

Introduction

EVERYONE NEEDS A WORLDVIEW. WITHOUT A CONTEXT for answering the basic questions of life, we can feel lost or disoriented. During the course of our lifetime, many of us have undergone fundamental changes in how we perceive ourselves, the universe, and our place within it. We are living in an era in which such transformation is fermenting across the planet on multiple fronts: personal, collective, spiritual, social, and scientific. An increasingly greater proportion of people are recognizing that habitual ways of thinking and doing must change or we risk catastrophic outcomes. And yet the shifts in perspective being called for seem to exceed our capacity to respond. We are constrained by a limited way of thinking about the world and our potential—a worldview—that we have inherited from the past and that may be incapable of overcoming the challenges it has created. How can such forces be overcome? How do transitions in worldview come about?

At Vrije Universiteit Brussel in Belgium, a research center was founded in 1995 with the aim of integrating worldviews. It describes a worldview as having the following seven components:

- 1. A model of the world:** Who are we?
- 2. An explanation:** Why is the world the way it is? Where does it come from?
- 3. Futurology:** Where are we going?
- 4. Values:** What is good and what is evil?
- 5. Action:** How should we act?
- 6. Knowledge:** What is true and what is false? How do we know what we know?
- 7. Building blocks:** What preexisting theories and models have been used to answer the questions of the other six categories?

In our current period of transition, most of us don't have clear, complete, and consistent answers to all of these questions. One reason is that we receive information in fragments, not as an integrated whole. As well, there are often built-in contradictions and biases in the sources. Sometimes what we are told contradicts our own experience. The sixth worldview component, how we know what we know, becomes extremely important when we search for truth. What we conclude usually ends up being an amalgam of what we've experienced, what we've read or heard, and what we *want* to believe.

Achieving a balanced and an integrated worldview requires combining an analytic approach to knowledge with an equally valid and complementary inner way of knowing. This *noetic* way of accessing knowledge involves processes such as intuition and inspiration, in which the information is perceived directly rather than through deductive or inductive reasoning. We tend to think that science advances only through logical analysis, but this noetic process has influenced some of civilization's most technological advances. "Eureka!" moments and dreams are often responsible for scientific discoveries, usually after a scientist has tried to solve a problem analytically. One example among many is the Russian chemist Dmitri Mendeleev's creation of the periodic table of elements in 1869. At that time approximately thirty elements had yet to be discovered, making it hard to classify the known ones because no clear pattern or set of clues existed yet for categorizing elements from their subatomic structure. Mendeleev struggled with this problem until he had a dream. "I saw . . . a table where all the elements fell into places as required. Awakening, I immediately wrote it down on a piece of paper. Only in one place did a correction later seem necessary."

*We believe that the convergence of noetic and analytic sources of knowledge about both the physical and nonphysical worlds is leading to important shifts in the dominant worldview. This evolution in paradigms is being ignited to varying degrees of intensity and depth across many cultures, such that the twenty-first century has the potential to become the Age of Transformation. Indeed, the world's current condition makes significant positive change imperative. Our efforts to map out this process have resulted in *The 2007 Shift Report: Evidence of a World Transforming.**

Timing is a key element in determining when transformation occurs within an individual or a society. Karen Armstrong's recent book *The Great Transformation* describes the Axial Age, the period from about 900 to 200 BCE when "the peoples of four distinct regions of the civilized world created the religious and philosophical traditions that have continued to nourish humanity to this day: Confucianism and Daoism in China, Hinduism and Buddhism in India, monotheism in Israel, and philosophical rationalism in Greece."

"The great transformation" of the Axial Age came about as a response to an unprecedented increase in violence, itself a result of wider access to transportation that placed people of different cultures into wider and more frequent contact with one another. This led not only to the exchange of ideas and goods but also to the desire to take enviable belongings away from others and to suppress beliefs that threatened one's own. To counter-balance these unleashed disruptive and destructive forces, various spiritual leaders appeared, advocating selflessness, compassion, and right action.

Striking parallels exist between the Axial Age and our current era. The travel industry and current technologies for communications have facilitated a truly global community while accelerating the spread of ideas and information. This cross-fertilization of knowledge and culture has led to alliances with tremendous potential for good but also to great animosity over social inequities that have become more obvious. Belief systems are clashing, and both religious and scientific fundamentalism have grown with the intention not only to counteract but to suppress alternative points of view. Many people are confused about what they believe. Some have given up on believing in anything.

So constructive transformation has become essential. We are at a pivotal point in history that is more extreme in many ways than any that has come before. Although the ideals of selflessness, compassion, and right action have been around for some time, they have never been fully realized because of the human capacity for self-deception, rationalization, and other forms of escape and denial. And despite its many astounding discoveries, traditional science has its limitations. The Earth revolved around the Sun and the law of gravity operated long before Copernicus and Newton

claimed it to be so. One wonders what else we don't yet have the means or the imagination to discover or understand.

The emerging paradigm/worldview we are highlighting in this report has its roots in both science and mysticism and was sparked in the middle of the twentieth century, when leaders in modern physics and ancient Eastern spiritual and philosophical traditions found that their views of reality validated each other. It has continued to gain momentum, with profound implications for humankind. The analysis of data by physicists and the direct experience of mystics both report that we are not separate from one another—we are all interconnected. This integrated worldview further proposes that our thoughts can have a measurable impact on the physical world and that even the act of observation is an action with consequences.

The conditions are thus ripening for a scientific revolution, similar to the Copernican revolution, that could have a major impact upon society. Thomas Kuhn's classic work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* points out the many parallels between scientific and political revolutions. Such shifts first meet with strong opposition—even though the new paradigm explains reality more clearly than the old did—but finally take hold when existing anomalies can no longer be ignored or rationalized away. Our era's new paradigm may not be firm yet, but it is crystallizing.

This report is organized into four major sections. The first looks at the adverse impacts of the dominant worldview and how it has compromised our collective ability to move forward. The second describes some of the scientific advances and philosophical developments that have contributed to a broader understanding of who we are and what we are capable of becoming. The third section illustrates how paradigm shifts are showing up in a variety of institutional settings, and the fourth section describes the Institute of Noetic Science's groundbreaking Transformation Research Project, which is generating deep insights into the nature of enduring personal transformation. We hope you are as stimulated by reading this report as we were in writing it.