The Psychological Link between Human Mind and Sustainability

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Abstract

A healthy connection between one's own mind and body is necessary for effective survival of an individual. Similarly, a connection between humans and their environment is necessary for ensuring and maintaining sustainability. Observing psychological behavioral patterns, especially ones that could be linked to the environment, might provide us with an insight into an interesting dynamic of dependency and also, how the world functions. Examining these dynamics would give an idea about how behavioral patterns might give a solution to sustainability issues. Since human beings are a vital part of the functioning of the world, these observations might help to create a better future, which starts right from us.

Keywords

Behavioral patterns; Psychology; Sustainability

1. Introduction

Sustainability issues mainly arise due to human habits that are to be changed and are of concern to nature. Psychological analysis of human behavioral patterns may give one an idea about why human beings act the way they do and also, the possible reasons for refraining from changing existing behavioral patterns despite of being aware of the harm caused by it. It is evident that most of the sustainability issues that we are aware of can be progressively made better with changes in day-to-day habits of the human population. It

could be something as simple as lessening the use of non-biodegradable materials like plastics [1]. But as we can clearly see, there is still a vast majority of the population using such materials rather than switching to eco-friendly materials despite knowing the damage caused by it. This is where psychological analysis comes into play.

Climatic changes are widely observed across all regions of the globe. Even a phenomenon like climate change that has been a rising concern for environmentalists and activists all over the world has a relation to the topic of sustainability. It would be good to develop an understanding of this subject by taking a very familiar example of Kerala floods that will be discussed briefly in the upcoming lines. Over the years climate change has become more prominent and its effects remain to have a hurtful grip on earth and its living organisms. There have also been other underlying calamities, whose traces lead to the factors relating to climate change. It is observed that the past few years have not been easy for the residents of Kerala due to the frequent occurrences of flood in the state. In 2018, people all over Kerala were struggling to stay safe due to the unexpected flooding that caused severe damage to property and life throughout the state. The vicious flood wrecked thousands of shelters and took lives of hundreds of people. The floods did not stop by marking its infamous presence by spreading its treacherous wings in mid-2018, it also caused widespread destruction the very next year as well. The year 2019 also witnessed severe losses and damages due to another flood. **Table 1** represents the statistics of floods that occurred in the years 2018 and 2019 in Kerala.

Table 1: Statistics of flood in Kerala in 2018 and 2019 [Data taken from the Disaster Management Authority of Kerala, as published in the newspaper, The Hindu]

Time period of flood in Kerala	Death rate	Financial Loss (in Rs.)
July 2018 – Aug 2018	433	31000 crores
8 August 2019 – 26 August 2019	102	2101.9 crores

2. Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations (UN) has defined 17 sustainable development goals, which are as follows: no poverty; no hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation, and infrastructure growth; reduction in inequality; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice, and strong institutions; partnerships to achieve the goals [2].

In an era of advancing technologies, we are driven by the desire to be a product of modernized practices. More often than not, these practices have an inclination to be of destructive nature. This is not necessarily done while the individual is completely aware of the consequences, it could also be a series of events or practices that might seem rather harmless on the outside but have underlying consequences. Habits that our ancestors from a long time ago had practiced tend to be a lot easier on nature than our existing practices. This could be due to the fact that advancements in technology have led us into following whatever practices are assumed to be required to keep up with it. It could also be impacted by societal pressure, peer pressure or other such factors that are related to complex human behaviors like development of inferiority or superiority complexes etc. An example of this would be the use of wooden furniture. A lot of people find it prestigious to own furniture made out of expensive and rare wood. While some furniture could be made from fallen trees, it is true to say that it is clearly not always the case. The rate of deforestation has been rapidly increasing over the past few decades and, directly or indirectly, human beings are the major cause of it [3]. As discussed earlier, the desire to come across as better than the people around us by doing such activities are a major cause of concern. A few common examples of destruction of habitat or the life associated with it includes the collection of elephant tusks, owning multiple cars that lead to excessive burning of fossil fuels which in turn leads to global warming, procurance of wild animal skin (Eg:- tigers) etc. It is necessary to keep certain egos and other unwanted issues aside to act as responsible citizens and individuals.

3. Psychological Measures to attain Sustainability

Even after multiple calamities become a recurring phenomenon, people seem to have a reluctance to take a direct and strong step to approach issues related to climate change, which in turn is linked to lack of habits that promote sustainability. Experts say that this is due to internal fear or anxiety and is deeply engraved within the minds of people that are perhaps unknown even to the individuals themselves [4]. This fear may sub-consciously prevent the individual from taking any further action due to a fear of it not being as effective, or things that are to be implemented simply not going as planned. Human mind is generally fearful of failures and this might be one of the reasons for the lack of implementation of new strategies or even trials of some new remedial measures that could be of use.

It would be accurate to say that the Newton's law of inertia also applies to individuals and their behavioral tendencies. Humans are creatures driven by habits and it is hard to break out of it unless one is forced to do so due to some alarmingly concerning consequence. Human beings are generally observed to have a slower approach to problems that may arise in the future, when compared to problems in their present lives that require immediate action [5]. Most often, these consequences also have to be foreseen and predictable to take an effective action against them, that in turn requires the implementation of some form of change. It is noticeable that even scientific laws of physics or mathematics can be metaphorically linked to human psychological behaviors and this is pointing to the fact that everything is interconnected and life cycles and patterns of living are indeed circular in nature and not necessarily linearly linked.

4. Role of Psychologists in Ensuring Sustainability

The key roles that psychology play in the act of sustainability has been discussed. Now the question is why psychologists cannot simply do the tasks required for maintaining and ensuring sustainability. But in the real-world scenario that is rarely ever the case. While there may be psychologists voicing the need for it, it is difficult for them to carry out these

tasks by themselves. Most psychologists are specialized in dealing with their respective profession and actions, and, implementations of these actions on a large-scale population are something that stretches way beyond the professional boundaries and streamlined specialization of trained psychologists [6]. While this might remain the case for psychologists, on the other hand, it could be noted that, it is common for environmentalists to talk about the rapidly increasing need and awareness for sustainable habits while simultaneously acting on it. But while analyzing the case of an average citizen or an "environmental psychologist" or an "ecopsychologist" the efficiency of pursuing an action-oriented path for an effective outcome is different and often difficult to successfully execute on a large-scale population.

Conclusions

It is important to realize that even the smallest of actions can have unexpectedly huge consequences. So, it is indeed a necessity to understand sustainable habits and their functioning thereby implementing some simple yet effective key changes to one's daily practices. Since it is difficult to change the day-to-day habits or behaviors of individuals, it is important to try and incorporate subtle yet effective mechanisms into the life systems of people so as to reach to them in a personal way while paving the way to a sustainable future. It is wise to say that the future begins with oneself.

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