

Thriving Versus Sustainability: The Deeper Perspective in the Face of Modern Challenges

Shift your mindset from sustainability to thriving, says Jason Liem



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In today's ever-evolving corporate landscape, it's hard to escape the buzzword "sustainability." It has become ubiquitous, often tossed around with little contemplation of its profound implications. As an executive coach with a background in clinical psychology and the cognitive sciences, I've had a front-row seat to the rising pressures individuals and organisations face in our fast-paced world.

The challenges are formidable, from the relentless march of artificial intelligence and machine learning to the looming spectre of climate change, the intricate dance of global market tensions, and the unravelling threads of globalisation (i.e., de-risking). In light of these complexities, sustaining the status quo no longer suffices; we need a shift in mindset from sustainability to thriving – a journey that propels us not merely to survive but to flourish and excel.

At first glance, sustainability seems straightforward, ensuring that things endure and persist and are maintained. But this seemingly simple word conceals layers of complexity. We often equate sustainability with maintaining current affairs, avoiding risks, and conserving resources. While these aspects are undoubtedly essential, using "sustainability" as a catch-all phrase can inadvertently limit our exploration of more profound possibilities.

The contemporary world confronts various challenges that demand a more profound response. The rapid ascent of AI and machine learning is reshaping industries and redefining the very nature of work. Climate change looms large, necessitating a reckoning with our impact on the planet and an urgent call to adapt to an environment in flux. The decoupling of globalisation and the escalating tensions in global markets threaten the stability of international trade and the interdependence of economies.

Shifting from Sustainability to Thriving

Let us take a moment to understand the transition from sustainability to thriving through relatable examples.

Sarah's sustainability mindset

Picture Sarah, a seasoned manager within a thriving corporation. For years, she has championed sustainability within her team. Her focus has always been on preserving the status quo, avoiding risks, and ensuring that her team's projects stay on a predictable course, no matter what. Under Sarah's guidance, her team has enjoyed stability. Still, this safety net has inadvertently hindered them from realising their full potential. Growth, innovation, and adaptability often elude them.



Alex's thriving mindset

In stark contrast, let's introduce you to Alex, another manager in the same organisation. Alex embodies the essence of a thriving mindset. They view setbacks as catalysts for growth and welcome change as an opportunity to innovate. When AI and machine learning started reshaping their industry, Alex didn't hesitate to encourage their team to embrace new knowledge and adapting methods.

They willingly ventured into calculated risks, exploring innovative applications of AI to enhance their products. Yes, there were hurdles along the way. Still, Alex's team thrived amidst the challenges, emerging as leaders in innovation and competitiveness.

The Psychology and Mindset of Thriving

Let's delve into the psychology and mindset that differentiate sustainability from thriving.

The mindset of sustainability

A sustainability mindset akin to Sarah's often emerges from fear and a sense of scarcity. It revolves around safeguarding the status quo, avoiding risks, and preserving the existing order. While this mindset may protect against immediate threats, it can inadvertently stifle long-term growth and innovation.

The mindset of thriving

A thriving mindset, epitomised by individuals like Alex, is grounded in abundance and possibility. It perceives setbacks as stepping stones to transformation and views change as

a catalyst for innovation. Leaders who embrace this mindset inspire their teams to take calculated risks, adapt to challenges, and excel in their endeavours.

Resilience and Equanimity in Thriving

Resilience and equanimity are inherent qualities of a thriving mindset. Alex's thriving approach has nurtured resilience within themselves and their team. When faced with adversity or setbacks, they demonstrate a remarkable capacity to bounce back with determination, using these experiences as invaluable learning opportunities. This resilience has made Alex's team more adaptable and better equipped to navigate the complex terrain of challenges.

Equanimity, the ability to maintain composure amid chaos, is another hallmark of thriving leadership. Alex's calm and confident demeanour during times of uncertainty has profoundly impacted their team. It has provided the reassurance needed to navigate the complexities of a changing market landscape with grace and confidence.

Alex places a premium on the team's well-being, advocating for an integrative approach to work-life dynamics and encouraging professional growth. This realistic approach has yielded tangible results, leading to higher job satisfaction, increased motivation, and a more engaged workforce.

Conclusion

In an era rife with modern challenges, sustainability has taken on new

dimensions. It's no longer enough to merely sustain ourselves in a world characterised by relentless change and complexity. To thrive and excel, we must shift our mindset from sustainability to thriving. Thriving beckons us to embrace change, cultivate resilience, maintain equanimity, and prioritise holistic well-being. In doing so, we not only navigate the turbulent waters of our times but also unlock our full potential to transcend the ordinary and create a brighter future – for ourselves, our teams, and our organisations.

In relationships and business, "sustainability" has become as ubiquitous as it is limiting. How often have we heard someone say, "My relationship with my spouse is sustainable," or a business leader declare, "Our company's practices are sustainable"? While on the surface, these statements may seem sensible and responsible, they fail to capture the essence of what we truly desire. The word "sustainable" suggests maintenance, endurance, and risk aversion, mirroring the mindset of preserving the status quo. But shouldn't our relationships and businesses aspire to be more than just sustainable? Shouldn't they aim to thrive?

To flourish and grow in the face of challenges and uncertainties, embrace change as an opportunity rather than a threat. It's time we shed the limitations of sustainability and, instead, choose to move towards thriving, ensuring our relationships and businesses endure and empowering them to excel and reach their fullest potential.

In parting, let us remember that thriving is about continuously moving toward the environment, and that sojourn is filled with opportunities for growth, innovation, and profound transformation.



Jason W Birkevold Liem helps people to think about their thinking so they are better at managing themselves, others and situations. He achieves this through an informative and engaging process that educates people about the brain, cognitive psychology and interpersonal communication. As a result, clients are better able to face their professional and private challenges with confidence, certainty and clarity. Through his company, MINDtalk, he designs and delivers brain-based leadership

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