



SAN FRANCISCO GREENFEST 2011 SURVEY

SOMATIC-EMOTIONAL
RESPONSES TO ECONOMIC
CRISIS

A SOCIAL BODY-BASED INQUIRY INTO GREEN/PROGRESSIVE
PERCEPTIONS AND REACTIONS TO ECONOMIC CRISIS

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INNATE INTELLIGENCE

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ABSTRACT

To learn more about how (presumably) progressive and activist people with “green” interests perceive themselves and the world situation — and how they react and act to economic and environmental challenges — Innate Intelligence worked with Post Carbon Institute (PCI) to develop a thirteen-question somatic-emotional response survey.

Attendees of the San Francisco Green Festival (November 12-13, 2011) were invited to complete a written survey and subjectively self-rank themselves on a number of structured subjects. Each were asked to consider both real and hypothetical situations involving a challenging economic and environmental future, and report on their felt-sense, as well as cognitive and logical responses.

The results provide a foundation for future inquiries. We identified key commonalities, trends, and types of responses worthy of future investigation. Although not validated, the results point to several new and promising avenues for exploring the dispositions and tendencies of this population. Further inquiry may yield interesting insights for both environmental groups (like Sierra Club, Greenpeace, NRDC, and others) and economic and community groups (like #Occupy, Transition, Resilience Circles, and others).

100 visitors at the Innate Intelligence booth completed surveys. Most respondents sat in comfortable chairs and took on average 3-7 minutes to respond. No respondents were paid. Respondents included a diversity of sex, age, ethnic, and professional groups but were neither scientifically sampled nor controlled.

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INTRODUCTION

Economic trends and events affect both individuals and their communities profoundly—both in the immediate short-term (e.g., economic downturns or spikes in oil process) and the potential or long-term (e.g., the end of economic growth or a sharp decline in available fossil fuels). Because the state of the economy typically is perceived as closely associated with security and well-being, economic events and trends can engender emotional and physiological responses that affect what people and groups pay attention to. That is, how they act and react, what they understand—even *what they are able to understand*.

As research and personal experience show, felt-sense responses precede (and profoundly influence) cognitive and logical responses. Innate Intelligence and Post Carbon Institute (PCI) want to better understand, communicate with, and serve the type of people who participated in this inquiry as well as inform environmental, green, and progressive groups whose constituencies likely overlap with the survey respondents. Through this inquiry, we explore how economic/environmental trends and events can impact and affect basic, underlying somatic (i.e., body-based) systems and functioning, and how those relate to thinking and feeling systems and functioning. In other words, we want to learn more about implicit drivers and how to more effectively engage people in thinking, relating and taking action.

Importance of Somatic Understanding to Social Functioning & Change Movements. Human perceptions and behaviors are driven by subconscious, biologically hardwired nervous systems and interaction with our environment, as well as by reasoning and training. Yet, these inherently physical responses to modern conceptual and symbolic stimuli are not widely understood, especially as part of improving our ability to motivate human change and constructive adaptation. With (by many estimates) 95-99% of human behavior arising from a subconscious, preprogrammed, automatic level, discerning all that is going on in any human communication is difficult. Something as simple as a word, image, question, or meaning may trigger an unanticipated response from an individual's or a group's past. Since we all have different internal trigger maps, designing outreach and informational strategies can be a tricky, high-risk endeavor, especially when touching on the economic and environmental realms, which are often linked to basic security.

As interrelated economic and environmental crises reverberate across the globe, it is now more important than ever that we observe, access, measure, and address ourselves and our constituencies on primary felt-sense, somatic, biological levels, in addition to the more typical intellectual and emotional planes. Greater understanding about what causes reaction and/or disassociation will lead to better design, development, and implementation of positive educational and social change efforts.

Preliminary Somatic Response Survey. Innate Intelligence and Post Carbon Institute co-created a Social Body Inquiry (SBI) survey for use at the 2011 San Francisco Green Festival (SFGF) to gather basic information about views and attitudes around sustainability and the economic crisis, and the way this affects bodies, views, perceptions, feelings, and functioning. Although preliminary, this effort yielded some notable, even surprising results of potential importance to future communication and outreach efforts. This report presents several key survey results, summary interpretation of their meaning and importance, and recommended next steps and opportunity areas for further inquiry.

KEY FINDINGS

General Results

Notable general findings, addressed below, include:

- Men and women tend to view themselves and their roles in the global economy and/or times of economic uncertainty differently.
- More than 90% of respondents reported a moderate to strong understanding of the global economic situation (nearly half, 46%, reported a “strong” understanding).
- Two-thirds of respondents do not believe new or restored economic growth can resolve the current crises.
- Respondents generally identified “anger” and “fight” (e.g., fight or flight) as their personal emotional and somatic (physical) reaction to the issues presented.

Summary discussion and interpretation of these and other survey results including initial analysis, and their possible interrelationship and implications, follow in the [Key Findings](#) and [Implications](#) sections directly below.

Specific Results (100 people responding)

1. **Reported levels of perceived understanding of the current economic crisis:**
 - 46% reported having a “strong understanding.”
 - 62% believe they have played a role in creating the economic crisis.
 - 66% believe that a return to economic growth will not resolve current problems and issues
 - 58% can imagine living in a world without economic growth.
2. **Reported levels of “Fight, Flight, or Freeze” reaction.** *When asked to contemplate the environmental and economic situation, respondents characterized their primary impulses as:*
 - 62% “Fight”
 - 15% “Flight”
 - 20% “Freeze”
3. **Predominant emotional responses.** *When asked to characterize their predominant emotional reaction to global economic events:*
 1. 36% “Anger”
 2. 25% “Sadness”
 3. 13% “Fear”
 4. 24% “Mixed”

4. Levels of perceived self-empowerment & collective empowerment

Respondents rated empowerment on a scale of 1-10, with 10 as the highest level.

Self-empowerment to change individual future:

- 14% Low to Moderate (1-5)
- 20% Moderate (6-7)
- 66% High (8-10)

Collective empowerment to change collective future:

- 30% Low to Moderate (1-5)
- 19% Moderate (6-7)
- 50% High (8-10)

5. Varying responses of Men and Women. *Although not the subject of this report, some potentially significant variances were noted between the 35 male and 31 female (34 did not specify a gender) respondents:*

Ability to Imagine a “No Economic Growth” Future:

Reported ability to imagine life without economic growth:

- 76% of Men
- 45% of Women

Identification of Current Causes and Issues:

- Of the 46% respondents who said they had a “Strong” understanding of the current economic crisis, 68% were men and 29% were women.
- Nearly a third (28%), identified “Greed/Overconsumption/Debt” as the primary underlying cause of the current economic and environmental crises. 15% said “Overburdening the Earth’s carrying capacity,” and 13% identified “Banking/Financial system practices.”

Reported Understanding of Subject

91% of the respondents reported having a moderate to strong understanding of the economic crisis; with 46% claiming a “Strong” understanding of the subject. These numbers may seem high, however, this is a self-selecting population (those exposed to this survey in the course of voluntary activist or self-education efforts). Because this is a self-selecting and subjectively-responding sample, it remains unclear to what extent these individuals accurately understand a highly complex, fluid situation.

- Action: More clearly identify what the 9% who do not claim a good understanding of the economic situation need to know; how the 45% in the “Moderate” group can be bolstered; and if the 46% “Strong” group is informed as they believe themselves to be. Just how much do even these active, engaged people understand about the situation and the possibilities?
- Action: Given that a significantly higher percentage of men than women self-rated as knowledgeable (76% vs. 45%), inquire if this gender discrepancy points to undeserved confidence or unnecessary modesty.
- Action: More clearly identify those in both groups who have a good grasp on economics, and design strategies and processes that can best leverage these progressive change agents and leaders, perhaps as “mentors” to others.

- Action: Design strategies to enhance the understanding of those needing more insight, whether or not a gap is acknowledged by those individuals. This suggests a strategy that is incremental, inquiry-based, and subconsciously and somatically safe and inviting.

Fight/Flight/Freeze Proclivities

Global economic events and their felt and/or perceived impacts trigger a “Fight” response in more than half of all respondents.

- **Fight:** Of the 62% “Fight” respondents: 31% responded. “Fight” without qualification. 31% responded with some kind of peaceful, calm, non-violent, engaged response — an engaged and mobilized response to potential threat — which can also be considered a “Fight” response.
- **Flight:** 15% reported a “Flight” response — which, like “Fight” is also a mobilized response — albeit with different emotional affects and motivations.

Combining “Fight” and “Flight”(both mobilized responses) yields an aggregate 72% “mobilized” majority. This majority of active respondents is perhaps not unexpected, given the Green Festival’s educated, activist population.

- **Freeze:** The 20% who reported “Freeze” (which may be a substantially lower proportion than in non-Green Festival populations) may deserve the closest attention.

Although the present sample was too small to correlate with lower “self-empowerment” rankings, this group may feel both immobilized and un-empowered. Educational and/or development efforts that speak to the environmental and economic crisis may need to address the potential for a dissociated “freeze” response in order to be inclusive, responsible, and effective.

- Action: Further research into the 20% “Freeze” population is indicated. Better discernment about specific triggers and perceived antidotes to these triggers would help educators and advocates better navigate this treacherous territory. This could lead to more associated, and fewer disassociated, responses in outreach and engagement efforts.
- Action: Similarly, investigation into whether education and economic status affect levels of flight, fight, and freeze is also indicated. Green Festival participants appear to have generally high levels of education and disposable income (although this inquiry did not measure this) and report high levels of self-empowerment. Other studies have shown that lower income and education often translate to fewer choices and options, and higher levels of freeze under stress. We might expect higher levels of freeze in groups with more varied levels of education, mobilization, and resources.
- Action: When the economy slows, the level of “Freeze” may increase, and continue to rise should local/global threats further permeate individual and collective lives. We are humans living in a finite space. Faced with increasing population, diminishing resources, accelerating climate change, and escalating danger, populations may self-divide into groups, which either fight, flee, or freeze. Further research into measuring implicit, physiological levels of fight, flight, and freeze in relation to economic crisis (as well as other social, environmental, and political challenges) could lead to safer, more integrated, and accelerated efforts that benefit the whole.

- Action: Consider mitigating and ameliorative techniques. Hope and subconscious somatic safety (SSS) are antidotes to the freeze response. While creating context, conditions, and environment for hope and SSS is an innately intelligent and effective strategy, it does not assure re-association, connection, or transformation. Hope and SSS mitigate (and avoid exacerbating) the underlying hair-triggered freeze condition that can arise when dealing with challenging economic and environmental topics.

Emotional Responses

“Anger” is the leading emotional response reported, but respondent reactions span a broad spectrum. Most notable is the wide range of emotions. This diversity of reactions indicates a clear need for emotionally-responsive and mature design and facilitation of conversations, content, process, and interactions around global economic and environmental issues.

- Action: Each of these primary emotions (Anger/Frustration, Sadness, and Fear) present different somatic dynamics and brain/body chemistries. Each has a different effect on overall personal and collective systems functioning. By more clearly identifying emotional states around specific issues, it is possible to design and facilitate context-specific somatic experiences and interventions that can more successfully engage, align, and mobilize individuals, groups, and movements.
- Action: Establishing resourced somatic referent points (a positive body-based reframe on each of the above emotions) would provide somatic structure, expedite neural integration, and could help rewire somatic-emotional feedback loops in context appropriate ways. **Further definition and study could be highly useful.**

Perceived Personal Responsibility

Respondents believe they played a role in creating the economic crisis. Some 68% of respondents believe they contributed to the creation of the current situation. This high level of personal responsibility seems to correspond with their generally high sense of empowerment.

- Action: Consider messaging and engagement strategies that focus not only on defeating external enemies (for example, Big Oil), but also on taking personal and collective responsibility for creating a better future.

Individual and Group Empowerment Rankings

Respondents report higher levels of empowerment for themselves than for others. This variance may have direct impact on respondents’ tension levels, emotional, and fight/flight/freeze responses, as well as optimism about the potential for change.

Overall, respondents reported 32% higher levels of perceived self-empowerment than perceived collective empowerment This difference requires further study. It could represent the American culture’s focus on the individual, without matching emphasis on collective well-being, or it could represent mistrust of others and/or institutions.

- Action: With less perceived trust and confidence in a collective ability to change the future, communication, outreach, and education techniques that motivate working together may be important. It may bear demonstrating once again the obvious: we can do more together than alone.

Envisioned Futures

Understanding of events does not necessarily limit perceived responsibility or future possibility. Of the 91% who said they had a moderate or strong understanding of the current economic situation, 74% said a return to economic growth would not resolve the situation. Similarly, 64% of these same people (who reported a moderate or strong understanding of the current economic situation) said they could imagine a world without economic growth.

- Action: This suggests (although the survey sample is small) that a strong majority of these "green" activists and advocates who feel connected to the situation (both personally and intellectually) have come to grips with the paradox of attempting to create infinite growth on a finite planet. And, they've already begun an imaginative (and possibly actual) journey to a world beyond growth.
- Action: Given that none of the respondents was primed with any sort of economic message, the results suggests:
 - Green" activists may be ready for information and action around the end of economic growth.
 - An end of growth message may be compatible with a "green" message, as this theme resonated even at an event where green products were strongly merchandised.
 - There may well be potential leaders/mentors/advocates within the green community to lead conversations and action around post-growth economics and environmentalism.
- Action: These consistently high responsibility/knowledge results present a potential red flag: Respondents may sense they have more control about their future than they actually do. If respondents, in their daily lives, overleverage their choices based on incorrect assumptions, they could be setting themselves up for a big fall. Further research to better clarify and document the perceptions and assumptions underlying this population's strong sense of understanding and agency is recommended.
- Action: Although it is important to not overreach on the basis of this short survey, the implications of these responses are potentially significant. Taken together, these results point to respondents with a general self-conception as integral parts in a cohesive whole. The results also point to an underlying belief that the current system is unsustainable, and cannot survive. The variant responses — not fully examined here — are especially worthy of further study (i.e., the effect of identified causes on respondent prognoses for the future, such as institutions vs. personal/cultural factors).

IMPLICATIONS

Outreach, Communication, and Mobilization

Despite the looming economic and environmental challenges, the majority of Green Festival survey respondents (particularly the men) report significant agency, responsibility, and mobility...even confidence about sailing into uncharted economic and environmental waters. But is this confidence warranted? And what about those with less certitude?

Confidence enables individuals and groups to make choices in the present that reflect their assumptions about future conditions. For much of the last century, most Americans have acted as if they assume a fairly consistent level of growth, and an abundant and predictable global ecosystem. These assumptions are so commonplace that they hardly seem worth mentioning. And when assumptions match well with reality, people tend to feel in control.

Now that there is strong evidence that generally accepted assumptions may not hold, how can constituencies like “green” progressives begin to reframe their understanding, actions, and emotions? How can those assumptions be pried apart so as to make room for new understanding and new, more effective actions?

Research suggests that we should begin with emotion and neurophysiology. Almost any individual, when exposed to information or ideas that contradict the basis of her/his security, will get triggered and react. Humans tend to associate a charge with things we find disagreeable or uncomfortable, and the charge is usually more powerful the more it threatens our identity and/or security. We enter a state of various degrees of dis-regulation/disassociation/disorganization/dysfunction.

“Triggered” people or groups typically do not respond to content-based communication. Introducing more “facts” that contradict core beliefs won’t change minds or the situation. The individual/group has moved away from content-based reasoning, and is now operating on a more basic biological realm. Challenging beliefs directly will be more than offset by all the energy that went into constructing (and now defending) that belief. The conversation is no longer operating in the present, and certainly not pointing toward a new viable future — it is focused on what was learned and assimilated in the past.

This survey reinforces the need to create context and conditions that support higher levels of subconscious somatic safety for constituents dealing with large-scale environmental and economic challenges. Education and advocacy groups need to make it easier for constituents to inquire into their assumptions and beliefs, and deal with possible alterations to some of their most basic assumptions. Care must be taken to slow down their reactivity, and spread out the charge so that their level of distress stays within a manageable range. Pulling the rug out from under people tends to lead to a fall (and a strong defensive reaction, which re-entrenches disassociation) far more often than to a change in belief structures.

Finally, further inquiry can illuminate just how informed various constituents actually are, and how ready they are to deal with the complexities of the looming challenges. The respondents to this inquiry showed a large variation in assumed knowledge level, emotional response, and sense of agency. Therefore, any strategy to engage constituencies should reflect this diversity, and avoid unproductive “triggering” of whole segments of the intended audience.

Somatic Implications

Survey results indicate a strong, if not fully defined, relationship between perception of economic crisis and personal somatic functioning. In addition, they indicate several types of responses that may provide insight into common dispositions and symptoms of the “activist” or “progressive” community. These people — particularly some subgroups and segments — could be more effectively engaged and activated by utilizing somatic-based techniques to increase association, receptivity, and other integrative functions that accelerate regenerative change.

CONCLUSIONS

While limited in terms of both sampling and methodology, the above results introduce important questions and provide several promising avenues for further investigation. They not only suggest several important generic elements worthy of further study and definition, but possible premises for development of testable new communication and organizational strategies for mobilization and sustained support of green and progressive activists on both individual and community levels.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

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INNATE INTELLIGENCE

Founded in 2000, Innate Intelligence is a leading somatic based whole systems process design and facilitation provider that works with individuals, organizations and communities to mobilize accelerated change. Innate Intelligence provides innovative somatic (body-based) trauma resolution therapies, organizational and cluster development consulting, somatic business coaching, trainings, workshops, and co-generates original research that explores implicit human process drivers in self-organizing education and change initiatives. For more information about Innate Intelligence, visit our website at www.innate-intelligence.com

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APPENDICES: SOCIAL BODY INQUIRY SURVEY

INNATE INTELLIGENCE & POST CARBON INSTITUTE

San Francisco Green Festival 2011

Please help us to gather some basic information regarding your views and attitudes on the sustainability and condition of our world—specifically economic crisis related themes and the way they affect your body, views, perception, feeling, and functioning. All information you provide is strictly confidential and will be used for research purposes only; it is not necessary to include your name unless you would like to receive additional information or discuss this subject separately from this short survey study. We appreciate the opportunity to learn more about the way current conditions affect green-conscious people like you. Thanks for your time!

1. Are you Female or Male? (Circle One)
2. What generation do you identify with? (Circle One) a) under 30 b) 30-50 c) 50-70 d) 70+
3. What's your current level of understanding of the global economic crisis? a) Strong b) Moderate c) Low d) None/Don't Know
4. What do you feel is the root cause of the economic crisis? a) Greed/Overconsumption/Too Much Debt b) Banking/Financial System Practices c) Governmental Failure d) Inequality e) Over-Burdening of the Earth's Carrying Capacity
5. Did you play a role in the creation of the economic crisis YES / NO (Circle One) What role can you play in moving beyond it?
6. Would a Return to Growth Resolve the Economic Crisis? YES / NO (Circle One)
7. Can you imagine living in a world without economic growth YES / NO (Circle One) What do you imagine that would be like?

***Now, please take a few moments to slow yourself down, go inwards and notice whats happening in your body.** You might want to shut your eyes, take a few long, slow, deep breaths and relax into the chair...aahhh....once you are at least semi-relaxed please turn the page and continue with the inquiry

8. Can you feel your feet, seat and heartbeat? YES / NO (Circle One)

9. What is your primary emotion about the current global crisis?

- a) Anger
- b) Sadness
- c) Fear
- d) Frustration
- e) Other _____

10. When you think of the current global economic situation and how it affects you and your loved ones, what sensations arise in your body? (Please Check Any/All that Apply)

- a) my body expands
- b) my body contracts
- c) my heart rate goes up
- d) my heart rate goes down
- e) my body goes numb
- f) other, please list_____

11. First, take a moment to Sense your Body – Now, take a moment to once again think of the Current Political, Environmental and Economic Global Situation. Is your primary impulse to:

- (a) fight
- (b) flee or escape
- (c) freeze or shut down
- (d) Other:

12. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most empowered), How Empowered or Able Do You Feel you are to Change Your Individual future? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Circle One)

13. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most empowered) How empowered do you feel you and others together are in changing our collective future? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Circle One)

Thank you again for participating in this inquiry. If you would like to receive a copy of the inquiry results—please include your email address and we will send you a link to our final post-survey report results.

Email Address:_____

Would you like to know more about the End of Growth from the Post Carbon Institute? Yes/No

Would you like to know more about Body Inquiry from Innate Intelligence? Yes/No