from Beethoven and Mozart to Tchaikovsky and his colleagues, all of them were talented individuals who were driven by their faith and belief that they can achieve extraordinary accomplishments. Despite the indifferent and sometimes hostile surroundings, these pioneers were fueled by their internal belief and personality toward attaining unbelievable achievements. Fortunately enough, it also seems that history tends to support such human efforts and is inclined to promote progress by securing and preserving these relevant individuals.

Therefore, a nation that is in search of innovation and progress should invest time and resources in finding and identifying the appropriate people for such a mission. Although some will argue that this strategy contradicts the egalitarian spirit of the social networks, there is no other way available. The most appropriate qualifying process, which can be used in other areas is the process of preparing, training and qualifying the space astronauts in US. Advancing a nation is such a critical mission that all steps necessary should be taken for finding the right personnel for achieving it.

To conclude this section, it is necessary to illustrate some of the major traits and the leading features of the able individuals who are located in the far end of the nation's bell shaped Normal Distribution Curve: Usually, they are always dissatisfied with the current state of affairs. They have a deep sense of curiosity, an enduring open-mindedness, and a lasting creative thinking. Mostly, they were raised as non-conformists, questioning and critical individuals. They are risk-takers, ready to dare and unafraid of making mistakes, while simultaneously willing to admit their failures. They are visionaries, with a constructive self-esteem that maintain optimism even in bad times. These outstanding individuals are humble, consistent, dedicated to their mission and result-oriented. Although they rest on their mind they also listen to their intuition and follow their internal leanings. In most cases they dislike formalities, detest bureaucracy and look for means to circumvent red tape. Due to their unconventional personality, many do not understand them and some even distance themselves from them. For a thorough and an instructive study on this topic see Dan Senor and Saul Singer's (2009) book: *Start-Up Nation*.

⁷³ In this paper the Author refers mainly to Christianity and Judaism, the Western Civilizations that he is familiar with.

He finds it necessary to mention this fact since 2 large nations, China and India, are not included in the analysis.

5. Conclusion

In the wake of the 2008 Financial Crisis, many European nations are experiencing stagnation and a sluggish economic growth. In these pages, a development strategy was proposed emphasizing the conditions required for a Post-modern approach. Whereas growth in the previous centuries was mainly carried out by governments and designated agencies, at present it depends more upon people, and talented ones in particular. Governments and public institutions must organize and maintain the social environment and the public climate so that free non-conformists and creative individuals will be able to take risks and innovate. At the same time, people and factions of the general public must realize that their future prospects are firmly linked to the spirit of entrepreneurship, their government's ability to maintain it and their leaders' willingness to nurture and preserve it. Unfortunately, not all governments understand, agree and choose such courses of action.

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