

Global Essay Competition 2024

Title: Embracing Care: A Paradigmatic Shift

Introduction

Climate change. Inequality. War. Leaders today are tasked with compounding and unprecedented crises. It is critical that leaders use this moment to reimagine the way that we think, act, and organize. The traditional paradigm, shaped by our parents' and grandparents' born circumstances, is outdated. The traditional paradigm has prioritized short-term growth for immediate benefit, and the long-term consequences are now clear. It is time for a new paradigm that prioritizes care. If paradigms are shaped by a generation's born circumstances, ours is scarcity. In the face of numerous scarcities exacerbated by climate change and social injustice, perhaps the most underlying scarcity is care. In every global crisis, a lack of care is evident. This essay advocates for a paradigmatic shift in societal values and leadership principles towards prioritizing care and human well-being. Such a shift would focus on equitable resource reallocation, long-term thinking, and maintaining sustainable practices instead of pursuing constant growth.

Limits of the Traditional Paradigm

The dominant narrative has long been the *economistic paradigm*, which is centered on short-term wealth maximization and growth. Global business leaders have traditionally operated in this way, seeking to increase short-term profit for shareholders without regard for the effects on society. A prime example is the oil and gas companies who knew their products contributed to climate change, but spent decades misleading the public for the sake of profit.¹ Government leaders have acted similarly, pursuing endless economic growth, despite the fact that GDP growth and growth in well-being are no longer correlated.²

The first issue with the economistic paradigm is that it prioritizes growth above all. There is a complete lack of care for human well-being. The world's richest people gained \$1.5 trillion in 2023,³ while almost half of Americans cannot afford basic necessities.⁴ Federal data shows that corporate profits in the U.S. "surged to an all-time record ... as companies continued jacking up prices, pushing inflation to a 40-year high to the detriment of workers and consumers."⁵ This profit maximization mindset hurts everyone, even those with the most. Multiple studies show that people's well-being decreases over time as they pursue materialistic goals.⁶

The second issue is short-termism, which focuses on maximizing short-term benefits, ignoring long-term effects. On the business side, demand for "short-term results and predictable earnings in an inevitably unpredictable world" adds "heavy pressure to reduce the workforce, to cut corners, to rethink expenditures on research and development," per John Bogle, founder of Vanguard.⁷ Policymakers are also "excessively focused on short-term considerations" and for example, often neglect infrastructure projects in favor of short-term priorities.⁸ Businesses and governments alike must overcome short-termism if we are to survive. Short-termism represents a lack of care for the future—for our children and grandchildren.

The economistic model operates under the false assumption that humans are driven primarily by the drive to acquire—more wealth, power, or status.⁹ Research shows that this assumption is problematic, and functions like a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁹ This is because the economistic model fails to recognize that humans have three other equally important

motivators. In addition to the drive to acquire (dA), the *humanistic paradigm* recognizes the drive to bond (dB), the drive to comprehend (dC), and the drive to defend (dD).⁹

Arguments for a New Paradigm

If we want to know how to best care for people, then we must first work to understand them. Because of this, it's important to discuss human nature. Homo sapiens acquired four main drives as we evolved.¹⁰ First came the drives to acquire and to defend, which for early humans meant finding food and defending themselves. Next came the drive to bond, when early humans formed tribes and worked together. Most recently came the drive to comprehend, which led us to where we are today. The humanistic model places equal emphasis on all four drives. They are, after all, equally important parts of human nature. This framework places emphasis on balance, in pursuit of dignity and well-being. It is not based on infinite growth, but rather establishes “a safe and just” operating zone for the health of humans and the planet.¹¹ The humanistic model advocates holistic care so that everyone may reach their fullest potential.

Dignity represents all things that have intrinsic value. It encompasses everything that does not have a price but has value nonetheless. Under the humanistic framework, the *dignity threshold* is met when basic needs, like the four drives, are met.⁹ This provides a framework for achieving well-being.

Businesses and governments have a responsibility to care for society. The solutions are here if they simply choose to care. In order to ensure our future, leaders must use our resources equitably, stop pursuing endless growth, and think long-term. What does this look like?

Applications for Businesses

For businesses and organizations, humanistic management provides a useful framework. Humanistic management recognizes that people are not simply resources but individuals who deserve to be treated with dignity.⁹ It recognizes that businesses have a responsibility not just to shareholders but to all stakeholders: employees, customers, suppliers, the environment, the community.⁹ Humanistic management employs a long-term perspective, moving beyond the idea of short-term profit maximization in order to properly care for all stakeholders. Humanistic management prioritizes employee engagement and well-being by engaging their four drives. Key factors for employee engagement include competitive rewards and fair compensation (dA), trust in leadership and having a friend at work (dB), identification with the mission of the company and having opportunities to learn (dC), absence of stress (dD), and others.¹² To reduce outside stressors, SAS CEO Jim Goodnight provides employees with on-site medical care, child care, exercise opportunities, dry cleaning, hair cuts, and much more—all of which greatly support employees and in turn the company.¹³ These are merely some of the ways in which business and organizations can better care for their employees and communities.

Applications for Governments

There are many, perhaps countless, instances in which governments need to change. According to the 2019 World Happiness Report, people around the world are happier with their lives when their governments are “more effective, enforce the rule of law, have better regulation, control corruption, and spend in certain ways—more on health care and less on military. It also helps to live in a country with more political stability, less violence, and less

conflict.”¹⁴ This essay cannot extensively discuss every needed change, but can suggest a good place to start.

In the United States, the militarized police force illustrates a perfect opportunity to reorganize for care. It is a violent system that prioritizes punishment when care is needed, wasting valuable resources in the process and offering short-term solutions *at best*. Instead of addressing the cause of the issues, policing is “used as a band-aid on top of deeper socioeconomic issues by getting [those] perceived as ‘criminals’ and ‘undesirables,’ like people experiencing homelessness, out of sight and out of mind.”¹⁵ Despite providing no long-term benefits, the U.S. spends upwards of \$129 billion annually on policing.¹⁶ Resources would be better spent on support programs that actually improve well-being in the long-term.

There are numerous care-oriented ways in which we could better allocate our resources. To start, some police funding should be reallocated to emergency response units run by qualified mental health professionals, whose care-oriented training and de-escalation abilities would prevent many needless deaths.

There also must be changes in the enforcement of bylaws which criminalize poverty and homelessness, such as laws against loitering, sleeping in public, public urination, and panhandling.¹⁷ Instead of spending money on police to harass and punish the homeless for existing in public, funding should be allocated to systems of care, such as affordable housing, and clean, free public restrooms.¹⁷

Police funding should also be reallocated to provide free and reliable public transportation, instead of criminalizing those who cannot afford to pay. In New York City, the MTA spends more money on policing fare evasion than it loses to fare evasion, proving policing not only ineffective but counterintuitive.¹⁸ Resources would be better used investing in community infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists, buses, and trains, considering that public transportation “improves access to jobs, schools, healthy food options, and medical care.”¹⁹

Additionally, we should shift away from criminalization and towards the treatment of addiction—an illness that is not cured by imprisonment. The Police Brutality Center argues: Legalizing recreational drugs would transition enforcement to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). HHS could institute a safer supply program that allows addicts to receive free drugs and access safe areas in which to use them. This would prevent many opiate overdose deaths and eliminate the cartelization of the drug trade, resulting in safe streets for everyone. Drug addiction is a brain disorder that should be regarded as a public health issue rather than a crime. The massive savings from ending law enforcement’s role could be reinvested in drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs, resulting in many benefits: The cost to rehabilitate is lower than imprisonment. Rehabilitation increases the likelihood of stable employment and housing. Rehabilitation decreases crime.¹⁷

In other words, offering care to those suffering from addiction is cheaper and more effective, and supports the well-being of the greater community.

Lastly, multiple studies have shown that education is the most effective way to reduce crime.²⁰ The presence of police in K-12 schools creates a hostile learning environment which contributes to dropout rates, criminalizes children, and undercuts future opportunities.¹⁷ Funding for school police should be reallocated to teachers, school nurses, social workers, and counselors who have dedicated themselves to caring for students. In New York City alone, the billions being spent on new police facilities could instead build 17 new elementary schools.²¹

We must be bold in our work to reimagine the role of police in our lives. There are some who will argue that we need police, lest society fall into chaos. They often ask who you might call if someone was breaking into your home. In response, I would clarify that arguments for police alternatives do not advocate against some sort of armed rapid response team that can respond to specific situations when necessary. However, the reality is that a very small percentage of police work actually consists of “fighting crime.” Studies show that, despite the popular narrative, U.S. police spend most of their time “conducting racially biased stops and searches of minority drivers, often without reasonable suspicion, rather than ‘fighting crime.’”²² Furthermore, a study of police spending and crime rates found that there’s absolutely no correlation at all between the two.²³ Therefore, we should dedicate our resources to systems of care that have been proven to improve well-being and reduce crime more effectively.

Conclusion

In a world marked by compounding crises of climate change, inequality, and social injustice, the dominant economic paradigm of relentless pursuit of growth and profit has revealed its limits. This traditional model, which prioritizes short-term gains over long-term well-being, has led to widespread inequality and a disregard for human dignity. Today, we stand at a critical juncture, and leaders must embrace a paradigmatic shift towards prioritizing care and human flourishing.

The arguments presented in this essay underscore the urgent need for a new approach to societal values and leadership principles. The economic paradigm, rooted in profit maximization and short-termism, fails to acknowledge the complexity of human nature and the interconnectedness of well-being. It disregards fundamental aspects of human nature, such as the drives for bonding, comprehension, and defense.

In contrast, the humanistic model offers a holistic framework centered on dignity, well-being, and balance. In recognizing the intrinsic value of every individual, we can better care for each other, namely by prioritizing equitable resource allocation, long-term thinking, and sustainable practices. This model promotes holistic care so that individuals can thrive. Whether in business or governance, embracing humanistic principles and care-oriented policies can pave the way for a more just and sustainable future.

The applications outlined in this essay provide some tangible pathways for change. From implementing humanistic management practices in the workplace to re-imagining policing to create new systems of care, there are numerous opportunities to foster well-being. By investing in systems of care and support, societies can promote collective flourishing.

Ultimately, the call for a paradigm shift towards care is not just a moral imperative but a pragmatic necessity. We cannot continue down our current path. As we confront unprecedented challenges, leaders must seize this moment to redefine success and prioritize the well-being of people and the planet. By embracing a paradigm of care, we can transform the world.

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