

SYMBOLISM AND BUSINESS: THE ECONOMICS OF MYTHOLOGY

BY EDGAR J. RIDLEY

The idea that we live in a mythological world is hard to accept. One of the reasons it is hard to accept is because we base our decisions on a mythological framework. What that means is that most of the decisions that we make are wrong, incorrect, ineffective and non-productive. Remember: mythology is a denial of reality. If mythology is a denial of reality and we live in a mythological world, then our world is basically sick. The reason why racism is so prevalent is because we live in a sick world. There is no doubt that the eradication of mythology would practically cure the mental illness and psychological problems that affect us in today's civilization. In today's business world, many people are on drugs such as Prozac and in psychiatric treatment simply because they are immersed in a mythological system with no way out.

This is the prime reason why drugs used by executives are so prevalent in the business community, because manipulating metaphors and creating new mythologies creates a worsening of the psychological condition of the world population. That means the world business population is primarily mentally confused and psychologically impotent. Businesses cannot flourish if we rely on mythological answers to solve serious problems.

Amos Wilson stated: "Whatever mythology we believe is one that organizes our approach to other people, our perception of ourselves and of other people. It provides answers. The answers may not be right, they may be wrong; but it still provides an answer. And that's psychologically satisfying. Nothing threatens us and nothing upsets us like unanswered questions. Often Man projects a mythology in order to get himself out of his agony of dealing with unanswered questions and to put his mind at rest."

Assumptions held by whites are beginning to backfire. Their own mythological system is backfiring. Set-aside programs for businesses that are owned and operated by women and so-called minorities have undergone scrutiny and evaluation recently. The prevailing attitude among the white population is that the set-aside programs, geared to help so-called minorities, must be eliminated because racism no longer exists. Many whites perceive that the programs that are geared to help people of colour and women have tendencies to produce reverse discrimination. This all comes out of a fear that whites have that they are beginning to lose their power. Whites are coming to a realization of themselves as being the minorities on the world stage. Whites have risen to a state of panic while still practicing racism to the

highest degree. At the same time, whites insist that racism is at such a low that the programs that have been operating to give minorities an opportunity should be eliminated.



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It must be clearly understood that there are two powerful forces deriving from symbolism that affect global business. These two phenomena are racism and religion. With the rather recent emphasis on global transactions, we need a new sophistication in order to do international business. It requires a knowledge base that was previously thought unnecessary. The behavioural sciences have not done an adequate job in educating the workforce on how to do world-class business. The education of managers and the rest of the workforce in an adequate and unbiased way is not in the vested interest of those who would rather see the present way of doing business remain status quo. This produces an elitist, racist, and sexist system that continues to dehumanize the poor, reward the rich, and utilize technology for greed.

The behavioural sciences, as taught in our business schools, stay away from issues they deem touchy, sensitive, or uncomfortable. Business is successfully done by exhibiting appropriate behaviour patterns. How one makes decisions is crucial to the outcome of any business transaction. The fad theories that are promoted by so-called motivational speakers and management gurus tend not to irritate or create a climate of deep thought, but are always on a very superficial level that requires no abstract insight.

By using myths as an escape for reality, we promote myths as the ultimate reality. This is why Tom Peters' book, 'Crazy Times Call for Crazy Organizations', or any management theory promoted in a book, will easily make the New York Times' bestseller list as long as a white person writes the book. Non-whites are not supposed to produce theories or offer solutions that would affect the balance of power in the world. Despite the growing tendencies of whites to discount the factor of race and its influence in the business world, racism in today's world is more vicious and insidious than ever before. If this racism is allowed to stand, the result will destroy the world economy and any chance for progress in health, education, politics, business and the overall welfare. It will cause a continued rise in poverty. What is so disturbing about this racism is its total and unequivocal rejection of ideas of Blacks and other people of colour.

New concepts and theories by people of colour can have an enormous effect on the enhancement of disciplines such as medicine, physics, science, and other major fields of study. The contributions of Africa and Asia are no secret. However, most concepts and ideas are tainted and discounted for the sole reason that their creators are non-whites. This practice must be eliminated so we can do business in an effective and efficient manner. This form of intellectual racism is supported and reinforced by academia, media, government, religion, business, and all areas where decisions are made to affect world policy. What is so appalling is the gall of whites and their mindless support of these racist practices.

In a global business world, it is neither polite nor considered appropriate to discuss racism and its continuous and damaging effects. It is not politically correct or good business practice to do this. The only code word that is acceptable in the global business community is diversity. This term has become an acceptable password for entertaining the ideas, out of necessity, of non-white workers in the global economy. What does diversity really mean?

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People of colour and women are dealt with on defined terms. This limits the extent of business dealings. However, since whites are a minority, it will become next to impossible to keep the global majority, which are people of colour, out of the workforce and other managerial positions as well. There is panic among whites to contain the effectiveness of all people of colour. Whites, for the most part, may not verbalize this position. Their positions are presented in code words in daily business transactions. This sophisticated racism must be addressed no matter how uncomfortable it is. We can never have the attitude that racism is acceptable or here to stay. The only way to eradicate racism is to eliminate the symbol systems that cause it. Symbol systems produce the mythology that results in racism.

It is time to stop writing about racism and start offering solutions that will eradicate it. We have a solution that will eliminate racism and its resulting effects. This solution is beneficial to all parties involved. This is the solution: the elimination of all symbol systems. By doing this, we eliminate all of the mythological systems that create and support racism.

As mentioned, the second most prominent phenomenon created by mythology is religion, a very sensitive topic. It is increasingly apparent that people make decisions based on their theological and religious belief systems and practices. When business people evaluate situations all over the world, invariably they come upon troubled areas where religion dictated the turmoil and unrest. However, in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe, religion is still very personal. Any businessperson doing business globally will have to understand the importance religion plays in the decision-making processes of the people he or she is doing business with. A severe injustice would be perpetuated if we did not deal with the ramifications of the theological belief of the masses around the globe.

First, it must be understood that religion has its origin in, and was created out of, mythology. There have been countless debates about the impact symbols and myths have had on religion, with the understanding that myths have created all religion. There is no religion that did not manifest from mythology, directly or indirectly. Many lives have been lost in the name of religion. Much unnecessary bloodshed has taken place because of this religious mythological phenomenon. In today's time, we can look at the situations in Ireland, India, Russia, and the Middle East.

Traditionally, it has been viewed as inappropriate and bad manners to discuss religious beliefs. But it is essential to understand the religion and culture of the people you are doing business with. Many business deals have been based on that. The understanding of one's religious practice could mean the success or failure of a business transaction. It is becoming more apparent that one's mythological belief dictates and controls not only business decisions but life and death decisions as well. This shows the overwhelming extent and importance of the mythological content of one's religious belief. The world economic community is suffering

from a mythological approach to doing business. Because symbols are still the main ingredient and vehicle for making decisions, the best that top management can come up with are new metaphors as a basis for decision-making. It is very obvious that the problem-solving methods taught in business schools and practiced and honed in national and international corporations and businesses are impotent, a total waste of time, racially oriented, and ineffective to the highest degree. People who classify themselves as white put a spin on their behaviour and activity that is filled with mythology. Unfortunately, a large percentage of Blacks all over the world buy it. That adds to the problem of Africans gaining a foothold in the worldwide economic community.

Several studies have been done on the so-called glass ceiling that Blacks face in the corporate world. The studies explore the rationale behind the force that keeps non-whites out of the upper echelons of management and power. They are never conclusive or seriously followed up. This results in a lukewarm attitude on the part of all concerned, especially senior management. In the vast majority of cases, these Blacks can never be creative or taken seriously. Black original thought is well received when the proposal is not advantageous to other Blacks. It does not matter whether those ideas have a possibility of rendering profit to a corporation.

In the international arena, Europe and North America feel threatened by Asia and its growing economic presence. Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir has done a great job in confronting the West on its racism and arrogance. Malaysia has formed productive alliances with other Asian countries and has recently forged a productive relationship with China. As Dr. Mahathir told a Malaysia-China forum in Kuala Lumpur, "We prefer to see China as a friend and partner in the pursuit of peace and prosperity in the region."

The international community must now take seriously the so-called developing world as it realizes its potential. Both Asia and Africa will indeed be a power to be reckoned with if they work together and form economic blocs. Meanwhile, Europe and North America have an agenda of destabilization when they view their economic position in jeopardy. It was fine for the West to form economic blocs that excluded people of colour, but the moment people in Asia and Africa form blocs, the paranoia of the Western world raises its head.

When reading the literature on the economic situation in international business, white superiority always shows through. In structuring deals and making business decisions, the West must always view itself as coming out ahead. They have severe problems forming partnerships and joint ventures that will be fair for all. The white world must always be in front and their mythology does not allow them to share power equally. That came across abundantly clear in their agitation with President Mugabe of Zimbabwe regarding Zimbabwe's joint venture relationship with Malaysia. The West masked their irritation with technicalities, but it is clearly evident that

their unhappiness comes from Asia doing deals with Africa, specifically Malaysia and Zimbabwe. There must be a serious and thoroughgoing Asian/African business connection if both regions are to realize their full economic strength. China and Malaysia have found a promising market in Africa. Africa is the richest continent in the world in natural resources and the Asian countries are taking advantage of the wealth in a way that will be advantageous for both regions.

What must happen during the relationship between Africa and Asia is that proper and productive management must be in place to ensure smooth transactions and productivity of on-ground projects. It is imperative that decisions are not based on symbol systems that allow mythologically based transactions to undermine productivity. Nothing would make the West happier than failed business dealings between Africans and Asians. People who classify themselves as white have always thrived on creating situations of conflict between the non-white populace.

The coming economic battle is between Africa and Asia against Europe and the West. The economic battle is between people who classify themselves as white and the people of colour throughout the world, with Africa at the forefront. Asian and African countries must realize that their ultimate survival rests on their ability to discard their symbols, and by doing that, eliminating any decisions based on myth. That in itself will propel them to world leadership and power. If Europe and the West also follow that lead, we will experience a height of productivity as never before in the history of humankind. The choice is up to us.

Edgar J Ridley is President of his own international consulting firm, Edgar J Ridley & Associates, Inc. with offices in New York and worldwide affiliates. He heads a multidisciplinary team of organisational behaviour and development specialists to help corporations and governments develop more efficient operations. Mr Ridley has lectured widely on his management productivity techniques in Africa, Europe, China and Malaysia. He is the author of "An African Answer - The Key to Global Productivity and Symbolism Revisited: Notes on the Symptomatic Thought Process", published by Africa World Press.

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For further information please contact: Edgar J Ridley & Associates, 121 W. 117th Street, Suite 3, New York, New York 10026 USA. Tel/Fax: 212 316 9163 Email: ridley@att.net