

## ***Leading by Design: The Five Elements of Appreciative Leadership as Design Criteria***

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The call to consciously design processes for human organizing through an affirmative, life giving lens has never been louder, more relevant and more essential to the well being and success of organizations world wide than it is today. The challenges of our time call for the re-design of social structures, products and services that not only foster a healthy bottom line but also make it possible and compelling for highly diverse groups of people - employees and customers - residing globally to collaborate and innovate.

Relationships have always been and always will be the way works gets done. The social structures of an organization enable the communication, planning, decision making and work needed to achieve the organization's strategic intent and goals. Leadership plays an important role in structuring relevant and necessary processes. At its best, leadership is the act of directing and guiding relationships; that is designing social structures to make a positive difference in the world - financially, socially and environmentally.

The purpose of this paper is to outline five elements of appreciative leadership as design criteria for enhancing the positive capacity of human organizations and communities. In an earlier paper I made the case for life giving designs and presented nine aspects of appreciative organizing.<sup>i</sup> This paper is a deeper exploration into one aspect of appreciative organizing – that is appreciative leadership.

Derived from the philosophy<sup>ii</sup> and practice of Appreciative Inquiry<sup>iii</sup> appreciative leadership has been defined by Dr. Diana Whitney and Dr. James Ludema as, “The capacity to discover, magnify, and connect that which is good and healthy, in people and the world around them, in such a way that deepens relatedness, inspires transformation, and mobilizes positive social innovation.<sup>iv</sup> At the heart of appreciative organizing is appreciative leadership characterized by five elements: Inclusion, Inquiry, Illumination, Inspiration and Integrity. Each is briefly described here along with an explanation of its implications for the design of appreciative organizations.

**Inclusion** – Appreciative leadership engages all the people whose future it is in processes to create the future. It fosters full voice and multi-modal, multi-media participation by diverse stakeholders. Including “the whole” organization or community means finding ways to engage the hearts, minds and ideas of everyone who is in some way interested or impacted by the conversational agenda. Inclusion of diverse voices and ideas enhances creativity and innovation; and leads to results that meet the diverse needs of the whole.

Life-affirming social structures are designed to include all the relevant and interested people and groups. Structures such as circles, dialogue and collaborative inquiry, as well

as, social technology enhance organizational capacity for connection, communication and contribution by diverse, globally dispersed people. They enable the emergence of collective wisdom.

**Inquiry** – Appreciative leadership is a shift from telling to asking, and as Dr. Marilee Adams notes, from “judging to learning.”<sup>v</sup> It is a sincerely curious stance in which value based questions set the conversational agenda for relationships among colleagues, with customers, within teams and throughout the entire organization.

Social structures designed in response to questions create openness to possibilities and learning in the process of achieving. They recognize that life is ongoing, emergent and ever changing. Consider the following examples of the difference between “question to design” and a more traditional approach of design to purpose.

<b>Question to Design</b>	<b>Design to Purpose</b>
How can we foster greater interaction among diverse employees?	The purpose of this meeting is to foster interaction among diverse employees.
How can we include customers’ in our strategic planning?	The purpose of this questionnaire is to get customer input.
How can we create a more cohesive executive team?	The purpose of this retreat is executive team building.

**Illumination** – Appreciative leadership brings out the best in people personally and collectively. It shines the light on strengths, resources and capacities as a means of building relationships and organizing to accomplish goals. It draws on what Tojo Thatchenkery and Carol Metzker call “appreciative intelligence.”<sup>vi</sup> According to Professor, David Cooperrider, originator of Appreciative Inquiry, “When Peter Drucker was asked to describe the core of leadership in tomorrow’s organizations, his reply was immediate and unequivocal: ‘The task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths and make people’s weaknesses irrelevant.’”<sup>vii</sup> Appreciative leadership directs conversations and systemic organization wide processes such as strategic planning, performance reviews and career development toward strengths.

The vitality of social structures is enhanced through the discovery and alignment of strengths. Processes such as Appreciative Inquiry and Gallup’s Strength Finder Index engage people in the discovery and discussion of personal and collective strengths – their positive core. When knowledge of specific best practices becomes public knowledge the likelihood of adoption and replication of successful practices increases significantly. Strengths aligned to strengths magnify collective capacity for performance.

**Inspiration** – Appreciative leadership inspires hope for the future. It engages people in the discovery and expression of hopes, dreams and visions, enabling both support for personal visions and the emergence of a shared vision. Through the questions it raises it creates an agenda for dialogue, learning, sharing of resources and the articulation of a path forward. In the face of challenges, obstacles and crisis it is hope that sustains commitment and action toward a better world. Appreciative leadership is a bearer of hope

in times of greatest challenge. By bringing people of common cause and interest together, it affords vision, assurance of resources and images of steps to be taken. By enriching collective wisdom it inspires hope for the good of the whole.

Hope is a sign of vitality. Generative social structures that bring out people's strengths, personally and collectively, and that invite collaborative envisioning of possibilities inspire hope. As people learn from each others' success they see how they too can succeed. Social structures that enable people to connect and to openly share ideas and resources – on line or face to face – inspire hope for the future.

**Integrity** – Appreciative leadership generates and is known by “relational integrity.” It crafts conditions, opportunities and dialogue which result in win-win-win situations. Recognizing that organizations, communities and even relationships among two people are constituted by different needs, wants, hopes and dreams, appreciative leadership listens, witnesses the differences, and works toward resolutions that satisfy all. An overarching intention for appreciative leadership is “a world that works for all.”

In a time when we recognize the essential interconnectivity of all life, no one wins unless everyone wins. Relational integrity balances the needs of the common with the needs of all. Integrity is not an individual phenomenon. As identity is relational so is integrity. Appreciative leadership understands that it takes two to tango, a village to raise a child and a team to make a leader.

Life-giving social structures are social. They are first and foremost safe spaces. They invite personal sharing and relationship making. They welcome expressions of needs, wants, hopes and dreams, along with strengths and resources, as meaningful contributions to the work of the whole. Designs which attend to basic human needs liberate people to contribute their best.

### **Leading by Design – Design by Leading**

The world today is designed more by the human hand (and mind) than by nature. As a result, we live and work in contexts defined by human design rather than natural order. Our current ecological crisis can be traced to our designs and their impact on society and the environment. Human minded designs tend borrow from nature while forgetting to care for nature. Consider some of the ways our designs interact with nature:

- Utilization and depletion of natural resources for everything from building materials to gemstone jewelry and energy.
- Overcoming nature as an obstacle to progress by constructing highways, dams, bridges and railroads.
- Mimicking nature to produce bigger, better and more consumer products.

In essence, design is leading our lives. All design, be it of social policies, fashion, architecture, or technology is an act of leadership. It guides, directs and defines what is possible, who we can be, whom we interact with, and how we interact with one another. The antidote, to many of the challenges we face today, is for leadership in all sectors of life – business, education, government, religion and health care – to recognize its role and

take its place in the design of life-giving organizations, products and services. The five elements of appreciative leadership can serve as benchmarks for life-affirming designs congruent with the natural order. Leading by design is an invitation to consciously design through an appreciative lens.

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<sup>i</sup> Whitney, D., “Designing Organizations as if Life Matters: Principles of Appreciative Organizing,” In M. Avital, R.J. Boland, and D.L. Cooperrider (Eds.) *Designing Information and Organizations with a Positive Lens: Advances in Appreciative Inquiry*, Volume 2, Elsevier Science, Oxford.

<sup>ii</sup> Cooperrider, D.L., Srivastva, S., *Appreciative Management and Leadership*, Jossey-Bass, 1990.

<sup>iii</sup> Whitney, D. and Trosten-Bloom, A., *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002.

<sup>iv</sup> Whitney, D., and Ludema, J., *Appreciative Leadership Development Program, Participant Workbook*, Corporation for Positive Change, 2006.

<sup>v</sup> Adams, M., *Change Your Questions Change Your Life*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2004.

<sup>vi</sup> Thatchenkery, T., and Metzker, C., *Appreciative Intelligence*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006.

<sup>vii</sup> Cooperrider, D.L., Foreword, In Schiller, M., Mah Holland, B., and Riley, D., *Appreciative Leaders: In the Eye of the Beholder*, Taos Institute, 2001.