ServicePlace Economics

Introduction:

The term ServicePlace is in direct contrast to the Marketplace, the core mechanism by which our current Capitalistic system goes about transacting business. Just as the fundamental principles of the Marketplace are expressed in simple terms (e.g buy low, sell high), the principles of ServicePlace are just as fundamental (e.g. receive low, serve high). Rather than hold out for the highest bidder, ServicePlace transactions are motivated towards achieving the greater good - under the watchful eye of a mentor who takes into consideration the larger scale implications (like sustainability) of the entire process.

The philosophical foundation for ServicePlace is the S2 Model of Self-Evolution (ref, see S2 essay). In the S2 model, we ascribe to humanity a measure of self-reflection, and through self-reflection, self-realization. This self-reflection gives us the ability to perceive where we are in an evolutionary trajectory, not only individually but also as our collective human civilization (ref, see DIEM model). Ultimately, we aspire to evolve the tremendous potential of our human presence here on planet earth, and transform ourselves into an undying aspirational presence at a cosmic scale.

One core principle behind the S2 model is the systematic way in which we go about expanding our consciousness. With each step in the expansion, we can now think and act in larger and larger spheres of influence. The ServicePlace concept is the full-cycle, integrative version of the Marketplace, where there is an inbuilt mechanism to explore the longer term implications for each transaction (or need fulfillment).

Throughout history, economics, even more than politics has been the life blood of humanity. It incessantly drives us, motivates us to do the things we do. Increasingly, though, the current economic system is succeeding in creating vast polarization between the haves (colloquially referred to as the 1%) and the have nots (the other 99%). Gradually, wealth is becoming its own evolutionary entity, interested more in its own self-preservation and reproduction than what's best for humanity. We could call this 'zombie' economics, as if the person behind the wealth is no longer necessary for the wealth to protect and expand itself. In the not-too-distant future, it's conceivable that the human behind the enterprise maybe even be considered a hindrance rather than an asset. Have we created another Frankenstein?

A new system is called for, where wealth dilutes its self-serving interests, and instead becomes a catalyst for the greater development of humanity. It would now include a humane approach to ecology and the sustainability of our planet. A change of this magnitude will not happen in a day, so for a while the current 'market' based system (Marketplace) would co-exist with the proposed 'service' based system (ServicePlace). This is the democratization and humanization of Economics. Welcome to ServicePlace Economics.

Debashis Chowdhury

S2 Summary – The basics of self-evolution

Figure 1 – The S2 model of self-evolution.

The S2 model of self-evolution is applicable to lives of humans, tribes, nations, and civilizations. One key enabler of self-evolution is a defining ability of human consciousness – our ability to self-reflect and scale our identity to multiple levels (e.g. Individuals → Families → tribes → Nations → Civilizations → Humanity). Nurtured properly, as humans, we have the capability to develop a perspective at higher levels of consciousness (think globally) and still act within our sphere of influence (act locally). Let us refer to this to this human ability to scale our consciousness as our Consciousness cycle.

The other key enabler is the creative visualization of incredible new possibilities as they become ripe for realization – the process of nurturing and delivering the 'ideas whose time has come'. Being able to do this not only for Physical Technology (PT, e.g. gadgets, buildings etc.) but also Social Technology (ST, e.g. how we educate and organize ourselves) allows us to bring amazingly transformative realities into existence. We will refer to this oscillation between Potentiality and Materiality as our Technology cycle. We see that often in real life, with technology companies (like Apple) coming out with more and more compelling products (e.g. iPhone 5, 6, etc.) on a regular basis. Amongst other technologies in the mix, with our own DNA now being part of the technology, we can expect radical new possibilities of what it means to be human.

The Consciousness cycle moves us between the nodes of Individuality and Universality in the S2 model. The Technology cycle moves us between the nodes of Potentiality and Materiality, as new realities continually comes into existence. We humans are both the subjects and the objects in the self-evolution model, as we change the reality around us, we also change ourselves.

The S2 model is based on the ancient Indian Ashrama system. The typical human life is divided into four quarters. The first quarter (say birth to 25 years) is our Studenthood, where our main purpose is to learn, develop ourselves, and attain our sense of Individual identity. This part of the cycle (Q1) takes us to the peak of physical and mental 'fitness' from an individual (Darwinian) sense. The next segment (Q2) takes us from Individuality to Materiality. Typically, the individual would get paired (married) and raise a

Debashis Chowdhury

family during this time. They would work hard on building a family home, and an economic nest-egg for their future.

In today's world, the transition from Q2 to Q3 is perhaps the most difficult. Let's say you are middle aged, the children are grown and independent, and you have built your economic base. What comes next in this model is a transition from the Householder (Q2) to the Servant leader (Q3). We expand our consciousness beyond our family, to see what's best for our community, our nation, our civilization, our humanity. This is the movement from Materiality to Universality. A lot of the service organizations that we have today would belong to this segment, starting with education, to health, to governance. Yet very often, the potential of these organization is not realized, as the individuals within the organization are still pursuing their Q1/Q2 interests. The challenge is to grow our consciousness so that we are truly thinking globally (or even universally). Inclusiveness and fellow-feeling is called for, which is an immensely difficult transition to make in today's individualistic and materialistic society.

Bridging the Mortality Gap

To enable self-evolution, and to realize our cosmic potential as humanity, the transition to Q3 is critical. As individual humans, we have a limited life-span and mortality is a constant reminder of our separate existence. Families, Tribes and Nations can live longer. Yet, Humanity itself is a flash in the pan in cosmological terms. The 100,000 odd years that we have existed on planet earth is approximately how long it takes light just to traverse our own galaxy! To come up with humanity's answer to the potential of the Universe, we must think in much longer, essentially immortal, terms. Self-evolution has the capability to lead us out of our limited biological existence to a much broader cosmic presence.
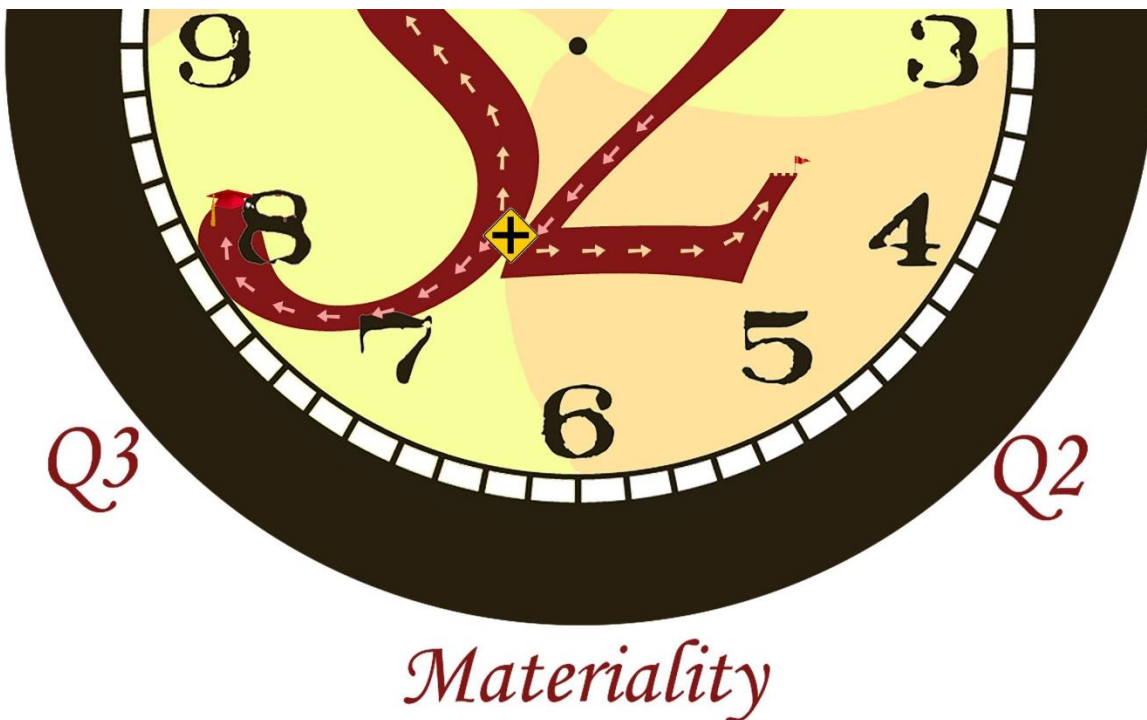
This key Q2 → Q3 transition, to me, is the way we bridge the Mortality Gap. In Q3, the main movement is towards Universality, as we learn to see our opportunities and threats in their greater global, then universal, context. Asset accumulation is no longer the primary goal, but the use of these assets in the

seeking of the greater good and the highest potential that we can realize as humans. In Q3 we can take a look at our human institutions and our technologies (Physical & Social) and tune them to better serve humanity and its longer term objectives. It is with this mindset that we take another look at our economic systems, currently highly Capitalistic and Marketplace driven, and come up with a version that keeps the best attributes of the current system, and yet serves humanity in our long term aspirations.

ServicePlace Economics

Let us begin with an expanded definition of economics. A good place to start is by looking at what economics typically measures, versus what it ignores. For a country, the measure of economic progress is its Gross Domestic Product (or GDP). It is a measure that indicates the sum of all the traditional economic activities in the country. It includes all recorded transactions where money is formally exchanged, be they in the public or private sector. Public sector relates to the spending by a range of governmental agencies, including defense. Private sector relates to all the transactions by private individuals and companies. What is not counted is often called the informal economy, where the transactions are not recorded as part pf GDP, or in some cases involves no monetary exchange at all (e.g. the barter system).

Perhaps the biggest sector that goes totally unaccounted is the Home sector. This is all the work that goes into maintaining a home, raising children, and fostering a supportive family environment. In total hours, more time goes into this segment than perhaps any other, yet it finds no place in the GDP. The second (and related) area is the Community segment. Oftentimes, what a person (or couple) can't do, can be done with the help of a supportive community. In evolutionary terms, the biggest advantage we received in our early years of human evolution is 'cooperative breeding' (ref: Evolutionary Anthropology), where a community takes care of child rearing activities, not just the biological parents. Even today, the activies that communities come together and do, often for little or no money, provides the environment for raising socially and emotionally well-adjusted children. Yet, this does not have a GDP representation.

If we leave aside transactions, and look at how wealth is portrayed, the story is quite similar. We perceive wealth (money) as a scarce resource that everyone is pursuing. By comparison, the abundant ones (e.g. air, water, sunlight, bio-diversity) have little value attached, until they become scarce. The poisoning or wastage of the abundant resources gets little economic attention, until the accumulated mismanagement leads to irreplaceable losses, and directly affects our daily lives. Efforts like community vegetable gardens and fruit trees have no stated economic value unless the produce is sold externally for money. Thus we see, the concept of wealth and also the transactions that represent economic activity, are both very incomplete models of the full economic reality.

Traditional Capitalism serves itself (Capital preservation and growth) very well, but by its very nature, gives little value to the deeper wealth where money transfers don't happen. In ServicePlace economics, the impact of the transaction to the larger population and ecosystem is a unifying part of the need fulfillment process. Also, all human effort, whether it is given for love or for money, would need to be considered. In the future, the effort of machines that act with, or on behalf of humans will need to be considered as well. Wealth would then truly become a measure of human potential - the capacity to take care of humanity's current needs, and thence to evolve and develop as an integral part of a greater organism/ecosystem.

Debashis Chowdhury

Figure 2 indicates how the basic transaction flow is enhanced going from the Marketplace to the ServicePlace environment.
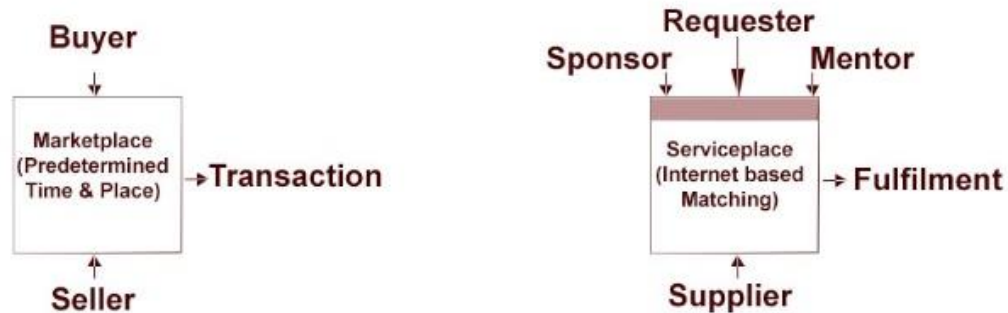

Figure 2. Marketplace and ServicePlace transactions compared.

Role of Mentor(s)

When we compare the two systems, the primary difference is the introduction of two new players, the Mentor and the Sponsor. The Supplier corresponds closely to the Seller, and the Buyer to the Requestor. Let's discuss first the role of the Mentor. The Mentor is typically a senior person, with a wide range of experience. Quite often, this person will be in the Q3 stage of life, with a strong internal aspiration to do what's best for our collective existence on planet Earth. They also have the social network to derive synergies in the need fulfillment, be they with suppliers, other requestors, of finding appropriate Sponsors. The presence of the Mentor allows a bit of Universality to seep into the transaction, so that the benefits can be maximized while the negative environmental effects are minimized.

Role of Sponsor(s)

The Sponsor role is also very important. In the world today, wealth is typically concentrated in the hands of a very small percentage of the population. Demographically, wealth accumulates most easily to the people who are older, typically older than 50 years of age. Yet, if you look at where the greatest opportunities are for the use of resources, they are typically with the young, and in areas where the full advantages of modern civilization are yet to take hold. Through taxation, wealth goes to the government, where the people in charge of utilizing the wealth often have very different priorities than the people they are serving.

Having one or more Mentors in their network allows the Sponsors to familiarize themselves with the most productive opportunities in the area(s) they are passionate about. The proliferation of information systems now allows the Sponsor to be kept much more involved in the mechanics of the 'need fulfillment' process. With micro-finance, the Sponsor could easily be a 'community of donors', which then trusts the Mentor(s) to carry out the intent of the Sponsors to the best of their ability. The accumulated wealth of humans, if properly used, can solve most of humanity's nagging problems.

In spite of the key role of the Sponsor, it is the Mentor(s) who are the face of the overall 'need fulfillment'. They know how to scale the economies such that a greater number of requestors can share

in the benefits (e.g. a well-managed village watering-well as opposed to a private household with a well). If there are issues with the sharing of the resources, it is the Mentor who would have to intervene. To the Mentor the need fulfillment is not just a point transaction, but an ongoing process.

ServicePlace Mentor Network

Mentors would need to be connected and organized, almost like neurons within a greater organism. Technology is one piece of the puzzle (e.g. internet, mobile devices). Perhaps the bigger piece is human, and involves building an empathetic relation with people from all walks of life. The Mentor does not see right or wrong, they see appropriate vs. inappropriate behavior. Their role is to guide without judging, to help without asking for anything in return. In this manner, they are the glue that would hold society together, giving all individuals in society an avenue to constructively follow their aspirations.

The key aspects of the ServicePlace Mentor Network would be:

1. The Mentors themselves – people who can look at the bigger picture and take a keen personal interest in the area of work being undertaken.
2. Just as no doctor can be an expert at all that ails a human body, Mentors also need other Mentors to consult and cooperate with. A reliable network is based on mutual caring and respect, and a shared understanding of the greater problems needing to be solved.
3. An electronic medium that the Mentors can readily plug into to be able to work interactively will all their constituents. A face to face meeting may not be possible (or timely), so the medium would need to have an electronic nerve center (most likely Internet based).

ServicePlace proof of concept

We are already seeing the onset of a new class of organizations that largely follow the ServicePlace model. One example is the web site – www.thinkitup.org

The idea is that a group of students are the ones who identify a need, working with their teacher(s) as Mentor(s). Multiple Sponsors can help fund a project that they like, and the organization itself finds the suppliers and delivers the necessary supplies to the school. The expectation is that once the supplies arrive, the teacher(s) will continue as Mentors for the effort, realizing the most benefit for the maximum number of students.

There is a strong affinity between the ServicePlace effort in Q3, and the Q3 concept of University, which is the lower left tip of the 'S' at 8 O'clock. Working as teachers and mentors, it is the hope that the great universities of the future become the repository (physical and virtual) of all that is functional and productive about our social and physical technologies, and the universe we find ourselves in. The University also becomes the launch pad for the awakening of the future potential for a greater human existence, as will be developed further in Q4.

ServicePlace.org itself has the CPR education effort, where we seek Mentors from various regions of the world, speaking various languages, to create and propagate local language versions of this life saving skill. We hope to expand the model many areas of service, seeking out areas with the most potential to improve our human condition.

The S2 Flow Continues

So far we have talked about Q1 and Q2 as the predominant models driving human behavior, and Q3 as the new frontier that moves us towards Universality. Yet, there comes a time when the senior Servant Leader of Q3, who has experienced Universality and Mentored significant projects, must also move on. If the movement from Materiality to Universality was difficult, the move from Universality to Potentiality is quite another challenge.

If Universality represents all that exists, Potentiality represents all that 'could' exist. If Universality counts as its constituents all humans and all life on planet earth, Potentiality extends out to generations yet to come, and visions of human destiny yet to be fulfilled. Incredible enough as the diversity and complexity is of what we see around us, it takes a leap of imagination to discern those ideas 'whose time has come' and align them for maximum benefit. This is the realm of the Q4 Spiritualist, the visionary traveler who can make herself at home in many disparate environments – even some which are yet to materialize in a physical sense.

The space that these Spiritualists work in is akin to Plato's 'Ideas' space, with one simple addition. The focus is now on those ideas, those constructs, whose 'time has come' to be turned into a grander version of our material 'reality.' Just as the Mentors would need their 'networking tools' to bring life to a responsive Mentor Network, the Spiritualist also would have an array of simulation and scenario analysis tools that they could bring to bear.

The defining characteristics that the Spiritualist will exhibit is the ability to move between full social and emotional immersion on one hand, and total withdrawal from contextual reality in the other. The Q4 spiritualist, like a great actor, can make virtually any role come to life. And yet, at the end of the day, they can discard the makeup and costume – and become free from the role they had been playing.

Debashis Chowdhury

Tomorrow he or she can take on yet another role, perhaps the diametric opposite (e.g. the oppressor vs. the oppressed) played the previous day. Over time, using the principle of superposition, the Spiritualist would learn to simultaneously play out both roles, based on a single shared consciousness.

On the surface, this does look a lot like video gaming, which can immerse us in an interactive virtual reality. However, now the 'virtual reality' within which this simulation is embodied is itself fluid, and can be nuanced as necessary to foreshadow the most desirable future reality. There is also a deep purpose to getting multiple perspectives on the same 'reality'. This mental calisthenics moves us closer to omniscience, where we can 'know' more than one perspective of a functional 'reality'. As civilization progresses, increasingly we will need people who can wear multiple hats at the same time, keeping in perspectives multiple viewpoints towards constructing a systemic whole.

In this manner, newer and better futures can be methodically brought to reality. The 'University', as an institution, which is nurtured in Q3, now grows into the fertile creative space in Q4 where the desirable futures can be tested, nurtured and brought into existence. When the new realities have been designed and 'pilot' tested, the mantle passes to the Q3 Servant Leaders to actually orchestrate the full emergence. The ServicePlace Mentors, being the key nerve centers and activation entities, now become the Mentors for the emerging reality.

Thus, it is important for the ServicePlace mentors to remain connected with the individuals from Q1 and Q2, and also build a bridge to the folks in Q4 who are coming up with the vision of future success. In this manner the ServicePlace mentors serve the entire segment of evolving humanity, thus ensuring that the future we create for ourselves is extraordinary and visionary. Moreover, they would actively facilitate the movement of individuals Q1→ Q2 → Q3→Q4 as the opportunities present themselves, so that all humans can feel they are part of the 'flow' of self-evolution.

Core Principles of ServicePlace

Not all ServicePlace principles need to be freshly minted. Principles carried over from Marketplace:

1. Decision(s) made at lowest (individual or small group) level.
2. Distributed need fulfillment process.
3. Opportunity to fund raise worthwhile projects. Entrepreneurial activity.
4. Government, mostly, stays out of the way.

Principles modified/changed in ServicePlace, especially relate to the role of Mentor:

1. Introducing the key role of mentors. Service leaders looking at wider scales of benefit.
2. Mentor network as the nerve center. Need fulfillment doesn't happens in isolation.
3. Direct link to visionary reality being created out of Q4.
4. Connectivity - once fully implemented, all humans would have access to one or more mentors who is connected to the ServicePlace mentor network.
5. In addition to need fulfillment, the Mentor Network would promote conflict resolution.

Apart from synergistic need fulfillment and conflict resolution, the general idea is for the Mentor Network is to move away from strife over material possessions to cooperation using our abundant shared resources. By tapping into the Q4 activities, the Mentor Networks will also know the promising new social and physical technologies about to break through, and can now harness them appropriately.

Debashis Chowdhury