

***Designing Organizations as if Life Matters:
Principles of Appreciative Organizing***

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*"Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."
- Arundhati Roy*

Images and ideals of organization design have changed dramatically in the past decade. Successful businesses have adapted their organizations to social innovations such as global access to information; enhanced diversity and connectivity among members, consumers and customers; the desire of people world wide for participation in decisions that affect their lives; and increasing opportunities for doing business globally.

Bureaucracies, operating on the belief that information is power, have migrated toward open and shared information networks (Evans and Wurster, 2000, Brown and Duguid, 2000) and chaordic structures (Hock, 1999). Authoritarian, power based, chain of commands have been replaced by team based organizations (Purser and Cabana, 1998) that value employee engagement, and workplace communities (Seiling, 1997). Hierarchies based on decision making at the top have given way to self organizing (Ulrich and Probst, 1984) and horizontal organizations (Ostroff, 1999).

New forms of organizing are responding to the need for a redirection in the purpose and strategy of business as well as leadership styles, decision making practices, employee processes and organization structures,. Not only do they place a high value on creating products and services cooperatively with customers (Zuboff, 2002, Lewis, 1995), they make it very clear that the purpose and strategy of business must address issues of environmental sustainability (Hawkin, 1993, Laszlo, 2001). Organizations of all size and scope are taking on the three fold responsibility for: people, profit and planet. From BP to Walmart, from Google to Whole Foods, businesses are benefiting from committing to environmentally sound practices and providing for employees. As Arundhati Roy states, a new world is on her way.

The leading headline in Fortune Magazine's annual report (2007) on the *100 Best Companies to Work For* reads, "Google is the New No. 1." The article describes employee commitment by saying that employees work like dogs and with dogs. And it describes a long list of employee services including onsite medical care and laundry facilities, 11 gourmet cafeterias, subsidies for purchasing hybrid cars, as well as exercise

and language classes. As the article points out, Google is not alone when it comes to caring for employees. Many other top ranking companies provide 100% of the cost of health insurance for employees, their spouses or their same sex partners. This report sends a loud and clear message – caring for people is good business.

In the same month (January, 2007) Ode Magazine writes about the innovative and liberating organization Brazilian entrepreneur, Richard Semler, has created. His company, Semco operates as a democracy. “Employees set their own hours, determine their salaries and choose their bosses.” (2007, p. 57). As Semco demonstrates – designing organizations to liberate the creativity of people is good business.

Google and Semco have a great deal in common. They are both financially successful. They are creative and innovative businesses. They draw upon people’s strengths and their desire to excel. And most significantly – they are life affirming. They care about and focus upon what gives life to people, communities and the environment. They value health and vitality in the ways they do business, in their products and services, and in their organization designs. They are examples of a new genre of organizations.

The purpose of this paper is to explore this new genre of life affirming organizations. It is an invitation to “appreciative organizing – as if life matters.” It is a call to abandon modern theories, processes and models of organization design that are based upon mechanistic, rational, objective assumptions and to embrace organizations designed to affirm, nurture and sustain life.

The ideas in this paper are presented in two sections:

- One, “What Gives Life to Human Organizing” – a preliminary set of principles about appreciative organizing followed by ideas for future research;
- Two, “What Are We Designing” – a conversation to expand what we mean when we talk about organization design followed by ideas on how to integrate the nine principles into the practice of design.

Section One – What Gives Life to Human Organizing?

Thus life is not a limited mechanical concept which applies to self-reproducing biological machines. It is a quality which inheres in space itself, and applies to every brick, every stone, every person, every physical structure of any kind at all, that appears in space.

Each thing has its life.”

-Christopher Alexander

The shift from mechanistic to life affirming, appreciative organizing requires a vocabulary of organizational design based on the assumption that there is some degree of life recognizable in all things, relationships and events. The natural and human made; relational and structural; artistic and ordinary; personal and professional; virtual and tangible all embody life. Life force, known as chi in Chinese medicine and prana among yogis, is apparent in nature and among humans. It flows among and with in us and is

recognizable as a feeling, a sense, a knowing, in our narratives, in relationships and in our health. It is in the nature of being – personally and collectively.

Architect and Stanford University Professor Emeritus, Christopher Alexander has written a series of four books beautifully demonstrating the presence of life in design (2002). He bases his work, as an architect, on the idea that life is recognizable and discernable in varying degrees. He writes “We do feel that there are different degrees of life in things – and that this feeling is rather strongly shared by almost everyone.” (2002, Book One, p. 32). Good design enables, enhances and embellishes life.

In nature we recognize the differing degrees of life in a breaking wave, a mountain stream and a pond of industrial waste. In social life we sense differing degrees of life in a lovers embrace, a handshake with a new customer and an icy stare. All organizations and human collectivities, conversationally, materially and spiritually possess some degree of life. Most significantly, the quality of life creates an organizational consciousness which people can feel and describe when they experience it.

The question of whether we are able to define, sense and measure an organization’s degree of life remains to be tested. I believe that research will show that people, as Alexander suggests, are able to discern degrees of life. When asked to determine where an organization or situation resides on a continuum of variables that give life to organizations people will be able to do so. They will be able to describe degrees of life in organizations, situations and communities.

Consider life in three grocery stores in a small town in New Mexico. The first, Cid’s sells organic foods, has a huge bulletin board in the lobby posted full of personal needs and offerings. On any given day groups of people can be seen talking around the coffee pot, across tables of free food samples and on the front porch. Shopping at Cid’s is a social event. Conversations are personal, reflecting small town concerns about what’s happening in families, the town council and the world at large.

The second, Smith’s is part of a larger chain of stores. It too sells organic foods along with a wide range of other foods, keeps a coffee pot full for shoppers and offers free food samples. It has a wider range of products and attracts a wider range of customers. The diversity of products reflects the diversity people in an exciting way. People shopping at Smiths greet one another speaking English, Spanish and Tewa. Along with the locals living in the town, tourists find their way to Smith’s. Conversations tend to be less personal as wide aisles invite distance and the capacity to pass one another by with only a nod or a friendly smile. The front entrance of Smith’s, however, is a staging ground for girl scouts selling cookies, local non profit bake sales and families giving away litters of kittens and puppies.

The third is Super Save where food is sold in bulk quantities to people shopping for best prices without regard for friendly encounters. Conversations reflect a collective concern for price as people share with each other what similar items cost elsewhere. All three stores sell food to nourish the people. Shopping at Cid’s and Smith’s is a much more life

giving and nourishing experience than shopping at Super Save. Each of these three stores can be seen as alive with people, relationships, conversation and activity. Each contains life to a different degree.

For yet another example consider life in a 100 year old manufacturing company, life in a Silicon Valley high tech company in the 1990s and life in the emergency room of a major metropolitan hospital. Each of these organizations differs in the degree of life we would experience walking the halls and talking with employees. And each of these organizations can enhance its degree of life through conscious cooperative design.

Principles of Appreciative Organizing

If as Alexander suggests, there is recognizable life in all things, a series of questions then arises. What is it that gives life to human organizing? What makes one organization more life affirming and sustaining than another? What gives vitality to social collectivities?

A preliminary answer to these questions is found in the nine principles of appreciative organizing listed in Table 1. They are thoughts about what gives life to human organizations and communities, based on 30 years of experience working with and observing hundreds of organizations. And indirectly, they offer ideas for designing life affirming, appreciative organizations.

**Table 1
Nine Principles of Appreciative Organizing**

1. Evolutionary Purpose
2. Harmonious Wholeness
3. Appreciative Leadership
4. Positive Emotional Climate
5. Strong Centers of Meaning
6. Just in Time Structures
7. Liberation Economics
8. Engaged Participation
9. Caring Culture

The following pages provide a brief description of each of the nine principles along with three sub-categories for each principle. The sub-categories are presented as continuums. Each continuum can serve as both a measure of the degrees of life present in any given organization and as a criterion for consciously designing life affirming, appreciative organizations and communities.

1. Evolutionary Purpose

Purpose has long been recognized as a central organizing element for communities and organizations. A clear and compelling purpose awakens the heart and mind of people and serves as a collaborative call to action. It is the strength of purpose as an organizing element that raises the question: What is the nature of purpose that gives life to human organizing? Today both the daily news papers and the scholarly journals pose questions about the appropriate purpose of businesses. Do they exist to serve shareholders, society or both? Are they responsible for the well being of employees, customers and the environment? How are companies that commit to social benefit able to balance profitability, growth and social responsibility?

Appreciative organizing calls for the purpose of business to be socially uplifting --- emotionally and tangibly. An evolutionary purpose is inspiring to those who work for and with the organization, beneficial to those who use its products and services, and leaves a small footprint or even strengthens the environment. An evolutionary purpose requires a kind of organizational *ahisma*, a sense of doing no harm. This in turn requires a strategic sensibility to the long term implications of business decisions, directions and strategies.

From Short Term Gain to Focus on the Ideal Future

An evolutionary purpose ensures that life will continue and thrive – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually into the future. Life affirming organizations accept accountability for environmental sustainability and social profitability as well as fiscal responsibility. This requires that hard choices be made to ensure that business strategies are financially rewarding and long term socially rewarding.

Many years ago I facilitated a strategic planning session for an international health care company. During the meeting the idea of entering the nursing home business was discussed in depth. It was clearly a promising business opportunity from a financial perspective. Ultimately, however, the group made a different life affirming choice. Based on their own values they decided to aggressively pursue home health care rather than nursing homes. Their value of independence for their own aging parents, and ultimately themselves as they aged, led them to make a very successful and life affirming business decision. Their ideal future was one in which aging people stayed at home and were cared for by loving family, friends and neighbors. They decided to invest in their ideal. They and the company's employees were proud of the direction they chose. And several shared in later meeting that their spouses or parents had commented that it was a good decision. Now some ten years later, it has proven to have been a very good decision financially as well.

Appreciative organizing values the institution of business and its significance in society. It asks simply that the leaders of business, like the leaders of this health care company, use their power and influence mindfully to ensure that today's business decisions are good for society's future.

From Sustainable Sales to Selling Sustainability

There is no doubt that business has a significant influence on people and societies. Indeed, if it is successful, business is the creator of trends, fashions and habits. The purpose of business is to sell its products and services, to make them appear needed and wanted, and to design and sell them into the daily lives of people. Appreciative organizing recognizes the power of business and poses the question: How can business use its significant influence toward sustainability? Life affirming organizations address this question in the design of their products and services, in their relationship with the environment and in their marketing and sales strategies. The more the purpose of a business focuses on sustainability, the greater its life affirming impact.

From Use of Human Resources to Elevation of Human Potential

Organizations founded on the attitudes and values of the industrial age are implicitly using people to achieve their goals. Appreciative organizing is an invitation to organize for the purpose of elevating human potential, personally and collectively. This requires the recognition of work as a noble endeavor, a way of learning and growing, and a way of serving the good of the whole. Appreciative organizations find ways to use the work of the business – whether it is roasting and selling coffee, manufacturing automobiles or building homes – as a learning ground for the development of all stakeholders. Among the organizing principles of Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, for example, is a commitment that everyone involved with their coffee has a satisfying and life enhancing experience including coffee growers and pickers, roasters, distributors, café owners and coffee drinkers. A commitment to elevating human potential is an evolutionary purpose that leads to both engaged employees and a sustainable world.

2. Harmonious Wholeness

The world is now recognized and experienced as one global whole. From the ease of communication to global warming, from seeing world news as it happens to the fear of globally spread diseases, from economies that fluctuate in relation to each other to movies that debut simultaneously on five continents, we are daily reminded that life on earth is one life. This realization presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities for the design of organizations and communities. Any organization, no matter how local, must now consider and account for its place in the whole.

Appreciative organizations shift from practices and structures that separate people and break things apart to practices of wholeness. Using large group processes such as Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005; Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, 2002; and Ludema, Whitney, Mohr and Griffin, 2003), Open Space (Owen, 1997) and Future Search (Weisbord and Janoff, 1995) they engage all of their stakeholders - employees, customers, suppliers, regulators, investors, etc. – in dialogue to co-create the

future of the business. Wholeness brings out the best of people. By drawing on diverse ideas and aligning strengths it creates one harmonious direction forward.

When the whole of an organization or community experiences harmony remarkable results occur. Harmony allows for diversity. Indeed, it depends on diversity. Organizing through harmony is a way of both honoring differences and creating a committed path forward. As harmony, or resonance among differences, increases in organizations and communities so too does the degree of life.

From Logos to Holos

Logics separate parts to make them manageable. Wholes deepen relatedness to bring them into harmony. Logics explain the past, offer reasons to act and consequences for not acting. Stories and experiences of the whole give meaning, heal and inspire new possibilities for action.

Holos recognizes that at any given time, in any given situation there are many diverse perspectives in relation to one other. Curiosity about multiple stories and explanations leads to a generative sense of wholeness, a harmony among differences affording identity and meaningfulness for all involved. Appreciative organizations such as the United Religions Initiative are enlivened by questions of how to be wholly inclusive, how to engage the whole in deliberations and decisions, and how to shift from logos to holos as the basis for engagement, decisions and actions.

From Separateness to Not Separateness

Philosophers and physicists, biologists and shamans all testify to the essential interrelatedness of all life. We breath the same air, we live in the same global flow of being, we are of the same essence be it biological or spiritual. Organizations designed from a knowing of non separateness attend to the chain of life from beginning to end, from input to output. Practical examples of this are found in the “cradle to cradle” designs of architect William McDonough (2003) and the business to business “natural step” designs of Paul Hawkin (1993).

From Chaos to Harmony

Diversity can no longer be reduced to ease the burden of managers or aid efficiency. That is a trade off that is not life giving. The vitality of an organization or community expands when diverse ideas, practices and cultures are harmonized into one meaningful whole. Appreciative organizing depends on processes for harmonizing the diverse interests, abilities and dreams of people.

Visions point the way; harmony weaves people together and unites diverse interests into aligned action. Martin Luther King had a dream. His dream inspired hundreds and thousands of people to be trained in non-violent resistance, how to harmonize in the face of extreme differences, that gave form and meaning to the civil rights movement. Gandhi’s vision for a better world led thousands of people in the salt march to demonstrate how people can uphold their dignity and in harmony transform an oppressive society.

3. Appreciative Leadership

Each era ushers in a new form of leadership appropriate to the time and situation at hand. The industrial age brought hierarchies and bureaucracies. The information age sports networks and distributed systems. The most defining challenge of our time is the diverse reach of globalization. The reinvention of civil society, organizations and communities in the global age requires a “contactful” form of leadership. The global age, defined by an awareness of interdependence and extreme diversity, calls for a relationally grounded, dialogically expressed form of leadership. Appreciative Leadership that focuses on bringing out the best of people, organizations and communities, through conscious acts of discovery, dream and design, is an answer to that call.

From Talking Heads to Conversations That Matter

Many people working in organizations and communities around the world suffer from “lack of voice.” They are treated as cogs in the wheel of work rather than as people with ideas and opinions that matter. Life giving organizations value communication as a relational act, not merely a transfer of information. Recognizing that meaning is made in conversations Appreciative Leaders create opportunities for people of all functions and levels to come together for inquiry and dialogue. Commitment, energy and vitality rise with curiosity and open conversation.

When the people whose future it is gather to assess strengths and explore opportunities the results are often surprising. In one high school in California the students attending a strategic planning meeting were the voice of diversity. They were clear that rather than new buildings, better sports equipment or even a coffee shop on campus, their school needed to expand its sensitivity to and inclusion of diverse students, faculty and staff at all levels. Conversations matter. They are the vehicle for creating shared meaning, identity and inspired action.

Talking at people puts them to sleep or invites them to resist. Talking with them awakens the spirit of possibility and generates a lively organizational environment. Listening to them evokes deep knowing and builds relational commitment needed for extraordinary results to unfold. Appreciative leaders foster conversations that matter

From Dominance to Partnership

Appreciative leadership is a shift from me to we, from telling to asking, from power over to power with. Social constructionist thought leader, Professor, John Shotter (1993) suggests that it is through “witness” that meaning is made and life is constructed.

Appreciative Leadership encourages people at all levels and in all functions of an organization to enter into dialogue with their stakeholders, to trust collaborative processes as a way of moving forward to optimal results. People commit to what they help create. The move away from dominance toward partnership is a move toward workplace democracy. It requires that some people find the courage to speak up while others find the confidence to listen up. Partnership practices include engaging with others in all levels of planning and decision making: from product design to strategic planning; from peer hiring to salary administration. Most significantly, life giving organizations engage

all the people whose future it is in dialogue, decision making and design of the future. Processes like Appreciative Inquiry become a daily practice for inclusion and open dialogue.

From Sole (the buck stops here) to Soul (answering the call)

When reflecting on what gives life in an organization or community we easily recognize the difference between “my way or the highway” leaders and servant leaders (Sims, 1997) who are dedicated to discerning and living into their “higher calling.” It is the difference between having to be at the center of things and knowing how to center one’s self. The top down leadership style of all too many large corporate hierarchies reward executives as if they are the only ones making anything happen. Appreciative Leadership in contrast, focuses on bringing out the best of people and teams, aligning strengths to create success and appreciating everyone’s unique and value added contribution. The more this is both an emotional and financial practice the greater the life affirming quality of the organization.

4. Positive Emotional Climate

The literature in management and organization development is abounding with writings on the value of a positive emotional climate. Daniel Goldman’s work on Emotional Intelligence (1995) clearly affirms the need for managers to demonstrate sensitivities to the feelings of team members and colleagues, as well as their own.

Leading positive psychology researcher, Dr. Barbara Fredrickson’s work on positive emotions (2003) makes the business case for good feelings at work. Her research shows a direct empirical correlation between the presence and experience of positive emotions such as joy, optimism and curiosity and high impact business goals such as innovation, achievement and cooperation. The work compiled and edited by Professors, Kim Cameron, Jane Dutton and Robert Quinn, under the banner, positive organizational scholarship (2003), also indicates that not only does a positive emotional climate feel good, it is good business. This research and writing on positive emotions and organizational scholarship suggests that the more positive the emotional climate the more life affirming and viable the business. Three shifts are called for to move today’s organizations up the scale toward more life affirming forms of interaction.

From Criticism to Appreciation

The dominant pattern of interaction and relatedness in most organizations today is defined by criticism. People who speak out do so at the risk of prompting others, superiors and peers alike, to respond with critical and often personally demeaning comments. The result can be devastating – to the confidence of employees and their willingness to take the risks needed for innovation and integrity within the organization. Consider the story of HT, a thirty something, graduate of Georgetown, Stanford Business School and Oxford, just weeks from being awarded his Ph.D. He accepted a position with a leading international consulting firm on the promise of work that would use his skills and continue to stimulate his growth and development. Within the first month on the job he was sent to a week long training program to learn research methods. It was a program required of all new hires – most of who were just out of undergraduate college. In the

course of the program he felt belittled by the trainer when he made comments or asked challenging questions. Being required to attend the program made him think that the firm was not living up to its promise to him. When he approached his supervisor with his thoughts he was told that he was “egotistical and grandiose”. After three months of continued criticism he left the firm and entered counseling to try to understand what he did wrong. In this case the manager’s criticism lost his consulting firm a valuable resource, and reinforced a supervisory style of critique, bordering on abuse. In addition, it led a bright young man into a downward spiral of self doubt rather than into an upward spiral of learning and contribution.

Appreciation - valuing of ideas, skills and aspirations can have just the opposite effect. Consider the story of SK, another thirty something with a deep well of potential. With ten years of experience in domestic and international communication strategy and an MPA from Harvard’s Kennedy School she applied for a position with an international NGO. During the interview she described her long range goal to be an Executive Director of an international NGO. The hiring manager, the current Executive Director, was an attentive listener and heard SK’s aspiration to diversify her experience, recognized her natural abilities to manage people, projects, events and functions and realized that SK would benefit by learning the development function. She offered her a job as Development Manager. The learning curve was steep and yet in the first three months SK hired three additional staff, managed the production of the annual fundraising event and established positive relationships with staff around the world. In this case the manager took a risk to put someone with no content knowledge, yet good managerial skills, into a position and it paid off. Her ability to appreciate potential set off an upward spiral of achievement and satisfaction for both the young woman and the organization.

From Fear to Safety

The greatest shift that must occur to bring people and organizations to life is the shift from a climate of fear to a climate of safety. When people are afraid to speak up, to express their ideas and feelings, and to be their authentic selves it is very hard, some would say even impossible, for them to trust others in order to collaborate or be creative.

A relatively new director of operations for a global company described the fear she found in her new organization, “Around here people don’t speak up. They don’t share information or ideas because when they do they are almost always attacked. It is usually by their boss who will say things like, ‘that doesn’t make sense, can you prove it, or that’s not right?’ The culture here is just not respectful. As a result, there is very little risk taking and initiative. I believe the business suffers. I know the people do.”

When an organization sets life as a priority it continuously seeks ways to create a sense of safety and add value to the life of people within and external to the organization. This means that life affirming organizations are both adapting to the changes around them and serving as advocates for a better world. They hold up the right of all people to a healthy and happy life – to a world that works for all.

From Rational to Natural and Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Expression

Key to a positive emotional climate is appreciation for the many ways people know what they know and express what they know. For some people intuition is natural, for others empirical research makes sense, and for still others consulting oracles and psychics provides valuable knowledge. Organizations that limit the ways of knowing limit the knowledge and wisdom available for learning, decision making and planning. Organizing in a global arena calls for a balance between the ways of the north and the ways of the south. The metaphor, “life as an extension of the machine” dominates current organizational life. To enhance the life affirming nature of organizations it must be balanced with an understanding of “life as a natural organic process.” Ways of being and knowing that are natural to indigenous, tribal people, farmers, fisher people and others who live close to nature are not a lesser way of knowing or being. They are simply different and once recognized, appreciated and integrated into organizational life can actually lead to a much healthier and happier quality of life for us all.

Relational, communal ways of being often place more of a premium on the celebration of life than on work then do rational and linear ways of knowing. In the process of designing and giving life to the United Religions Initiative (Gibbs and Mahe, 2004) we brought together people from dozens of religions, spiritual traditions and indigenous practices. During one meeting on the campus of Stanford University 220 people were gathered. Following appreciative interviews into our vision, values and ideals for the design of such an organization the discussion in my small group of ten people from 5 continents turned to celebration. A businessman from Belgium commented on the importance of clear goals and the celebration of success following their achievement. His comments made sense to about half of the group. His comment was followed by that of a minister from South Africa who said, “No, no, no we can’t wait to celebrate. We must design an organization in which everyday is a celebration of life.” His comments made sense to the other half of the group. The conversation continued back and forth until we as a group could laugh at ourselves, and our different views of celebration as an organizing element.

Even today when the United Religions Initiative’s Global Council meets for its week long annual meeting our success depends on finding the fine balance between working a logical linear agenda and singing, dancing, and ceremony. In the design of global organizations it cannot be an either or. We must learn from one another and be willing to join in and participate in ways of being that integrates and balances rational and relational, individual and communal, modern and mystical.

5. Strong Centers of Meaning

Vitality in organizations increases with meaningfulness. And meaningfulness varies from social group to social group, from generation to generation and from person to person. The nature of meaningful work and organizing shifts as each new generation enters the workforce. Unfortunately each generation enters a world of meaning given form by the prior generation which often does not satisfy their unique needs for meaning. Futurist, Jay Jamrog (2001) points out that Baby boomers and Gen Xers, for example, work for different reasons and in very different ways. Baby boomers work to earn money to

someday have a great life. Gen Xers work as a part of a good life, not as the means to it. The organization design question is then, “how do we design organizations that allows for differing groups of people to experience meaning harmoniously in relation to one another?”

Strong centers of meaning are more often socially negotiated and determined than assigned. When people are given choices about how they can participate and have opportunities for expression strong centers of meaning emerge. Freedom of choice about participation and expression enables people with differing skills, abilities, and learning styles, etc. to find meaning in relation to one another, and to make a vital contribution to the whole organization.

In his, *Tips for Democratic Management* (p.59) Entrepreneur Ricardo Semler makes the case for freedom of choice when he says, “Let employees determine everything for themselves: their salaries, their working hours, their managers.” In a study of why Appreciative Inquiry works, Appreciative Inquiry thought leaders and international consultants, Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom (2003) found “freedom to choose their form of participation” at work one of six freedoms valued by employees. They correlate the six freedoms with the liberation of power, or potential, at work.

From Control to Choice

Another of innovative entrepreneur, Ricardo Semler’s tips is, “Let go of control” (p.59). There was a time when people went to work and accepted “the job” for what it was. That time has passed. All four generations actively engaged in the workforce now – Depression Gen, Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y – are calling for greater choice. Depression Gens and Baby boomers want flexibility in benefits and work hours along with opportunities to learn on the job. They want choices in order to create work-life balance needed to care for elder parents and still have time for travel. Gen Xers want even greater choices to ensure life-work balance. Work, to them, is not meant to interfere with life. Gen Yers want yet a different kind of freedom - to work virtually. A large majority of them plan to be their own boss someday and see jobs as a stepping stone to owning their own business.

Along with generational differences, there are cultural, ethnic and religious differences requiring greater degrees of freedom in the workplace. Creating opportunities for greater choice, in areas of significance to employees of varying generations, as well as cultures and ethnicities, gives life to organizing and enhances loyalty, retention and commitment. As diversity increased in an organization or community, so does the need for freedom of choice. By offering possibilities and encouraging volition appreciative organizing enlivens people personally and collectively.

Gortex, a leading maker of high quality active wear, has long understood this and built it into its processes. Rather than job or work assignment, new associates go through a process of job or work selection. They join the company as associates and spend their first few months getting to know the company, working in various areas and determining where and how they can best contribute. After a time, in dialogue with their mentor, they define their own job and how they will contribute to the success of the enterprise.

From Authority to Collaborative Authoring

As Thomas Friedman so aptly points out in his best selling book, *The World is Flat*, collaboration is key to success in the twenty-first century.

“Rule #4: The best companies are the best collaborators. In the flat world, more and more businesses will be done through collaboration within and between companies, for a very simple reason: The next layers of value creation – whether in technology, marketing, biomedicine, or manufacturing – are becoming so complex that no single firm or department is going to be able to master them alone”(2005, p. 352-353).

Along with this unquestionable call for collaboration comes a dramatic shift in the meaning of authority. Organizations that are collaboratively capable move beyond the notion that people possess authority “over” resources, responsibilities and other people to a notion of people co-authoring the future. Everything from products, services, processes and budgets become horizontally organized and co-authored by people whose skills are equally valued and needed in order to achieve their collective goals.

Co-authoring and sharing power recognizes the power, or potential, that stems from relatedness rather than power over or against. It requires both the knowledge of one’s own strengths and capabilities and a willingness to inquire into and learn about others.’ Professors, Sheila McNamee and Ken Gergen edited volume on relational responsibility (1999) suggests that shared responsibility goes hand in hand with the co-creation of shared meaning and results.

From Seeking “Right” to Liberating Voice

In a global environment “seeking to be right” more often than not results in conflict, people feeling disrespected, and the disintegration of relationships. The artistry of creating harmony among differences depends on accepting and liberating multiple forms of expression as a rich palette of possibilities. As Amanda Trosten-Bloom and I discovered (2003, p. 241), when people feel heard they feel safe to give their best. Opportunities to share information, ideas and stories of success liberate voice, afford the experience of being heard and lead to innovative co-authoring of the future.

6. Just in Time Structures

Design requirements change over time and situation. Designs and styles of clothing vary based upon the values of society, generational preferences and materials at hand. So too do the designs of organizations and communities vary. As each new technology is introduced it creates both an imperative and blue print for the redesign of other structures of organizing. Such was the case with the car, the train, airplanes, computers and now the internet.

With the advent of the internet organizational designs have moved from being held in place by “bricks and mortar” to being fluidly articulated in virtual space. Virtual assistants, for example, do the work that once required a secretary sitting on the other side of the doorway. Professors not only teach online but also schedule and hold virtual

office hours. These structures of support and learning easily replace face to face structures. And they are flexible, what we might call “just in time structures.” They are established for a period of time and are not expected to last indefinitely.

From Hierarchical to Distributed

The move toward distributed structures is underway. Aided by the internet more and more organizations are shifting power from the center to the periphery. Distributed centers of excellence defined by practice areas, product and service niches, interest areas or local geographies enable global organizations to be viable and relevant as they reach around the world.

Hierarchies are no longer the most effective way to make things happen; and they are certainly not the most life giving. Hierarchically driven, top down ideas, products and services meet with resistance the moment they are rolled out, not necessarily because they are bad ideas but because end users, customers and others along the value chain were not involved in the process. Distributed structures engage stakeholders - the entire value chain - on a regular basis. They are ways of organizing to do business that are of enlivening the whole.

From Assigned Role to the Continuous Alignment of Strengths

Appreciative organizing invites a shift from assigned roles to the continuous alignment of strengths. In this way work is most efficiently done by people who have the skills and abilities to do it, and who enjoy doing it. Delegation of work to people in roles, rather than to people with interest and capacity, contributes to low performance and lack of follow through. People are energized by work that is designed to use the full range of their unique talents and skills. People are enlivened by work that they find interesting and fun. President of Catalyst Consulting, Leslie Yerkes (2001) writes about this as the fun/work fusion.

Moving from role based work to strengths based work requires a shift of assumptions about people and growth. In order to select, train and develop people, Buckingham and Clifton (2001) counsel managers to start with the following two assumptions (p.8):

1. Each person’s talents are enduring and unique.
2. Each person’s greatest room for growth is in the areas of his or her greatest strengths.

Managers and supervisors who take this counsel change the way they do their jobs. They shift from assigning roles and delegating work to aligning strengths and ensuring the success of people and teams. The result is that the live giving quotient of their organization and its members soars.

From Clock Time to Relational Time

The first public clock was erected and sounded regularly in the plaza of Dusseldorf Germany as a way for people to know when to be at work. A wonderful device designed to help people. The original intention of its designers was to enable factory workers to

interact in a coordinated manner. And of course, it has transformed life beyond anyone's initial intention or imagination. Organizations around the world run on clock time, some 9-5 and others 24-7. And so people too run on clock time, run to be on time, and run around to make the most of their time. And all the while they are running out of time to enjoy life.

Life centered organizations find ways to let loose of clock time and instill practices in support of relational time. Processes such as job sharing, flexible time, flexible benefits, home offices, virtual teams, day care and elder care centers at work, meditation rooms and sabbaticals enable people to live more freely on relational time. Organizations designed to ebb and flow with developmental rhythms of life, are able to support members as they move through natural life transitions and benefit from a fully engaged workforce.

7. Liberation Economics

The conscious design of currencies, reward systems, economic policies and practices within organizations, communities and globally holds great promise for transformation. The redesign of financial systems is most often considered as a way to "better motivate" and "get more out of our people." Seldom does an organization or community consider the redesign of its financial systems as having the evolutionary potential that it has.

Finances, currencies, pay, salary, budgets, prices, revenues, profits, investment, debit, credit, loan, value added, and worth – all part of our current vocabulary of money. A vocabulary that contributes to the increasing gap between the economic "haves" and "have-nots." Money has become a highly desired end rather than a useful means to support life giving exchange and the liberation of the human spirit. Popular magazines dedicated to matters of money such as *Forbes* and *Money* seem to appeal to collectors of money in the same way that *Antiques Today* appeals to collectors of antiques - with articles about how to increase and care for your collection.

Imagine instead, economic policies and practices designed to enable access to education and healthcare for all. Imagine an economic system designed to create a balance of autonomy and collective social justice across the globe. Imagine an economic process that fostered collaboration among people who themselves felt cared for and confident to contribute to the good of the whole. It is not only possible, it is essential to design economic systems through a positive, life giving lens.

From Secrecy to Transparency

Over the past decade many businesses and communities have designed processes to engage both internal and external stakeholders. As this occurs the need emerges, to move from secrecy to transparency in all aspects of financial management. It is impossible for people to participate fully and to contribute their best without access to information about costs, salaries, revenues, profits, etc. On more than one occasion I have heard front line employees make comments such as, "I know the executive team expects us to be more fiscally aware and even cut costs. I just don't see how we can do that without knowing what things actually cost and what revenues they generate."

Secrecy about finances renders stakeholders unable to act and creates systemic distrust. Transparency about finances, open access to budgets, costs and even salaries, creates more life giving and liberating organizations. The design of fully transparent economic and financial systems creates the conditions for both trust and the need for education.

From Mystification to Education

Money has become a profession and as such is surrounded by a haze of jargon, rules and regulations. From employee policies to tax laws nothing about financial and economic systems are designed to be easily understood and acted upon. They seem to protect the ego identities and interests of those in the various professions – salary administration, benefits, investments, banking, accounting, tax reporting, etc. – rather than serve the well being of people.

To add life to economic systems we must approach them with an eye to education. No where has the value of economic education been more apparent than in the “micro banking movement.” When women in rural areas of Nepal, for example, were educated to count and to keep track of their money the benefits magnified in unexpected ways. They used their newly acquired literacy skills to learn about and understand health care practices and the rate of maternal mortality declined. They were able to break their dependency on the money lenders who had previously kept them constantly in debt, afraid and impoverished. And to the surprise of the NGO leaders supporting the initiative, women living great distances apart began writing to each other. They wanted to learn about “best practices.” They wanted to share how they manage their money and small businesses. And they wanted to be in community and support one another.

Simplification, demystification and economic education raise the degree of life in an organization or community by giving people information, skills and access to vital resources needed to care for themselves, their families and their extended communities.

From Singular to Complimentary Currencies

Currencies serve organizations and communities in a wide variety of ways. They allow for connection and exchange among people. They facilitate the movement of goods and services. And they define value. In most cases, currencies are designed to achieve business aims. Pricing strategies, for example, vary from wholesale to retail, from department store to discount store. Pricing can depend on the quantity purchased or with airline tickets varies according to time of purchase. In each case a pricing strategy has been designed – to increase sales, to render competition too expensive, or to entice first time customers.

Businesses have even designed new currencies to stimulate sales and to create customer loyalty. Consider airline frequent flyer points which have grown to include hotels, rental cars, movie theatres and for some people, every purchase they make with a credit card. Frequent user points have established value and are exchangeable for tangible goods and services.

Recognizing the flexibility we have to design currencies for specific purposes, appreciative organizing challenges us to design currencies aimed directly at human well being. A crucial set of questions then emerges: how might currencies be designed to support social justice and reduce the expanding gap between rich and poor? How might currencies serve as a pathway out of poverty for those so willing? How might currencies be designed to elevate human dignity and respect for self and others?

Appreciative organizing is a shift from using currencies to define privilege to creating complimentary currencies that give life to multiple kinds of wealth. In *The Future of Money* (2001), economist, Bernard Lietaer tells story after story of the development and application of complimentary currencies. He describes how they enable a broader base of people within a community to provide services and be paid in a meaningful way. Time dollars (p. 189 – 192), for example, allow members of a community to offer services ranging from rides to the doctor's office, dog walking, repairing plumbing and baking cookies for a meeting to be valued and paid for by other members in the time dollars network. Time dollars not only provide a way for people to give and receive needed and highly valuable services. They create opportunities for people to feel valuable and appreciated for their contributions. In many organizations this plays out as flexible benefits and recognition packages. On a larger scale, complimentary currencies hold great potential as a pathway out of poverty and as a vehicle to liberate creativity, confidence and caring.

8. Engaged Participation

Based on the assumption that not everyone is capable of being involved in decision making, industrial age organizations are designed with layers of involvement and responsibility. The distinction between owners and employees is an explicit organizing principle. Owners make decisions, take risks and reap benefits while employees do the work needed to carry out the owners' decisions and strategies. Clearly, this is an antiquated model for organizing. Many organizations have moved beyond the owner – employee distinction by creating employee ownership, total quality processes and other forms of employee engagement.

Appreciative organizing takes the shift toward engaged participation one step further. Based on the assumption that the people whose future it is must be in the process of creating the future appreciative organizing is a full voice, inclusive process. This creates an essential requirement for engaged participation at all levels, functions and activities.

From Employment to Self Organizing Membership

Global, information based organizing calls for a shift from employees who are hired by a centralized organization to processes for stimulating, accepting and integrating self organizing membership. This shift requires clear "boundaries of belonging:" what is required to become a member and what is expected of members once accepted.

The charter of the United Religions Initiative (URI), a global interfaith organization dedicated to interfaith cooperation and peace, states that any seven people of three faiths, committed to the purpose and principles of the URI may form a cooperation circle and

apply to become a member of the URI. This statement serves as a boundary of belonging telling anyone who is interested how they can organize and become a member. The URI currently consists of over 300 cooperation circles in 50 countries. By providing opportunities to freely “opt in” people who choose to do so are highly committed to making a positive contribution.

From Span of Control to Circles of Resonance

In bureaucratic organizations managers delegate his or her objectives to those within his or her span of control. Tasks and activities are assigned down the chain of command and distributed across the span of control. At best, people receiving assignments have a say in what they are assigned. Generally they do not have a voice in setting the vision, defining the strategy or determining priorities they are expected to full fill.

In life affirming organizations people can choose to self organize in order to address locally relevant issues. They have the freedom and are supported in forming circles, or local hubs, based on shared resonance, affinity and interest. The design of circles of resonance enables people to take initiative to collaborate. It provides a way for people to gather with others of their choice, to set their own goals and plan for action all the while being part of the whole. Volition creates momentum for accountability, cooperation and service to the whole. People who are able to choose to work from their strengths, for causes that matter to them, tend to bring more enthusiasm, commitment and dedication to what they do. This shift from span of control to circles of resonance creates energy and commitment to results.

From Top Down to Cohering Center

The need to link, connect, coordinate or integrate the activities of local circles creates a need for a central cohering body of people and processes. Along with a compelling purpose and set of principles, the cohering center serves to unite, but not make common, the differing and unique local circles.

Rather than a top down executive body which initiates strategies and activities, the cohering center creates coordinating processes to support the initiative and work of the local circles of resonance. The locus of authority shifts away from: the few at the top directing the many who do the work. It shifts toward: the many doing the work calling forth the need for central support and authority. A strong cohering center supports circles of local resonance in authoring their own future while being aware of, sensitive to and integrated with the needs of the whole. Its over-arching function is to create harmony among the unique and essential parts of the whole.

9. Caring Culture

Implicit in life affirming organizing is a deep and abiding sense of care which shows itself in a myriad of ways – care for people, care for relationships, care for self, care for commitments made, care for the quality of work, care for results, care for the way things are done, care for words used in an advertising campaign, care for the life experience, care for nature, care for the sacred, care for our relationship with the divine.

The word care resonates deeply among people. It creates safety, builds trust and contributes to the creation of a harmonious work environment. Offers of care open hearts and minds. They unleash energy for cooperation and productivity. Acts of care give life and are positively contagious. Appreciative organizing brings caring to life in all arenas an organization or community.

Cultures of caring embody three dimensions of caring: one, taking care of, as in “we care for our customers;” two, being mindful of, as in “we care about the impact we have on the environment;” and three, having significance, as in “we care about integrity.” Caring practices also fall into these three dimensions: taking care of; mindfulness and significance.

When people are cared for they have energy and effort to care for others. When leaders, managers and supervisors care for people those people learn to care for others. Research into customer service has long suggested that the way employees are treated is directly correlated to how they treat customers. Indeed in my work with customer service representatives in airlines, resort hotels and casinos the happier and more satisfied the employees are the higher the customer service ratings. Happy people provide happy service.

In addition to having energy to care for others, people who work in caring environments learn how to nurture and care for others. They develop a mindfulness of caring, as well as life giving attitudes and skills. Caring for people should be included in business 101, along with caring for markets, finances and strategies as it has a direct effect on business success, profits and the life giving quality of the organization.

From Supervision to Support for Success

In a culture of caring relationships move from supervision to support for success. The purpose of supervisors, or more likely mentors, is to support success. It is not to oversee, inspect or ensure that things are done the right way. It is to appreciatively coach, guide and mentor for success.

I learned this from a manager I worked with during my first corporate job at Sperry Univac. He was a regional manager who believed his job was to support the success of people reporting to him. Not just success in their current job or even in the company. He cared for their ultimate success in whatever mattered to them. As a result he coached them for job interviews with other companies. He even lent his car to one employee for a job interview at another company. His actions clearly shifted the idea of supervision from policing people to supporting people to succeed. As a result, the people who worked with him were fiercely loyal to him. They valued him as a supervisor and as a human being. They were so loyal to him that they even became his customers when they took jobs with other companies. I learned from him that supporting success is good business.

In another unlikely situation, the shift from supervision to support for success has made a life affirming difference. In most call centers supervisors are able listen in to calls. They generally do this to be sure the call center employee is doing a good job. One innovative

call center changed their practice. Their supervisors' job was redefined from checking in on people to enabling success, for call center employees and their customers. As a result, two key success indicators, retention and morale, increased among call center employees.

From Dual Personalities to Whole Person

Life affirming organizations recognize people as whole and integral. They make the shift from treating people as two personalities - the person at work and the person at home - to recognizing the whole person at work. This includes attending to mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well being. Hearthstone, a leading home builder in the Midwestern United States recognizes the value of personal development and offers extensive opportunities for learning to its associates. What is really unique is that they offer the same opportunities to associates' spouses and significant others, including same sex partners. They do this so that couples can learn together in ways that, President John Smith says, "maintains or strengthens their relationship with each other, as well as their capacities at work."

The International Center for Spirit at Work, founded by Judi Neal, each year recognizes companies around the world that have experienced success by incorporating whole person, spiritually enlivening practices into the workplace. During a recent conversation, ICSW board member and international consultant, Sabine Bredemeyer commented on the many benefits of caring for the whole person at work,

"When a person's mental, physical and spiritual needs are nourished and appreciated at work their genius potential can fully unfold. The synergy of different potentials and individual talents then creates a unique creativity and productivity that does not have to fear competition. The concentrated power of people who fully live out their potential creates organizations that are safe and sustainable in our world of globalization."

And indeed, Google's recognition as *Fortune's* #1 Best Company to Work For (2007) has a lot to do with making it easy for the whole person to come to work.

From Ready, Fire, Aim to Mindfulness

Buddhist practitioner, Rick Field and his colleagues say of enlightenment in their book, *Chop Wood Carry Water* (1984), "Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water; after enlightenment, chop wood, carry water." So it is with a caring culture. When caring becomes the norm nothing changes and everything changes. People are still working, with one another, to achieve mutually accepted goals and objectives. What is different is the consciousness with which they work. In a caring culture, work is the practice field for spiritual cultivation. It is the means for learning, growing and fulfilling one's spiritual potential. It is the means for enhancing the collective consciousness of society. It is the means of evolution.

By contrast, much of the work currently done in hierarchies follows a path described by one Vice President of Human Resources as, "ready, fire, aim." He uses this metaphor repeatedly to illustrate the way plans and decisions are made, or not, in his company. The

tendency to act before consideration of implications is often what creates accidents, blame and failures. Caring cultures do not espouse action for the sake of action, change for the sake of change, or faster for the sake of faster. They develop mindfulness in the way decisions are made and work is done.

Mindfulness may lead to “slow success” like in the fable of the turtle who wins the race with the hare. Mindfulness may lead to the discovery of a simpler way, so beautifully portrayed by Margaret Wheatley and Myron Keller-Rogers (1996). Mindfulness will lead to doing work with deeper and more sincere respect for life and still being successful.

Future Research

Taken together, these nine principles offer a lens into organization design – as if life matters. They are a preliminary framework for consideration by both organization development practitioners and scholars. Research is needed to both refine them and to advance them into a theory of appreciative organizing.

Three areas of research are indicated. One, as mentioned on page 3, it would be meaningful to test the notion that people recognize life in varying degrees in all things, relationships, situations and events.

Two, it is necessary to test the validity of the continuums used to describe each of the nine principles of appreciative organizing. Once their validity is determined a tool useful to both practitioners and scholars can be developed to assess the degrees of life expressed by human collectivities – organizations, communities and movements.

And three, Appreciative Inquiry into what gives life to human organizing would yield rich and meaningful accounts of life giving organizations. Sharing these stories among communities of organization development practitioners, leaders and scholars would elevate practice and theory building about appreciative organizing.

Section Two - What Are We Designing?

“Hope remains only in the most difficult task of all: to reconsider everything from the ground up, so as to shape a living society inside a dying society.”

-Albert Camus

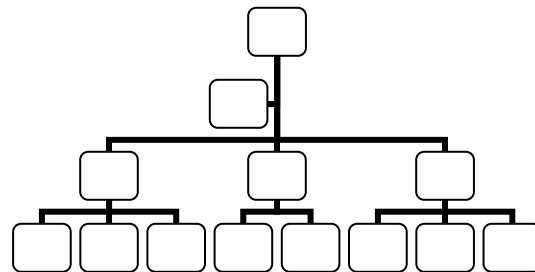
When asked to explain the design of their organization most managers and leaders will draw a picture or offer you a copy of their organizational chart. They equate organization design with organization structure: levels of responsibility, functional and departmental divisions, and who reports to whom in the chain of command. The portrayal of this structure as boxes on an organizational chart represents the design of the organization. Figure 1 is an example of an organization chart circa 1998.

The limits of this understanding of organization design were pointed out by organizational theorists, Katz and Kahn (1966) when they described the incompleteness of organization design,

“The characteristic incompleteness and imperfection of organizational design is obvious whenever the organization chart ... (is) compared with the ongoing cycles of behavior which define the pattern of the “real” organization.” (p.304)

The recognition that the organizational chart and the way things really work in an organization are not one in the same is equally apparent today as it was in 1966.

Figure 1
Organization Chart



Organization charts are attempts to illustrate and communicate the designated, rule governed, ordering of relationships, and power, within an organization – what has been called the formal structure. Recognizing that the organization chart, however, does not adequately describe much of what actually happens in organizations the distinction has long been made between the formal structure and informal structures (Blau and Scott, 1962).

I believe, as Camus’ quote suggests, organization design is the reconsideration of everything, from the ground up, so as to shape a living society inside a dying society. The simple distinction of formal and informal structures will not do it.

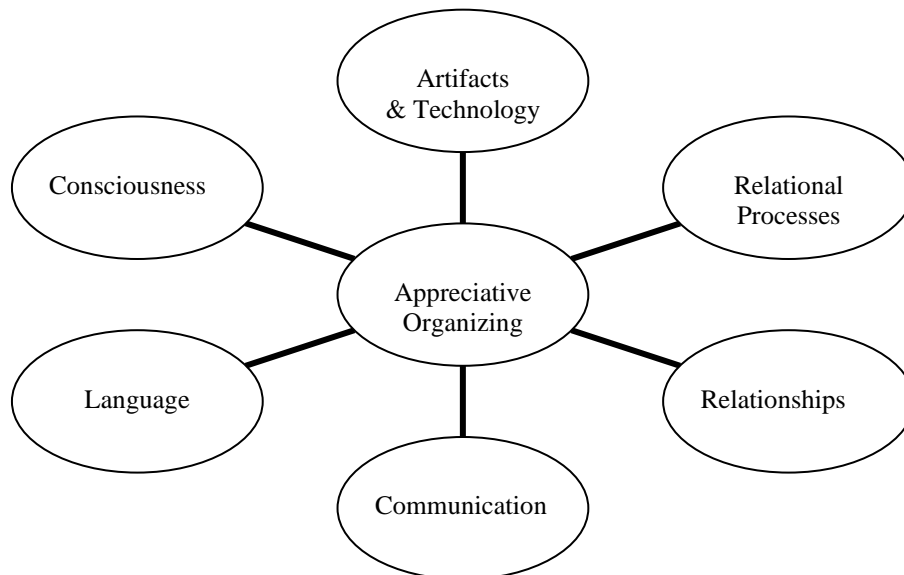
Six Facets of Appreciative Organizing

Six structures that seem to be at play organizing the energy and effort of people at any given time are described on the following pages. They are shown in Figure 2 as the facets of appreciative organizing: artifacts and technology; relational processes; relationships; communication; language; and consciousness. They reflect the intersection and application to organizations of my interests and long history with communication theory, social construction theory and consciousness studies. They range from those that are material and tangible to those that are relational and sensory apparent to those that are subtle and less readily apparent as a structure of reality.

Each of these facets is interrelated and is influenced by and influences the others. Research and theory often suggests that one is more prior to the others. Noted anthropologist, Margret Mead, for example, wrote that any technological change created a complimentary social change, even a technology as seemingly simple and insignificant

as a fork (1955). There is no doubt that we are now living in a time in which we are running to keep up with technology and savor all that it has to offer, while at the same time trying to reduce its detrimental influences on nature and society.

Figure 2
Six Facets of Appreciative Organizing



1. Artifacts and Technology - The design of objects and technology that enable, contain and enhance life. Artifacts and technology that give structure and meaning to life range, for example, from buildings and parks, to modes of transportation and exploration, to technology for health care, construction and defense. Artifacts and technology, by design, influence the nature of interactions, draw upon natural resources and implicitly convey and teach values. I need only mention the introduction of the fax machine into daily business life, followed by the internet and email. Postal service is now called “snail mail” in reference to the value placed the speed and immediacy of electronic mail.

Designs of artifacts and technology create both limitations and possibilities for human interaction, many of which cycle back generations later to influence the structure of organizations, industries, and communities. Chalk boards, the printing press, and now the computer are artifacts that have in their time influenced the design of classrooms, schools and educational processes. When we talk about organization design we must include in our conversations consideration of artifacts and technologies and their implications for human life, well being and sustainability.

2. Relational Processes - The design of processes for enabling interdependencies. Relational processes are the ways people engage with each other for information sharing, decision making, achieving results, honoring contributions, resolving differences and celebrating successes, as well as bringing in, developing, promoting and terminating members, etc.

Relational processes by design may either enliven people and foster cooperation and innovation or disenfranchise them and build resistance and animosity. The design of relational processes calls for choices to be made about the ways people are able to participate, contribute ideas, and influence decision making. For example, relational processes implicit in democracy, as a structure of organizing, are inclusive and seek to give each person an opportunity for expression: voice in the discussion, a vote and access to public office.

3. Relationships - The design of relationships among people, within and among groups and with nature. Organizations are sets of relationships that have been institutionalized through repetition from generation to generation. For example, as each new class of students enters a university, its unique design for the organization of education is affirmed. As each new employee signs his or her employment contract the employer – employee relationship is affirmed. As each devotee is accepted into an order of sisters the organization of the church is affirmed. In the same way as the numbers of people who engage with existing institutions decrease the meaningfulness and life of these organizations are called into question and the need for transformation is signaled.

On the other hand, new organizations, be they service centers, schools, hospitals, or entrepreneurial enterprises, come into being through relationships that will define who they are, what they will do, with and for whom. In some cases, inquiry and dialogue among a wide range of interested parties may precede and lead to the design of these essential relationships resulting in a business plan, a strategic plan and a staffing plan. In my experience, however, having it all together in the beginning is seldom the way organizations are born and grow. The process actually seems akin to an improvisational jazz performance – a few people begin to play and when others join in they take the performance in a totally unexpected and yet meaningful direction.

In healthy, vibrant startups, the initiative of a few people inspires and invites the engagement of others who in turn offer input and ideas for growth and evolution. When a small group of us hosted an international conference in Taos, New Mexico in 1993 under the name Taos Institute we had no idea we were initiating a non profit organization. It was not until conference participants asked to be on our mailing list, for the schedule of future activities, and for whom to contact with possibilities for partnership, etc. that we realized we had opened conversations that wanted to continue and take form as a new organization. And so we nurtured existing relationships, created new ones and decided to incorporate as a non profit entity. To this day, Taos Institute thrives as our relationships with each other and many others around the world flourish through conversations that matter.

4. Communication - The design of patterns of interaction and self expression. Important considerations in the design of organizations and communities include: who talks to whom; about what. In many organizations, communication patterns are stratified by position and authority. People are simply not permitted to talk to anyone above the level of their manager. To do so would be a violation of status and lead to unfavorable

repercussions. Appreciative organizing calls for inclusive communication patterns in which people participate based on strengths, interests or opportunities for learning rather than position or authority.

Forms of expression, and ways of knowing, vary from person to person, society to society, across genders and within organizations. Communication patterns within organizations prescribe certain forms of expression as acceptable: research, memo, executive briefing and decry others as not professional: singing, dancing and yelling across the room. Appreciative organizing invites an expanded palette of expression to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse workforce.

5. Language – The design of vocabularies, logics, metaphors and languages. People who are able to speak multiple languages understand that each language invites them into a different world. Those who are mono-linguistic may not as readily understand the power language has to create experiences, emotions and meaning. For example, in both Spanish and French, there is no word for shallow. The way the experience is expressed is to say it is “less deep.” Words create worlds and so must be chosen with intent.

Some logics and words are life affirming. They foster sharing of experiences, ideas and information, a deepening of relatedness, compassion and the imagination of a world that works for all. Other logics, vocabularies and words limit possibilities and render people without voice and without hope.

To design organizations and communities as if life matters is to choose to speak values into being, to strategically choose to speak about what gives life to people and their communities, to use words, logics and metaphors that create images of vibrant, energetic and healthy possibilities for all stakeholders.

And most significantly it requires the capacity to portray positive images through words and expressions. Appreciative organizing takes form in the presence of clearly articulated images of affirmative possibilities. Organizing against an issue does not enliven people; organizing toward a shared goal, dream or ideal does.

6. Consciousness – Consciousness is and yet is not definable. It is a most subtle presence in the flow of life. It influences and is influenced by organizational life.

The images we hold in our mind’s eye, the words and metaphors we chose to use, our actions and interactions are all reflections of consciousness. An organization’s collective consciousness is apparent in the way people greet one another, the ways they value and use time, the way they relate to nature, and the way they react when someone is in need.

To actively engage with consciousness is to seek to know it. To sense consciousness requires quiet, time and space not often present at work. To knowingly be informed by consciousness requires a willingness to enter the unknown, to let go and to hear the voices of ancestors, nature, angels and the wind. To speak of consciousness is to speak of that which can be known but not seen, sensed but not touched, lived but not designed.

It is not possible to design organizational consciousness. At best we can design practices for spiritual development, we can provide opportunities for people to be silent and reverent, and we can give thanks in a myriad of ways for the bounties of life. And we can, in all we say and do, be the consciousness we seek to know.

Bringing the Six Facets to Life

The six facets of an organization are in many ways neutral. They exist in all forms of organizations. Hierarchies, networks, bureaucracies and appreciative organizations all consist of artifacts and technologies, relational processes, relationships, communication, language and consciousness. What differentiates one organization from another is the set of principles upon which they are designed.

The six facets are like the line drawings in a child’s coloring book. They hold the form while waiting for vibrant colors applied at the choice of the child to bring them to life. It is the choices we make as we design our organizations that give them life.

As shown in Table 2, each of the six facets can be designed in a way that leads us to say it has a low degree of life, or vitality. And each facet can be designed in a way that it serves as a lever for enhancing life and vitality.

**Table 2
Designing Vitality into the Six Facets of Organization**

	Low Vitality	High Vitality
Artifacts and Technologies	Use of technologies to reinforce individualistic consumer entitlement and deplete resources.	New technologies to support social, economic, and environmental sustainability.
Relational Processes	Exclusive rule and role governed processes.	Inclusive inquiry and dialogue processes.
Relationships	Living into relationships defined by prior generations such as: boss, subordinate, employer, employee, family, marriage, etc.	Experimenting and creating new forms of relationship reflecting social justice across diverse cultures, generations and genders.
Communication	Mono-cultural expressions and interactions bordering on fundamentalism.	Cross cultural interactions, and polyphonic expressions in harmony.
Language	Use of language to separate and maintain dominances.	Invention and use of life affirming vocabularies.
Consciousness	Formal religions prescribing beliefs and practices for being with the unknown.	Openness to mysteries, alternative epistemologies and spiritual entelechies.

As Table 2 shows, the process of organization design is about choice. It is about embedding values and ideals into the six facets which give form and life to the collective energy and effort of people. It can be a bold and transformational process.

It requires willingness to let go of or even destroy the “sacred cows” of the past: designs that no longer serve a noble purpose; designs that no longer give life; designs that limit human potential. The only way to break the patterns of the past, to create new, fresh, generative forms of organizing that are congruent with contemporary values is to choose to do so. The mastery and artistry of design requires attention and intention – conscious choice – about the kind of world we most want to live in now and leave as our legacy for generations to come. Organization design is about embedding values in processes, conversations, artifacts and action with profound attention to social aesthetics, relational integrity and systemic implications for life.

The nine principles of appreciative organizing are value laden. They value life in all forms of expression, the gifts and potential of each person, freedom of speech, and the right to participate in decisions impacting your life. They value work as a noble endeavor and business as a powerful force in society. They value cooperation, social justice, the celebration of diversity and mindfulness in the pursuit of happiness.

Conclusion

Organizations designed upon the values and assumptions of the industrial age no longer serve humanity. As the twenty first century unfolds we see upon the landscape of a naturally and electronically interconnected world, the need for organizations designed to support and sustain life. A deep and authentic transformation is being called for in the design of human organizations. According to evolutionary biologist and World Business Academy Fellow, Dr. Elisabet Sahtouris the need is essential and it is possible,

“Our worldwide economic system, our transportation and communications technology, our information revolution, have bound us into a body of humanity that is now being pushed for the sake of its survival to evolve from competition to cooperation among nations and with our environment... We are capable of regaining our reverence for life, of replacing the drive to conquer with the will to cooperate, of remaking our engineered institutions, including our corporations, into living systems.” (1999)

At the heart of appreciative design is a bold commitment to life as a central organizing principle. To nurture and sustain life, in all its many expressions is the antidote to violence, abuse, war and environmental destruction. Hopeful images of a flourishing world, supported by educational institutions, health care systems, businesses and governments dedicated to the well being of all life, invite us into the study and practice of appreciative organizing – as if life matters.

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