PREFACE

Generativity is a term first coined by the psychoanalyst Erik Erikson in 1950 to denote a concern for establishing and guiding the next generation. Generativity refers to 'making your mark' on the world, through active inter-generational concern and caring; creating things and bequeathing new sources of meaning and value that make the future and our world a better and brighter place. In Erikson's articulation it is the exact opposite of a life of stagnation. Indeed he conceptualized it as a divergent fork in the road that all human beings are likely to face in the later years: generativity versus stagnation (Erikson, 1959).

We've all seen it. Think of the elders you know. Some stagnate in isolation and preoccupation; they shrink from life in indifference, loneliness, internal anger, trivial activities, sometimes sadness or despair. Others you've seen grow and advance in both age and a sense of grace. They develop in a wholly different way. They are often grateful and they draw themselves towards life's meanings and callings, compelled to give and to generate, and then move on to their later years to contribute more than they might ever have imagined. Generativity, in brief, is a beautiful life option and an urge, especially in the human sense about which Erickson spoke and wrote. And we all seem to know it when we witness it.

Generative lives have a presence in the world and they make a difference. A great example is Elise Boulding, one of the 20th century's great thinkers and finest sociologists. One of us met with her when she was nearly 90, while participating in her famous programme on 'imaginative competence and world peace building'. Although she was frail, her eyes sparkled and radiated every moment and her infectious smile captivated. Her books came alive as she spoke and so did her relational view of life. She spoke about how precious 'our two hundred year present' was. What does this mean? 'There are people today just being born who will live hundred years into the future' said Elise Boulding, 'and there are others, like I am myself, at or nearing the century mark. That adds up to 200 years more or less, yet it's only when we meet *together* in discovery and inter-generational community, that we can access this priceless treasure'. This fascinating concept allowed us to time-stretch. We began to notice and

value every voice and life experience in the room from the eight year old to the eighty year old. The dialogical setting, the emphasis of imagining the future, the inter-generational concern, the call to create a better future, the respectful relationships — all of these things created a sense that our realities could be consciously shaped and that every utterance, thought, conversation and articulation of potential mattered. The experience of generativity that day was all around. Elise Boulding has been a role model for many of us with her abundant generative capacity, with her ability to create settings that would bring out the best in people, and with her ability to demonstrate positive aging that grows in inter-generational impact.

Nowadays, the term *generativity* refers not only to a crucial trajectory in adult development but also to a fork in the road faced by many different fields of endeavour. For instance, in contemporary human science, this concept is coming to signify the enormously important constructionist call to *generative theory* that challenges the status quo and opens the world to new possibilities (Gergen, 1978, 1982). The task of social theory is not only to hold a mirror up to 'what is' but also to open the world to new and untold intellectual potential. Rather than 'telling it like it is', the generative challenge is to fashion a social science that asks all of us as theorists to 'tell it as it may become'. Could it be that everything we consider as true or good or real or possible could be otherwise — for some other culture or people, or time in history, or some future possibility for our children's children? By accepting the fact that we don't know what's not possible, we become open for a kind of inquiry whose primary task is to offer not predictions but creations, options for better living and sculpting the future, that is ways of knowing that help us imagine the unimaginable.

More recently, in resonance with this kind of theoretical activism, we see attention being given to a kind of scholarship that is not stagnant or inert but generates knowledge alive. Carlsen and Dutton (2011) speak to the deeper vocation of qualitative research as a way of knowing that is life giving, transformative and expansive — not stagnant — while Cooperrider and Strivastva, earlier — in 1987 — called for a kind of scholarship that was 'no longer tranquilized in the trivial' but instead was purposefully charged and life centric. Their aim: a humanly significant and inspired science, capable of helping to make life all that it is capable of becoming. But to enable this, they argued, we as researchers might well need not just epistemological revolution but a conscious reunion of the sacred and the secular. Unification in the sense that Einstein signalled when he said 'that all true science begins and ends in wonder'. Nurturing a generative scholarship of human organizations should be a top priority, argued Cooperrider and

Srivastva (1987). Such scholarship re-weave into the very fabric of our field a deep appreciation for the miracle of life, a felt sense of a reverence for life, and a burning need to wonder about 'what gives life?' to living systems. In their original articulation, *Appreciative Inquiry into Organizational Life*, Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) wrote:

> Appreciative inquiry is presented here as a mode of action-research that meets the criteria of science as spelled out in generative-theoretical terms (see Gergen, 1982). 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 … 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. (p. 5)

> 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 … an inquiry 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. (p. 47)

In the years since that seed vision for appreciative inquiry (AI) as a generative theoretical approach to knowledge was published, many people and organizations have been involved in advancing new tools, concepts and practices for doing AI and for bringing it with other life-inspired methodologies into organizations all over the world. Today AI's approach to life-centric change, is supplanting many of the traditional change management models in business and society. AI is being practiced everywhere: in the corporate world, the world of public service, of economics, of education, of faith, of philanthropy − it is affecting them all. Of particular interest, AI has been referenced and cited at the originating core of the 'strengths revolution in management' (Buckingham, 2006), as one of the founding elements of the Taos Institute's advancement of constructionist science, and as one of the root systems in the rapidly growing positive organizational scholarship domain (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003). In addition AI is an essential part of the core curriculum in the top graduate programmes in the positive psychology field (Seligman, 2010) at places such as the University of Pennsylvania, Case Western Reserve University, Claremont and Harvard. 'Appreciative inquiry is revolutionizing the field' said University of Michigan's Robert Quinn (2000) and likewise Marty Seligman writes that AI 'is a perennial favorite' in MAPP, the acclaimed master's degree in positive psychology (Seligman, 2010).

In spite of the naïve misconception and undue critique that AI is only about accentuating the positive which might have been fuelled in part by a superficial interpretation of Cameron et al. (2003) framing of 'positive deviance', AI has grown strong and evolved attuned to the respective calls of the time, building on its life-giving foundations that stem from genuine appreciation and relentless inquiry (Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008). The generative and open character of AI is alluring and captivating. People from all walks of life and from any cultural background can easily see how AI can generate value in their domain of interest, their organization, their community and their life. The AI seeds have been carried by people to virtually everywhere – close and far countries from Norway to Brazil and Nepal, as well as close and far disciplines from management to community development to psychology and design. The growth and expansion has been self-reinforcing as we were entering the crossroads of our web of interconnectedness – like the renaissance's Medici effect of bringing cross-disciplinary dialogues into existence.

The growth of the community of AI aficionados both in size and diversity created the need for organizing opportunities for a grand meeting of the minds that can bring together hundreds and even thousands people at a time. The AI summit method has been the answer to that call. Its application and theory of whole system, strength-based inquiry is transforming every domain of management imaginable: organization strategy formulation; mergers (of strengths) between large companies and multi-sector partnerships; organization culture development work; product design and branding; information systems design and igniting networks of interest. It is transforming world summits at the UN and other global change bodies; launching the design of green innovation possibilities; making operational improvements and taking costs out of a business; transforming customer partnerships and relationships; and turning global issues into business and society opportunities for doing good and doing well. But these applications are only the beginning. We are convinced that the AI summit will continue to grow in significance and positive possibility as our aching world calls for mind-sets, management methods and governance structures that go beyond enterprise resource planning and value chains optimization, and move towards the inclusive joint design of whole systems and bio-regions, whole organizations and whole communities of everyone.

The fourth volume of the Advances in Appreciative Inquiry series is dedicated to the exploration of the generative core and generative potential of AI in theory and practice in the context of human systems. The book is designed to both re-connect with the roots of AI's commitment to the

social constructionist call for generative theory as well as to advance its own future disruptive innovations for growing as a generative set of practices. But what precisely is generativity in human organizations and larger systems? Can we speak not only of generativity as related to adulthood or individuals and construct the possibility of generative organizations and generative industries, even generative societies? When and where have we seen AI advance in its generative capacities to open the world to new possibilities? And what − if we cast our minds ahead a decade or two − what new, unorthodox practices will be born? What is the relationship between positivity and generativity, or generativity and negativity? Are there reciprocal or self-reinforcing relationships involved? And what − thinking from our 200 year present − are our past and our future worlds calling for?

In general, being generative refers to having an evocative power or aptitude that can result in producing or creating something, tapping into a source of innovation, or bringing something into life. Being generative often goes hand in hand with design (Avital & Te'eni, 2009). Design is about the shaping of alternatives or forward-looking courses of action. For example, the design of work environments, think-tanks, social movements, marketing channels, work processes, organizational development interventions, or research instruments. Clearly, generativity is interconnected with design − together they reframe, recreate and rejuvenate the stale; dovetail the past into future worlds and give birth to new life. People's generative capacity is a key source of innovation and rejuvenation, and by definition, generative design aims to encapsulate the design directives that enhance and complement that unique human capability. Generative design is evocative − it evokes new thinking and inspires people to create something unique. Generative design is engaging − it is enchanting and holds the attention of people by inducing their natural playfulness and Flow experience. Generative design is adaptive − it is flexible, malleable, adjustable, scalable and extendable. Generative design is open − it accentuates permeable boundaries and transparency that promote cross-fertilization, sharing and exchange of any kind. Not all design must be generative. However, generative design has the potential to evoke a capacity for rejuvenation, a capacity to produce infinite possibilities, a capacity to challenge the status quo and think out-of-the-box, a capacity to reconstruct social reality and consequent action, and a capacity to revitalize our epistemic stance. Generative design can help ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results (Avital & Te'eni, 2009).

Again think ahead a decade or two. Anticipate, if you will, the grand challenges and opportunities of our time: the call to climate action across

the earth; massive energy and infrastructure transition; establishing economic conditions for peace; creating sustainable water, regenerative agriculture, sustainable forestry and fisheries and walkable cities; or designing effective policies for moving from an economic era of contained depression to one of ecological sustainability and the flourishing of 9 billion people. Will AI and generative design have more, or less, relevance, as we enter this age of collaboration? Will it be able to make the leap from groups and organizations to generative change at the scale of the whole − with industry-wide transformations, or more transformational and effective UN World Summit meetings, for instance? How will our exponential technologies, for example the Internet of Things, exponentially affect our capacities for inaugurating worldwide appreciative inquiries, not as some distant fantasy but as a way of life across the interconnected human family?

This volume brings together 19 original chapters from scholars and practitioners that are doing exceptional work all around the world.

PART 1: GENERATIVE KNOWLEDGE, GENERATIVE ACTION

In the first part, each of the authors delves conceptually into the idea of generativity with attention focused on many of the questions detailed above. This part examines questions like: Is AI about positivity or generativity? What about the so called shadow dynamics in human systems and polarities in general? How do we advance and enrich the generative potentials of knowledge and idea work? How do we apply generative processes of organizing? Does generativity imply a normative or moral direction for the field of change, that is does generativity imply more than simply opening the world to new possibilities − and are there specific values, character traits, or visions of a certain kind of future embedded in the idea of generativity? Why do we want to raise and advance the concept of generativity and its deeper social epistemological connections to social constructionist thought?

PART 2: THE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY SUMMIT AND THE GENERATIVE POWER OF WHOLE SYSTEM CONFIGURATIONS

In the second part, we explore exciting advances in what might be the most generative relational space appreciative inquiry creates, in what is known

as the AI summit methodology. An AI summit is a large group strategic research, design or implementation forum that brings a whole system of 300−1,000 or more internal and external stakeholders together to work on a shared task of strategic, and especially creative, value. Moreover, it is organized as a discovery and design studio where everyone is engaged as co-inquirers and co-designers, across all relevant and resource-rich boundaries, to share leadership and take ownership for making the future of some transformational opportunity come alive. The summit appears bold at first glance, but is based on a simple notion: when it comes to human system innovation and integration, there is nothing that brings out the best in human beings − faster, more consistently and more effectively − than the power of 'the whole'. It is based on a simple idea: in the beginning is relationship, and relationships come alive where there is an appreciative eye. The use of large group methods such as AI for doing the work of co-leadership, once a rare practice, is now soaring in business and society efforts around the world. And while at first it seems incomprehensible that large groups of hundreds and sometimes thousands in the room can be effective in unleashing new system-wide realities, designing rapid proto-types and taking action, this is exactly what is happening. The authors of the chapters in the second part explore several significant advances in the creation of generative spaces for communities of inquiry, and provide vivid illustrations, stories from the field and new designs for generativity. The chapters in this part lift our sense of hope about what we are capable of as human beings.

PART 3: NURTURING THE FUTURE THROUGH GENERATIVE DYNAMICS

The third part helps to illuminate a future rich with promise and new vistas through a series of case studies that illustrate how AI evokes a generative stance and action. The authors explore transformative innovations that emerge when organizations explore the intersection of business and society as well as share how AI has inspired the business community to embrace generative language and increase awareness of the larger system in which it operates. Some authors engaged with a whole system to examine transformative innovations in the public sector and in the context of community building. Last but not least, they explore the concepts of inter-generational and multigenerational and discuss generativity in the context of inter-generationalism. Among others, the chapter reports findings from

Nutrimental Foods, Telefonica, the São Paulo State Federation of Industries, the rejuvenation of Bibb County Schools at Macon, the clean-up and closing of the nuclear weapons facility at Rocky Flats, Colorado, and the Business as an Agent of World Benefit world inquiry. The cases show that AI has developed over the course of the years by responding to situated needs, and gradually expanding its scope from a strengths-based approach to organizational development into a catalyst of new social order. Nobel Prize Laureate Rufus Jones once pointed to the wonderful mystery of generativity in action: *Nobody knows how the kindling flame of life and power leaps from one life to another.*

Inspired by life, all of the chapters in this volume are expansive and impassioned. Each one makes you pause and reflect: what are the possible manifestations of generativity in organizational and collective life? What conditions are conducive for such generativity to flourish? And what, more precisely, is the relationship between generativity (e.g. opening the world to new possibilities) and positivity (e.g. things like hope, inspiration, and joy)? With much appreciation, we offer this volume as a continuing expansion of the conversation.

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