

Gift Economy

Joy of Giving, Abundance, and Bonds of Love

By Manoj Pavithran

At the heart of immensely complex economic systems move the fundamental generative dynamics of demand and supply – the complementary opposites, the two poles of a single force field. Understanding this dual force in its various levels of evolution is essential for gaining insight into the nature of Gift Economy.

Transactions

No individual or organisation can exist in isolation; there is always exchange of goods and services among individuals or organisations or with the surrounding environment in general. Everything is embedded in the force field of demand and supply and an evolving individual or group has to interact with the force field through unending series of transactions. However all exchanges or transactions are not of the same nature; they undergo fundamental qualitative change with the growth of individual or organisation and this growth has three distinct stages which can be called:

1. Receiver
2. Trader
3. Giver

Receiver

This is the first stage of transactions, the childhood, of an individual or organisation in which the entity is primarily in need of goods and services but at the same time it is not capable of giving something in return. Every individual or organisation goes through this stage. A new born child is in need of receiving nourishments for its growth and there is nothing much a child can give in return. Parents take care of the child. So is someone who is crippled by age or disease who should be taken care. Similarly a new organisation that is taking birth requires lots of investment to get it going before it stands on its own feet. There is a childhood stage where an entity is primarily a receiver.

If a childhood stage prolongs then even when physically outgrown the entity will continue to remain as a receiver and fail to become an adult who is capable of independence. It can also be a result of psychological distortions as in the case of someone who is selfish or miser and is unwilling to give anything in return to others. When this stage turns dark we get the thief or the exploiter who intentionally live like a parasite. There are people and organisations that live like parasites; they do not give anything in return for what they take. This is the receiver stage that has become diseased and dark.

The focus of awareness during this stage is in receiving or taking.

Trader

This is the second stage of the growth of an individual or organisation, the adulthood, in which the entity becomes productive and actively engages in trade with other individuals or organisations to create wealth. This phase brings economic freedom and greater independence to engage in activities that are mutually enriching. But the characteristic feature of the act of giving something to someone during this stage is the demand for return in equal measure. In fact the focus is more on the returns and the individual or organisation involved in trade is engaging in it for the sake of returns it brings. One-to-one return for every investment is a key factor during this stage. If there is no possibility of getting something back from someone or a group, nothing will be given to them.

This stage is largely animated by reason at the best. A fair trade market operates on this basis making sure that all those who are involved in trade are receiving returns in fair measure. An individual or organisation in this stage of their growth will always make sure that the people with whom they engage in trade are getting what they deserve and sharing is fair on both sides of the equation.

Often trade is animated by greed in which one gives as little as possible but takes as maximum as possible. When trade is animated by greed one is closer to a thief, the darker side of first stage, than a genuine trader in the second stage. Not all trades are fair trades; there is a tug of war and bargain which can be driven by force of greed or reason. When driven by reason we get fair trade and when driven by greed we get parasites.

Act of giving bound to returns breeds trader-hood, the second stage of growth.

Giver

This is the third stage of the growth of an individual or organization, the parenthood, which brings to focus the joy in the very act of giving itself. Joy of giving is often discovered when you fall in love and discover the sheer joy of giving a gift to someone you love dearly. Giving is a means to express your love and not a means to get something in return. This is the stage of parenthood or lover-hood in which one takes responsibility over people, organisations or situations that requires support and does so for the joy of doing it. It is largely animated by love. Parents taking care of their children are a typical example of this stage; organisations involved in charity, social work, environmental protection are some of the common examples of organisations that operate in the third stage.

It is not so much the outer form of action that determines the stage of growth but the inner quality of giving. For example if a parent is supporting the child for the sake of future returns then it is still a trade relation, similarly charity work done with hidden agendas to spread a particular religion or philosophy is still a trader consciousness in disguise of a giver. The purity of giver-hood is in the purity of giving; only an unconditional giving for the very joy of giving qualifies one to be in the third stage.

The magic of gift economy starts only at this stage when you discover that all acts of unconditional giving brings back returns of abundance beyond your imagination.

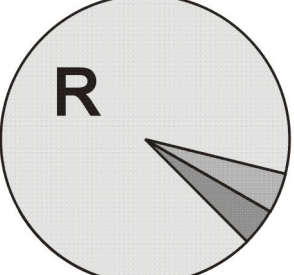
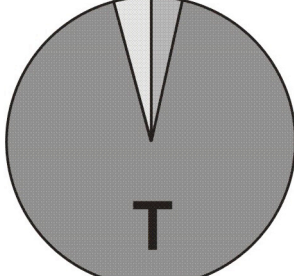
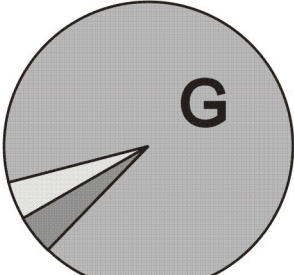
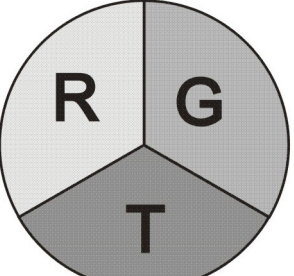
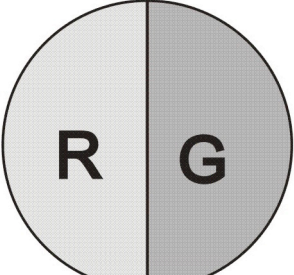
Transaction matrix

All the three stages of transactions simultaneously exist in every individual or organisation in varying proportions. No one is entirely locked up in a single level. You may be a receiver in one transaction, a trader in another or a giver in yet another transaction. It is a dynamic quality that changes in every interaction. For example you receive a gift from someone who loves you and you would not spoil the quality of that transaction by insisting that you should pay for it. On the other hand you go to market and buy something and make sure that you pay them properly. The same item you bought as a trading transaction you may give to someone as a gift to express your love. There is a greater joy in receiving a gift as well as giving a gift. We engage in such a mode of transaction only with those whom we love where as with strangers we prefer to engage in trade. Every interaction is qualitatively different; we are receiving, trading or giving all the time. We are dynamically changing and taking roles in every interaction and since there are three roles possible we get six possible combinations of transaction matrix.

Receiver - Receiver	They cannot help each other; both are in need, leads to conflict over resources.
Receiver - Trader	Trader would not prefer such a transaction
Receiver - Giver	This combination works joyously
Trader - Trader	This combination works with negotiations
Trader - Giver	This combination works with ease.
Giver - Giver	This combination is a celebration of love deeply enriching.

With this transaction matrix it is easy to see that all our daily interactions neatly fall into one or other category and we are constantly in flux.

There are enriching transactions and there are depleting transactions. Those few transactions that bring us greater joy and inner satisfaction (not necessarily material or financial benefits) are the ones in which you have received something unconditionally as a gift or you have given something unconditionally as a gift, as an expression of your love. By observing our daily transactions it is relatively easy to find our dominant mode of transactions and take steps to bring necessary balance or to evolve to higher modes of transactions.

	<p>Receiver – The childhood Transactions are primarily on receiving mode. This is unsustainable.</p>
	<p>Trader – The adult hood Transactions are primarily based on trading. This brings independence but fails to fulfill deeper needs. Materially sustainable but spiritually empty.</p> <p>Corporate environments suffer from overdose of traderhood.</p>
	<p>Giver – The parenthood Transactions are primarily based on giving. This brings great joy of taking responsibility and giving oneself. Not sustainable without learning to receive or trade.</p>
	<p>Balanced growth</p> <p>When all three types of transactions are in balance there is greater harmony - materially and spiritually.</p>
	<p>Pure Gift Economy Unconditional Giving and Receiving.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family environment - Like in Nature - Wiki Pedia / Linux etc - Open Source Culture