

In this interview with EuroScientist, Birju Pandya explains gift culture, which he has helped introduce in finance. He explains how this approach can be beneficial for any field of work but also in all aspects of our own lives. The gift culture is based on a non-transactional approach to work, which is instead replaced by trust-based approach, based on pursuing higher-order values, such as connection to community and ecology. While there will be resistance against this rewiring of the mind, the result is worth the effort.

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Birju Pandya interview: choosing sustainable values to drive research



Moving away from a transaction-based towards a trust-based approach to social project financing

[Birju Pandya](#) is a specialist of the [gift-economy](#). In this gift-based approach, what is of value is higher purposes, such as progress in social or environmental protection, not merely financial gains. Pandya defines gift culture as follows: "it's the engagement of people between one another in an unconditional way, moving away from a transaction-based approach relationship to a trust-based approach". For him, it is offering no strings attached. "I have been playing around with ways of incorporating that into my own life and offering it to groups that I work with for about ten years now", he adds.

Specifically, he specialises in introducing the gift culture to the world of finance. Prior to this, Pandya was a consultant with McKinsey & Company. He is based in Berkley, California, USA. Until now, he has

been involved with social and ethical financing organisations. Among others, he has been working with [Armonia](#)—a private equity firm specialising in 'regenerative investing' using nature-based solutions—[RSF Social Finance](#)—a social fund focusing on food & agriculture, education & the arts, and ecological stewardship—[ServiceSpace](#)—a non-profit, which provides an umbrella for generosity-driven projects—and [Nessel Development](#)—which develops housing that is beyond sustainable. He has noticed that there are already organisations in Europe following this approach, including [Awakin](#), in London, UK and the [Lunt Foundation](#), in Brussels, Belgium.

By helping people change their perspective on values—no longer relying solely on transaction-based approaches—and instead introducing trust-based approach via direct, transparent, and personal involvement in building new values, based on long-term relationships. This leads to what he describes as inner transformation in terms of redefining what values support the well-being of all. This in turn, may shift the way we live and interact with each other.

Gift culture in academia

Even if academia is different from finance, Pandya thinks that “the impetus behind much of the original trust of academia was in effect information being free.” However, he admits that he has seen more recently “how the nature of research is starting to skew and bend to the will of the capitalist paradigm, that we are part of, and so, so much of the research happening seems to be driven by monetisation.”

In research and innovation, he believes, the easiest way to success is not necessarily to encourage technological progress but also inner progress—i.e. defining the values to drive progress before starting to research or innovate. . For him, organisations and people across the world may find benefit in “seeing the world with new eyes.” He further explains: “there is a growing movement of people who are living a life that is more based on voluntary simplicity now, inviting in ways of living that are more connected to earth, more connected to their community members, more connected to their own inner nature”. “I find that there are tremendous opportunities for bringing non-transactional approach to all of these things”, he adds.

Resistance against rewiring

Pandya explains that he sees in gift culture as “the invitation for a person to rewire [their] own mind,” both metaphorically and biologically. If we want to live in a sustainable society, he believes, we first need to start rewiring ourselves to redefine what values drive us. Rewiring one’s brain without immediate survival reason is difficult. The same applies to changing the way organisations are run. “I see it in myself and, certainly, I’m not surprised when I see it in culture and in systems”, he says.

By starting to change perspective, the benefits become obvious. “What I have discovered is that there are many sources of capital that I was not tracking previously that I am now starting to grasp, as my own neurology starts to shift.” While there may be resistance, for him, the ongoing results are well worth the effort.

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