THE GIFT OF NEW EYES: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS AFTER 30 YEARS OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY IN ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE

David Cooperrider

ABSTRACT

It's been thirty years since the original articulation of "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life" was written in collaboration with my remarkable mentor Suresh Srivastva (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). That article – first published in Research in Organization Development and Change – generated more experimentation in the field, more academic excitement, and more innovation than anything we had ever written. As the passage of time has enabled me to look more closely at what was written, I feel both a deep satisfaction with the seed vision and scholarly logic offered for Appreciative Inquiry, as well as well as the enormous impact and continuing reverberation. Following the tradition of authors such as Carl Rogers who have re-issued their favorite works but have also added brief reflections on key points of emphasis, clarification, or editorial commentary I am presenting the article by David Cooperrider (myself) and the late Suresh Srivastva in its entirety, but also with new horizon insights. In particular I write with excitement and anticipation of a new OD – what my colleagues and I are calling the next "IPOD" that is, innovation-inspired positive OD that brings AI's gift of new eyes together in common cause with several other movements in the human sciences: the strengths revolution in management; the positive pscyhology and positive organizational scholarship movements; the design thinking

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explosion; and the biomimicry field which is all about an appreciative eye toward billions of years of nature's wisdom and innovation inspired by life. AU:2

Keywords:: Action research; appreciative inquiry; organization development; social construction; design thinking; change management; positive psychology

INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTICLE AND 2017 REFLECTIONS

It's been more than thirty years since the original articulation of "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life" was written, published first in my 1985 PhD defense, and then more formally two years later in collaboration with my mentor Suresh Srivastva (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). That article generated more experimentation in the field, more academic excitement, and more innovation than anything we had ever written. As the passage of time has enabled me to look more closely at what was written, I feel both a deep satisfaction with the seed vision and scholarly logic offered for Appreciative Inquiry, as well as well as the enormous impact and reverberation. "Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is revolutionizing the field of organization development and change" said University of Michigan's Bob Quinn, while Frank Barrett and Ronald Fry concluded that the original article was at "a magnitude perhaps not seen since that of Kurt Lewin's classic article outlining action research." AU:3

Indeed with AI's contribution to the strengths revolution in management (see Buckingham's 2008 historical tracing of strengths-based management to AI as one of its central roots) as well as the emergence of positive psychology (see AI's reverberations in Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2008; Seligman, 2010) there have been millions of people, organizations, and researchers, involved in advancing the new tools, concepts, and practices for doing appreciative inquiry and for bringing AI methodologies into organizations all over the world. Today AI's approach to life-centric and strengths-based, instead of deficit-based and problematizing change, is succeeding many of the traditional analytic models in business and society. Writes Ken Gergen: "The growth and application of Appreciative Inquiry over the past two decades has been nothing short of phenomenal. It is arguably the most powerful process of positive organizational change ever devised" (Whitney et al., 2010, p. x). AU:4

Obviously it's been thrill. There is, as Alfred North Whitehead so well articulated, an "adventure in ideas." But if there is a slight bit of unease or disappointment it is this: very few of the hundreds of applications today go to the radical depth intended in the original writing, and in many ways the key concept of AI as a *generative theory building method* for the collaborative construction of

reality has been glossed over in the rush to take the power of AI into the applied world of practice. Activists, paradoxically, have begun to emphasize practice over theory when the original intent was to emphasize and lift up theory (and knowing) as perhaps the most *powerful form of practice* we could ever devise. In a social world made up not of stable "things" but meanings and relationships, theory is practice and theory-building, as intervention, is a prime-time competency in OD work even though its scarcely mentioned in any global OD practice framework (see the 2017 OD Network competency wheel).

So the rest of this chapter is more than a re-print of the 1987 article. Following the tradition of authors such as Carl Rogers who have re-issued their favorite works but have also added brief reflections on key points of emphasis, clarification, or editorial commentary, I offer here both the early article by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva in its entirety, but also with contemporary reflections embedded. To be sure my comments will be brief and serve predominantly to add points of emphasis to ideas we may have too hurriedly introduced. And my comments – placed in indented and italicized format along the way – are informed by 30 years of new human science insight (e.g., the proliferation of research in Positive Psychology) and will emphasize key ideas that we may have not emphasized enough. For example *Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life* talks about the "miracle of life" and "mystery of social existence" as a root metaphor for an applied and creative human science that is more powerful than "the world as a problem-to-be-solved" *if* our knowledge-interest is to inspire our imaginative capacities. Reading the world gratefully so to speak – that is, embracing the sacredness or miracle of life on this planet for its *intimations of something more and for what's next or possible* – is a fundamental part of the call for an *appreciative* inquiry of valuing those things of value worth valuing. It's also a key to the spirit of *inquiry* that is moving from edges of the known to the unknown (mystery) in ways that opens minds, ignites genuine curiosity and, and inspires fresh images of possibility.

Of course there are also many contemporary debates and questions surrounding the idea of appreciative inquiry. For example, is appreciative inquiry about positivity – as so many people in positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship are quick to claim – or is it about generativity, that is ways of doing inquiry that opens our future to new possibilities and better worlds? Let me stress that I am not making or re-making the original argument here, but I am going to say that there are clarifications that may be unifying, valuing elements of both, and that the ambiguity might usefully push us forward toward added insight, enhanced logical consistency, and meaningfulness. For me, the long-term call and journey to understand the gift of appreciative inquiry – appreciative ways of knowing, appreciative interchange and ways of relating, and appreciative ways of designing – is still in its infancy and perhaps always will be as the numbers of AI co-authors and co-creators multiplies (see Barrett & Fry, 2010; Ludema et al., 2005; Watkins & Mohr, 2010; Whitney & Trosken-Bloom, 2010).

Indeed, AI is not a thing or a static concept, but an ongoing co-construction of reality; it's the result of many voices, contexts and circumstances, planned and unplanned experiments, new discoveries and designs, narratives and cases, and unlimited imagination. The only thing I am certain of right now is this: as long as AI is constructed upon, practiced or inspired by the sense of the mystery and miracle of life on this planet, it will never become inert or lifeless. Why? Because *life* is *alive* – it's always bursting out all over – and AI is about the search for "what gives life?" to living systems – organizations, communities, industries, countries, families, networks, societies, relationships, and our global living systems – when they are most alive and jointly flourishing in their inseparable and intimate interrelations. AI's generativity lies precisely in its "inquiry inspired by life" north star and in its starting search not in current ideals (certainties) but in the lure of unexplored possibilities (those intimations of something more) where possibility and positive potential can be sensed in the texture of the actual (searching for our worlds' life-giving best).

Let me offer one final note before launching into the substance of the original article. In 1984 Karl Wieck, then the editor of *Administrative Science Quarterly* proposed that if we could cut the paper in half that he would be very interested in seeing it published in ASQ. But Suresh and I both felt, while it would be an honor, that the integrity of the deeper inauguration of the concept of AI would be compromised. Did we make the right choice when we were invited to publish it in its entirety in the Bill Pasmore and Richard Woodman academic book series *Research in Organization Development and Change*? I believe we did. This research series has emerged, in our view, as the premier place of scholarship propelling the future of the field of OD.

For us it was a thrill to see what happened because of the 1987 article. Academics and practitioners, such as MIT's Richard Beckhard as well as executives and leaders such as Kofi Annan soon responded to the ideas in ways we scarcely could have imagined. Kofi Annan, then Secretary General of the United Nations called on AI to transform the nature of UN world summits and said, "I would like to commend your innovative methodology of Appreciative Inquiry and to thank you for introducing it to the United Nations. Without this, it would have been very difficult, perhaps even impossible, to constructively engage so many leaders of business, civil society and government." Likewise MIT's Richard Beckhard, in his last speech at the Academy of Management said "Appreciative Inquiry is, in my view, an exciting breakthrough, one that signals a change in the way we think about change … We are looking at something very important – AI will be of enduring consequence and energizing innovation for the field. That's my prediction. And that is why we are going to give it more attention in this session" (quoted in Jane Watkins and Bernard Mohr's book tracing the history and impact of Appreciative Inquiry, 2001, p. xxv).

My hope is that these brief reflections will help us illuminate new potentials and possibilities for the future of positive organization development and call a

younger generation of thinkers to once again ask the big questions, to courageously dare in scholarship, and to especially explore the power of the second word in the "Appreciative" and "Inquiry" duet. Appreciation is about valuing the "life-giving" in ways that serve to inspire our co-constructed future. Inquiry is the experience of mystery, moving beyond the edge of the known to the unknown, which then changes our lives. Taken together, where appreciation and inquiry are wonderfully entangled, we experience knowledge that's not inert but alive, as well as an ever-expansive inauguration of our world to new possibilities. *In many ways I've begun to question today whether there can even be inquiry where there is no appreciation, valuing, or amazement – what the Greeks called thaumazein – the borderline between wonderment and admiration.*

Finally it is hoped that my brief reflections offered in this chapter will help shed light on the positive future of OD and to re-establish AI's call for generating knowledge of consequence, especially for a younger generation of thinkers who I urge to once again ask the big questions, to courageously dare in scholarship, and to open wide new vistas and directions for appreciative inquiry as a generative theory discipline.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY IN ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE ☆

David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva

ABSTRACT

This article presents a conceptual refigurationy of action-research based on a "sociorationalist" view of science. The position that is developed can be summarized as follows: For action-research to reach its potential as a vehicle for social innovation it needs to begin advancing theoretical knowledge of consequence; that good theory may be one of the best means human beings have for affecting change in a postindustrial world; that the discipline's steadfast commitment to a problem solving view of the world acts as a primary constraint on its imagination and contribution to knowledge; that appreciative inquiry represents a viable complement to conventional forms of action-research; and finally, that through our assumptions and choice of method we largely create the world we later discover.

We are sometime truly to see our life as positive, not negative, as made up of continuous willing, not of constraints and prohibition.

–Mary Parker Follett.

We are steadily forgetting how to dream; in historical terms, the mathematicist and technicist dimensions of Platonism have conquered the poetical, mythical, and rhetorical context of analysis. We are forgetting how to be reasonable in nonmathematical dialects.

–Stanley Rosen.

☆This chapter presents the original article—Cooperrider, D. and Srivastva, S., (1987). "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life." In R. Woodman and W. Pasmore (eds.), *Research in organizational change and development*, Volume 1, pp. 129-169—and it weaves in 2017 reflections and draws from recent publications such as Inquiring Into Appreciative Inquiry: A Conversation With David Cooperrider and Ronald Fry, *in* Management Inquiry, *first published January 10th, 2017 and also* Cooperrider, D.L et. al (2013) **Organizational Generativity: The Appreciative Inquiry Summit and a Scholarship of Transformation**. Volume #4 in Advances in Appreciative Inquiry. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a conceptual reconfiguration of action research. In it we shall argue for a multidimensional view of action-research, which seeks to both generate theory and develop organizations. The chapter begins with the observation that action-research has become increasingly rationalized and enculturated to the point where it risks becoming little more than a crude empiricism imprisoned in a deficiency mode of thought. In its conventional *unidimensional* form action research has largely failed as an instrument for advancing social knowledge of consequence and has not, therefore, achieved its potential as a vehicle for human development and social-organizational transformation. While the literature consistently signals the worth of action-research as a managerial tool for problem solving ("first-order" incremental change), it is conspicuously quiet concerning reports of discontinuous change of the "second order" where organizational paradigms, norms, ideologies, or values are transformed in fundamental ways (Watzlawick, et al., 1974).

In the course of this chapter we shall touch broadly upon a number of interrelated concerns–scientific, metaphysical, normative, and pragmatic. Linking these streams is an underlying conviction that action-research has the potential to be to the postindustrial era what "scientific management" was to the industrial. Just as scientific management provided the philosophical and methodological legitimacy required to support the bureaucratic organizational form (Clegg and Dunkerley, 1980; Braverman, 1974), action-research may yet provide the intellectual rationale and reflexive methodology required to support the emergence of a more egalitarian "postbureaucratic" form of organization. Unlike scientific management however, which provided the means for a technorational science of administration, action-research holds unique and essential promise in the sociorational realm of human affairs. It has the potential to become the paradigmatic basis of a truly significant–a humanly significant–generative science of administration.

DC note: The bold aim here was to help advance a new humanly significant and socially constructive science of organizations. The vision was a science not of probabilities but of possibilities. I know when writing this that it felt audacious, that we were reaching further beyond our competence than was safe to dare. But this effort was not about simply re-framing organization development (OD) as a change practice. That's a paradox worth underscoring: AI was not meant initially as an OD intervention. In terms of context, the writing of Appreciative Inquiry into Organizational Life began during my dissertation research starting in 1980 with the world class Cleveland Clinic and it was an attempt to create logic for the theory-building methodology that was emerging. The study was one of those cherished high point moments in a career, the kind of thing every young scholar dreams about. The research

demonstrated a Heisenberg "observer effect" on steroids– how just the mere act of inquiry in human systems can change a whole organization. This article (the "first draft" of it) was offered up in chapter two of the dissertation and it provided the logic for the research methods section. For more—and for a copy of the dissertation—go to the Case Western Reserve University website on AI at http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/.

In the first part of the essay it is suggested that the primary barrier limiting the potential of action-research has been its romance with "action" at the expense of "theory." This tendency has led many in the discipline to seriously underestimate the power of theory as a means for social-organizational reconstruction. Drawing largely on the work of Kenneth Gergen (1978, 1982), we re-examine the character of theoretical knowledge and its role in social transformation, and then appeal for a redefinition of the scientific aims of action-research that will dynamically reunite theory and practice. The aim of science is not the detached discovery and verification of social laws allowing for prediction and control. Highlighted here instead, is an alternative understanding that defines social and behavioral science in terms of its "generative capacity," that is, its

> "Capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is 'taken for granted' and thereby furnish new alternatives for social actions" (Gergen, 1978, p. 134).

Assuming that generative theory is a legitimate product of scientific work and is, in fact, capable of provoking debate, stimulating normative dialogue, and furnishing conceptual alternatives needed for social transformation, then why has action-research till now so largely downplayed creative theorizing in its work with organizations? Here we will move to the heart of the chapter and argue that the generative incapacity of contemporary action-research derives from the discipline's unquestioned commitment to a secularized problem-oriented view of the world and thus to the subsequent loss of our capacity as researchers and participants to marvel, and in marveling to embrace, the miracle and mystery of social organization. If we acknowledge Abraham Maslow's (1968) admonition that true science begins and ends in wonder, then we immediately shed light on why action-research has failed to produce innovative theory capable of inspiring the imagination, commitment, and passionate dialogue required for the consensual reordering of social conduct.

Appreciative inquiry is presented here as a mode of action-research that meets the criteria of science as spelled out in generative-theoretical terms. Going beyond questions of epistemology, appreciative inquiry has as its basis a metaphysical concern: it posits that social existence as such is a miracle that can never be fully comprehended (Quinney, 1982; Marcel, 1963). Proceeding from this level of understanding we begin to explore the uniqueness of the appreciative mode. More than a method or technique, the appreciative mode of inquiry is a way of living

with, being with, and directly participating in the varieties of social organization we are compelled to study. Serious consideration and reflection on the ultimate mystery of being engenders a reverence for life that draws the researcher to inquire beyond superficial appearances to deeper levels of the life generating essentials and potentials of social existence. That is, the action researcher is drawn to affirm, and thereby illuminate, the factors and forces involved in organizing that serve to nourish the human spirit. Thus, this chapter seeks to enrich our conception of administrative behavior by introducing a "second dimension" of action-research that goes beyond merely a secularized problem-solving frame.

DC reflection: In these days, most scientists and scholars view it as an insult if they are accused of being drawn toward mysticism and a reuniting of the sacred and secular, especially if they are making the argument that the experience of the mystical or life as a mystery is a legitimate knowledge *method*, that is, it is something that can consciously be harnessed in the service of creating knowledge of consequence. I still cannot help but puzzle over how far we've drifted from amazement and enchanted experience of our world. We do not come close to teaching the importance of this in our research methods courses, for example. As the epigraph at the outset of this chapter stated: "We are steadily forgetting how to dream; in historical terms, the mathematicist and technicist dimensions of Platonism have conquered the poetical, mythical, and rhetorical context of analysis. We are forgetting how to be reasonable in nonmathematical dialects." This trajectory is in sharp contrast to some of the greatest, most generative thinkers in history. As a towering example, Albert Einstein once wrote: "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed."

But how do we prepare for this—the cognitive power of wonder, awe, and valuing– including cultivating a kind of *appreciative literacy* for finding values and visions in our ordinary daily lives of work, leadership, and human organizing? It's time, the rest of this chapter suggests, to bring this kind of sensibility and sensitivity into the human science of OD. Human organizing, it can be argued, is a special and sacred adventure—it can be and often is a world full of meaning and value—it is the "place" where so much of humanity's greatest work, development and human growth, and collective achievement with others does and can happen. That makes the sphere of human organization pretty special territory. I cannot help but think that this was exactly the grateful and curious stance of great thinkers, such as Peter Drucker, Karl Weick, Jane Dutton, and Abraham Maslow, and that it was precisely this kind of appreciative apprehension that inspired and nurtured their generative theorizing.

The proposal that appreciative inquiry represents a distinctive complement to traditional action-research will be unfolded in the following way: First, the role of theory as an enabling agent of social transformation will be considered; such consideration can help to eliminate the artificial dualism separating theory from practice. Second, we will challenge the problem-oriented view of organizing inherent in traditional definitions of action-research, and describe an affirmative form of inquiry uniquely suited for discovering generative theory. Finally, these insights will be brought together in a general model of the conceptual underpinnings of appreciative inquiry.

TOWARD GENERATIVE THEORY IN ACTION-RESEARCH

The current decade has witnessed a confluence of thinking concerning the paradigmatic refiguration of social thought. As Geertz (1980) notes, there is now even a "blurring of genres" as many social scientists have abandoned–without apology–the misdirected quest to mimic the "more mature" physical sciences. Turning away from a Newtonian laws-and-instances-type explanation rooted in logical empiricist philosophy, many social theorists have instead opted for an interpretive form of inquiry that connects organized action to its contextually embedded set of meanings, "looking less for the sorts of things that connect planets and pendulums and more for the sorts that connect chrysanthemums and swords" (Geertz, 1980, p. 165).

In the administrative sciences, in particular, this recent development has been translated into observable movement away from mechanistic research designs intended objectively to establish universal causal linkages between variables, such as organizational size and level of centralization, or between technology, environment, and organizational structure. Indeed, prominent researchers in the field have publicly given up the logical positivist idea of "certainly through science" and are now embarking on approaches to research that grant preeminence to the historically situated and ever-changing "interpretive schemes" used by members of a given group to give life and meaning to their actions and decisions (Bartunek, 1984). Indicative of the shift away from the logical positivist frame, researchers are converging around what has been termed the "sociorationalist" metatheory of science (Gergen, 1982).

Recognizing the symbolic nature of the human universe, we now find a flurry of innovative work supporting the thesis that there is little about human development or organizational behavior that is "preprogrammed" or stimulus-bound in any direct physical or biological way. In this sense, the social universe is open to indefinite revision, change, and self-propelled development. And, this recognition is crucial because to the extent to which social existence is situated

in a symbolic realm, beyond deterministic forces, and then to that extent the logical positivist foundation of social science is negated and its concept of knowledge rendered illusionary.

> DC reflection: The term "sociorationalist" never really took off but was an important concept indicating that there could be a so called rationality but it would need to be a totally different kind of rationality, one that acknowledges that everything we take to be good, or beautiful, or "true" is the result of the *socius* or the social relationships of which we are a part. To be rational—in its highest form—would be to create spaces for all voices, free and open or unforced dialogue, and a shared realization of idea that if everything we consider real is socially constructed, then nothing is fixed or real. In other words: everything can be other than it is—that standing before us as scientists, scholars, and all of us is a vast spectrum of possibility, and endless invitation to imagination. The better term for sociorationalism as a knowledge form might have been "participatory social science" or "possibility science"— or simply social constructionist scholarship. Indeed we still do not have an adequate term for the kind of science that embraces both a constructionist social epistemology as well as a science not of probabilities but possibilities. Appreciative Inquiry is expressly designed to unite the two. What's exciting about this is that it affirms that the future is ours—together—to shape and create. And in a world where the future is opportunity, not destiny, then the *future forming* task of human inquiry can take on even more importance as a source of innovation, relevance, and world changing.

Nowhere is this better evidenced than in the variety of works concerned with such topics as organizational paradigms (Brown, 1978; McHugh, 1970); beliefs and master scripts (Sproull, 1981; Beyer, 1981); idea management and the executive mind (Srivastva, 1983, 1985); theories of action and presumptions of logic (Argyris and Schon, 1980; Weick, 1983); consciousness and awareness (Harrison, 1982; Lukes, 1974); and, of course, an array of work associated with the concept of organizational or corporate culture (Ouchi and Johnson, 1978; Schein, 1983; Van Maanen, 1982; Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Sathe, 1983; Hofstede, 1980). As Ellwood prophetically suggested almost half a century ago, "This is the cultural view of human society that is [or will be] revolutionizing the social sciences" (Ellwood, 1938, p. 561).

This developing consensus on the importance of the symbolic realm–on the power of ideas–by such independent sources embracing such diverse objectives reflects the reality of organized life in the modern world. However reluctantly, even the most traditional social thinkers are now recognizing the distinctiveness of the postindustrial world for what truly is–an unfolding drama of human interaction whose potential seems limited or enhanced primarily by our symbolic capacities for

constructing meaningful agreements that allow for the committed enactment of collective life.

Never before in history have ideas, information, and beliefs–or theory–been so central in the formulation of reality itself. Social existence, of course, has always depended on some kind of idea system for its meaningful sustenance. The difference now, however, is that what was once background has become foreground. Today, the very fact that society continues to exist at all is experienced not so much mechanistically (an extension of machines) or even naturalistically (a by-product of fateful nature) but more and more humanistically as a social construction of interacting minds–"a game between persons" (Bell, 1973). And under these conditions–as a part of the change from an agrarian society to a goods-producing society at first and then to an information society–ideas and meaning systems take on a whole new life and character. Ideas are thrust center stage as the prime unit of relational exchange governing the creation or obliteration of social existence.

DC reflection: Obviously when this was written we did not have the connected universe of web technologies or the "internet of all things" with upward of a trillion interconnected and intelligent objects, organisms, viral videos, and network effects. There is no doubt that in terms of trajectory, our cultures and economies are increasingly powered by the non-material forms knowledge, creativity, and ideas. Hence, in the points to come we need to add emphasis to the original argument: *to the extent that the primary product of science is systematically refined idea systems–or theory–science too must be recognized as a powerful agent in the enhancement or destruction of human life. And while this presents an unresolvable dilemma for a logical empiricist conception of science, it spells real opportunity (and responsibility) for a social science that wishes to be of creative significance to society. Put most simply, the theoretical contributions of science may be among the most powerful resources human beings have for contributing to change and development in the groups and organizations in which they live*. One idea can change the world as Alfred North Whitehead so aptly showed us in *The Adventure of Ideas*. Indeed the constructionist orientation begins to see the inquirer not just as an observer but also a creator—for we as analysts, scientists, and inquirers—are also fashioning ideas and symbolic resources by which people carry on their lives. The implication of this simple idea is enormous: that the understanding of organizations and their/our practical transformation is a single undifferentiated act. The *productive* act of organizational inquiry is at one stroke the production of self-and-world or subject-and-object. *Doing* inquiry is also an *undergoing*. When we see ourselves in it—that we as inquirers are also engaged in forms of social construction—then we become more reflexively aware of how our topics can frame and produce

the world, how our questions and words begin to enable worlds, and how our assumptions and choice of methods help create the world we later "discover." In many ways we become what we study most seriously, frequently, and systematically.

This line of argument applies no less potently to current conceptions of social science. To the extent that the primary product of science is systematically refined idea systems–or theory–science too must be recognized as a powerful agent in the enhancement or destruction of human life. And while this presents an unresolvable dilemma for a logical empiricist conception of science, it spells real opportunity (and responsibility) for a social science that wishes to be of creative significance to society. Put most simply, the theoretical contributions of science may be among the most powerful resources human beings have for contributing to change and development in the groups and organizations in which they live. This is precisely the meaning of Kurt Lewin's early view of action-science when he proposed: "There is nothing so practical as good theory" (1951, p. 169).

Ironically, the discipline of action-research continues to insist on a sharp separation of theory and practice, and to underrate the role of theory in social reconstruction. The irony is that it does so precisely at a time when the cultural view of organizing is reaching toward paradigmatic status. The sad and perhaps tragic commentary on action-research is that it is becoming increasingly inconsequential just as its opportunity to contribute is on the rise (Argyris, 1983).

Observers such as Rappaport (1970) and Bartunek (1983) have lamented the fact that action-researchers have come to subordinate research aims to action interests. Levinson (1972) has gone even further by branding the discipline "atheoretical." And, Friedlander and Brown (1974) have noted that the definition of action-research in classic texts give virtually no mention to theory-building as an integral and necessary component of the research/diagnostic process, or the process of organizational change. Whenever theory is mentioned, it is almost always referred to as a springboard for research or diagnosis, not the other way around. Bartunek (1983, pp. 34) concludes that "even the most recent papers that describe action-research strategies tend to focus primarily on the process of action-research and only secondarily on the specific theoretical contributions of the outcomes of such research" (e.g., Frohman, Sashkin, and Kavanaugh, 1976; Shani and Pasmore, 1982; Susman and Evered, 1978; see Pasmore and Friedlander, 1982, for an exception). For those of us trained in the field this conclusion is not surprising. Indeed, few educational programs in organizational behavior even consider theory building as a formal part of their curriculum, and even fewer place a real premium on the development of the theoretical mind and imagination of their students.

DC reflection: This same argument can of course be made far beyond the realm of action research. Few educational programs and research methods courses in psychology, sociology, anthropology, or political science even consider imaginative theory building as an active agent in the creation of the future (I like to call it theoretical activism) as a formal part of their curriculum Byron and Thatcher, 2016). To acknowledge the agential role of theory would place too many common conventions—objectivity, value neutral inquiry, independent observation—into jeopardy. But to suppress the agential role of theory building is to quell an amazing and unlimited resource: if our organizational and societal worlds are made and imagined and if schools are developing people to take advantage of the precious resource of imagination and mind, wouldn't the human sciences become even more relevant to the great needs and opportunities of our times? Making our human sciences humanly and ecologically significant—in our time if we wish—is an exciting task of historic significance.

According to Argyris (1983), this lack of useful theorizing is attributable to two major factors. On the one hand practice-oriented scholars have tended to become so client-centered that they fail to question their clients' own definition of a problem and thereby to build testable propositions and theories that are embedded in everyday life. Academics, on the other hand, who are trained to be more scientific in their bent, also undercut the development of useful theory by their very insistence on the criteria of "normal" science and research–detachment, rigor, unilateral control, and operational precision. In a word, creative theorizing has literally been assaulted on all fronts by practitioners and academic scientists alike. It must also be noted that implicit in this critique by Argyris (1983), and others (e.g., Friedlander and Brown, 1974), is an underlying assumption that action-research has built into it certain natural conflicts that are likely to lead either to "action" (consulting) or "research" (diagnosis or the development of organizational theory), but not to both.

The situation is summed up by Friedlander and Brown (1974) in their comprehensive review of the field:

> We believe that research will either play a far more crucial role in the advancement of this field, or become an increasingly irrelevant appendage to it…We have generally failed to produce a theory of change, which emerges from the change process itself. We need a way of enriching our understanding and action synergistically rather than at one or the other's expense–to become a science in which knowledge-getting and knowledge-giving are an integrated process, and one that is valuable to all parties involved (p. 319).

Friedlander and Brown concluded with a plea for a metatheoretical revision of science that will integrate theory and practice. But in another review over a decade later, Friedlander (1984) observed little progress coming from top

scholars in the discipline. He then put words to a mounting frustration over what appears as a recurring problem:

> They pointed to the shortcomings of traditional research and called for emancipation from it, but they did not indicate a destination. There is as yet no new paradigm that integrates research and practice, or even optimizes useful knowledge for organizations.... I'm impatient. Let's get on with it. Let's not talk it, write it, analyze it, conceptualize it, or research it. Instead let's actively engage and experiment with new designs for producing knowledge that is, in fact, used by organizations (p. 647).

This recurrent problem is the price we pay for continuing to talk about theory and practice in dualistic terms. In a later section in this chapter another hypothesis will be advanced on why there is this lack of creative theorizing, specifically as it relates to action-research. But first we need to look more closely at the claim that social theory and social practice are, indeed, part of a synthetic whole. We need to elaborate on the idea that scientific theory is a means for both understanding *and* improving social practice. We need to examine exactly what it means to merge the idea and the act, the symbolic and the sociobehavioral, into a powerful and integral unity.

The Sociorationalist Alternative

As the end of the twentieth century nears, thinkers in organizational behavior are beginning to see, without hesitation, why an administrative science based on a physical science model is simply not adequate as a means for understanding or contributing in relevant ways to the workings of complex, organized human systems (see, for example, Susman and Evered, 1978; Beyer and Trice, 1982). Kurt Lewin had understood this almost half a century earlier but his progressive vision of an action science fell short of offering a clear metatheoretical alternative to conventional conceptions of science (Peters and Robinson, 1984). Indeed, the epistemological ambiguity inherent in Lewin's writing has been cited as perhaps the critical shortcoming of all his work. And yet, in hindsight, it can be argued that the ambiguity was intentional and perhaps part of Lewin's social sensitivity and genius. As Gergen (1982) suggests, the metatheoretical ambiguity in Lewin's work might well have been a protective measure, an attempt to shield his fresh vision of an action science from the fully dominant logical positivist temper of his time. In any event, whether planned or not, Lewin walked a tightrope between two fundamentally opposed views of science and never did make clear how theory could be used as both an interpretive and a creative element. This achievement, as we might guess, would have to wait for a change in the intellectual ethos of social science.

That change, as we earlier indicated, is now taking place. Increasingly the literature signals disenchantment with theories of science that grants priority to the external world in the generation of human knowledge. Instead there is

growing movement toward granting preeminence to the cognitive processes of mind and the symbolic processes of social construction. In *Toward Transformation in Social Knowledge* (1982), Kenneth Gergen synthesizes the essential whole of this movement and takes it one crucial step beyond disenchantment to a bold, yet workable conception of science that firmly unites theory with practice–and thereby elevates the status of theoretical-scientific work. From a historical perspective there is no question that this is a major achievement; it brings to completion the work abruptly halted by Lewin's untimely death. But more than that, what Gergen offers, albeit indirectly, is a desperately needed clue to how we can revitalize an action-research discipline that has never reached its potential. While a complete statement of the emerging sociorationalist metatheory is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important at least to outline the general logic of the perspective, including its basic assumptions.

At the heart of sociorationalism or social construction is the assumption of impermanence–the fundamental instability of social order. No matter what the durability to date, virtually any pattern of social action is open to infinite revision. Accepting for a moment the argument of the social constructionists that social reality, at any given point, is a product of broad social agreement (shared meanings), and further granting a linkage between the conceptual schemes of a culture and its other patterns of action, we must seriously consider the idea that alterations in conceptual practices, in ways of symbolizing the world, hold tremendous potential for guiding changes in the social order. To understand the importance of these assumptions and their meaning for social science, let us quote Gergen (1982) at length:

Is not the range of cognitive heuristics that may be employed in solving problems of adaptation limited only by the human imagination?

> One must finally consider the possibility that human biology not only presents to the scientist an organism whose actions may vary in an infinity of ways, but it may ensure as well that novel patterns are continuously emerging… variations in human activity may importantly be traced to the capacities of the organism for symbolic restructuring. As it is commonly said, one's actions appear to be vitally linked to the manner in which one understands or construes the world of experience. The stimulus world does not elicit behavior in an automatic, reflex-like fashion. Rather, the symbolic translation of one's experiences virtually transforms their implications and thereby alters the range of one's potential reactions. Interestingly, while formulations of this variety are widely shared within the scientific community, very little attention has been paid to their ramifications for a theory of science. As is clear, without such regularities the prediction of behavior is largely obviated… to the extent that the individual is capable of transforming the meaning of stimulus conditions in an indeterminate number of ways, existing regularities must be considered historically contingent–dependent on the prevailing meaning systems of conceptual structure of the times. In effect, from this perspective the scientist's capacity to locate predictable patterns of interaction depends importantly on the extent to which the population is both homogeneous and stable in its conceptual constructions (pp. 16-17).

While this type of reasoning is consistent with the thinking of many social scientists, the ramifications are rarely taken to their logical conclusion: "Virtually unexamined by the field is the potential of science to shape the

meaning systems of the society and thus the common activities of the culture" (Gergen, 1978, p. 1349).

DC reflections: Indeed, the social sciences have always aped the physical sciences instead of asking how might the subject matter be so unique that a whole different approach might be not only warranted but also welcomed. To be sure—even far before the spread of social constructionism—there had been major developments of the idea of *homo poeta,* the human being as the creator of meaning. In 1744, for example Vico proposed the radical new idea of the social world as the work of the human being—on the culturally created nature of human institutions. All of this—from Vico to the 20th century thinkers such as George Herbert Mead, John Dewey, and Berger and Luckman—created the potential for a radically revised conception of the great task of social theory. Imagine what it would be like if the socially constructed nature of reality—including the scientist in the equation—was the commonly accepted assumption base? Imagine if science then, like a good piece of poetry, was about opening the world to new possibilities? What would happen to all the inert writing? Might there be a decisive shift from almost total focus on explain the past (holding a so called mirror to what was and "what is") to an imaginative focus on and for the future (what Michelangelo once called "the mirror and the lamp") and what we might call *anticipatory theory*? In the Greek language there is a concept that I am drawn to and its represented by the term "prolepsis." In literal terms it means something like "speaking the future into existence." I think AI is a kind of *proleptic theory* in the sense that it is prospective and future forming and recognizes how words create worlds. I also want to point people to a book I now use in every one of my research methods classes. It's a method called "portraiture" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and it draws on the arts and the "art appreciation" tradition.

Virtually unexamined is the important role that science can–and does–play in the scientific construction of social reality. One implication of this line of thought is that to the extent the social science conceives its role in the logical positivist sense, with its goals being prediction and control, it not only serves the interests of the status quo (you can't have "good science" without stable replication and verification of hypotheses) but it also seriously underestimates the power and usefulness of its most important product, namely theory; it underestimates the constructive role science can have in the *development* of the groups and organizations that make up our cultural world. According to Gergen, realization of this fact furnishes the opportunity to refashion a social science of vital significance to society. To do this, we need a bold shift in attention whereby theoretical accounts are no longer judged in terms of their predictive capacity, but instead are judged in terms of their generative capacity–their ability to foster dialogue about that

which is taken for granted and their capacity for generating fresh alternatives for social action. Instead of asking, "Does this theory correspond with the observable facts?" the emphasis for evaluating good theory becomes, "To what extent does this theory present provocative new possibilities for social action, and to what extent does it stimulate cooperative and normative dialogue about how we can and should organize ourselves?"

The complete logic for such a proposal may be summarized in the following ten points:

1. The social order at any given point is viewed as the product of broad social agreement, whether tacit or explicit.
2. Patterns of social-organizational action are not fixed by nature in any direct biological or physical way; the vast share of social conduct is potentially stimulus-free, capable of infinite conceptual variation.
3. From an observational point of view, all social action is open to multiple interpretations, no one of which is superior in any objective sense. The interpretations (for example, "whites are superior to blacks") favored in one historical setting may be replaced in the next.
4. Historically embedded conventions govern what is taken to be true or valid, and to a large extent govern what we, as scientists and laypersons, are able to see. All observation, therefore, is theory-laden and filtered through conventional belief systems and theoretical lenses.2
5. To the extent that action is predicated on ideas, beliefs, meanings, intentions, or theory, people are free to seek transformations in conventional conduct by changing conventional codes (idea systems).
6. The most powerful vehicle communities have for transforming their conventions–their agreements on norms, values, policies, purposes, and ideologies–is through the act of dialogue made possible by language. Alterations in linguistic practices, therefore, hold profound implications for changes in social practice.
7. Social theory can be viewed as a highly refined language with a specialized grammar all its own. As a powerful linguistic tool created by trained linguistic experts (scientists), theory may enter the conceptual meaning system of culture and in doing so alter patterns of social action.
8. Whether intended or not, all theory is normative and has the potential to influence the social order–even if reactions to it are simply boredom, rebellion, laughter, or full acceptance.
9. Because of this, all social theory is morally relevant; it has the potential to affect the way people live their ordinary lives in relation to one another. This point is a critical one because there is no such thing as a detached/technical/scientific mode for judging the ultimate worth of value claims.
10. Valid knowledge or social theory is therefore a communal creation. Social knowledge is not "out there" in nature to be discovered through

detached, value-free, observational methods (logical empiricism); nor can it be relegated to the subjective minds of isolated individuals (solipsism). Social knowledge resides in the interactive collectivity; it is created, maintained, and put to use by the human group. Dialogue, free from constraint or distortion, is necessary to determine the "nature of things" (sociorationalism).

In Table 1 the metatheory of social constructionism is both summarized and contrasted to the commonly held assumptions of the logical empiricist view of science. Especially important to note is the transformed role of the scientist when social inquiry is viewed from the perspective of social constructionism. Instead of attempting to present oneself as an impartial bystander or dispassionate spectator of the inevitable, the social scientist conceives of himself or herself as an active agent, an invested participant whose work might well become a powerful source of change in the way people see and enact their worlds. Driven by a desire to "break the hammerlock" of what appears as given in human nature, the scientist attempts to build theories that can expand the realm of what is conventionally understood as possible. In this sense the core impact of social constructionist metatheory is that it invites, encourages, and requires that students of social life rigorously exercise their theoretical imagination in the service of their vision of the good. Instead of denial it is an invitation to fully accept and exercise those qualities of mind and action that make us uniquely human.

Now we turn to a question raised earlier: How does theory achieve its capacity to affect social practice, and what are some of the specific characteristics of generative theory?

The Power of Theory in Understanding Organizational Life

The social constructionist or sociorationalist vision of science is of such far-reaching importance that no student, organizational scientist, manager, educator, or action-researcher can afford to ignore it. Good theory, as we have suggested, is one of the most powerful means we have for helping social systems evolve, adapt, and creatively alter their patterns over time. Building further on this metatheoretical perspective we can talk about five ways by which theory achieves its exceptional potency:

1. Establishing a conceptual and contextual frame;
2. Providing presumptions of logic;
3. Transmitting a system of values;
4. Creating a group-building language;
5. Extending visions of possibility or constraint.

Table 1: Comparison of Logical Empiricist and Social Constructionist Conceptions of Social Science.

Dimension for Comparison	Logical Empiricism	Social Constructionism
1. Primary Function of Science	Enhance goals of understanding, prediction, and control by discerning general laws or principles governing the relationship among units of observable phenomena.	Enhance understanding in the sense of assigning meaning to something, thus creating its status through the use of concepts. Science is a means for expanding flexibility and choice in cultural evolution.
2. Theory of Knowledge and Mind	Exogenic—grants priority to the external world in the generation of human knowledge (i.e., the preeminence of objective fact). Mind is a mirror.	Endogenic—holds the processes of mind and symbolic interaction as preeminent source of human knowledge. Mind is both a mirror and a lamp.
3. Perspective on Time	Assumption of temporal irrelevance: searches for transhistorical principles.	Assumption of historically and contextually relevant meanings; existing regularities in social order are contingent on prevailing meaning systems.
4. Assuming Stability of Social Patterns	Social phenomena are sufficiently stable, enduring, reliable and replicable to allow for lawful principles.	Social order is fundamentally unstable. Social phenomena are guided by cognitive heuristics, limited only by the human imagination: the social order is a subject matter capable of infinite variation through the linkage of ideas and action.
5. Value Stance	Separation of fact and values. Possibility of objective knowledge through behavioral observation.	Social sciences are fundamentally nonobjective. Any behavioral event is open to virtually any interpretative explanation. All interpretation is filtered through prevailing values of a culture. "There is no description without prescription."
6. Features of "Good" Theory	Discovery of transhistorically valid principles; a theory's correspondence with face.	Degree to which theory furnishes alternatives for social innovation and thereby opens vistas for action; expansion of "the realm of the possible."
7. Criteria for Confirmation or Verification (Life of a Theory)	Logical consistency and empirical prediction; subject to falsification.	Persuasive appeal, impact, and overall generative capacity; subject to community agreement; truth is a product of a community of truth makers.
8. Role of Scientist	Impartial bystander and dispassionate spectator of the	Active agent and coparticipant who is primarily a source of linguistic activity (theoretical language),

Table 1: (*Continued*)

Dimension for Comparison	Logical Empiricism	Social Constructionism
	inevitable; content to accept that which seems given.	which serves as input into common meaning systems. Interested in "breaking the hammerlock" of what appears as given in human nature.
9. Chief Product of Research	Cumulation of objective knowledge through the production of empirically disconfirmable hypothesis.	Continued improvement in theory building capacity; improvement in the capacity to create generative-theoretical language.
10. Emphasis in the Education of Future Social Science Professionals	Rigorous experimental methods and statistical analysis; a premium is placed on method (training in theory construction is a rarity).	Hermeneutic interpretation and catalytic theorizing; a premium is placed on the theoretical imagination. Sociorationalism invites the student toward intellectual expression in the service of his or her vision of the good.

DC reflection: in this upcoming section of the paper the seeds of many of AI's key principles were foreshadowed: for example, the "constructionist principle" and the "principle of simultaneity"—that inquiry and change are not separate moments at but totally entwined and entangled. We are profoundly shaped what we study—human systems move in the direction of what they ask questions about most frequently, authentically, and rigorously. Instead of being woven at random like an afterthought in a larger fabric, inquiry shall become the centerpiece thread weaving things together for a theory of appreciative inquiry. For some this is a big claim, especially the idea of a snowballing effect or exponential inquiry effect from even a tiny question. Certainly it is a big challenge for our conventional assumptions about the nature of knowledge. As is typically understood good science is objective and detached and the scientist is an impartial bystander whose methods should not influence the events he or she hopes to understand. But this view is unnecessarily limiting, and over many years has served to restrain us from fashioning a humanly significant science, unique in its own terms, and capable of helping life become all that it can be. Imagine an encyclopedia of 1,000s of ingeniously crafted questions to help organizations and people see every asset or hidden opportunity in the worlds around them as well as 100s of "how might we?" questions to help human systems imagine and design beyond perceptual blinders of our culture. Remember Einstein's imaginative question? It changed our world forever. But it also changed Einstein's own

life from the moment it was posed in his late teen years. Questions are like that. They shape everything we discover and do, and this one was classic: "What would the universe look like if I were riding on the end of a light beam, moving at the speed of light?" I often ask my students in theory building to read this section closely and for many it is eye opening, especially the upcoming story of the riots at the Vauxhaull automobile facility after a sociologist's so called objective report was leaked to the workers before going to the printers. The report declared the workers were dormant, totally socialized into the system of power relations, and that managers had no worries related to union organizing. Read on: for the sociologists report created a Heisenberg like "observer effect" that no one anticipated. It created an uprising. Why did nobody predict it? It's because we cling to outmoded assumptions such as the one that states that inquiry and change are separate moments. In human systems things do and can change in an instant and that spells real opportunity, in our view, for a new kind of generative and anticipatory theory that affirms that there are no laws related to social systems—only the imaginative ideas, constructions, valued possibilities, and meaning systems that we give them.

Establishing a Perceptual and Contextual Frame

To the extent that theory is the conceptual imposition of order upon an otherwise "booming, bustling, confusion that is the realm of experience" (Dubin, 1978), the theorist's first order of business is to specify what is there to be seen, to provide an "ontological education" (Gergen, 1982). The very act of theoretical articulation, therefore, highlights not only the parameters of the topic or subject matter, but becomes an active agent as a cueing device, a device that subtly focuses attention on particular phenomena or meanings while obscuring others. In the manner of a telescope or lens, a new theory allows one to see the world in a way perhaps never before imagined.

For example, when American eugenicists used the lens of biological determinism to attribute diseases of poverty to the inferior genetic construction of poor people, they literally could see no systematic remedy other than sterilization of the poor. In contrast, when Joseph Goldberg theorized that pellagra was not genetically determined but culturally caused (as a result of vitamin deficiency and the eating habits of the poor), he could discover a way to cure it (Gould, 1981). Similarly, theories about the "survival of the fittest" might well help executives locate "predators," "hostile environments," and a world where self interest reigns, where it is a case of "eat or be eaten." Likewise, theories of leadership have been known quickly to facilitate the discovery of Theory X and Theory Y interaction. Whatever the theory, it provides a potential means for

members of a culture to navigate in an otherwise neutral, meaningless, or chaotic sea of people, interactions and events. By providing an "ontological education" with respect to what is there, a theory furnishes an important cultural input that affects people's cognitive set. In this sense "the world is not so constituted until the lens is employed. With each new distinction the groundwork is laid for alterations in existing patterns of conduct" (Gergen, 1982, p. 23).

As the reader may already surmise, an important moral issue begins to emerge here. Part of the reason that theory is, in fact, powerful is that it shapes perceptions, cognition's, and preferences often at a preconscious level, much like subliminal communications or even hypnosis. Haley (1973) talks about how Milton Erickson has made this a central feature of this psychotherapeutic work. But Lukes (1974) cautions that such thought control may be "the supreme and most insidious exercise of power," especially when it prevents people from challenging their role in the existing order of things and when it operates contrary to their real interests.

Providing Presumptions of Logic

Theories are also powerful to the extent to which they help shape common expectations of causality, sequence, and relational importance of phenomena within a theoretical equation. Consider, for example, the simple logic underlying almost every formal performance-appraisal system. Stripped to essentials, the theoretical underpinnings run something like this: "If you want to evaluate performance (P), then you must evaluate the individual employee (E); in other words, 'P = E'." Armed with this theory, many managers have entered the performance-appraisal meeting shaking with the thought of having to pass godlike judgment on some employee. Similarly, the employee arrives at the meeting with an arsenal of defenses, designed to protect his or her hard-won self-esteem. Little genuine communication occurs during the meeting and virtually no problem-solving takes place. The paperwork is mechanically completed, then filed away in the personnel office until the next year. So powerful is this subtle P = E equation that any alternative goes virtually unnoticed, for example the Lewinian theory that behavior (performance) is a function of the person and the environment (in this case the organizational situation, the "OS" in which the employee works). Following this Lewinian line, the theory underlying performance appraisal would now have to be expanded to read P = E ´ OS. That is, P ^{1} E. To adequately assess performance there must be an assessment of the individual *in relation* to the organizational setting in which he or she works and vice-versa. What would happen to the performance-appraisal process if this more complete theory were used as a basis for re-designing appraisal systems in organizations throughout the corporate world? Isn't it possible that such a theory could help shift the attribution process away from the person-blame to systems analysis?3 By attributing causality, theories have the potential to create the very phenomena they propose to explain. Karl Weick, in a recent

article examining managerial thought in the context of action, contends that thought and action are part and parcel of one another; thinking is best viewed as a kind of activity, and activity as the ground of thought. For him, managerial theories gain their power by helping people overlook disorder and presume orderliness. Theory *energizes* action by providing a *presumption of logic* that enables people to act with certainty, attention, care, and control. Even where it is originally inadequate as a description of current reality, a forceful theory may provoke action that brings into the world a new reality that then confirms the original theory. Weick (1983) explains:

> Once the action is linked with an explanation, it becomes more forceful, and the situation is thereby transformed into something that supports the presumed underlying pattern. Presumptions [theories] enable actions to be tied to specific explanations that consolidate those actions into deterministic events….The underlying explanation need *not* be objectively "correct." In a crude sense any old explanation will do. This is so because explanation serves mostly to organize and focus the action. The focused action then modifies the situation in ways that confirm the explanation, whatever it is.
>
> Thus, the adequacy of any explanation is determined by the intensity and structure it adds to potentially self-validating actions. More forcefulness leads to more validation and more perceived adequacy. Accuracy is subordinate to intensity. Since situations can support a variety of meanings, their actual content and meaning are dependent on the degree to which they are arranged in sensible, coherent configurations. More forcefulness imposes more coherence. Thus, those explanations that induce greater forcefulness become more valid, not because they are more accurate, but because they have a higher potential for self-validation…. the underlying explanations they unfold (for example, "This is war") have great potential to intensify whatever action is underway (1983, pp. 230-232).

Thus, theories are generative to the extent that they are forceful (e.g., Marx), logically coherent (e.g., Piaget), and bold in their assertions and consistency (e.g., Freud, Weber). By providing a basis for focused action, a logic for attributing causality, and a sequence specification that grounds expectations for action and reaction, a theory goes a long way toward forming the common expectations for the future. "And with the alteration of expectation, the stage is set for modification of action" (Gergen, 1982, p. 24).

Transmitting a System of Values

Beyond abstract logic, it is often the affective core of social theory that provides its true force and appeal, allowing it to direct perception and guide behavior. From the tradition of logical positivism, good "objective" theory is to be value-free, yet upon closer inspection we find that social theory is infused with values and domain assumptions throughout. As Gouldner (1970) so aptly put it, "Every social theory facilitates the pursuit of some, but not all, courses of action and thus, encourages us to change or accept the world as it is, to say yea or nay to it. In a way, every theory is a discrete obituary or celebration of some social system."

Nowhere is this better exemplified–negatively–than in the role scientific theory played in the arguments for slavery, colonialism, and belief in the

genetic superiority of certain races. The scientific theory in this case was, again, the theory of biological determinism, the belief that social and economic differences between human beings and groups–differences in rank, status, political privilege, education privilege–arise from inherited natural endowments, and that existing social arrangements accurately reflect biological limits. So powerful was this theory during the 1800s that it led a number of America's highest-ranking scientific researchers unconsciously to miscalculate "objective" data in what has been brilliantly described by naturalist Steven Jay Gould (1981, p. 54) as a "patchwork of fudging and finagling in the clear interest of controlling a priori convictions". Before dismissing this harsh judgment as simple rhetoric, we need to look closely at how it was determined. One example will suffice.

When Samual Morton, a scientist with two medical degrees, died in 1851, the *New York Tribune* paid tribute saying, "Probably no scientific man in America enjoyed a higher reputation among scholars throughout the world than Dr. Morton" (in Gould, 1981, p. 51). Morton gained this reputation as a scientist who set out to rank racial groups by "objectively" measuring the size of the cranial cavity of the human skull, which he regarded as a measure of brain size. He had a beautiful collection of skulls from races throughout the world, probably the largest such collection in existence. His hypothesis was a simple one: The mental and moral worth of human races can be arrived at objectively by measuring physical characteristics of the brain; by filling skull cavities with mustard seed or lead shot, accurate measurement of brain size is possible. Morton published three major works, which were reprinted repeatedly as providing objective, "hard" data on the mental worth of races. Gould comments:

> Needless to say, they matched every good Yankee's prejudices–whites on top, Indians in the middle, and blacks on the bottom; and among whites, Teutons and Anglo-Saxons on top, Jews in the middle, and Hindus on the bottom…. Status and access to power in Morton's America faithfully reflected biological merit (p. 54).

Morton's work was undoubtedly influential. When he died, the South's leading medical journal proclaimed: "We of the South should consider him as our benefactor, for aiding most materially in giving the Negro his true position as an inferior race" (in Gould, 1981, p. 69). Indeed Morton did much more than only give "the Negro his true position," as the following remarks by Morton himself convey:

> Negroes were numerous in Egypt, but their social position in ancient time, was the same as it is now, that of servants and slaves. The benevolent mind may regret the inaptitude of the Indian civilization… [but values must not yield to fact]. The structure of his mind appears to be different from that of the white man, or can the two harmonize in social relations except on the most limited scale. [Indians] are not only averse to restraints of education, but for the most part are incapable of a continued process of reasoning on abstract subjects (in Gould, 1981, p. 53).

The problem with these conclusions–as well as the numerical data, which supported them–was that they were based not on "fact" but purely and simply on cultural fiction, on Morton's belief in biological determinism. As Gould

meticulously shows, all of Morton's data was wrong. Having reworked it completely, Gould concludes:

> Morton's summaries are a patchwork of fudging and finagling in the clear interest of controlling a priori convictions. Yet–and this is the most intriguing aspect of the case–I find no evidence of conscious fraud; indeed, had Morton been a conscious fudger, he would not have published his data so openly.
>
> Conscious fraud is probably rare in science.... The prevalence of unconscious finagling, on the other hand, suggests the general conclusion about the social context of science.... prior prejudice may be found anywhere, even in the basics of measuring bones and totaling sums (pp. 55-56).

Morton represents a telling example of the power of theory. Theory is not only a shaper of expectations and perceptions. Under the guise of "dispassionate inquiry" it can also be a peddler of values, typecasting arbitrary value as scientific "fact." Along with Gould, we believe that we would be better off to abandon the myth of "value-free" science and that theoretical work "must be understood as a social phenomenon, a gutsy, human enterprise, not the work of robots programmed to collect pure information" (Gould, 1981, p. 21). Even if Morton's data were correct, his work still could not be counted as value-free. His data and theories were not only shaped by the setting in which he worked; they were also used to support broad social policy. This is akin to making nature the source of cultural values, which of course it never can be ("What is" does not equal "what should be").

Creating a Group-Building Language

The sociorationalist perspective is more than a pessimistic epitaph for a strictly logical positivist philosophy. It is an invitation to inquiry that raises the status of theory from mere appendage of scientific method to an actual shaper of society. Once we acknowledge that a primary product of science–theory–is a key resource for the creation of groups, the stage is set for theory-building activity intended for the use and development of human society, for the creation of human options.

Students of human behavior have been aware of the group as the foundation of society since the earliest periods of classical thought. Aristotle, for example, discussed the importance of bands and families. But it was not until the middle of the present century that scientific interest in the subject exploded in a flurry of general inquiry and systematic interdisciplinary research (for a sample review of this literature see Hare, 1976). Among the conclusions of this recent work is the crucial insight that:

The face-to-face group working on a problem is the meeting ground of individual personality and society. It is in the group that personality is modified and socialized and it is through the workings of groups that society is changed and adapted to its times (Thelen, 1954, p. vi).

Similarly, in the field of organization development, Srivastva, Obert, and Neilsen (1977) have shown that the historical development of the discipline has paralleled advances in group theory. And this, they contend, is no accident because emphasis on the small group is responsive to the realities of social change in large complex organizations. It is through group life that individuals learn, practice, develop, and modify their roles in the larger organization. "To enter programmatically at the group level is both to confront and potentially co-opt an important natural source of change and development in these systems (p. 83)."

It is well established that groups are formed around common ideas that are expressed in and through some kind of shared language which makes communicative interaction possible. What is less clear, though, is the exact role that science plays in shaping group life through the medium of language. However, the fact that science frequently does have an impact is rarely questioned. Andre Gorz (1973) offers an explosive example of this point.

In the early 1960s a British professor of sociology by the name of Goldthorpe was brought in from a nearby university to make a study of the Vauxhall automobile workers in Luton, England. At the time, management at the factory was worried because workers in other organizations throughout the United Kingdom were showing great unrest over working conditions, pay, and management. Many strikes were being waged; most of them wildcat strikes called by the factory stewards, not by the unions themselves. Goldthorpe was called in to study the situation at Vauxhall, to find out for management if there was anything to worry about at their factory. At the time of the study there were at Vauxhall no strikes, no disruptions, and no challenges by workers. Management wanted to know why. What were the chances that acute conflict would break out in the "well-managed" and "advanced" big factory?

After two full years of research, the professor drew his conclusions. Management, he said, had little to worry about. According to the study, the workers were completely socialized into the system, they were satisfied with their wages and neither liked or disliked their work–in fact, they were indifferent to it, viewing it as boring but inevitable. Because their job was not intrinsically rewarding, most people did it just to be done with it–so they could go home and work on other more worthwhile projects and be with their family. Work was marginal and instrumental. It was a means to support other interests outside the factory, where "real life" began. Based then on his observations, Goldthorpe theorized that management had nothing to worry about: Workers were passively apathetic and well integrated into the system. They behaved according to middle-class patterns and showed no signs of strength as a group (no class-consciousness). Furthermore, most conflict with management belonged to the past.

The sociologist's report was still at the printer's when some employees got hold of a summary of his findings. They had the conclusions copied and distributed reports to hundreds of co-workers. Also at around this time, a report of Vauxhall's profits was being circulated, profits that were not shared with the

employees. The next day something happened. It was reported by the *London Times* in detail:

> Wild rioting has broken out at the Vauxhall car factories in Luton. Thousands of workers streamed out of the shops and gathered in the factory yard. They besieged the management offices, calling for managers to come out, singing the 'Red Flag,' and shouting. 'String them up!' Groups attempted to storm the offices and battled police which had been called to protect them (quoted in Gorz, 1973).

The rioting lasted for two days. All of this happened, then, in an advanced factory where systematic research showed workers to be apathetic, weak as a group, and resigned to accept the system. What does it all mean? Had the researchers simply misread the data? To the contrary. Goldthorpe knew his data well. He articulated the conclusions accurately, concisely, and with force. In fact, what happened was that the report gave the workers a *language* with which to begin talking to one another about their plight. It brought them into interaction and, as they discussed things, they discovered that Goldthorpe was right. They felt alike, apathetic but frustrated; and they were apathetic because they felt as individuals working in isolated jobs, that no one could do anything to change things. But the report gave them a way to discuss the situation. As they talked, things changed. People were no longer alone in their feelings, and they did not want things to continue as they were. As an emergent group, they now had a means to convert apathy into action, noninvolvement into involvement, and individual powerlessness into collective strength. "In other words," analyzes Gorz, "the very investigation of Mr. Goldthorpe about the lack of class-consciousness helped tear down the barriers of silence and isolation that rendered the workers apathetic" (p. 334).

The Vauxhall case is an important one for a number of reasons. At a general level it demonstrates that knowledge in the social sciences differs in quality and kind from knowledge generated in the physical sciences. For instance, our knowledge of the periodic chart does not change the elements, and our knowledge of the moon's orbit does not change its path. But our knowledge of a social system is different. It can be used by the system to change itself, thus invalidating or disconfirming the findings immediately or at some later time. Thus the human group differs from objects in an important way: Human beings have the capacity for symbolic interaction and, through language, they have the ability to collaborate in the investigation of their own world. Because of our human capacity for symbolic interaction, the introduction of new knowledge concerning aspects of our world carries with it the strong likelihood of changing that world itself.

DC reflections: What do all of the stories in this section have in common? They all show that reality is not what it used to be—that *everything* can be other than "it" is— that even so called "real" or actual "things" such as "worker apathy" can be dissolved in one quasi-instantaneous collective

activation, and at speeds faster than common imagination. All of the examples share one thing that cannot be sidestepped: you cannot do inquiry in a system *without* changing it, no matter how hard you try. That realities shift as we put our attention on something—asking questions, gathering information, and paying attention to someone—is so commonplace by now that we forget that it might just be the most important first principle for a field devoted to human systems development and change. For some this simultaneity between inquiry and change is regarded as an incidental phenomenon. It actually has a name. Its been dubbed "the mere measurement effect." However as it relates to the generative task of Appreciative Inquiry, something we soon explore, there is nothing at all minor about it—we should be speaking instead "of *the exponential inquiry effect*.

Gergen (1982) refers to this as the "enlightenment effect" of scientific work, meaning that once the formulations of scientific work are made public, human beings may act autonomously either to disconfirm or to validate the propositions. According to logical positivist philosophy, potential enlightenment effects must be reduced or–ideally–eliminated through experimental controls. In social psychology, for example, deception plays a crucial role in doing research; enlightenment effects are viewed as contaminants to good scientific work. Yet there is an alternative way to look at the reactive nature of social research: it is precisely because of the enlightenment effect that theory can and does play an important role in the positive construction of society. In this sense, the enlightenment effect–which is made possible through language–is an essential ingredient making scientific work worthwhile, meaningful, and applicable. It constitutes an invitation to each and every theorist to actively participate in the creation of his or her world by generating compelling theories of what is good, and just, and desirable in social existence.

Extending Visions of Possibility

The position taken by the sociorationalist philosophy of science is that the conduct of inquiry cannot be separated from the everyday negotiation of reality. Social-organizational research is, therefore, a continuing moral concern, a concern of social reconstruction and direction. The choice of what to study, how to study it, and what to report each implies some degree of responsibility. Science, therefore, instead of being considered an endpoint, is viewed as one means of helping humanity create itself. Science in this sense exists for one singular overarching purpose. As Albion Small (1905) proposed almost a century ago, a generative science must aim at "the most thorough, intense, persistent, and systematic effort to make human life all that it is capable of becoming" (pp. 3637).

Theories gain their generative capacity by extending visions that expand to the realm of the possible. As a general proposition it might be said that theories designed to empower organized social systems will tend to have a greater enlightenment effect than theories of human constraint. This proposition is grounded in a simple but important consideration which we should like to raise as it relates to the unity of theory and practice: Is it not possible that scientific theory gains its capacity to affect cultural practices in very much the same way that powerful leaders inspire people to new heights? Recent research on the functioning of the executive mind (Srivastva, 1983, 1985) raises a set of intriguing parallels between the possibilities of a generative science and the workings of the executive mind.

The essential parallel is seen in the primary role that ideas or ideals play in the mobilization of diverse groups in the common construction of a desired future. Three major themes from the research stand out in this regard:

- **Vision:** The executive mind works largely from the present and extends itself out to the longer-term future. It is powerful to the extent that it is able to envision a desired future state which challenges perceptions of what is possible and what can be realized. The executive mind operates beyond the frontier of conventional practice without losing sight of either necessity or possibility.
- **Passion:** The executive mind is simultaneously rational and intuitive, which allows it to tap into the sentiments, values, and dreams of the social collectivity. Executive vision becomes "common vision" to the extent that it ignites the imaginations, hopes, and passions of others-and it does so through the articulation of self-transcending ideals which lend meaning and significance to everyday life.
- **Integrity:** The executive mind is the mental muscle that moves a system from the present state to a new and different future. As such, this muscle gains strength to the extent that it is founded upon an integrity able to withstand contrary pressures. There are three dimensions to executive integrity. The first, system integrity, refers to the fact that the executive mind perceives the world (the organization, group, or society) as a unified whole, not as a collection of individual parts. The second type of integrity is *moral integrity*. Common-vision leadership is largely an act of caring. It follows the "path of the heart," which is the source of moral and ethical standards. Finally, integrity of vision refers to consistency, coherence, and focus. Executive vision–to the extent to which it is compelling–is focused and unwavering, even in the midst of obstacles, critics, and conflicting alternatives.

Interestingly, these thematic dimensions of the executive mind have their counterparts in recent observations concerning the utilization of organizational research. According to Beyer and Trice (1982), the "affective bonding" that takes place during the research largely determines the attractiveness of its

results and generates commitment to utilize their implications. For example, Henshel (1975) suggests that research containing predictions of an appealing future will be utilized and preferred over research that points to a negative or repelling future: "People will work for predicted states they approve of and against those they detest" (p. 103). Similarly, Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980) report that results which challenge the status quo are most attractive to high-level executives because they are the persons expected to make new things happen, at least on the level of policy. And, with respect to passion and integrity, Mitroff (1980) urges social scientists to become caring advocates of their ideas, not only to diffuse their theories but also to challenge others to prove them wrong and thus pursue those ideas which have integrity in action.

This section has explored a number of ways in which social theory becomes a powerful resource for change and development in social practice. The argument is simple. Theory is agential in character and has unbounded potential to affect patterns of social action–whether desired or not. As we have seen, theories are not mere explanations of an external world lying "out there" waiting to be objectively recorded. Theories, like powerful ideas, are formative. By establishing perceptual cues and frames, by providing presumptions of logic, by transmitting subtle values, by creating new language, and by extending compelling visions of possibility or constraint–in all these ways social theory becomes a powerful means whereby norms, beliefs, and cultural practices may be altered.

DC reflection: Many have come up to me and remarked how similar this may be to the new physics and the idea of Heisenberg observer effects. Indeed our discoveries over even that the last several decades about the startling nature of reality are an indispensible pillar to a field that wishes to be a developmental force for innovation. What's more, the much-discussed Heisenberg uncertainty principle of observer effects only begins to scratch the surface. In the science series on PBS Nova—including their sites on Science Now and the physics blog—the tagline reads "the physics of nothing, everything, and all the things *in between."* This is more than a tagline because if there is one message from quantum mechanics it is this– the complete turn to the focusing on the "in-between" that is, on relationships *and* more relationships; it's all about relationships and the relational nature of reality. Classical physics of course, studies a world of "things" with assumed well defined edges, where it is possible to tell where one thing stops and another "thing" begins and where its possible to stand outside of something and observe it, without interfering. But all that began to change in 1926 with one of the key creators of quantum mechanics, Werner Karl Heisenberg. The Heisenberg principle tells us that the smallest entities in the physical world do not behave at all like larger scale objects. Until an instrument or act of observation registers them, the quanta have neither a unique location nor a unique state. It's

only when we observe its state that a quantum particle is essentially forced to choose one probability, and that's the state that we observe.

In addition, it appears that particle measurement A doesn't just reveal and already established state B: it actually produces that state. The state of B depends rigorously on the measurement on A. A signal seems to propagate from A to B. Some of the most famous subsequent experiments, built on the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, have been carried out across great distances. They suggest an instant interconnection between paired particles that originated in the same quantum state. The spin of a paired particle in one location can be instantly correlated to the spin of the other in another location—distance does not matter here. Schroeder, even further, established in his experiments that there are no individually defined states: their states are intrinsically "entangled."

Organizational theorist Meg Wheatley sums it up neatly: " In the quantum world, relationships are not just interesting; to many physicists, they are *all* there is to reality." Then she continues, "Several years ago I read that elementary particles were "bundles of potentiality." That's what we are involved with when we study human systems. Goldthorpe at the automobile factory was studying "bundles of potentiality" and in many ways his observations unleashed the most powerful reaction he'd ever seen. He was completely bewildered. He was shaken. His career was never again the same. When the workers intercepted the sociologist's report, which showed how apathetic and asleep they were, there was a spontaneous co-arising that was contagious and communal. The inquiry itself helped to produce a spectacular quasi-instant change of state. There was nothing listless or apathetic anymore about the workers at Vauxhall.

Just as in the new physics, it is dawning on all of us that everything is relationship—*including the observer* in that resonating entangled world—and that sheer observation changes the phenomenon. Now let's magnify this metaphor of inquiry's *observer effects* when we shift our attention to the mystery and power of observer effects in human systems—systems that *also* have miraculous brains with tens of billions of cells; and with relationships that connect the world in six degrees of separation to every other brain; and with imaginations that are free and unlimited; and with eyes that see possibilities everywhere; and with internet speeds that spread stories of Arab springs and stock splits nearly instantaneously; and with 9 billion creative people arising by 2050— again, where everything reverberates. Welcome to the world of novelty and human action: there are no "things" just bundles of *abundant* possibilities in the making, where things such as apathy are simply *intermediate states* in networks of interactions and reality-in-motion.

We all pay lip service to the idea that inquiry and information can alter human systems but here is where we might stretch to really appreciate it—by *how much* does inquiry help to create change? Exponentially? Not many of us everyday think or act this way. But it is certainly an intriguing pathway to explore.

Finally, in a recent interview I proposed a union of Gergen and Heisenberg arguing that Kenneth Gergen is to the social sciences what Heisenberg was and is to the new physics of quantum mechanics. I have come to the conclusion that in human systems we have a Heisenberg observer effect on steroids. I propose to call it the Gergen-Heisenberg principle—its both subtle and exponential, inevitable, and potentially so powerful that it can lead us to fashion a human science that is truly vital to our world's future.

REAWAKENING THE SPIRIT OF ACTION-RESEARCH

The key point is this: Instinctively, intuitively, and tacitly we all know that important ideas can, in a flash, profoundly alter the way we see ourselves, view reality, and conduct our lives. Experience shows that a simple economic forecast, political poll, or technical discovery (like the atomic bomb) can forever change the course of human history. Thus one cannot help but be disturbed and puzzled by the discipline of action-research in its wide-ranging indifference to theory. Not only does it continue to underrate the role of theory as a means for organizational development (Friedlander and Brown, 1974; Bartunek, 1983; Argyris, 1983) but it appears also to have become locked within an assumptive base that systematically distorts our view of organizational reality and inadvertently helps reinforce and perfect the status quo (Brimm, 1972).

Why is there this lack of generative theorizing in action-research? And, more importantly, what can be done to rekindle the spirit, excitement and passion required of a science that wishes to be of vital significance to organizations? Earlier we talked about a philosophy of science congenial to the task. Sociorationalism, it was argued, represents an epistemological point of view conducive to catalytic theorizing. Ironically though, it can be argued that most action researchers *already do* subscribe to this or a similar view of science (Susman and Evered, 1978). Assuming this to be the case, it becomes an even greater puzzle why contemporary action-research continues to disregard theory-building as an integral and necessary component of the craft. In this section we shall broaden our discussion by taking a look at some of the metaphysical assumptions embedded in our conventional definitions of action-research–assumptions that can be shown to govern our thought and work in ways inimical to present interests.

Paradigm 1: Organizing As a Problem to be Solved

The intellectual and spiritual origins of action-research can be traced to Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist of German origin who coined the term *action-research* in 1944. The thrust of Lewin's work centered on the need to bridge the gap between science and the realm of practical affairs. Science, he said, should be used to inform and educate social practice, and subsequent action would then inform science: "We should consider action, research, and training as a triangle that should be kept together" (Lewin, 1948, p. 211). The twofold promise of an action science, according to Lewin, was to simultaneously contribute to the development of scientific knowledge (propositions of an if/then variety) and use such knowledge for bettering the human condition.

The immense influence of Lewin is a complete puzzle if we look only to his writings. The fact of the matter is that Lewin published only 2 papers–a mere 22 pages–concerned directly with the idea of action-research (Peters and Robinson, 1984). Indeed, it has been argued that his enduring influence is attributable not to these writings but to the sheer force and presence of the man himself. According to biographer Alfred Marrow (1968), Lewin was a passionate and creative thinker, continuously knocking at the door of the unknown, studying "topics that had been believed to be psychologically unapproachable." Lewin's character was marked by a spirit of inquiry that burned incessantly and affected all who came in contact with him, especially his students. The intensity of his presence was fueled further by the belief that inquiry itself could be used to construct a more democratic and dignified future. At least this was his hope and dream, for Lewin had *not* forgotten his experience as a refugee from fascism in the late 1930s. Understanding this background, then, it is clear why he revolted so strongly against a detached ivory-tower view of science, a science that is immersed in trivial matters, tranquilized by its standardized methods, and limited in its field of inquiry. Thus, the picture we have of Lewin shows him to have been a committed social scientist pioneering uncharted territory for the purpose of creating new knowledge about groups and societies that might advance the democratic ideal (see, for example, Lewin, 1952). It was this spirit–a relentless curiosity coupled with a conviction of the need for knowledge-guided societal development–that marked Lewin's creative impact on both his students and the field.

Much of this spirit is now gone from action-research. What is left is a series of assumptions about the world which exhibits little, if any, resemblance to the process of inquiry as Lewin lived it. While many of the words are the same, they have been taken too literally and in their translation over the years have been bloated into a set of metaphysical principles–assumptions about the essence of social existence-that directly undermine the intellectual and speculative spirit. Put bluntly, under current norms, action-research has largely failed as an instrument for advancing social knowledge of consequence and now risks being (mis)understood as little more than a crude empiricism imprisoned in a deficiency mode of thought.

DC reflection: The same idea that "action-research has largely failed as an instrument for advancing social knowledge of consequence and now risks being (mis)understood as little more than a crude empiricism imprisoned in a deficiency mode of thought" could have been written not just about action research but also about every one of the applied social sciences. Years later as it related to psychology, for example, Marty Seligman wrote that the field of psychology – an important foundational discipline for organizational studies – had become consumed with a single topic: mental illness. Through decades of rigorous research, it built a rich understanding of the various psychological conditions that render the population below 'normal'. "This progress has come at a high cost" writes Seligman: "Relieving the states that make life miserable, it seems, has made building the states that make life worth living less of a priority…(if you were hoping for this) you have probably found the field of psychology to be a puzzling disappointment" (2002: *ix*). So as you read about the deficit bias of action research, think about the same argument in relation to psychology, our news media, and everyday culture.

While the idea is multifaceted, we can quickly get a feel for it with a commonly understood example. Imagine the child who arrives home with a school report card. The parent anxiously opens the envelope. They see the following grades: "A", "A", "C", and "F." Where do you suppose the parents put the majority of their *inquiry* attention? The studies show, not surprisingly, nearly 80% of their help goes into correcting the Failure. Underlying this predictable response is a theory of change. It starts with a deficit-based set of assumptions, doesn't it? "There is a real problem here and we've got to correct this" it says. Then it asks, "What's at the root of this problem; how are we going to solve this so it doesn't happen again"? We all recognize this set of questions. Yet we must ask why would the parent, or any of us, assume that focusing on weaknesses would be the most generative pathway to excellence? Some say we gravitate to the F because of our negative brain; that we are hardwired to dwell on what's wrong or what's weak or what's dangerous. Others say that it is part of our culture, for example it is well documented that the big newspaper media devotes 80% of the headlines to violence, drugs and failings of politicians, instead of stories for example, of courage, generosity, and improbable acts humanity. So the debate goes in circles. "Is it our evolutionary brain or is it our culture—which one of these is the reason for the deficit biased 80-20 rule?"

A quick sketch of six sets of assumptions embedded in the conventional view of action-research will show exactly what we are talking about while also

answering our question about the discipline's lack of contribution to generative theory:

Research equals problem-solving; to do good research is to solve "real problems." So ingrained is this assumption that it scarcely needs documentation. Virtually every definition found in leading texts and articles equates action research with problem solving–as if "real" problem solving is virtually the essence of the discipline. For example, as French and Bell (1978) define it, "Action-research is both *an approach to problem solving–a model or paradigm, and a problem-solving process–a series of activities and events." (p.88)* Or in terms of the Bradford, Gibb, and Benne (1964) definition, "It is an application of scientific methodology in *the clarification and solution of practical problems" (p. 33). Similarly,* Frohman, Sashkin, and Kavanaugh (1976) *state: "Action research describes a particular process model whereby behavioral science knowledge is applied to help a client (usually a group or social system) solve real problems and not incidentally learn the process involved in problem solving" (p. 203). Echoing this theme, that research equals problem solving, researchers at the University of Michigan's Institute in Social Research state,*

Three factors need to be taken into account in an organization development [action-research] effort: The behaviors that are problematic, the conditions that create those behaviors, and the interventions or activities that will correct the conditions creating the problems. What is it that people are doing or not doing, that is a problem? Why are they doing or not doing these particular things? Which of a large number of possible interventions or activities would be most likely to solve the problems by focusing on why problems exist? (Hausser, Pecorella and Wissler, 1977, p. 2).

Here it is unmistakably clear that the primary focus of the action-research approach to organizational analysis is the ongoing array of concrete problems an organization faces. Of course, there are a number of differences in the discipline as to the overall definition and meaning of the emerging action-research paradigm. But this basic assumption–that research equals problem solving–is not one of them. In a recent review intended to discover elements of metatheoretical agreement within the discipline, Peters and Robinson (1984) discovered that out of 15 different dimensions of action-research studied, only 2 had unanimous support among leaders in the field. What were these two elements of agreement? Exactly as the definitions above suggest: Social science should be "action oriented" and "problem focused."

Inquiry, in action-research terms, is a matter of following the standardized rules of problem solving; knowledge is the result of good method. "In essence," write Blake and Mouton (1976), "it is a method of empirical data gathering that is *comprised of a set of rather standardized steps*: diagnosis, information gathering, feedback, and action planning" (pp. 101102). By following this ritual list, they contend that virtually any organization can be studied in a manner that will lead to usable knowledge. As Chiles (1983) puts it, "The virtue of the model lies in the sequential process.... Any other sequence renders the model

meaningless" (p. 318). The basic idea behind the model is that "in management, events proceed as planned unless some force, not provided against by the plan, acts upon events to produce an outcome not contemplated in the plan" (Kepner and Trego, 1973, p. 3). Thus, a problem is a deviation from some standard, and without precise diagnosis (step one) any attempt to resolve the problem will likely fail as a result of not penetrating the surface symptoms to discover the true causes. Hence, like a liturgical refrain which is seldom questioned or thought about, Cohen, Fink et al. (1984) tell the new student that *knowledge is the offspring of processing information through a distinct series of problem-solving stages*:

> Action-research begins with an identified problem. Data are then gathered in a way that allows a diagnosis which can produce a tentative solution, which is then implemented with the assumption that it is likely to cause new or unforeseen problems that will, in turn, need to be evaluated, diagnosed, and so forth. *This action-research method assumes a constantly evolving interplay between solutions, results, and new solutions.... This model is a general one applicable to solving any kind of problem in an ongoing organization* (pp. 359-360).

Action-research is utilitarian or technical; that is, it should be initiated and designed to meet a need in an area specified by the organization, usually by "top management." The search is controlled by the "felt need" or object of inquiry; everything that is not related to this object should be dismissed as irrelevant. As we are beginning to see, action-research conventionally understood does not really refer to research per se but rather to a highly focused and defined *type* of research called problem solving. Taken almost directly from the medical model, the disease orientation guides the process of inquiry in a highly programmed way. According to Levinson (1972), diagnostic action-research, "like a therapeutic or teaching relationship should be an alliance of both parties to discover and resolve these problems.... [The researcher] *should look for experiences which appear stressful to people. What kinds of occurrences disrupt or disorganize people" (p.* 37). Hence in a systematically limiting fashion, the general topic of research is largely prescribed–before inquiry even begins. As we would guess: "Typical questions in [action-research] data gathering or "problem sensing" would include: *What problems* do you see in your group, including problems between people that are interfering with getting the job done the way you would like to see it done? And *what problems* do you see in the broader organization? Such open-ended questions provide latitude on the part of respondents and encourage a *reporting of problems* as the individual sees them (French, 1969, pp. 183-185).

In problem solving it is assumed that something is broken, fragmented, not whole, and that it needs to be fixed. Thus the function of problem solving is to integrate, stabilize, and help raise to its full potential the workings of the status quo. By definition, a problem implies that one already has knowledge of what "should be"; thus one's *re*search is guided by an instrumental

purpose tied to what is already known. In this sense, problem solving tends to be inherently conservative; as a form of research it tends to produce and reproduce a universe of knowledge that remains sealed. As Staw (1984) points out in his review of the field, most organizational research is biased to serve managerial interests rather than exploring broader human and/or social purposes. But even more important, he argues, the field has not even served managerial interests well since research has taken a short-term problem focus rather than having formulated logic's of new forms of organization that do not exist. It is as if the discipline's *concept of social system development* means only clearing up distortions in current functioning (horizontal development) and does not include any conception of a stage-based movement toward an altogether new or transformed reality (vertical development or second-order change).

Action-research should not inquire into phenomena that transcend the competence of human reason. Questions that cannot be answered should not be asked and issues that cannot be acted upon should not be explored (i.e., action-research is not a branch of political philosophy, poetry, or theology). This proposition is a "smuggled-in" corollary to the preceding assumptions. It would appear that once one agrees with the ground rules of a pragmatic problem-solving science, the universe for inquiry is largely predetermined, defined, and delimited in scope. Specifically, what one agrees to a secularized view of a human universe that is predictable, controllable, and rational, one that is sequentially ordered into a series of causes and effects. As both a credit and a weakness, the problem-solving mode narrows our gaze in much the same manner that a blinder over one eye narrows the field of vision and distorts one's perception of depth. As a part of a long-term movement evidenced in social sciences, contemporary action-research embodies the trend toward metaphysical skepticism and denial (Quinney, 1982). That is, it operates out of a sacred void that cuts off virtually any inquiry into the vital forces of life. Indeed, the whole promise of modern science was that it would finally banish illusion, mystery, and uncertainty from the world. An inquiry process of immediate utility (problem solving), therefore, requires an anti-religious, secular spirit that will limit the realm of study to the sphere of the known. And because of the recognition that the formulation of a problem depends largely on one's views of what constitutes a solution, it is not surprising to find that *research on the utilization of research* shows a propensity for social scientists and organizations to agree on studying only those variables that can be manipulated (Beyer and Trice, 1982). As one might imagine, such a view has crippling implications for generative theorizing. For example, as typically practiced, action-research does little in the way of theorizing about or bringing beauty into organizational life. Does this mean that there is no beauty in organizing'? Does this mean that the realm of the esthetic has little or nothing to do with organizational dynamics'?

DC reflection: If inquiry is all about paying attention—and generative inquiry is about inspiring us to see new possibilities and decipher a world filled with meaning—then why so little talk in research methods about things like mindfulness? "For lack of attention" writes Evelyn Underhill, "a thousand forms of loveliness elude us every day" while the writer Henry Miller likewise comments "The moment one gives close attention to anything, even a blade of grass, it becomes a mysterious, awesome, indescribably magnificent world in itself (see Brussat and Brussat 1996 p52-53.)"

The tidy imagery of the problem-solving view is related to what Sigmund Koch (1981) has called, in his presidential address to the APA, the syndrome of "ameaningful thinking." One element of this syndrome is the perpetuation of the scientistic myth which uses the rhetoric of prediction and control to reassure people that their lives are not that complex, their situations not all that uncertain–and that their problems are indeed manageable through causal analysis. In the process, however, science tends to trivialize, and even evade, a whole class of issues that "transcend the competence of human reason" yet are clearly meaningful in the course of human experience. One way in which the field of inquiry is restricted, according to Koch, has to do with one's choice of methodology:

> There are times and circumstances in which able individuals, committed to inquiry, tend almost obsessively to frustrate the objectives of inquiry. It is as if uncertainty, mootness, ambiguity, cognitive infinitude were the most unbearable of the existential anguishes.... *Ameaningful* thought or inquiry regards knowledge as the result of "processing" rather than discovery. It presumes that knowledge is an almost automatic result of a gimmickry, an assembly line, a "methodology".... So strongly does it see knowledge under such aspects that it sometimes seems to suppose the object of inquiry to be an ungainly and annoying irrelevance (1981, p. 259).

To be sure, this is not to argue that all action-research is "ameaningful" or automatically tied to a standardized problem-solving method. Likewise, much of the success achieved by action-research until now may be attributed to its restricted focus on that which is "solvable. " However, it is important to recognize that the problem-solving method of organizational inquiry quite systematically paints a picture of organizational life in which a whole series of colors are considered untouchable. In this way the totality of being is obviously obscured, leading to a narrowed conception of human nature and cultural possibility.

DC reflection: A few years ago, for example, it was standard fare for our field to study topics such as low morale. Then a decade later the topic focus shifted to job satisfaction. But why weren't we studying flourishing

or thriving? Out of 44,000 refereed journal articles in the late 1990s in the human sciences, guess how many of them were focused on human deficit—what's wrong with the human being?" It was around 98% or nearly 43,120 publications on human defects (see Cooperrider and Godwin, 2010). In the field of organization development this focus on gaps, root causes of failure, and defects began to have an anti-inspirational effect on managers. In a curious turn, organizations and executives began to turn away from OD firms and instead began to flock to designers and design studios—specialists in artistry and thinking beyond the possible—for inspiring and generative organization development work. If designers could bring their product design inspirations into OD work why couldn't the field of OD start looking more like design studios?

Problems are "out there" to be studied and solved. The ideal product of action-research is a mirror-like reflection of the organization's problems and causes. As "objective third party " there is little role for passion and speculation. The action-researcher should be neither a passionate advocate nor an inspired dreamer (utopian thinker). One of the laudable and indeed significant values associated with action-research has been its insistence upon a collaborative form of inquiry. But unfortunately, from a generative-theory perspective, the term *collaboration* has become virtually synonymous with an idealized image of the researcher as a facilitator and mirror, rather than an active and fully engaged social participant. As facilitator of the problem-solving process, the action-researcher has three generally agreed-upon "primary intervention tasks": to help generate valid organizational data; to enable others to make free and informed choices on the basis of the data, and to help the organization generate internal commitment to their choices. Elaborating further, Argyris (1970) states:

> One condition that seems so basic as to be defined as axiomatic is the generation of *valid information.... Valid information is that which describes the factors, plus their interrelationships that create the problem* (pp. 16–17).

Furthermore, it is also assumed that for data to be useful there must be a claim to neutrality. The data should represent an accurate reflection of the observed facts. As French and Bell (1978) describe it, it is important for the action-researcher to stress the objective, fact-finding features: "A key value inculcated in organizational members is a belief in the validity, desirability, and usefulness of the data" (p. 79). Then through feedback that "refers to activities and processes that 'reflect' or 'mirror' an objective picture of the real world" (p. 111), the action-researcher facilitates the process of prioritizing problems and helps others make choices for action. And because the overarching objective is to help the organization develop its own internal resources, the action-researcher should not play an active role or take an advocate stance that might in the long run foster an unhealthy dependency. As French and Bell (1978)

again explain, an active role "tends to negate a collaborative, developmental approach to improving organizational processes" (p. 203).

As must be evident, every one of these injunctions associated with the problem-solving view of action-research serves directly to diminish the likelihood of imaginative, passionate, creative theory. To the extent that generative theory represents an inspired theoretical articulation of a new and different future, it appears that action-research would have nothing to do with it. According to French and Bell (1978) "Even the presenting of options can be overdone. If the [action-researcher's] ideas become the focal point for prolonged discussion and debate, the consultant has clearly shifted away from the facilitator role" (p. 206).

At issue here is something even more important. The fundamental attitude embodied in the problem-solving view is separationist. It views the world as something external to our consciousness of it, something "out there." As such it tends to identify problems not here but "over there": Problems are not ours, but yours; not a condition common to all, but a condition belonging to this person, their group, or that nation (witness the acid-rain issue). Thus, the action-researcher is content to facilitate *their problem solving* because he or she is not part of that world. To this extent, the problem-solving view dissects reality and parcels it out into fragmented groups, families, tribes, or countries. In both form and substance it denies the wholeness of a dynamic and interconnected social universe. And once the unity of the world is broken, passionless, mindless, mirror-like inquiry comes to make logical sense precisely because the inquirer has no ownership or stake in a world that is not his or hers to begin with.

Organizational life is problematic. Organizing is best understood as a historically situated sequence of problems, causes, and solutions among people, events, and things. Thus, the ultimate aim and product of action-research is the production of institutions that have a high capacity to perceive, formulate, and solve an endless stream of problems. The way we conceive of the social world is of consequence to the kind of world we discover and even, through our reconstructions, helps to create it. Action-researchers, like scientists in other areas, approach their work from a framework based on taken-for-granted assumptions. To the extent that these assumptions are found useful, and are affirmed by colleagues, they remain unquestioned as a habitual springboard for one's work. In time the conventional view becomes so solidly embedded that it assumes the status of being "real," without alternative (Morgan, 1980; Mannheim, 1936). As human beings we are constantly in symbolic interaction, attempting to develop conceptions that will allow us to make sense of and give meaning to experience through the use of language, ideas, signs, theories, and names. As many have recently shown, the use of metaphor is a basic mode under which symbolism works and exerts an influence on the development of language, science, and cognitive growth (Morgan, 1980; Ortony, 1979; Black, 1962; Keeley, 1980). Metaphor works by asserting that A equals B or is very much like B. We use metaphors constantly to open our eyes and sensitize us to phenomenal realities

that otherwise might go unnoticed. Pepper (1942) argues that all science proceeds from specifiable "world hypotheses" and behind every world hypothesis rests the boldest of "root metaphors."

Within what we are calling Paradigm I action-research, there lies a guiding metaphor which has a power impact on the theory-building activity of the discipline. When organizations are approached from the deficiency perspective of Paradigm I, all the properties and modes of organizing are scrutinized for their dysfunctional but potentially solvable problems. It is all too clear then that the root metaphor of the conventional view is that *organizing is a problem* to be solved. This image focuses the researcher's eye on a visible but narrow realm of reality that resides "out there" and is causally determined, deficient by some preexisting standard–on problems that are probably both understandable and solvable. Through analysis, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up evaluation the sequential world of organizing can be kept on its steady and productive course. And because social existence is at its base a problem to be solved, real living equals problem solving, and living better is an adaptive learning process whereby we acquire new and more effective means for tackling tough problems. The good life, this image informs, depends on solving problems in such a way that problems of utility are identified and solutions of high quality are found and carried out with full commitment. As one leading theorist describes:

> For many scholars who study organizations and management, the central characteristic of organizations is that they are problem-solving systems whose success is measured by how efficiently they solve problems associated with accomplishing their primary mission and how effectively they respond to emergent problems. Kilmann's approach (1979, pp. 214-215) is representative of this perspective: "One might even define the essence of management as problem defining and problem solving, whether the problems are well-structured, ill-structured, technical, human, or environmental.... In this view, the core task of the executive is problem management. Although experience, personality, and specific technical expertise are important, the primary skill of the successful executive is the ability to manage the problem-solving process in such a way that important problems are identified and solutions of high quality are found and carried out with the full commitment of organizational members (Kolb, 1983, pp. 109-110).

From here it is just a short conceptual jump to the idealized aim of Paradigm 1 research:

> Action-research tends to build into the client system an institutionalized pattern for continuously collecting data and examining the system's processes, as well as for the continuous review of *known* problem areas. *Problem solving becomes very much a way of organizational life* (Margulies and Raia, 1972, p. 29).

I have tried in these few pages to highlight the almost obvious point that the deficiency/problem orientation is pervasive and holds a subtle but powerful grasp on the discipline's imagination and focus. It can be argued that the generative incapacity of contemporary action-research is securely linked with the discipline's guiding metaphor of social-organizational existence. As noted by many scholars, the theoretical output of the discipline is virtually nonexistent,

and what theory there is, is largely problem-focused (theories of turnover, intergroup conflict, processes of dehumanization. See Staw, 1984 for an excellent review). Thus, our theories, like windsocks, continue to blow steadily onward in the direction of our conventional gaze. Seeing the world as a problem has become "very much a way of organizational life."

> DC reflection: The ossification of intellectual traditions is nothing new. We still see organizations as machines, for example, and we can see how this style of thought still serves to undergird the development of bureaucratic organization. But with today's compelling neuroscience for example, the metaphor of organizations as an intelligent brain network is taking off. So the good news here is that we can open even our deepest assumptions to re-creation and renewal, sometimes with dramatic paradigm shifting effect.

It is our feeling that the discipline has reached a level of fatigue arising from repetitious use of its standardized model. Fatigue, as Whitehead (1929) so aptly surmised, arises from an act of excluding the impulse toward novelty, which is the antithesis of the life of the mind and of speculative reason. To be sure, there can be great adventure in the process of inquiry. Yet not many action-researchers today return from their explorations refreshed and revitalized, like pioneers returning home, with news of lands unknown but most certainly there. Perhaps there is a different root metaphor from which to work.

Proposal for a Second Dimension

Our effort here is but one in a small yet growing attempt to generate new perspectives on the conduct of organizational research, perspectives that can yield the kind of knowledge necessary for both understanding and transforming complex social-organizational systems (Torbert, 1983; Van Maanen et al., 1982; Mitroff and Kilmann, 1978; Smirchich, 1983; Forester, 1983; Argyris, 1970; Friedlander, 1977). It is apparent that among the diverse views currently emerging there is frequently great tension. Often the differences become the battleground for fierce debate about theories of truth, the meaning of "facts," political agendas, and personal assertions of will. But, more fruitfully, what can be seen emerging is a heightened sensitivity to and interdisciplinary recognition of the fact that, based on "the structure of knowledge" (Kolb, 1984), there may be multiple ways of knowing, each of them valid in its own realm when judged according to its own set of essential assumptions and purposes. In this sense there are many different ways of studying the same phenomenon, and the insights generated by one approach are, at best, partial and incomplete. According to Jurgen Habermas (1971) different perspectives can be evaluated

only in terms of their specified "human interests," which can broadly be differentiated into the realm of practical rationality and the realm of technical rationality. In more straightforward language Morgan (1983) states:

> The selection of method implies some view of the situation being studied, for any decision on *how* to study a phenomenon carries with it certain assumptions or explicit answers to the question, "What is being studied?" Just as we select a tennis racquet rather than a golf club to play tennis because we have a prior conception as to what the game of tennis involves, so too, in relation to the process of social research, we select or favor particular kinds of methodology because we have implicit or explicit conceptions as to what we are trying to do with our research (p. 19).

Thus, in adopting one mode over another the researcher directly influences what he or she will finally discover and accomplish.

It is the contention of this chapter that advances in generative theorizing will come about for action-research when the discipline decides to expand its universe of exploration, seeks to discover new questions, and rekindles a fresh perception of the extra ordinary in everyday organizational life. In this final section we now describe the assumptions and philosophy of an applied administrative science that seeks to embody these suggestions in a form of organization study we call appreciative inquiry. In distinction to conventional action-research, the knowledge-interest of appreciative inquiry lies not so much in problem solving as in social innovation. Appreciative inquiry refers to a research perspective that is uniquely intended for discovering, understanding, and fostering innovations in social-organizational arrangements and processes.5 Its purpose is to contribute to the generative-theoretical aims of social science and to use such knowledge to promote egalitarian dialogue leading to social-system effectiveness and integrity. Whatever else it may be, social-system effectiveness is defined here quite specifically as a congruence between social-organizational values (the ever-changing non-native set of values, ideas, or interests that system members hold concerning the question, "How should we organize ourselves?") and everyday social- organizational practices (cf. Torbert, 1983). Thus, appreciative inquiry refers to both a search for knowledge and a theory of intentional collective action which are designed to help evolve the normative vision and will of a group, organization, or society as a whole. It is an inquiry process that affirms our symbolic capacities of imagination and mind as well as our social capacity for conscious choice and cultural evolution. As a holistic form of inquiry, it asks a series of questions not found in either a logical-positivist conception of science or a strictly pragmatic, problem-solving mode of action-research. Yet as shown in Figure 1, its aims are both scientific (in a sociorationalist sense) and pragmatic (in a social-innovation sense) as well as metaphysical and normative (in the sense of attempting ethically to affirm all that social existence really is and should become). As a way of talking about the framework as it is actually practiced, we shall first examine four guiding principles that have directed our work in the area to date:

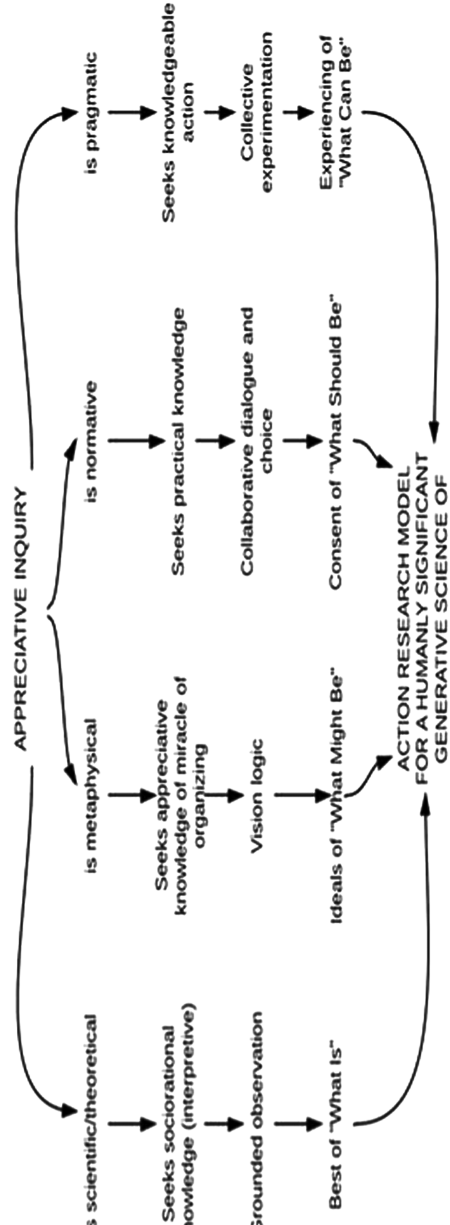

Figure 1. Dimensions of Appreciative Inquiry.

Principle 1: Research into the social (innovation) potential of organizational, life should begin with appreciation

This basic principle assumes that every social system "works" to some degree–that it is not in a complete state of entropy–and that a primary task of research is to discover, describe, and explain those social innovations, however small, which serve to give "life" to the system and activate members' competencies and energies as more fully functioning participants in the formation and transformation of organizational realities. That is, the appreciative approach takes its inspiration from the current state of "what is" and seeks a comprehensive understanding of the factors and forces of organizing (ideological, techno-structural, cultural) that serve to heighten the total potential of an organization in ideal-type human and social terms.

Principle 2: Research into the social potential of organizational life should be applicable

To be significant in a human sense, an applied science of administration should lead to the generation of theoretical knowledge that can be used, applied, and thereby validated in action. Thus, an applicable inquiry process is neither utopian in the sense of generating knowledge about "no place" (Sargent, 1982) nor should it be confined to academic circles and presented in ways that have little relevance to the everyday language and symbolism of those for whom the findings might be applicable.

Principle 3: Research into the social potential of organizational life should be provocative

Here it is considered axiomatic that an organization is, in fact, an open-ended indeterminate system capable of (1) becoming more than it is at any given moment, and (2) learning how to actively take part in guiding its own evolution. Hence, appreciative knowledge of what is (in terms of "peak" social innovations in organizing) is suggestive of what *might be* and such knowledge can be used to generate images of realistic developmental opportunities that can be experimented with on a wider scale. In this sense, appreciative inquiry can be both pragmatic and visionary. It becomes provocative to the extent that the abstracted findings of a study take on normative value for members of an organization, and this can happen only through their own critical deliberation and choice ("We feel that this particular finding is [or not] important for us to envision as an ideal to be striving for in practice on a wider scale"). It is in this way then, that appreciative inquiry allows us to put intuitive, visionary logic on a firm empirical footing and to use systematic research to help the organization's members shape the social world according to their own imaginative and moral purposes.

Principle 4: Research into the social potential of organizational life should be collaborative

This overarching principle points to the assumed existence of an inseparable relationship between the process of inquiry and its content. A collaborative relationship between the researcher and members of an organization is, therefore, deemed essential on the basis of both epistemological (Susman and Evered, 1978) and practical/ethical grounds (Habermas, 1971; Argyris, 1970). Simply put, a unilateral approach to the study of social innovation (bringing something new into the social world) is a direct negation of the phenomenon itself.

The spirit behind each of these four principles of appreciative inquiry is to be found in one of the most ancient archetypes or metaphorical symbols of hope and inspiration that humankind has ever known–the miracle and mystery of being. Throughout history, people have recognized the intimate relationship between being seized by the unfathomable and the process of appreciative knowing or thought (Marcel, 1963; Quinney, 1982; Jung, 1933; Maslow, 1968; Ghandi, 1958). According to Albert Schweitzer (1969), for example, it is recognition of the ultimate mystery that elevates our perception beyond the world of ordinary objects, igniting the life of the mind and a "reverence for life":

> In all respects the universe remains mysterious to man.... As soon as man does not take his existence for granted, but beholds it as something unfathomably mysterious, thought begins. This phenomenon has been repeated time and time again in the history of the human race. Ethical affirmation of life is the intellectual act by which man ceases simply to live at random.... [Such] thought has a dual task to accomplish: to lead us out of a naive and into a profounder affirmation of life and the universe; and to help us progress from ethical impulses to a rational system of ethics (p. 33).

For those of us breastfed by an industrial giant that stripped the world of its wonder and awe, it feels, to put it bluntly, like an irrevelant, absurd, and even distracting interruption to pause, reflect deeply, and then humbly accept the depth of what we can never know–and to consider the ultimate reality of living for which there are no coordinates or certainties, only questions.

DC refection: Just a personal disclosure here. I wrote these lines shortly after my first child was born in September of 1984. A year later when I defended the thesis of Appreciative Inquiry I dedicated that dissertation to Daniel Cooperrider, the newborn. Why? Because for the first time I felt, at a deeper and more experiential way, the reverence for life that Albert Schweitzer wrote about, as well as how the experience of *the miracle of life on this planet* can shape what we see. Joshua Hershel once said: "What we cannot comprehend by analysis, we become aware of in awe"—and Daniel's birth was, for me overwhelming, in a positive but unpredictable way. I never felt more awake or more alive than in the life-giving moment of birth. Afterward, I saw everything and everyone in

new ways: with more humility, sensitivity, gratitude, and personal and professional curiosity. There was such a positive dislodgement of certainty (like vertigo) that even my work came alive in ways I had not imagined. My writing began to have more feeling. I began to read accounts of shamans and mystics and had a new sense of what Joseph Campbell meant when he said, "awe is what moves us forward?" In all of this I began to have a sense of what inquiry really is. *Inquiry is the experience of mystery, which then changes our lives*. There simply is no inquiry where there is no experience of mystery. Inquiry takes us, by definition, beyond the edges of the known into the unknown.

Medicine cannot tell me, for example, what it means that my newborn son has life and motion and soul, anymore than the modern physicist can tell me what "nothingness" is, which, they say, makes up over 99 percent of the universe. In fact, if there is anything we have learned from a great physicist of our time is that the promise of certainty is a lie (Hiesenberg, 1958), and by living this lie as scientistic doctrine, we short-circuit the gift of complementarity–the capacity for dialectically opposed modes of knowing, which adds richness, depth, and beauty to our lives (Bohr, 1958). Drugged by the products of our industrial machine we lose sight of and connection with the invisible mystery at the heart of creation, an ultimate power beyond rational understanding.

In the same way that birth of a living, breathing, loving, thinking human being is an inexplicable mystery, so too it can be said in no uncertain terms that *organizing is a miracle* of cooperative human interaction, of which there can never be final explanation. In fact, to the extent that organizations are indeed born and re-created through dialogue, they truly are unknowable as long as such creative dialogue remains. At this point in time there simply are no organizational theories that can account for the life-giving essence of cooperative existence, especially if one delves deeply enough. But, somehow we forget all this. We become lulled by our simplistic diagnostic boxes. The dilemma faced by our discipline in terms of its creative contribution to knowledge is summed up perfectly in the title of a well known article by one of the major advocates of action-research. The title by Marv Wiesbord (1976), has proven prophetic: "Organizational diagnosis: six places to look for trouble, with or without a theory." Content to transfer our conceptual curiosity over to "experts" who finally must know, our creative instincts lie pitifully dormant. Instead of explorers we become mechanics.

This, according to Koch (1981), is the source of "ameaningful" thinking. As Kierkegaard (1954) suggests, it is the essence of a certain dull-minded routine called "philistinism:

> Devoid of imagination, as the Philistine always is, he lives in a certain trivial province of experience as to how things go, what is possible…. Philistinism tranquilizes itself in the trivial (pp. 174-175).

As we know, a miracle is something that is beyond all possible verification, yet is experienced as real. As a symbol, the word *miracle* represents unification of the sacred and secular into a realm of totality that is at once terrifying and beautiful, inspiring and threatening. Quinney (1982) has suggested with respect to the rejuvenation of social theory, that such a unified viewpoint is altogether necessary; that it can have a powerful impact on the discipline precisely because in a world that is at once sacred and secular there is no place, knowledge, or phenomenon that is without mystery. The "miracle" then is pragmatic in its effect when sincerely apprehended by a mind that has chosen not to become "tranquilized in the trivial." In this sense, the metaphor "life is a miracle" is not so much an idea as it is–or can be–a central feature of experience enveloping (1) our perceptual consciousness; (2) our way of relation to others, the world, and our own research; and (3) our way of knowing. Each of these points can be highlighted by a diverse literature.

In terms of the first, scholars have suggested that the power of what we call the miracle lies in its capacity to advance one's perceptual capacity what Maslow (1968) has called a B-cognition or a growth-vs-deficiency orientation, or what Kolb (1984) has termed integrative consciousness. Kolb writes:

> The transcendental quality of integrative consciousness is precisely that, a "climbing out of"…. This state of consciousness is not reserved for the monastery, but it is a necessary ingredient for creativity in any field. Albert Einstein once said, "The most beautiful and profound emotion one can feel is a sense of the mystical…. It is the dower of all true science" (p. 158).

Second, as Gabriel Marcel (1963) explained in his William James lectures at Harvard on *The Mystery of Being*, the central conviction of life as a mystery creates for us a distinctly different relationship to the world than the conviction of life as a problem to be solved:

> A problem is something met which bars my passage. It is before me in its entirety. A mystery on the other hand is something I find *myself* caught up in, and whose essence is therefore not before me in its entirety. It is though in this province the distinction between "in me" and "before me" loses its meaning (p. 80).

Berman's (1981) recent analysis comes to a similar conclusion. The re-enchantment of the world gives rise to a "participatory consciousness" where there is a sense of personal stake, ownership, and partnership with the universe:

> The view of nature which predominated the West down to the eve of the Scientific Revolution was that of an enchanted world. Rocks, trees, rivers, and clouds were all seen as wondrous, alive, and human beings felt at home in this environment. The cosmos, in short, was a place of *belonging*. A member of this cosmos was not an alienated observer of it but a direct participant in its drama. His personal destiny was bound up with its destiny, and this relationship gave meaning to his life.

Third, as so many artists and poets have shown, there is a relationship between what the Greeks called *thaumazein*–an experience which lies on the

borderline between wonderment and admiration–*and a type of intuitive apprehension or knowing that we call appreciative. For Keats, the purpose of his work was:*

> to accept things as I saw them, to enjoy the beauty I perceived for its own sake, without regard to ultimate truth or falsity, and to make a description of it the end and purpose of my appreciations. Similarly for Shelley: Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world… it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful… it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty, which is in the spirit of its forms.

And in strikingly similar words, learning theorist David Kolb (1984) analyzes the structure of the knowing mind and reports:

> Finally, appreciation is a process of affirmation. Unlike criticism, which is based on skepticism and doubt (compare Polanyi, 1968, pp. 269ff.), appreciation is based on belief, trust, and conviction. And from this affirmative embrace flows a deeper fullness and richness of experience. This act of affirmation forms the foundation from which vital comprehension can develop…. Appreciative apprehension and critical comprehension are thus fundamentally different processes of knowing. Appreciation of immediate experience is an act of attention, valuing, and affirmation, whereas critical comprehension of symbols is based on objectivity (which involves a priori controls of attention, as in double-blind controlled experiments), dispassionate analysis, and skepticism (pp. 104105).

We have cited these various thinkers in detail for several reasons: first, to underscore the fact that the powerful images of problem and miracle (in)form qualitatively distinct modes of inquiry which then can shape our awareness, relations, and knowledge; and second, to highlight the conviction that the renewal of generative theory requires that we enter into the realm of the metaphysical. The chief characteristic of the modern mind has been the banishment of mystery from the world, and along with it an ethical affirmation of life that has served history as a leading source of values, hope, and normative bonding among people. In historical terms, we have steadily forgotten how to dream.

In contrast to a type of research that is lived without a sense of mystery, the appreciative mode awakens the desire to create and discover new social possibilities that can enrich our existence and give it meaning. In this sense, appreciative inquiry seeks an imaginative and fresh perception of organizations as "ordinary magic" as if seen for the first time–or perhaps the last time (Hayward, 1984). The appreciative mode, in exploration of ordinary magic, is an inquiry process that takes nothing for granted, searching to apprehend the basis of organizational life and working to articulate those possibilities giving witness to a better existence.

DC reflection: When we fuse the word inquiry—that is, the experience of mystery which opens our minds and changes us through dislodgement of certainty—with the word appreciation, we are talking about things like awe, inspiration, veneration, delight wonderment, humility and valuing.

I love the Greek term *thaumazein* the most—again it refers to an experience, which lies on the borderline between wonderment and admiration. In that sense appreciation draws our eye toward life, but stirs our feelings, excites our curiosity, and provides inspiration to the mind of possibility. In contrast to assertions of positivity or *firm* affirmation where there is no inquiry, the appreciative eye actually seeks uncertainty as it is thrown into the elusive and emergent nature of life itself. Appreciation, in my view, is generative rather than conservative precisely because it allows itself to be inspired by the voice of mystery and the miracle of life. It calls us to see what Bruner refers to as "the immensity of the commonplace" or "epiphanies of the ordinary" (see Brunner, 1986, p. 198.) Samuel Miller was speaking of awakening the appreciative eye when he said "In the muddled mess of this world, in the confusion and the boredom, we ought to be able to spot something—an event, a person, a memory, an act, a turning of the soul, a flash of bright wings, the surprise of sweet compassion—somewhere we ought to pick out a glory to celebrate." (in Brussat and Brussat, 1996, p. 16). In many ways I've begun to question whether there can be inquiry where there is no appreciation, valuing, or thaumazein, the borderline between wonderment and admiration. It's about reading the world for meaning and possibility. And appreciative inquiry can happen across all circumstances, not just the so-called positive moments. AI can happen when we are searching for *excellence* or positive deviations from the norm; or when we are deciphering the extraordinary in *the ordinary*; and it can also happen during moments of *tragedy* when we are alert to "What new meanings are being made possible here during these moments of magnified meaning making?" or "What new, possible good can emerge from this?" In all of this lurks the reverence for life and the ability to search for things that give life, breathe life, harmonize life, and energize meaning and connection.

The metaphysical dimension of appreciative inquiry is important not so much as a way of finding answers but is important insofar as it heightens the living experience of awe and wonder which leads us to the wellspring of new questions–much like a wide-eyed explorer without final destination. Only by raising innovative questions will innovations in theory and practice be found. As far as action-research is concerned, this appears to have been the source of Lewin's original and catalytic genius. We too can re-awaken this spirit. Because the questions we ask largely determine what we find, we should place a premium on that which informs our curiosity and thought. The metaphysical question of what makes social existence possible will never go away. The generative-theoretical question of compelling new possibilities will never go away. The normative question of what kind of social-organizational order is best, most

dignified, and just, will never go away, nor will the pragmatic question of how to move closer to the ideal.

DC reflection: Even in its earliest articulation, AI recognized the power of questions, that is, that we live in worlds our questions create and continues to open wide the vast horizons implied: could it be that we live in worlds that our questions create?

In Letters to a Young Poet, Rilke wrote:

> Be patient…try to love the questions themselves…
>
> Live the questions now.
>
> Perhaps you will then gradually without noticing it, Live along some distant day in into the answers.

In its pragmatic form appreciative inquiry represents a data-based theory building methodology for evolving and putting into practice the collective will of a group or organization. It has one and only one aim–to provide a generative theoretical springboard for normative dialogue that is conducive to self-directed experimentation in social innovation. It must be noted, however, that the conceptual world which appreciative inquiry creates remains–despite its empirical content–an illusion. This is important to recognize because it is precisely because of its visionary content, placed in juxtaposition to grounded examples of the extraordinary, that appreciative inquiry opens the status quo to possible transformations in collective action. It appreciates the best of "what is" to ignite intuition of the possible and then firmly unites the two logically, caringly, and passionately into a theoretical hypothesis of an envisioned future. By raising ever new questions of an appreciative, applicable, and provocative nature, the researcher collaborates in the scientific construction of his or her world.6

DC note: It is so very interesting to me now decades later, to notice that only one paragraph in the entire early paper, the one just above, begins to hint at what today we call the 4-D *method* of appreciative inquiry. The real method is not so much a method at all, but an existential stance and conscious construction—including who we are and how we feel—in relation to the miracle and mystery of life and our astonishing subject matter. Our metaphors matter as we seek to discover world's full of meaning, unlimited possibility, and generative theory. For AI life is a sacred adventure. Physicist and Nobel Laureate Albert Einstien once asked, "What's the most important question you can ask in life?" He replied by essentially asking each of us to wonder if, deep down, do we believe that the

universe is fundamentally good, that it's a friendly place—or not. His words were wonderfully compact:

> "There are only two ways to live your life: as though nothing is a miracle, or as though everything is a miracle."

CONCLUSION

What we have tried to do with this chapter is present conceptual refiguration of action-research; to present a proposal arguing for an enriched multidimensional view of action-research, which seeks to be both theoretically generative and progressive in a broad human sense. In short, the argument is a simple one stating that there is a need to re-awaken the imaginative spirit of action-research and that to do this we need a fundamentally different perspective toward our organizational world, one that admits to its uncertainties, ambiguities, mysteries, and unexplicable, miraculous nature. But now we must admit, with a certain sense of limited capability and failure, that the viewpoint articulated here is simply not possible to define and is very difficult to speak of in technological, step-by-step terms. From the perspective of rational thought, the miraculous is impossible. From that of problem solving it is nonsense. And from that of empirical science, it is categorically denied (Reeves, 1984). Just as we cannot prove the proposition that organizing is a problem to be solved, so, too, we cannot prove in any rational, analytical, or empirical way that organizing is a miracle to be embraced. Each stance represents a commitment–a core conviction so to speak–which is given to each of us as a choice. We do, however, think that through discipline and training the appreciative eye can be developed to see the ordinary magic, beauty, and real possibility in organizational life; but we are not sure we can so easily transform our central convictions.

In sum, the position we have been developing here is that for action-research to reach its potential as a vehicle for social innovation, it needs to begin advancing theoretical knowledge of consequence–that good theory may be one of the most powerful means human beings have for producing change in a post-industrial world; that the discipline's steadfast commitment to a problem-solving view of the world is a primary restraint on its imagination, passion, and positive contribution; that appreciative inquiry represents a viable complement to conventional forms of action- research, one uniquely suited for social innovation instead of problem solving; and that through our assumptions and choice of method we largely create the world we later discover.

DC's final reflection: In closing I want to say that its been a thrill to see Appreciative Inquiry grow, blossom beyond imagination, and to have helped in the development of "a positive revolution in change"—where an AI approach insists that change is not simply about moving from a "-7" to a more neutral"0", but it also all about a qualitatively different kind of change that moves from a "+2" to a plus "+20" or "+200"—where positivity and the discovery of all that is best in life is not simply the end but the essential starting point and the primary means.

In other words life-inspiring strengths do more than perform, *they transform*.

When Marcus Buckingham (2006), for example, spoke about "the strengths revolution" bursting onto the scene in management, he pointed to this 1987 AI article as one of the most formative theoretical foundations. When Kim Cameron, Bob Quinn, and Jane Dutton designed the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) at University of Michigan they lifted up and honored AI as one of the field's pillars (Cameron, et al., 2003). Likewise, in the first graduate program in the newly christened Positive Psychology field in 2000, AI was placed immediately into the heart of the curriculum (Seligman, 2012) and, in the 2017 World Congress on Positive Psychology, AI was featured in a "Founders Symposia" where I was invited to speak about AI's early days along with "Appreciative Inquiry and the Macro Promise of Positive Psychology."[1]

In addition to all of this—that is, the strengths-based leadership domain and the rapidly growing fields of Positive Psychology and Positive Organizational Scholarship—AI has blossomed inside the optimistic "design thinking" world and it has been singled out for its impact in volumes such as *Innovation Methods Mapping* (VanPatter and Pastor 2016) and *Managing as Designing* (Boland and Collopy, 2004) and *Designing Information and Organizations with a Positive Lens* (Avital et al., 2007). And finally, in terms of new domains with close affinity toward AI's valuing "the best of what is" and its "reverence for life" there is the exciting field of Biomimicry. Bios, from the early Greeks, means life, and just as appreciative inquiry is the search for what gives life in human systems and has been called bio-centric, biomimicry is a science that studies nature's extraordinary models and then takes inspiration from these designs to innovate in human systems, e.g., a solar cell inspired by a leaf. Biomimcry—the conscious emulation of life's genius—is all about innovation inspired by nature.

So what might happen for *OD* when we unite each of these fields and domains and add them all to our knowledge base of the applied behavioral sciences? Could it be that a whole new species of organization development and change might be emerging?

Recently my colleagues and I have begun to envision and write about the new OD, something we are calling "the next IPOD"—*innovation-inspired positive organization development* (Cooperrider and Godwin, 2011.) While it is clearly beyond the scope of this chapter to illuminate its new human science knowledge-base, it's new change equation, and its Cooperrider-Godwin 8-Stage P.O.S.I.T.I.V.E Change Platform with AI type action research at the heart, we can say three brief things about the possibility that the new OD involves a "new species" of change (Cooperrider and Godwin, 2015.)

The first is that the call for OD *innovation* is eclipsing the call for OD *intervention*. Design firms, for instance the acclaimed IDEO in Silicon Valley, have expanded their mission from product design and have expanded into organizational transformation, embodying the core values of OD, minus the predominant focus on intervention—and organizations are flocking to them and other design firms because of their creative confidence, empathy, capacity for positive reframing, their optimism and opportunity focus, and their recognition that the early phases of creative innovation require massive amounts of inspiration and positive emotion such as hope, sense of possibility, and joy. Their work is all about the art of creating, and *creating* is often quite different than *solving*. Of course innovation and intervention are both about change, and both have their respective strengths, but they operate from different theories of change, time frames, methodological assumptions, and distinctive practices. Can you envision a future OD that can help organizations out-innovate and out-inspire the innovators, as well as rise to the standards of excellence found in some of our world's most dazzling, supercreative design firms?

Innovation is not the whole story but it's the big story for the future of OD. There is no question, in business at least, that we've reached a stage of diminishing returns in relationship to the near obsessive treadmill of incrementalism. In many ways, the resources placed into correcting errors, squeezing out one more ounce of efficiency, and intervening with one more problem solving task force to change the corporate culture is an anachronism. Being the best error-reducer at best helps you stand in place; it will never produce the ideas that can take an industry by surprise, humanistically empower and inspire an entire workforce, and establish distinctive leadership. The next stage of OD must take on the innovation agenda *of our clients*. It's the world *they* live in.

The second reason for the call for a more appreciative, strengths-based, and innovation inspired OD is that quite suddenly the metaphor of the world is a machine-like "problem-to-be-solved" has given way to a successor metaphor that the world is an interconnected "universe of

strengths" with unlimited abundance. The global wired marketplace is, for sure, a permanently revolutionary force. Its been called "the strengths economy" and success in this new economy is all about lifting up and uniting strengths—often free and totally accessible—that no one else can see. Airbnb and Uber, as models of the strengths economy, are platforms for uniting and leveraging strengths that have always been there. Empowered by digital technology that annihilates the barriers of time and space, these and many other strength-linking organizations are producing results that are little short of miraculous. The implications are truly staggering: Amazon's Kindle platform allows anyone to write a book; Uber in now the world's largest taxi company owns no vehicles, and Airbnb, the world's largest "hotel" owns no real estate. In each case the "external" community or universe of strengths provides the resources for an interactive ecosystem in which large magnitudes of value can be created and scaled rapidly. In this new economy, OD needs to help organizations of all kinds to bring in what Peter Drucker so aptly called "the meaningful outside" and help new relationships form and develop.

Boundaries come alive through positive network effects. And this relies, by definition, on appreciative ways of knowing; it's what Tojo Thanchenkery calls "appreciative intelligence" that is, the capacity to see the towering oak in the acorn (Thatchenkery & Metzker, 2006). Imagine what would happen to you if you had the ability to see consistently, and connect with, every strength—every one of the capacities—inherent in the world around you; or to see every positive potential in your son or daughter; or, like Michelangelo, the intellectual ability to "sense" the towering, historic figure of David "already existing" in the huge slab of marble—even before the reality. Indeed, the appreciable world—the universe of strength, value, and life-generating potential all around us—is so much larger than our normal appreciative capacity. So what does this mean for IPOD—an innovation inspired positive OD? For me it means a more macro-OD. To take on the massive innovation agenda that many are envisioning (the great global challenges) will require new macro approaches in OD theory, practice and education. The macromangement context of tomorrow demands a reconstruction of OD even greater than the one that occurred when participative change altered the dogmas of unilateral power.

Finally, in my own work with appreciative inquiry, I am finding that the positive or "life centric" approaches are not only heading in an increasingly macro direction (working with "the universe of strengths") but that there is something of a new North Star emerging for OD. If one can imagine three circles all interconnected, we might propose that the new

innovation-inspired OD has three primary tasks: (1) the collaborative elevation of our highest human and organizational strengths; (2) the creation of combination effects and positive network effects of strengths; and then (3) the discovery and design of institutions that not only elevate and magnify strengths in the service of collaborative transformation, but then move far beyond to the discovery and design of "positive institutions" *defined as institutions that refract our highest human strengths outward in the service of societal change and world level innovation*. Think about some of our highest human strengths: wisdom; courage; love of humanity; social intelligence; etc. Now think of positive institutions as a prism, bringing and refracting outward our highest and most amplified human strengths to the global agenda for change: a world that's eradicated extreme poverty from the planet; a world that's successful transitioned to 100% renewable, clean energy; a world where every child has access to education; and a world filled with positive institutions.

With AI's abundance mindset—that we live in a universe of strengths and that there are no limits to the growth of constructive cooperation—the next stage seems almost inevitable: it's the shift from micro OD (based mainly on the internal needs of organizations) to macro OD where even the concept of the *change agent* moves to a macro or universal level. Let me end, in a bit of a thought experiment, to invite you to simply begin imagining institutions **not** as OD clients but as *the* change agents. Once you do this, now venture a step further and in your mind's eye and begin to list the kinds of OD interventions that *institutions as change agents* will be consciously enacting and leading. If you can see OD happening *through* and not just *for* institutions, then you can instantly sense the exciting vistas and courageous contours of an innovation-inspired positive OD that is shaping the future of the planet, its people's, and our world systems.[2]

That's the direction 30 years of Appreciative Inquiry is now taking many great colleagues and me. It's been and adventure. It's been a gift. And I call it *the gift of new eyes*.

NOTES

1. http://www.ippanetwork.org/wcpp2017/–see the World Congress "Founders Symposia"

2. See our work on positive institutions and the study of Business as an Agent of World Benefit at http://thedaily.case.edu/weatherheads-david-cooperrider-discusses-his-ideas-on-businesses-as-agents-of-change/

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