FOREWORD

I have recently been thinking about an ideal style of communication for leaders in contemporary organizations. One vision that particularly calls out to me is that of *trans-valuing*. By this I mean a way of listening and responding to others. On the side of listening, it is not so much recording the information that counts, but grasping the form of understanding and way of life this information represents. The challenge is to absorb what is heard so that it becomes part of one's own working vocabulary. The second challenge is to bring this world into integral connection with other worlds that one inhabits. In what ways can these many worlds resonate with each other; how can the enrich each other; where are the uniting metaphors? Finally, there is responding, and here the challenge is to use the integrated forms to add value to what has been heard. How can others depart with an energizing sense of extended relationship and a more promising future? To respond in a trans-valuing way is to recognize the legitimacy of all voices, and to creatively seek ways of amalgamating them in ways that energize the organization.

In their conception and execution of this volume, Coopperrider, Zandee, Godwin, Avital, and Boland perfectly exemplify a trans-valuing orientation. At the outset, they have responded to earlier variations on the concept of generativity, by combining and adding further dimension. How delighted I was to find my concept of generative theory — born in a context of critique of the dominant paradigm, now folded into a vision of generative scholarship aimed at attending, appreciating and apprehending "what gives life" to living systems. Most importantly, however, the editors have responded in a trans-valuing way to their many colleagues who have variously been touched by the logic and values of appreciative inquiry. The voices here are many and diverse, with contributions ranging from concerns with archetypes, dialogue, cynicism, the AI summit, co-evolution, and servant leadership to technology, innovation, appreciative intelligence, and intergenerational inquiry. And more … Yet, in the hands of these editors — in their commentary, their choice of inclusions, and their orchestration of the volume, we are treated to a mighty chorus. One cannot read this book and depart with other than a resounding sense that we can all draw from

each other, and thereby make a positive difference in the worlds we inhabit.

Emerging throughout this volume is a strong sense among the contributors that they are participating in a sea-change in organizational study and practice. I think they are right. But I also think they underestimate the magnitude of this change of which they are a part. In my view these chapters are both drawing from and contributing to what may be a major shift in the Western world-view or cosmology. Consider: our conception of the world − including our view of empirical knowledge − has important origins in the works of both Aristotle and Plato. Among the most subtle but significant influences is the metaphysical belief in a cosmos of permanent or enduring forms. For Plato the forms exist as pure ideals; for Aristotle the permanent forms are inherent within material objects themselves. This belief in bounded and enduring entities is no small matter, as it supplies the justification for contemporary attempts to establish reliable and valid knowledge about human behavior. It is only when we can presume a world of enduring forms − objects of study − that we can entertain the idea of ascertaining their nature. When we can presume the enduring existence of a subject matter, we can properly begin to measure, generalize, and predict. Indeed, the very concept of research enshrines the assumption that we can return to an available object of investigation and "search" again, thus vindicating or vanquishing our assumptions about its nature. And it is on this account that various fields of knowledge − including organizational studies − has variously endeavored to establish principles or foundations of human functioning.

Yet, there is a second but shadowed movement in Greek philosophy, one standing as a catalytic alternative to the views of Aristotle and Plato. This is the metaphysics of impermanence, most centrally attributed to pre-Socratic philosopher, Heraclitus. For Heraclitus, "Everything changes and nothing remains still." It is indeed the Heracletian challenge to which Aristotle and Plato were attempting to supply an answer. Recognizing the empirical justification for the Heracletian view, the search was for an essence somewhere *behind* or *beyond* the empirically evident. There are many reasons for the failure of a metaphysics of change to flourish in the early centuries, and it is not until the 19th century that there was a significant re-emergence of interest. Scholars such as Hegel, Bergson, and Whitehead have added rich dimension to what we now understand as process philosophy.

We now find that various fields of study have gained substantially by shifting their emphasis from substance to process, or permanence to

change. The Nobel prize-winner Ilya Prigogine has argued that because of instability and irreversibility in quantum systems, the presumption of determinism is no longer adequate. Because chance will leave systems open to the emergence of new and novel structures, new forms of investigation are invited. A challenging group of scholars has now abandoned the search for economic laws, and turned to the historically and culturally emerging social conventions they believe to be the basis of economic behavior. Anthropologists also realize that it is no longer possible to study stable, geographically isolated cultures. Rather, attention turns to the global flows of peoples, along with media, technology, ideas, and habits. Concerns with shifting identities, colonization, and hybridization all become prominent. And in organizational studies, a small but vigorous band of scholars is shifting from the traditional conception of organizations as structures to organizational process. Attempts to halt the process − thus creating a structure − are viewed as lethal. In all these cases, placing the focus on change as opposed to stability has born fruit.

In my view, the chapters composing the present volume make an enormously important contribution to a metaphysics of change. First, they all share in one form or another a vision of the organization as a human construction, its life thus depending on a culturally and historically situated array of negotiated agreements. And because human conversation is always in motion, so must we abandon the concept of *the organization* with that of a continuous process of *organizing*. In effect, the study of organizations, with the hope of establishing knowledge of optimal forms of functioning, is obfuscating. Indeed, the very criteria of optimal functioning are also in motion and varyingly so around the globe. Most important, however, these chapters furnish direction for future organizational study and practice. As they illustrate, our potential to enrich the future lies in shifting our attentions from *what is* to *what can be*. It is less important to ask about the nature of the well-functioning organization that exploring how we can create organizational life in ways that are optimal for us at this point in history. We move from re/search to creating positive futures.

It is precisely here that one may view the present work as a landmark contribution. It catches the movement of the times − culturally, intellectually, and practically − and provides an inspiring array of resources for the collaborative creation of future ways of life.

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