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Globalized workers – How the changes on "organizational vision" impact people's perception

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Abstract

In a previous research the authors identified that one of the most relevant dimensions involved in the construction of a global company is the "type of organizational vision". Many reasons explain why the global organization needs to develop a so-called "global vision", or, as some scholars prefer, a "geocentric vision".

This change represents significant impacts to a specific group of employees: the "globalized workers" – migrants or remote employees. The present unbalanced equilibrium of job positions and people originates transferences of people and work places.

Observing that the cultural values of an organization are mainly forged by the cultural values of the involved social groups and by their internal practices, a survey was conduct in order to verify some of the impacts of this change on their workers' perceptions.

The results were obtained by qualitative analysis of the collected data and its interpretation was based on the contemporary literature in the field. Even if the analyzed data were collected in Brazil the results are useful to enhance the understanding of the question in any part of the globalizing world.

I. INTRODUCTION

As an introduction to this study we will present a general view of the following subjects: the present changes at the international company, and the importance of the organizational vision on these changes. We will conclude the introduction by pointing out the objectives of this article.

The development of this study will conduct to investigating how the changes on the organizational vision are related to the advent of the globalized workers and to exploring some collected data on people's perception. The conclusion consists of a discussion on the proposed matter.

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Present changes at the international company

One of the relevant aspects of the so-called globalization is the international transformation of the companies. A way of observing this question is to comprehend how the international companies evolve. We understand that the preceding organizational model — the multinational company — has been giving place to a new one — the global company. The authors previously compiled this vision and a five-dimensional model emerged from this compilation (Azevedo and Bertrand, 2001).

Theoretical initial and final states and the dimensions of the change			
	Dimension	**Initial state - Multinational**	**Final state – Global**
A	Global integration of the operations	Low	High
B	Strategic management pattern	Decentralized	Centralized
C	Covered world key-markets	Some	All
D	Dominant marketing approach	Multi-domestic	Global
E	Type of organizational vision	Polycentric	Geocentric

Table 1 – Theoretical states and the dimensions of the change (Azevedo and Bertrand 2000)

The present study will focus on the "E" dimension, namely "type of organizational vision". This vision, as disclosed by the analysis of many references, tends to change from a "polycentric" state, typical of the multinational company, to a "geocentric" state, which is proper of the so-called "global company".

By the market point of view, the creation of globalization can be understood as a three steps process, (Joag, 2000). At first, after the end of Word War II, the acceptance of free market system by the world governments. Then came the creation of regional free trade areas and, at last, the event of the general agreements on tariffs and trade (GATT) and the world trade organization (WTO).

Many different models identify globalization as a multidimensional phenomenon. Joag (2000), for instance, points out that globalization can be understood by a many-faceted phenomenon defined by a set of changes that had the effect of breaking down old boundaries that compartmentalized the world into continents, regions, countries, states, nations, and other economic and political blocks.

His model, which focuses on marketing analysis, identify the following dimensions of the globalization phenomenon: (1.) globalization of supply sources and manufacturing, (2.) globalization of competition, (3.) globalization of marketing operations, (4.) globalization of marketers' attitude or marketing philosophy, (5.) globalization of markets, and (6.) globalization of marketing environment, Joag (2000).

If we contrast these two models – Azevedo and Bertrand's (2000) and Joag's (2000) – the "E" dimension, "type of organizational vision", is found to have many similarities with "4." dimension, "globalization of marketers' attitude or marketing philosophy". Excepting for the fact that one of the studies refers only to the marketing aspects of the question, the results are basically the same, and lead to the importance of the "organizational vision", or "attitude".

Importance of the organizational vision on the changes

Many authors understand that having a global vision is an important attribute to be obtained by the global company. This vision concerns the internal aspects of the organizations, (*e.g.* Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1987a, 1987b and 1989; Campbell 1993; and Keegan 1995), as well as the external ones (Randolph, 1990; Parker 1998; among others). As noted by Randolph (1990) the multi-domestic strategy adopted by the multinational company was useful when the world was a simpler place and the nations were more insular. Nowadays the company that continues to use this approach will probably not survive.

The literature also indicates that the *organizational vision* establishes the difference between multinational and global companies. Parker (1998), in her bibliographical survey, finds that a typical attribute of the global company is *to have the world as home.* For Bertrand (1994), this means replacing the *polycentric* vision of the organization for a *geocentric* one. The objective is to become *citizen of the world* instead of *national citizen.*

Joag (2000) presents a similar approach by establishing three possibilities of "marketers' attitudes or marketing philosophy": (1.) philosophy of domestic marketing extension *i.e.* ethnocentric attitude; (2.) philosophy of multidomestic markets extension *i.e.* polycentric attitude; and (3.) philosophy of global markets *i.e.* regiocentric or geocentric attitude.

Having an ethnocentric vision means to observe the world with domestic references only, as domestic companies do. Under this attitude the managers tend to treat the international marketing merely as an outlet to deal with problems associated with the domestic marketing – which is the primary focus. This vision is related to the early steps of the internationalization process. Often this first movement is more likely to be caused by internal market threat, *e.g.* shortage of demand or economic crisis, rather than to fruit of a strategic decision. As points out Czinkota and Ronkainen (1995), these are "reactive motivations" to become international.

This first step is usually related to weak international results and lack of positioning. The main reasons for it are the low concern given to the international operations and the inability of understand the differences. This "myopia" takes place when the organizations try to observe the world with domestic references.

In the same way the multinational company tends to adopt a polycentric vision, *i.e.*, tends to observe the world with different domestic references. Each national market is looked upon as a unique market requiring a separate, independent, and different strategy. Low or minimum effort is therefore made in comparing, coordinating, or integrating the actions. The focus is to be as able as possible to reach the specific needs of each country. The national borders are respected. But the company tends to evolve to a more integrated vision as far as this movement is allowed by the markets' homogenization and it is required by cost reduction and economies of scope.

The geocentric vision (to have the world as reference) is typically attributed to global companies. These companies "considers itself as the citizens of the world and not of any specific country", Joag (2000). In some contexts, as for instance common markets and economically integrated regions, the regiocentrism emerges as an intermediate state. Under these concepts the national borders are ignored and the world (or the region) is conceptualized as a single market. Parker's (1998) *world as home* also refers to a *worldwide presence.* The global company has a global presence, *i.e.* it is present in all the key-markets of the world. Porter (1990a) and Omahe (1985) also refer to this question.

To become global a company should see the world as a whole and abandon its multi-domestic backgrounds. If one looks at the globe with a set of provincial references, only a caricature can be seen. To transform the mentality from polycentric to geocentric is an enormous challenge, mainly because it implies changing people's minds, and most people are

not ready to abandon their multi-domestic references (Azevedo and Bertrand, 2001). Andersen et al. (1997) agree by pointing out that the main challenge involved in the transition is to overcome the mentality barriers of the management staff.

A geocentric attitude is a rare human resource that may be difficult to develop, especially in places where cross-border interaction is weak, typically the case of continental-size countries, nations with very strong cultural unity, and places with closed economies. To find and create this kind of people and to maintain them at the company are difficult tasks. Efforts to promote mobility and horizontal interaction among the parts should be made, Kanter (1995).

To share the vision with other players, typically suppliers and distributors, which are involved in similar process, is also a way of developing a global vision. To understand that the activities of the group are interconnected and that the results cannot be analyzed separately is another point.

The global company does need a geocentric vision, which is rare because there is no coincidence with the majority of people's reality. And, because it does not match, the natural way of composing the organizational vision needs to be overcome. The organizational vision, as summarized by Lee (1999), "just reflects the values of their people and societies".

Part of the opposition to be surmounted is based on a very simple reason: there are barriers and borders in the existing world. The uniformity to be built among the several units of the organization is not found in the external reality. In other words, the individual still living in a local environment and not in a global one as the organizations would like them to be.

The company internal reality is permanently confronted with the external real world, and its extreme diversity of culture, behavior, legal and ethical systems. Some companies try to approximate these two realities by emphasizing the similarities among people. An used approach, both in internal and external communications, is to show the world differences in an indistinct manner and point out to the fact that people have almost the same virtues, dreams and necessities.

People are the focus of this work. In special people who serve the company as employees and are confronted with these changes. As the companies and organizational visions evolves, what are the impacts to the so-called globalized workers?

II. OBJECTIVE AND METHOD

Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to understand how the advent of the global workers relates to the changes on organizational vision. This investigation will be based on the theoretical review of several references and will also be supported by some quantitative data analysis on people's perception, collected in Brazil.

The first element ("changes on organizational vision") was presented in the introductory revision. The second and third elements ("the advent of the global workers" and the "people's perception") will be presented in the development. This development will provide the necessary ground to discuss the relationship among the three subjects. This "domain of analysis" is shown on figure 1.
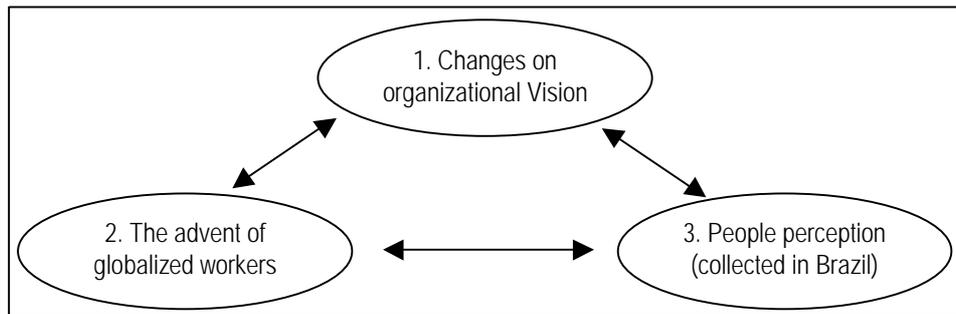
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Figure 1 – Domain of analysis

Method and data analysis

The method used in this study was based on the revision of the literature and on statistic treatment of collected data. The statistical results were used mainly to verify some propositions emerged from the revision.

The sampling data was obtained through a closed questionnaire composed of 36 questions, 6 of them specifically related to organizational vision. The questions intended to measure the perception of individuals and had been answered in a five-alternative Likert-type attitude scale, Sincich (1996) and Aaker et al (1998).

The quantitative data was treated using basically the descriptive statistics for confidence intervals for population proportions. In the construction of all the confidence intervals a confidence coefficient (1-) of 90% was used, (type I error probability of 10%). For the application of the descriptive statistics we admitted that the sample, which was selected by convenience, was valid to represent the studied population.

III.   THE ADVENT OF GLOBALIZED WORKERS

The movement of people is usually indicated as one of the facets of the globalization. In Joag (2000): "(...) demolish trade barriers to enable free exchange of goods, services, and people among economies (...)"; in Azevedo and Bertrand (2001): "the increasing flows of capital, merchandise, people and data across national borders"; among others.

These groups of moving people are constituted of "globalized workers". But other categories, which do not move but perform global tasks, can be considered as globalized workers as well.

Who are the "globalized workers"? To the scope of this study the globalized workers are the groups of workers that are impacted by the changes related to the globalization of companies, markets and visions.

Virtually all the manufacture and service processes of all world locations are at least minimally connected to the advent of globalization. Therefore, it is difficult to identify people in the developed or in-development world whose work is not impacted. However there are some specific groups that suffer a stronger influence. Among them we found:

-   Migrants: people who go overseas seeking new possibilities;

-   "Expatriates": migrants who are sent overseas by companies to perform specific tasks;

-   "Brains-abroad": migrants who have special educational skills acquired at motherland and used in other countries;

- Remote service providers: workers producing services that are used in other countries; and

- Remote manufacture producers: workers producing goods that are used in other countries.

Migrants, "expatriates" and "brains-abroad"

These are the groups of workers that are moving from a place to another. All of them are migrants, but the expatriates and the brains-abroad are peculiar types of migrants.

The expatriates, as we consider in this study, are the workers, typically executives or specialized technicians that are sent from places where a company is firmly established to other locations where they are performing development operations. They are most normally playing the role of managerial staff, new business prospectors, consultants or technical specialists and usually represent the interest of the headquarter in other lands.

As identified by Hsieh, Lavoie and Samek (1999a) multinational corporations employ them to exploit overseas opportunities and they are among the scarcest and most dear resource. They are important for sustaining international growth and they continue to be the most effective means to that end (they are "cornerstones on which international ventures are built"), despite the fact that they represent a very significant investment – five times as much as home-based managers.

The so-called "brains-abroad" are normally people moving in the other direction. They are typically highly educated workers who seek better positions in more developed markets. As the global war for talent heats up, indicate Devan and Tewari (2001), this flow of the best and the brightest from the developing countries is likely to increase.

Some astonishing data can be picked up from specific cases. For instance, 30 percent of the 1998 graduating class of the famed Indian Institute of Technology – and a staggering 80 percent of the graduates in computer science – headed for graduate schools or jobs in the United States.

The income of the migrants compared to their countrymen is, in some cases, impressing. The gross domestic product of China (2000's figures) is 1.030 U$ billion. Chinese emigrants annual income is about 700 U$ billion. In other words, the emigrants, a group 25 times smaller than the original population, earns the equivalent of 68% of China GDP. Each oversea Chinese touches 17 times more money than a Chinese in China.

In India, wages for highly educated professionals in accounting, engineering, software development and others, are 70 to 80 percent lower than they are in developed economies, (Sharma, Sood and Vollenweider, 2000).

Many fear that this talent drain will have lasting economic repercussions on the developing world. Developing and retaining highly skilled professionals is therefore a crucial long-term outlay for any economy.

These three groups represent the movement of workers from one place to another. The next two groups represent movements of jobs from one place to another

Remote service providers and manufacture producers

As long as it became simpler to export products and, in some cases, services, the labor cost differences among the countries contributed to the transference of job position to lower cost

regions. At first related characteristically to the settling of industrial plants overseas, the information technology allowed services to be remotely produced as well.

India is an example of the early advent of so-called "remote service". India's advantages as a platform for software development was the most important of the competitive advantages employed by multinational companies: "a supply of educated workers who can be hired for a fraction of the cost of their colleagues in the developed world and lower infrastructure expenses", (Sharma, Sood and Vollenweider, 2000).

Nowadays the remote services are opening up possibilities for moving many parts of a company's business system. As forecast Sharma, Sood and Vollenweider (2000), by 2008, global remote service operations may undertake activities accounting for half a trillion dollars around the world and represent every element of the value chain: upstream activities such as research and design, manufacturing related activities such as procurement and logistics, front-end activities such as marketing and sales, and staff functions such as accounting, information technology, and human resources management.

Sharma, Sood and Vollenweider (2000) present the example of companies from the financial-service sector. Several companies in this sector have remotely serviced certain processes, thereby cutting their costs by 50 to 60 percent after adjusting for higher telecommunication and management expenses. Just one global financial-services company has achieved annual saving of more than $250 million – according to its management, only a fraction of the total saving potential.

Even among the developed countries these differences can be remarkable. In a comparative analysis between France and the United States, Duchesne (2000), identifies some reasons to the transfer of jobs: "(...) France's high minimum wage, generous mandatory social benefits, and obstacles to eliminating redundant jobs have made French industry loath to hire, though the country's unemployment rate is almost three times that of the Unites States."

One key to these new possibilities, says Ohmae (2000), is the availability of global high-speed freight integrator (such as U.P.S. and FedEx), networking (internet) and financial system (credit cards and banks). These are part of a global logistic availability, based on the management of multi-modal transport and information technology network.

As noted by Barlett and Ghoshal (1989), the global company uses the competitive advantages of the different parts of the world. Yip (1995) identifies that this creates a "global chain of value". Activities such as research and development, design, buying, manufacture, assembling, marketing, sales, distribution, and services are distributed around the world.

The remote service providers and manufacture producers run this global chain of value.

Consequences of the advent of the global workers

Regarding primarily the effects to people's lives and culture – and not the economical and competitive ones that are implicit on the business administration point of view – the consequences of the advent of the global workers can be observed according to the two different movements, which are the transferences of people and the job transferences.

Both movements represent a pursuit to equilibrate the present state of affairs. The companies look for possibilities of reducing costs by removing operations from the more expensive places; whereas the people from in-development countries look for possibilities of having better jobs.

The case of transference of people implies mainly changes on the cultural and behavioral model of the specific moved groups. The diverse groups of migrants – expatriates and brains-

abroad included – will be exposed to a new set of environmental stimuli which will modify their way-of-living and specific cultural concerns. The results are, therefore, intense but restricted to specific sets of people. Secondary effects to the countries receiving migrants are also noticeable as subtle additions to the local culture.

The case of job transference results mainly in local changes. These local changes concern both places where the jobs are created and other where jobs are lost. By creating jobs overseas the transnational companies are also transferring knowledge and technical skills to other economies. The economies that are losing work positions are defied to find new possibilities of employment, which tend to be more related to technology and knowledge generation than to production of goods and services – the solution is related to the professed "knowledge intensive economies", (Gomes, Azevedo and Carvalho, 2001).

This image explains both movements of people – expatriates being transferred to implement new ventures in other countries and brains-abroad traveling after better job positions – as well as the relocation of jobs.

Those transferences are not effortless, though. Managing potential labor disputes back home when a company decides to transfer jobs to a remote location will prove to be a thorny issue. And some employees of remote operations, armed with information about global job opportunities and compensation levels, may eventually bid up the price of their skills, reducing the cost advantage that companies currently enjoy, (Sharma, Sood and Vollenweider, 2000).

In the foreseeable future these movements are likely to continue, but not necessarily between the same places or in the same intensity. The picture is changing. The simple opposition between low-cost labor of the developing countries and knowledge-based economies of the developed countries is becoming more difficult to distinguish.

Devan and Tewari (2001) suggest some possibilities of reversion concerning the flow of brains-abroad: "instead of being unambiguous losers in the global war for talent, emerging markets may find that they can be winners after all". Also does Omahe (2000) concerning the centers of technology creation: "(...) large cities are governed by conservative establishments, but India (Bangalore, Hyderaband and Pune), Ireland, Finland, Singapore and Malasya (the Multimedia Super Corridor) may have good chance to succeed (...)".

Some studies (*e.g.* Hsieh, Lavoie and Samek, 1999b) indicate that the extensive use of expatriates also needs to be reviewed. Local managers have not only better understanding of their markets but also relationships that outsiders lack. Possibilities of reframing the present equilibrium are related to exploring overlooked talent pools and investing heavily in training programs.

Concerning the use of low-cost work force, there are also some signs of change. An example is given by the accusations against some sports material producers regarding their operations in Asia (Athreya, 1995). Acting as global companies these organizations design their products in the headquarters, contract the manufacturing in Asia, and commercialize them worldwide. Investigations by the Asian American Free Labor Institute on interviews with workers from Asia had revealed at that time, middle 90s, working conditions which left much to be desired.

The overworking and underpaying of workers, neglect of health and safety, physical abuse of workers, and the persecution of those involved in organizing workers were common features in all of the investigated plants. As the international consumer markets have become aware of these conditions, the pressure of public opinion imposed new practices on the companies and their suppliers. Certainly there is still a long way to go, but some "Codes of Conduct" were put into practice and the companies realize that.

Observing another type of change, not directly related to the advent of globalized workers, but to the globalization of competition and to global integration, it is possible to identify a major modification of internal practices, in particular those related to communication.

As noted when the company seeks to achieve a high level of global integration, creating a common code is indispensable, (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989; Azevedo and Bertrand 2002). A straight measure is to adopt the dominant values of the globalized world as internal values of the company. It brings the company's vision and the consumer's vision closer. Examples of it can be the adoption of some occidental oriented values by companies in East Asia or the adoption of English as the "official internal language" in German or French companies.

In Lee (1996), where the case of Chinese companies in Singapore is discussed, the tendency of the change in organizational vision is identified. The companies are gradually moving in the sense of the "occidentalization" and of the adaptation to the global world scenario.

These last referred changes affect the organizations in a less specific way and also collaborates to the development of a more geocentric vision. Joag (2000) identifies then this change is also related to the realization of the value of international markets, and to the long-term commitment to serve them.

However, hasty changes on cultural matters normally lead to bad results. Because the cultural roots of an organization are their very core value, the transformations of companies need to be conducted by preserving them. Many are the cases of unsuccessful merges and acquisitions where the fiasco was caused by mishandling of cultural differences. An English worker will not be able to act as a German one only because BMW bought an English car factory. Ghosn (2002) reports the process of recovering of the Japanese company Nissan and understand that its success is mainly based on the respect to the traditional Japanese cultural model.

Ending the analysis on the advent of globalized workers, some data concerning workers perception will be shown.

IV. PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION ON CHANGES OF ORGANIZATIONAL VISION

The data here presented is part of a survey that still in progress. And, because the database is still incomplete, collected information will just be used in the way of providing insights to the discussion.

The population considered by the research were individuals, in Brazil, working for companies that had international operations. Both Brazilian and foreigners companies were considered. The questionnaires were answered without intervention of the researchers and the 53 valid questionnaires were treated. The responses were obtained between January 2002 and March 2002.

Better describing the sample we verify that: 41,0% of the sample works in companies whose main activity is "product related" and 59,0% is "service related". Among the most representative product related industries we have: oil, food and equipment. Among the most representative service related industries we have: banks, insurance and telecommunication. The answerers were found to typically occupy positions from middle to higher management.

Some results, considering a confidence coefficient (1-) of 90%, are:

- At least 53,7% of those who work in Brazil for companies that had international operations agrees, or fully agrees, with the statement: "the workers at my unit interact considerably with workers at other operations in other countries";

- At least 53,7% of those who work in Brazil for companies that had international operations agrees, or fully agrees, with the statement: "the company I work for understands the world as a whole and intends to develop a global mentality";

- At least 73,1% of those who work in Brazil for companies that had international operations agrees, or fully agrees, with the statement: "the culture of the company is very influenced by their original country's culture"; and

- At least 34,4% of those who work in Brazil for companies that had international operations agrees, or fully agrees, with the statement: "the workers at my unit are encouraged to move to other countries as their careers develop".

The first and the second answers reveal that the majority of the workers notices that their companies are currently involved in interactions with other international operations and that the company cultivates the intention of, in some way, developing a "global vision". Those results indicate that the minimal aspects of the globalization are present in the organizations and, at least, this question has become part of the present-day discussion.

The result of the third question reveals that, even if the "global vision" (to have the "world as home") seems to be an aim, the geocentric vision is far from being a reality. At least two thirds of the workers see their companies mainly as ethnocentric, in the way that their vision is mainly based on their original culture.

The result of the last question reveals that the encouragement to become expatriate is recognized as a practice that, at least in Brazil, is still somewhat rare. It's possible to state that only one third of the workers recognize it as a reality. The fact that Brazil is a developing economy may contribute to this low practice of expatriation, which is supposed to be higher in the developed economies.

V. DISCUSSION

By observing the relations between the changes to a geocentric vision and the advent of the global workers, a set of associations could be identified. As long as globalization is recognized as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, the various groups of global workers and the changes on organizational vision are certainly interconnected.

An interesting point for the conceptual understanding of the global workers emerged from the categorization of the diverse types of migrants and global workers at remote operations. The globalization of production created different flows of workers and of work positions. These flows are the responses to an unbalanced distribution of labor-cost and labor-opportunities around the globe.

But this model is likely to point to new possibilities as long as new centers of opportunities and changes on the work force demand evolve. Remotely provided services and production will become more current because of the improvements in communication and logistics. This transference of jobs, though, may face the limit of workers in developing regions who will not accept very low income; or the limit of the developing countries that cannot sustain upper levels of unemployment. Some reactions to this last limitation can be seen now as the increasing restriction to immigration and a tendency of xenophobia into some regions.

Automation of production and services imposes problems of unemployment and misdistribution of revenues that will certainly not be solved by economical measures, but by political ones actually. Those questions are not to be worked out by transnational companies.

Observing the cultural changes on the organizations, the transferences of jobs and people contributed to the globalization of the vision – the creation of a geocentric vision – as well as other competition-driven forces, as for instance the adoption of dominant occidental values and languages as internal values. But this movement is still somewhat shy in many places, as is the Brazilian case.

These cultural changes can be conducted on purpose and at the same time they cannot be avoided. As long as the human social environment is changing in the sense of homogenization, nothing appears to be able either to impede it or to accelerate it too much. Organizations that ignore the need of cultural changes will perish as well as those that do not respect the original cultural roots.

The borderless world that some organizations are trying to envisage is a beautiful model that does not fit the real world yet. Each one needs to be aware of the risks of treating reality based on visionary pictures. People, culture and national interests are, to this day, too strong and too diverse to allow the immediate adoption of geocentric values.

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