THRIVABLE INSIGHTS FROM THE THRIVABILITY MATTERS WEBINAR

Hi, passionate thrivability enthusiast. We live in unprecedented times. The numbers prove that climate change is here to stay. Social injustices corrupt the very fabric of our society, and misinformation and false narratives clog our devices through mainstream and social media. It's important to have reliable information from people who stand to gain nothing from sharing it with you. A person's agenda defines their motivation. THRIVE's agenda is to assist others to build a thrivable future, while our passionate volunteers walk the talk to deliver an authenticity that is difficult to find elsewhere.

Every month, THRIVE delivers a knowledge-filled webinar, straight to your screens, providing statistics, facts, tips, tricks, and hints on how we can solve the problems our world faces everyday. from new innovations and discoveries, to the actions that people and communities take every day to make our world just a little more thrivable.

Each month, a particular solution is unpacked, disseminated, and investigated, to see how it applies to us and how we can play as a global team, on the playing field of Earth, to reach these goals. It isn't enough for us to sit passively by and let governments and businesses make our decisions for us. After all, their motivation is driven by their agenda.
What does that mean for us?

Our aim is to arm you with the knowledge to change from being simply sustainable to terrifically thrivable. Therefore, I'd like to introduce you to Dr. Jayant Mahajan. He was an esteemed guest for the February 2024 Thrivability Matters Webinar who spoke to us on SDG12: Responsible Consumption and Production. Jayant's focus was on inherent problems with profit driven motives and concepts of navigating the interconnectedness of sustainability. The thrivable insights that follow are his precious pearls of wisdom that he generously shared with us during the Q&A session that follows every webinar.

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Dr. Jayant Mahajan, a graduate in physics, with a Master's Degree in Information Management and a PhD in Field Management.

Furthermore, he has 15 years of industry experience and about 12 years of experience in academics.

He has worked across industries like real estate, hospitality and tourism, and Information technology in various capacities.

He is currently working as an Associate Professor with Christ University. He is also a PhD Guide, and on the panel of the RAC committee at the Symbiosis International University.

Q & A

How do you see the problem of reaching out to people at a grass roots level and what is the solution of making them aware?

In my experience and observations during my interaction with people across the different socio-economic strata and different walks of life, people are vaguely aware of the issues and causes of climate change and the solutions. Very few people are attempting to do something about it in their limited capacity. Some people give up their efforts in despair because of not enough resources and support.

For example, I know of a small NGO who planted many trees on a roadside and nurtured them for a year only to find that government decided to implement a road widening project and without a second thought uprooted all the trees overnight in the name of development. In this case, the people involved just give up on the cause.

For most of the population, climate change is more of a coffee table talk and thus, they are not willing to take any action because it would mean that they will have to give up on their comforts and change their consumerist lifestyle. So, in my opinion – the issue is multi fold - at the grass roots level most of the people are struggling to meet their basic needs and mostly don't worry

too much about climate change. Some people who do take initiatives at individual levels or as small groups often find their impacts are not powerful enough to reverse the negative impacts of climate change.

So, governments and corporations have to really use their might to educate masses and shape the attitude and habits and actions at all levels. But mostly, the government and corporates are engaged in greenwashing – they show they are pro-climate, but on the other hand encourage consumerist behaviours because they must make more profits for stakeholders. I believe to make changes at a grass root level, governments all over the world must become serious about generating a meaningful impact, or else the situation will continue to deteriorate.

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But what about developing countries that feel that it may not only hinder their economic growth (and poverty eradication), but stop them from becoming the next super global economies. What are your thoughts on this?

The so-called developing nations exploited resources indiscriminately and built a lot of wealth to become developed nations and super-powers. All the issues related to climate change are a result of their action and the price will be (and is being) paid by underdeveloped and developing countries.

Firstly, the arguments made by these developing countries seems logical. But I think we are in the same boat. The boat is sinking – just because someone benefitted by burning holes in the boat does not mean I, as a developing nation, should continue doing the same. When the boat sinks – it will take everyone down, irrespective of whether they are a developing, underdeveloped, or developed nation.

Secondly, the definition of development itself is skewed – we claim an increase in consumerism and GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as development - this is wrong. We should examine our definitions and measures of development.

For instance, we should look at countries like Bhutan where Gross Happiness Index is a measure of development and not GDP.

What do you suggest to the people sitting at the bottom of the pyramid as to how they can practise sustainability in their day-to-day life, without compromising on the ability to fulfil their basic needs?

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You could start with planting trees and using public transport; people should follow the principles of repurpose, reduce, recycle, and reuse, give up consumerist behaviour, not use plastic, and use locally produced goods. These are the few things that anyone at the bottom of the pyramid can practice. Again, I think the issue is not at the bottom, it's at the top of the pyramid. Those are the people who have to amend their ways and adjust their attitudes, because they are the ones who control the thought processes and attitudes of people, shaping their opinions, thinking, and lifestyles to suit their business and political needs.

A few things that businesses should do is focus on clean energy and take responsibility for the litter that the packaging of their products cause. For instance, they should incentivise their customers to return packaging material back to the company, and reuse it. Furthermore, they should use their advertisement and marketing machinery to spread awareness, and fund startups in green businesses. There is a lot that governments and corporates need to do, which unfortunately they are not, as their focus is mainly on short-term profits for stakeholders.
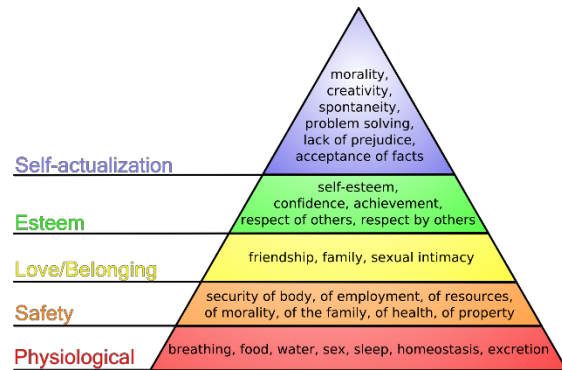
Please shed some light on why it's difficult for small and micro businesses to take this route and what can be the way forward?

I would like to start by acknowledging the challenges like:

- **Limited resources:** Small businesses often have tighter budgets and fewer staff members compared to larger corporations, thus investing in resource-efficient technologies or processes could be perceived as a cost burden rather than a long-term benefit.
- **Knowledge gaps:** Owners and staff might lack the expertise to identify and implement resource-efficient practices.
- **Time constraints**: People in small businesses and startups often need to work on several tasks at once with significant time constraints, always running to meet immediate deadlines. This means researching and

implementing new sustainability solutions / practices could be overwhelming or impractical.

Having said this, it's not impossible; this can still work by considering the following:

- **Policy incentives:**
  I would like to emphasise the need for government policies that support small businesses in adopting environmentally sustainable practices / solutions, like:
    - o Tax rebates for investments in energy-efficient equipment or sustainable materials.
    - o Grants / funding / subsidised loans to offset the capital expenditures, and, even operating expenses (if possible) for a limited period of time, to give them time to implement these solutions.
    - o Simplified regulations to make it as simple as possible for small businesses to align with environmentally friendly standards.
- **Business Practices:**
    - o Promote low-cost or no-cost resource-efficiency strategies such as optimising energy use by turning off lights and electronics during non-working hours, reducing water waste, or implementing recycling programs.
    - o Encourage collaboration within the business community to share knowledge and resources related to resource efficiency, and implementation of environmentally friendly solutions.
- **Knowledge Sharing:**
  Advocate for creating a central resource hub or workshops specifically designed for small businesses.
  These resources could provide:
    - o Clear and concise information on the benefits of resource efficiency.
    - o Step-by-step guides on implementing specific practices.
    - o Case studies showcasing successful examples from other small businesses.

Businesses should be made aware that implementing resource efficiency solutions can save money on utility bills and waste disposal costs in the long run, improving the business's bottom line and contribute to the topline indirectly.

It will also help in generating good will for the brand.

The growing consumer demand for sustainable products and services will surely be a pressure point to make small and big businesses to adopt sustainable practices. Hence, being environmentally responsible can help attract a wider customer base.

How can we make sure that the end consumer is not heavily impacted because of the investments made by businesses to make themselves resource efficient?

We all share the concern that businesses might raise prices due to resource-efficiency investments. However, the good news is, if done properly, sincerely, and honestly and by staying true to the spirit of sustainability, achieving this goal doesn't have to burden consumers.

To this end, I would suggest a multi-pronged approach for different stake holders involved in the process:

Businesses should strive to absorb some initial costs through innovation, operational efficiency, or green financing. Resource efficiency often leads to long-term savings on energy and water, potentially leading to stable or even lower prices for consumers in the future.

This may increase capital expenditures, but don't be tempted to pass on the initial Increased capital to the consumers, look long-term.

Consumers should support businesses committed to resource efficiency and adopt resource-conscious practices themselves. They can contribute to lower demand and potentially influence market prices. Educational campaigns can help consumers understand the benefits of these products and services. Consumers should not shy away from paying a small premium, if they can, for products/services provided by businesses that adopt environment friendly practices.

Policymakers can incentivise businesses to invest in resource efficiency through tax rebates / subsidies, or grants, potentially lowering the cost burden passed on to consumers. Additionally, supporting research for cost-effective resource-efficient technologies benefits both businesses and consumers and eventually the climate of our planet.

Adopting environment friendly practices isn't just about cost, it's about building a sustainable future for

all of us who share this Earth.
By working together, businesses, consumers, and policymakers can find solutions that will benefits all of us.

Please share your thoughts about circular economy principles being introduced in schools. What do you think could be the impacts of this?

Teaching circular economy principles in schools is a fantastic idea!

Here's why:

- **Empowering young minds:**
  Students learn about responsible resource use from a young age, fostering environmental consciousness and helping them become active participants in a circular economy.
- **Behaviour change:**
  These practices can translate into positive changes at home and in their communities, influencing others towards a more sustainable lifestyle.
- **Innovation and problem solving:**
  By integrating these concepts, students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills through creative challenges and project-based learning.
- **Building a sustainable future:**
  This will equip students with the knowledge and skills for future careers, empowering them to contribute to a more sustainable world.

Here's what to consider for successful implementation:

- **Age-appropriate learning:**
  Tailor content and activities to the students' age and understanding level to ensure effective engagement.
- **Teacher training:**
  Provide educators with training and resources to integrate these principles effectively.
- **Collaboration:**
  Collaborate with environmental organisations, businesses, and communities for resources, expertise, and real-world connections.

Overall, introducing circular economy principles in schools is a powerful tool to equip future generations with the

knowledge and skills needed for a sustainable future.
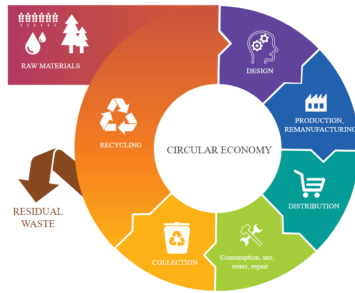
How do you see technology helping organisations to tackle the challenges related to Environmental cost?
i.e. the adoption of Digital twin technology which aims to reduce emissions level in buildings.

Technology offers a powerful arsenal for organisations to combat environmental challenges and reduce their associated costs.

Some Examples:

- **Digital twins:**
  As you mentioned, creating digital simulations of buildings (digital twins) allows for testing and optimising energy efficiency measures before real-world implementation. This can significantly reduce energy consumption and emissions while saving on operational costs.
- **Precision agriculture:**
  Technology like sensors, drones, and data analysis helps farmers optimise resource use by precisely applying water, fertilisers, and pesticides only where needed. This minimises environmental impacts and reduces waste, leading to cost savings.
- **Renewable energy management:**
  Smart grid technologies, blockchains, and AI enabled energy generation / distribution ensures efficient integration and management of renewable energy sources like solar and wind power. This helps organisations reduce reliance on fossil fuels and associated environmental costs.

Technology is also playing a crucial role in:

- **Monitoring and reporting environmental performance:**
  Sensors and data collection tools enable organisations to track their environmental footprint and identify areas for improvement.
- **Developing sustainable products and services:**
  Businesses are leveraging technology to design and manufacture products with lower environmental impact, creating a competitive advantage and attracting eco-conscious consumers.

It's important to note that technology alone is not a silver bullet. Successful implementation requires conducive governance policies, investment, training, and a commitment to sustainability within organisations.

However, the potential of technology to reduce environmental costs and create a more sustainable future equally significant.
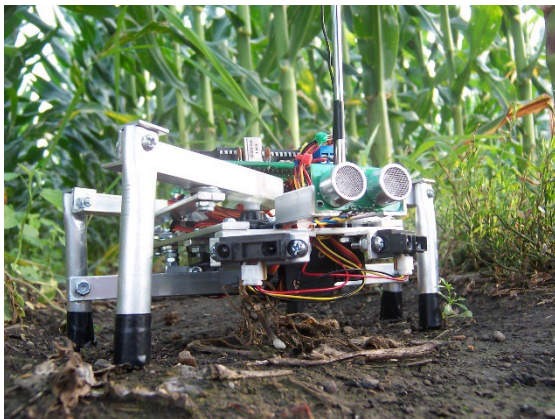
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What are your views on who should lead this change, and what are probable challenges going forward?

The transition to a sustainable future requires a collective effort, not a single leader.

Here's why:

- **Shared responsibility:**
  The environmental crisis is a global issue affecting everyone. We need collaboration and action from individuals, businesses, governments, and civil society organisations to achieve meaningful change.

- **Diverse perspectives and expertise:**
  No single entity has all the answers. Collaboration across various stakeholders leverages diverse perspectives, skills, and resources to address complex challenges. This approach has its own challenges, such as:

  o **Coordination and alignment:**
    Ensuring coordinated and aligned action across different sectors and interests can be complex, requiring effective communication, collaboration platforms, and potentially even new governance models.

  o **Individual commitments**:
    Changing mindsets and behaviours, from individuals to organisations, requires sustained awareness, education, and incentives to overcome resistance and encourage participation.

Despite these challenges, the collaborative approach offers the most promising path towards a sustainable future. By working together, embracing diverse perspectives, and holding each other accountable, we can collectively overcome the challenges and build a more sustainable future for all.

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I feel that the governments in power are using the wrong models eg. GDP as a measure of growth.

Thus, what do you believe would be the most effective way for governments, corporations and the citizens (if possible) to make effective change on a mass scale? What needs to happen to enact change, and how?

I understand your frustration with traditional growth models like GDP not capturing sustainability efforts. Fortunately, several approaches can drive effective change for a sustainable future.

One of these is collaborative action:

- **Governments:**
  They can implement environmental regulations and policies that incentivise sustainable practices for businesses and individuals. They can invest in green infrastructure and renewable energy sources. Furthermore, they can support research and development in sustainable technologies and solutions.

- **Corporations:**
  They can integrate environmental sustainability into their core business strategies and operations. They can also develop and offer sustainable products and services. Finally, they must increase transparency in their environmental impacts and progress towards mitigating them.

- **Citizens:**
  They can reduce their own environmental footprint through conscious consumption, waste reduction, and energy-efficient practices, and support businesses committed to sustainability. Citizens can also hold your governments and corporations accountable for their environmental actions.

Another way is alternate metrics to measure growth of nations economy/wealth:

- It's not only money – health is wealth – physical, mental and spiritual.
- Advocate for alternative metrics beyond GDP that consider environmental and social well-being, like the Gross National Happiness index used in Bhutan.
- Measure progress towards sustainability, by tracking environmental indicators like

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carbon emissions, resource use, and biodiversity.

Remember, change starts with each of us. By working together, demanding change, and embracing new models, we can pave the way for a more sustainable future for all.

This is just a starting point, and continuous dialogue and innovation are crucial for successful implementation.

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If you found value in this webinar, and loved it as much as we did, please register for our next exciting webinar at **thrivabilitymatters.online**.

We can't wait to see you there. Keep on thriving!

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