

The Age of Thrivability



VITAL PERSPECTIVES
AND PRACTICES FOR
A BETTER WORLD
MICHELLE HOLLIDAY

"INSPIRING READING!"

Carol Sanford, author of *The Responsible Business*

"The Age of Thrivability provides a timely and accessible introduction to the significance of living systems principles. In this impressive synthesis, Michelle Holliday reveals how self-organizing and self-integrating patterns continually shape seemingly disparate fields and trends. From the history of human evolution to contemporary business examples, she demonstrates how recognizing and working with these patterns and principles is key to making sense of the role and potential of human agency. With compassion and clarity, she illuminates how understanding and participating in the shift to a living systems paradigm is essential for anyone seeking to cultivate healing relationships with Earth, the environment, and each other."

David McConville, PhD, Chairman, Buckminster Fuller Institute

"In this brilliant compendium of information, ideas and philosophy showing the urgent need for our world of business to fit itself sustainably into the web of all life, Michelle Holliday tells us life is not a metaphor to complement that of mechanics, but that life is our entire reality! And that sums up why we cannot ignore her imperative or her leadership. I, for one, will use this book in teaching MBA students!"

Elisabet Sahtouris, PhD, Evolution Biologist, Chair in Living Economies, Professor of Business, author of *Gaia's Dance: The Story of Earth & Us*, and other books

In **The Age of Thrivability**, Michelle Holliday offers a bold reinterpretation of human history and a clear course to a better future. In contrast to the mechanistic paradigm of the Industrial Era, a new, expanded story is emerging that allows you to see organizations, communities, and even humanity itself, as the dynamic, self-organizing living systems they are.

To embrace this view and to operate effectively within it, you need to understand how to support a living system's intrinsic ability to thrive — its *thrivability*. With this knowledge, you can step into wise stewardship of life wherever you find it. And you find it everywhere.

The Age of Thrivability is a comprehensive guide to the transition humanity is undergoing. More importantly, it outlines a straightforward framework for enabling life to thrive along the way. As real-life stories throughout the book demonstrate, viewing our businesses and communities through this lens reveals tremendous new possibilities for success and sustainability. And with mounting threats to the continued existence of life on Earth, nothing could be more important.

In all, you will find profound insights, practical guidance and plenty of inspiration. Though targeted to organizational and community leaders in particular, *The Age of Thrivability* will be valuable for anyone who is deeply concerned about the future of humanity.

Michelle Holliday is a facilitator, organizational consultant, researcher, presenter and writer. Her work centers around "thrivability" — a set of perspectives, intentions and practices based on a view of organizations and communities as living systems. To this end, she brings people together and helps them discover ways they can feel more alive, connect more meaningfully with each other, and serve life more powerfully through their work. You can learn more about her work at www.ageofthrivability.com.

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Guided by what we know about living systems, thriving [calls for] a continual and purposeful drive to create the fertile conditions for life to thrive at the levels of the individual, the organization, the community and the biosphere. Profoundly practical, it is distinguished by a deep understanding of how life works - and by intentional participation in that pattern. The thriving movement recognizes that only by aligning with life in the spirit of learning, compassion, contribution and play can we find the motivation and the means to collaborate and innovate at the levels required.

MICHELLE HOLLIDAY, "THE PRACTICE OF THRIVING"

FOREWORD

By Michael Jones

WE ARE BETWEEN stories. The old story is no longer working for us and the new story is not quite here. To help map our way through these times of transition and ambiguity we look for guides who can articulate what cannot yet be clearly seen or understood. Through her book, *The Age of Thrivability*, Michelle Holliday serves as one of our new guides. She is both an insightful cartographer and an inspired storyteller. What she offers in this book is a broad and sweeping view of a thrivable future crafted out of stories that are filled with magic, boldness and possibility.

"There are two ways of looking at life," she writes, quoting a remark by Albert Einstein. "One as though nothing is a miracle and the other, as though everything is a miracle." And miracles appear throughout *The Age of Thrivability*. What we discover is that, not only is life a miracle itself, but there is a greater miracle, and that is that life always seeks more life.

What that means is that we are an integral part of a universe that is held together, not only through the physical principles of gravity, but through allurements and love. She writes: "There is an underlying tendency or urge in all life to connect with other life in order to create emergent, transcendent forms."

To imagine that we are part of an intelligence governed by the principles of attraction in a universe that is always seeking to become more of itself is breathtaking. We cannot return to our old ways of thinking once Michelle has awakened us to the deeper nature of the world we find ourselves in. This worldview suggests that, in the

midst of life's strife and struggle, there is something at the very heart of it all – an impulse, a pattern of connection, an urge – even an urgency to embrace what Lebanese poet Khalil Gibran calls, "life's longing for itself."

This longing is an ache in the heart that runs throughout all of Michelle's writing. The ache reminds us that where there could have been nothing – an emptiness, a void, or a black hole – there is something. And this something fills the emptiness with beauty, grace and love. This is the thrivable ground she writes of. A thrivability that recognizes how the connections, patterns and characteristics in our organizations, our communities and ourselves reflect life's longing to be reunited with itself.

Michelle invites us to nourish this longing for life, because ultimately it is this longing that does all the work. And the work, as she describes it, is to be stewards of life's conscious evolution in order that life's constant pursuit of ever-higher levels of emergence and self-transcendence can be realized.

As a pianist and composer, I am familiar with how a musical composition grows in beauty and complexity – and often transcendence – each time I play. As she suggests, I cannot create this outcome directly. But I *can* create the conditions for this to happen on its own.

Out of this cultivated ground there arises a propensity or inner necessity to create. An urge that engages us with the phenomenon of *autopoiesis*, which means self-creation – the experience of life's eternal longing to experience and re-generate itself.

Crafting this new narrative for the future is what makes *The Age of Thrivability* both vital and necessary. Reading it, I am reminded of an interview between the award-winning broadcast journalist Bill Moyers and CEO and poet James Autry. Autry was among thirty-four poets that Moyers was interviewing as part of a PBS Series on *The Language of Life*. He hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the notion of autopoiesis through exploring commentaries on the lives of poets and their poetry.

During the interview, Moyers seemed puzzled as he tried to understand how Autry could cross over from celebrating his poetry at public festivals to reading it to his supervisors and staff in the competitive – and often tough-minded – world of business.

To this, Autry replied: "It's crucially important for business people to feel that what they're doing in business is life. There is only life, and business is part of that."

It is in this context that *The Age of Thrivability* is revolutionary. There are many books on leadership and organization that offer diverse points of view – but they share a common context, which is that life serves business. What makes this book unique is that it shifts the context to say: business serves life. And, as Michelle writes, this story has the power to change everything, including what it means to be human and alive and at work in the world.

Plato wrote:

This world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence... a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related.

And this is Michelle's call to us. There is one single narrative – a living intelligence – that is "at once radically revolutionary and timelessly true." To align with this living intelligence is the work of the future. To manifest this in our stewardship of life is our gift to ourselves and to the world.

Michael Jones is a widely recognized leadership educator, keynote speaker, thought leader, pianist composer and storyteller. He is an award-winning author of a series of books on reimagining leadership, including: The Soul of Place, Artful Leadership and Creating an Imaginative Life. He is also a Juno nominated (Canadian Grammy) pianist and composer whose 16 popular recordings of original piano music have served as a benchmark for contemporary instrumental music and attracted an audience of millions worldwide.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

THIS BOOK DOESN'T easily fit into one category. "Management literature" is too small (and not quite accurate). "Philosophy" doesn't cover it fully, broad as that topic may be. Indeed, *The Age of Thrivability* touches on history as well as future trends, on science as well as spirituality, and on the meaning of life as well as practical questions of how change happens within organizations.

With such a wide-ranging scope, it is intended for thoughtful, curious people who are concerned about the future of humanity. It is for readers who are interested in new stories and the patterns that connect them. It is for those who value wisdom and compassion, and who feel certain these two traits are critical for the path ahead.

In particular, it is written for people who find themselves at the intersection of organizational leadership, social innovation, and an emerging paradigm rooted in life and living systems.

No matter what the context, however, this book is for people who would be well served by insights into how life works and what those insights mean for our organizations and communities.

In other words, it is for you.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

IF WE WERE together in conversation, I would be able to ask you about your interests and offer only the angles and anecdotes that would be most relevant for you. But unfortunately, a book doesn't afford that level of personalization. Some sections may appeal to you more than others. And so, you will have to make your own choices about what to focus on along the way, as every reader does.

There are two opening chapters that lay out the "menu," setting the scene in different ways and whetting the appetite for the new story of thriving.

Next are several chapters that reveal the core patterns of living systems in a variety of contexts, each of which shapes our understanding of the world. I invite you to approach this section as an open buffet. Sample the topics that appeal to you most. Read until you feel well satisfied.

Then meet me again in the third section to explore how these insights might feed your work in the world. In particular, I hope you'll enjoy the sprinkling of inspiring real-life stories from people within organizations and communities that have embraced the principles of thriving. They offer a tantalizing taste of the future that awaits us, if only we choose to align with life.

Finally, the fourth section suggests some profound – and practical – ways to move forward into the Age of Thriving.

May you find it a truly nourishing experience along the way!

1.1

MY STORY AND THE STORY OF THIS BOOK

THOUGH MUCH OF *The Age of Thrivability* is written in an objective, sometimes even academic style, there is a personal story and a human voice behind it. If you have been drawn to this book, then I suspect you'll find familiar threads in my story – not in the specific circumstances, perhaps, but in the yearnings, observations and inquiries that drove me to research and write and that continue to propel me in my work today.

This book first came to life in the lovely and elegant St-Germain-des-Prés arrondissement of Paris, where my husband and I spent a year and a half in 2001 and 2002 while he was on a temporary work assignment. As an accompanying spouse, I was not legally allowed to work, and that suited me just fine. Not only was a sabbatical in Paris a heavenly proposition, I was determined to use this time to find answers to questions that plagued me about the nature of work and life.

It was a deliciously fertile time. My days were full of beauty, possibility and an easy alignment with the rhythms of life. Curiosity was my guide, luring me into topics as wide-ranging as biology, organizational theory, architecture, anthropology, history and philosophy. For me, the city's every half-hidden courtyard, ornate doorknob and ancient cobblestone radiated inspiration, though I spent much of my time in the gardens of the Rodin Museum, the towering bronze figure of *The Thinker* joining me in

1.2

THE BROADER CONTEXT AND INTENTION OF THE BOOK

WE SEEM TO be a planet on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Ecosystem degradation threatens the survival of our species and extinguishes countless others on a daily basis. Poverty, violence and social tension persist tenaciously. And global economies are at their most vulnerable since the Great Depression.

The sustainability, corporate social responsibility and related movements have long been our best hope for pulling back from the brink and establishing new, vital practices and healthy patterns of living. And they do a tremendous amount of good. But it's becoming increasingly clear that something more is needed. Too often mired in the incremental, those movements are not getting us where we need to go – not far enough, not fast enough. And they're not satisfying a deep hunger that many of us harbor.

The premise of this book is that existing efforts don't need to be abandoned; they just need to be positioned within a larger context. We need an expanded story to be able to see what else is possible beyond our current habits of thought and action.

The good news is that such an expanded story is readily available – and already spreading. In fact, the following chapters present evidence that this emerging narrative is the natural and obvious next stage in human evolution.

At the heart of this story is an understanding of the core characteristics of thriving living systems – of what's needed for life to thrive. The story also recognizes those characteristics within our organizations, our communities, our economies – and, in fact, across all of human civilization. And with these insights, the expanded story ushers in a shift in the purpose of all our activities, toward what some are calling *thrivability* – the intention and practice of enabling life to thrive as fully as possible, at every level.

This emerging thrivability movement is more momentous than it may appear. Enabling life to thrive is not currently the explicit and primary intention in most spheres of human activity. Instead, we generally set our sights on lesser goals – and, as a result, we are getting something substantially *less* than thriving.

However, as we see how much “non-thriving” is happening in the world, what if we explore what thriving would look like – and what it would require?

Given the rising popularity of organizational practices promising agility, resilience, emergence, self-organization – living systems concepts, all of them – what if we went to the root of these practices and deeply understood how living systems work? And what if that understanding were somehow simple and useful, opening up new insights and suggesting new ways forward?

As we recognize the patterns and characteristics of life within our organizations and communities, what if we made it our primary intention and goal to enable life to thrive within them as fully as possible?

Perhaps at the heart of it all, what if our most powerful role, both individually and collectively, is to act as stewards of life's processes, actively cultivating the fertile conditions for life to thrive? And what if acting in accordance with this “prime directive” helped us achieve all of our other objectives more effectively?

These questions are at the heart of what some are calling "The Great Transition," as humanity moves into a new worldview that is both more complete and more useful.

In fact, this so-called "new story" has always been available. After all, it's the story of how life works – of how living systems create and sustain themselves. And if we know what to look for, we can find guidance from the simple set of patterns that's common to every form of life, at any level of complexity. It's present in sea sponges, ant colonies, rainforests and our bodies. It's how our brains operate and how effective organizations function. It shapes our very consciousness. And it's what has guided the evolution of our species over the ages. If a living system is to thrive, it must have the handful of characteristics described in the following chapters. And if we are to be wise stewards, *it is these conditions we must tend.*

Even as this story is both simple and as old as life itself, though, our newfound awareness of it has the power to change everything, including what it means to be human, and alive, and at work in the world. This awareness can help us grasp a new logic that is at once radically revolutionary and timelessly true, bringing together people and planet into a single narrative, not in conflict with each other or even in awkward conciliation, but in natural alignment. It brings to light an ethos and a set of principles that – at long last – give us permission to do what really needs to be done, making it sensible to do what our hearts often know to be the right thing in our own lives, in our organizations, and in our communities.

To bring that better future for all into clearer focus, **Section Two** offers a brief overview of the core patterns of living systems. It then dives more deeply into them, offering a whirlwind tour of several disciplines:

Chapter 2.2 reviews science's evolving explanation of life, from a clockwork universe to a systems perspective to a living systems view.

* First introduced by the Global Scenario Group, an international, interdisciplinary body convened in 1995.

Chapter 2.3 reveals the characteristics of living systems in the evolutionary path of humanity, charting how we developed in specific ways in each past era and how the current age calls for (and in many ways already demonstrates) newfound integration of all those perspectives and capabilities.

Chapter 2.4 shows the patterns of living systems in the way the human brain works, suggesting ways we can unleash even more intellectual power to solve our most challenging problems.

Chapter 2.5 delves into our individual consciousness, showing how each of us moves toward maturity along the familiar patterns of life and highlighting the characteristics of wisdom that are urgently required.

Together, these four domains (science's explanation of life, our social context, the workings of the brain, and individual consciousness) strongly shape how we understand and engage with the world. In each of them, the core patterns of living systems are evident, pointing to the emergence of an important new epistemology (way of knowing). And in each, there is a clear trajectory toward a promising new epoch in human evolution, if only we align with life's guiding principles in time to avert catastrophe.

Section Three then offers a series of reflections on the implications of the living systems lens, particularly for our organizations and communities. The disastrous system-level characteristics of ecosystem degradation, poverty and economic fragility are not the fault of any one of us. They emerge from patterns of collective action. For the most part, it's not what any *one* of us does that is problematic – it's what whole crowds of us do *together* that shapes the world. And so the collective realms of our lives are where we most need to bring this new story of life *to life*. To these ends, Section Three shines a light on an emerging ontology (way of being), adding useful detail to the view of organizations as living systems and offering guidance about the perspectives that are needed to steward life within them.

Finally, **Section Four** invites us into the ongoing practice of cultivating thriving in our daily lives.

THE AGE OF THRIVABILITY

These chapters and the stories that accompany them demonstrate that when we truly acknowledge the life in and around us and our ability to create the conditions for life to thrive, new visions of reality become apparent: new possibilities, new goals, new priorities and new actions. In embracing the perspectives this story of thriving offers, we become more active and intentional participants in life's process. And along the way, we find a path to richer meaning, to greater compassion, to more effective collaboration, to healthy regeneration and renewal, and to more thriving, in all senses of the word.

Ultimately, if we are to navigate increasing complexity successfully... if we are to bridge the many fragmented approaches to sustainability and corporate social responsibility... if we are to solve the persistent problems of poverty, environmental degradation and conflict... and, indeed, if our species is to survive, it is precisely such an expanded lens and inspired approach that is needed.

All of this may sound naively utopian, denying the world we see before us today and the fundamental aspects of human nature that have contributed to the problems we face – things like competition for scarce resources and individual self-interest. But the lens of thriving doesn't deny those aspects. It *defies* them, in the grand tradition of Daniel Bernoulli.

A Swiss mathematician and physical scientist, Bernoulli is most famous for his eighteenth-century discovery of the principle that paved the way for human flight. His principle illustrated that air moving faster over the top of a shaped wing will have lower pressure than air moving more slowly underneath the wing. This difference in pressure will cause graceful lift – and flight. But his more important contribution may have been to set a precedent for going beyond the previously accepted laws and limitations of science. He didn't dispute the existence or validity of the law of gravity. Instead, he discovered a principle that allowed people to transcend it – both figuratively and literally.

Until Bernoulli's principle was applied to early planes, intrepid inventors modeled their various attempts at aircraft after the dynamics of birds – the only known model

for flight. These flapping contraptions did succeed in getting off the ground, but not far and not for long. Spurred on by their limited success, their designers continued to focus on incremental improvements to their model, all to no greater success.*

Then came a brilliant flash of insight: instead of working so furiously and gracelessly against gravity, why not use another force of nature to *transcend* it? Wings were affixed firmly to the sides of the plane and designed to direct air over them faster than it could travel under them. Speed was applied, and *voilà!* Takeoff! What followed was a blindingly rapid series of advancements that led to modern jet airplanes and space travel. So potent was this transcendent principle that we put a man on the moon a mere sixty years after Wilbur and Orville made their first hesitant flight.

Similarly, thriving rises above the piecemeal, incremental efforts and compromises of sustainability and corporate social responsibility, offering nothing less than a soaring path out of the desperate race in which humanity seems to be caught. The unseen force with the power to provide graceful lift is life itself. And in our organizations and communities, that dynamic force may be thought of as the human spirit – the part of each of us that is vital and alive, passionate and creative, ever seeking opportunities for connection and contribution.

Taking advantage of this transcendent principle calls for stretching our perceptions beyond the current Western guiding story. It requires looking beyond familiar “flapping” tactics to entirely new perspectives. And it means shifting from a reductionist, mechanistic understanding of reality to an integral, organic paradigm. As with Bernoulli’s important insight, this calls for imagination and more than a little faith.

Yet there is considerable incentive to move ahead. Our ecology, our economic systems and our social structures together rely on our ability to move toward more life-enhancing ways of acting in the world. And though there are signposts pointing the way to a hopeful future, it’s far from clear that we’ll actually get there. The Mayans and the ancient Greeks offer fair warning that collapse and regression are always possible.

* To be fair, there is still today an active Ornithopter Society dedicated to achieving flight in this way. They have had notable success with small craft the size of birds.

THE AGE OF THRIVABILITY

The more of us who embrace and begin living out the emerging story now, the more likely we all are to reach the destination that calls to us from the horizon.

For individual readers, the insights contained in this book will:

- help you understand what to bring forward from the previous story;
- lay out a simple but powerful blueprint for how to thrive in the story we're moving into;
- give you confidence to challenge assumptions, as well as courage to try new, more effective practices.

In these ways and more, *The Age of Thrivability* offers important shifts in understanding and practical ways to act on these shifts. It also gives an important glimpse into the wisdom, joy and compassion for all life that are at the heart of the dawning era. None of these values featured prominently in the guiding story of the Industrial Era. But *all* will be needed in large quantities if we are to counteract the grave problems we face as a species.

At a global level, *The Age of Thrivability* offers nothing less than a revision of human history, revealing how we have unwittingly participated in life's inherent patterns throughout the ages. Now, newly aware of this, we can become active, intentional participants and bold, life-sustaining stewards.

As activist and eco-philosopher Joanna Macy says:

The most remarkable feature of this historical moment on Earth is not that we are on the way to destroying the world — we've actually been on the way for quite a while. It is that we are beginning to wake up, as from a millennia-long sleep, to a whole new relationship to our world, to ourselves and each other.²

2.1

A QUICK OVERVIEW

LAST SUMMER, A landscape architect friend helped me plant a sizeable and varied flower garden in my yard. This year, the garden came back gloriously – along with an overwhelming crop of myriad weeds. As a novice gardener, I couldn't quite be sure which plants were welcome and which were not. So my friend came back and helped me get better acquainted with the different characteristics and needs of my charges. As we stood next to the garden after clearing the weeds, he reached out and plucked one more. It had been partly hidden alongside one of the more intentional plants, but its different leaf pattern had given it away. "Humans are masters of pattern recognition," my friend said. "But until a pattern is pointed out to them, they remain befuddled by what they see."

That was certainly the case with me and my garden. And it's often true of our work in organizations and communities. We don't really understand what we're looking at or why some things work and others don't. Once we understand the basic patterns, though, things become clearer. We are no longer befuddled. We see the patterns easily and everywhere. And we can act as more effective stewards of those systems. This is the value of pointing out a set of simple patterns common to all living systems, including organizations, economies and communities.

Although theories abound and there is little consensus about the definitive list of characteristics, following is the set of four properties I have found to be widely cited across the literature in biology and also universally present across the organizations and communities I have observed. Whether it is your body, a rainforest, an organization, or a community, these are the factors at play:

1. **Divergent Parts:** In every living system, there are individual parts – for example, the cells in our bodies and the people in an organization or community. This is “who I am” within the system.

Generally, the more diverse and self-expressive the parts are able to be, the more resilient, adaptive and creative the living system is likely to be. This is the principle of biodiversity.

In our human systems (e.g., organizations and communities), that means we have to create conditions that invite each person’s unique expression and contribution – that enable them to bring as much of their particular strengths, talents and perspectives as possible – even as they are nourished in the process.

2. **A Pattern of Relationship:** The divergent parts are connected and supported in a pattern of responsive relationship with each other and with context.

In our bodies, this is the interdependent systems that regulate circulation, digestion and temperature regulation, as well as the supportive skeletal structure. In organizations, it’s the patterns and infrastructure of information-sharing, decision-making and getting things done: the org chart, processes, meetings, shared vocabulary, office design and equipment. In a community, we find it in the roads and traffic rules, retail infrastructure, governance systems and the culture of the commons. This is “how we are together” within and around the system.

Generally, the more open and free-flowing the interactions between parts, the more resilient, adaptive and creative the living system is likely to be.

In our organizations, communities and families, this means we have to design structures and systems that support effective connection and collaboration with consistency but also with flexibility and responsiveness.

3. **A Convergent Whole:** The divergent parts come together in relationship to form a convergent whole with new characteristics and capabilities.

This is the level not of your cells, but of you and your body. It is the level not of the individuals, but of the organization or community they create together. It is here that we find the phenomenon of emergence, in which new capabilities and characteristics are created, in the same way the properties of water (wetness, fluidity) emerge from the convergence of hydrogen and oxygen. This is the great promise of living systems – that new things become possible and new forms take shape. *You* can think, feel and move – capabilities not found at the level of your cells. Similarly, an organization or community is able to complete complex tasks and maintain order, even when those functions lie beyond the abilities of the people who comprise it.

Just as the living system needs the seeming chaos of divergence, it also needs convergent order at the level of the whole. *You* remain recognizably *you*, even as your cells are continuously replaced. An organization remains focused on shared purpose, even as people come and go. A community retains its character across generations. This is “*who* we are together” and “*why* we are together” as a system.

Generally, the more consistency and convergence there is at the level of the whole, the more resilient, adaptive and creative the living system is likely to be.

Within our human groups, this means the shared purpose that brings us together must be both clear and compelling, and it must continuously guide our individual and collective actions.

2.2

SCIENCE'S UNFOLDING EXPLANATION OF LIFE

THOUGH IT MAY not be immediately evident, science's explanation of life directly influences the ways we perceive the world, the ways we make decisions, the ways we relate to each other, and the ways we live our lives. That explanation is currently in flux. With only slight delay, so are our perceptions, choices, relationships, and the most fundamental aspects of our lives.

THE MACHINE STORY

In the outgoing era, science explained the world as a controllable, predictable machine made up of inherently separate components. Perhaps most associated with this explanation is Sir Isaac Newton, who introduced the idea that the world could be understood by examining and controlling its smallest parts, each of which interacts only with its immediate neighbors in a linear progression. "Every action has an equal and opposite reaction," Newton assured us. And the entire world could be mapped and predicted according to a limited number of mathematical principles.

On the basis of this explanation, we came to understand ourselves, our communities and our organizations in this way. To a significant degree, it has guided and determined:

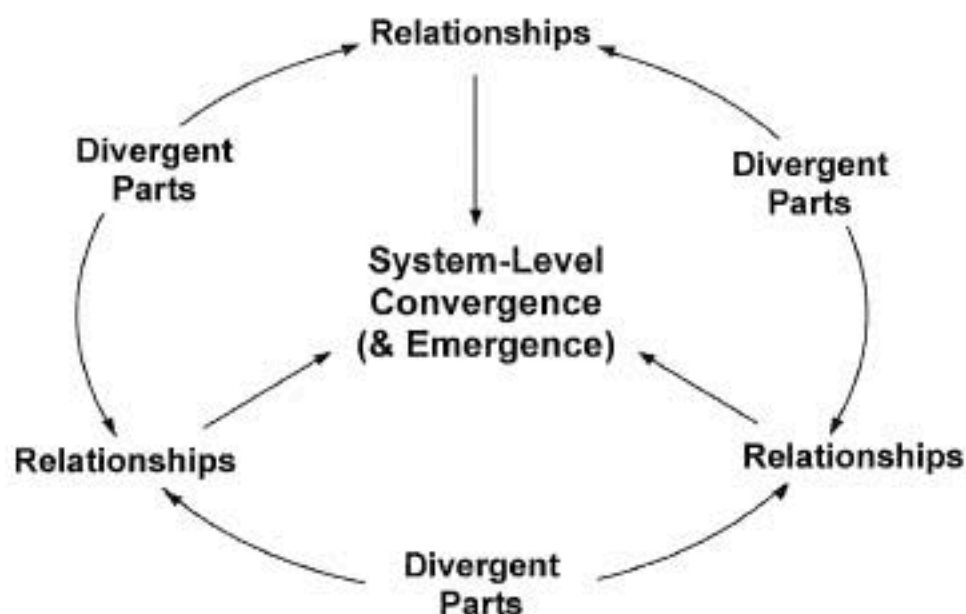
SYSTEMS THINKING

Enter systems thinking, which introduces the simple yet profound notion that 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.' If reductionism focused on the *divergence* of parts, systems thinking was interested in their *interrelatedness*. As *Wall Street Journal* business writer Thomas Petzinger explains in his book *The New Pioneers*, "If Newtonianism sought understanding by taking things apart (the process called 'analysis'), systems thinking sought understanding things by putting them together ('synthesis')."⁵

The more science entertained this approach, the more it appeared that putting things together was the true nature of life. Howard Bloom explains this in a chapter called "Superorganism" in his book, *The Lucifer Principle*. According to Bloom, more than a hundred years ago German botanist Matthias Schleiden observed that the life and behavior of an organism comes from the way in which the individual cells work together. Pathologist Rudolph Virchow then added to this, declaring that "[t]he composition of the major organism, the so-called individual, must be likened to a kind of social arrangement or society, in which a number of separate existencies are dependent upon one another...." Each human being, said Virchow, is actually a society of separate cells.⁶

Indeed, the pattern of interaction extends beyond the organism to its environment, enabling a system to sense and adapt to ongoing changes in its habitat. In this

THE SYSTEMS MODEL



And while all of this represented an important shift in emphasis, it did not usher in a truly meaningful revision to our guiding ideology. Instead, systems thinking remained (and still generally remains) grounded in a mechanistic model, simply making more of the machine visible.

Consider as evidence this definition by systems theorist Alan Scrivener:

Systems theory is the study of systems which can be mapped using any kind of network to define the flow of information. This includes the study of systems whose emergent properties we cannot yet predict due to a lack of plausible mechanisms, rigorous mapping techniques and/or robust mathematical treatment.¹³

reveals the persistence of mechanistic thinking that is valuable to some degree and absurd if taken as the total view. The result is that many of the changes made to date on the basis of systems thinking represent important first steps in a new direction, while most have been superficial and built on familiar values. In summary, the Systems Model has been a limited and temporary bridge.

As life continued to evade control and prediction – despite an expanded model – science again was pressed for further explanation. And again it responded with hesitant acknowledgment of yet another chapter to the story.

LIVING SYSTEMS THINKING

Revealed only a few decades ago, the plot of this next chapter in science's story revolves around the property that some biologists call "self-integration." This property is the main characteristic that distinguishes *me* from *my car*. After all, both my car and I contain diverse parts – engine, brakes, steering wheel, in the case of my car; cells and organs in the case of my body. Both function through interactions between parts and with the outside world. In both cases, divergent parts and a dynamic pattern of interactions come together to form a convergent whole with new characteristics not present at the level of the parts – the parts of my car come together to form a vehicle that has the new capability to move me around town; my cells and organs come together to make me a thinking, feeling, moving human being. Previously, this is where the comparison ended. And with such clear similarities, I was believed – literally – to be a machine, just like my car. "Living systems are chemical automata," says one author in a book called, ironically, *The Nature of Life*. "We shall consider living systems as fluid machines," says another.¹⁸

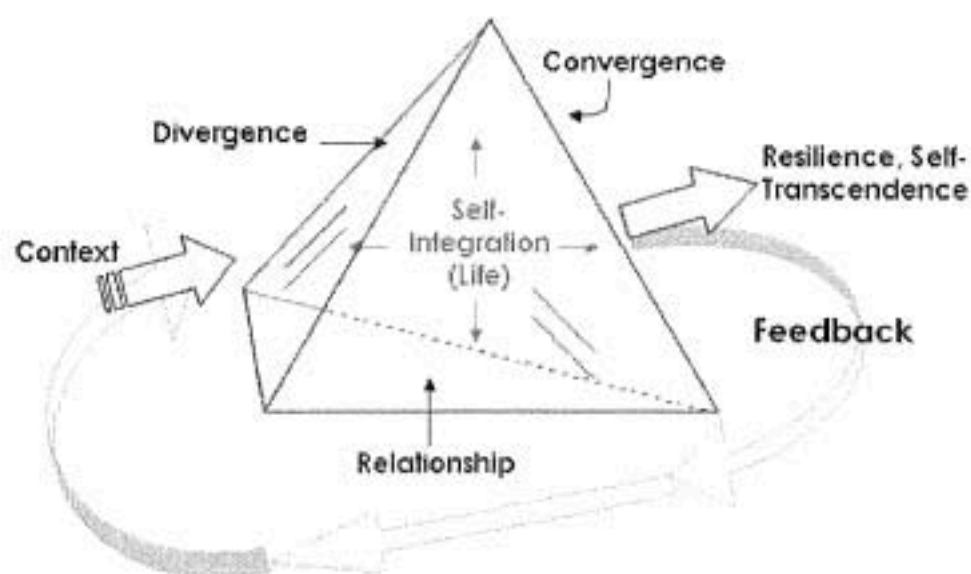
But in recent years, biologists have begun to recognize a key differentiating factor. Without this factor, my car can't generate itself – or a new car. It will never have a great idea. It will never repair itself. It is not resilient, adaptive or creative. But I am.

What distinguishes me from my car, science now tells us, is the property or capability of "self-integration."¹⁹ This means that – **by itself** – every living system **integrates**

This four-part pattern is present at every level of life – including our organizations, economies and communities, which are revealed as a higher level of life created by the interactions of the people and institutions within them. Indeed, many scientists believe the Earth itself is a single, living, self-regulating entity. Known as the Gaia Hypothesis, the theory holds that (as Vaclav Havel explained it in a powerful speech called *The Need for Transcendence*), "the dense network of mutual interactions between the organic and inorganic portions of the earth's surface form a single system, a kind of mega-organism, a living planet."³⁰

With this broader understanding, life can now be viewed not as a one-dimensional spectrum or a two-dimensional feedback loop, but as a three-dimensional process, actively creating from its environment. The following diagram portrays one metaphor for how we might envision this process: as a three-sided prism or pyramid.

THE LIVING SYSTEMS MODEL



ASPECTS OF LIVING SYSTEMS

<u>Aspect</u>	<u>Description</u>
Parts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Distinct, diverse, dynamic. ▪ Exert pressure toward chaos and divergence. ▪ Parts exist, evolve and are defined in relationship to the whole, to other parts in the system, and to context. ▪ Every part is itself a whole living system, down to the sub-atomic level.
Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The network, infrastructure and pattern of communication and interaction between parts, whole and context. ▪ Reflects the responsive and evolving nature of living systems, equivalent to learning. As the system evolves in reaction to changes in its context, it becomes increasingly integrated with its environment. In this way, it becomes increasingly sensitive to changes in the context, driving more evolution, in turn driving infinite and unpredictable creativity.
Whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collective, convergent. ▪ Exerts pressure toward order and coherence. ▪ The whole takes on properties of its own that cannot be understood by examining the parts. ▪ Every whole system is a part of a higher-order system, out to the far reaches of the cosmos.

MICHELLE HOLLIDAY

Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enabled by the essence, spirit or spark of life. ▪ The self-organizing property of continuously enfolding divergent parts within a convergent whole. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Excess convergence creates stagnation, death. ▪ Excess divergence creates chaos, death. ▪ Dynamic balance between the two creates coherence, evolution and the conditions for "aliveness" and thriving. ▪ Creates a whole greater than the sum of its parts. ▪ Must increase with rising complexity. ▪ The integrative property is observed to generate system divergence of its own accord (if necessary) to support a dynamic balance and, presumably to support further evolution.
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The environment (energy, matter, information) of which the system is an integral part. ▪ Continually acts on the system of whole and parts, introducing novelty and opportunity. ▪ The whole exists as part of, is defined by, and evolves within its context.
Transcendence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The natural and continuous urge and outcome of the living combination of divergent parts, convergent whole, relationship, integration and context – a higher level, more complex form of life is created. ▪ Reflects the living system's emergent capability to generate new forms, as well as to regenerate, evolve, react, adapt and innovate. ▪ Represents the fundamental creative nature of complex adaptive living systems.

2.3

THE EVOLUTION OF OUR SOCIAL CONTEXT

IN ADDITION TO science's explanation of reality, our "way of knowing" is also a function of the social context in which we live – the content, nature and tone of our interactions with others, as well as our beliefs about those interactions. While views about social context vary from person to person, there are clearly dominant trends within any culture and within each major era. And so any examination of worldviews – including one with thriving and thrivability at its core – must also explore social context.

With such an exploration, we find that our human communities exhibit the trademark features of living systems: the increasingly *divergent* contributions of individuals united in dynamic *relationship* within *convergent* communities of all forms and sizes, generating ever greater forms of *transcendence* (e.g., families, tribes, nations, companies, sports teams, communities, as well as their novel outputs).

A NEW LENS ON HUMANITY'S FOUR MAJOR ERAS

As we might expect, social context evolves over time. What is surprising, though, is that in its evolution, humanity seems to have concentrated on honing each of the four major attributes of living systems *in succession*. The following pages will take us on a brief historical tour, showing how our perceptions and interactions were convergent

2.4

THE EVOLVING BRAIN

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTERS presented evidence indicating that (1) era-level shifts occur because of evolutions in worldview, and (2) a new era-level shift is underway right now. So, why not stop there? Isn't an exploration of the brain going just a little too far down the rabbit hole?

Truly, this may be belaboring the point. (And if this is your feeling, you have my permission to skip ahead to the Section 3 and its exploration of the practice of thriving.)

If we stop here, though, each of us is just so much flotsam being tossed about on the surging ocean of civilization. And not only is that a depressing, disempowering scenario - it's not the whole story. In the previous two chapters, we saw the view from above. But that's not where all the action is. At least as important is the drama taking place beneath the surface, at the level of the parts.

In living systems, the parts create the whole. Buckminster Fuller called the whole a "pattern integrity," life's ongoing capability to produce patterns from parts. His example was the human hand. All the cells in your hand are replaced every few years, he pointed out. The only static thing is life's ability to create the pattern that constitutes

2.5

AN EMERGING LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS

THE FOURTH AND final "wall" in the matrix of how we understand reality is our individual consciousness – not the state of being awake and aware, but the underlying personal assumptions and filters that shape the reactions we choose, the way we relate to others, and the themes that preoccupy us.

In a general sense, this is what we typically think of as our level of maturity. And it is the realm of consciousness that can be observed and assessed. You know a three-year-old struggling for independence when you see one, just as the grace of elderly wisdom is plain to see. In fact, distinct stages or levels have been identified, with each level representing a characteristic "frame of reference or lens" through which individuals perceive and react to their social world. And reliable assessment methods have been formulated to ascertain a person's current stage of consciousness.*

The premise of this chapter is that a critical mass of people has moved into a new stage characterized by *integration* of the previously dominant levels of maturity, in a powerful meshing of universal instincts and intuition, community orientation, and individual achievement. And as these people progress, they are introducing cultural

* In reality, a person is not simply at one level; though we spend most of our time at one level, occasionally we rise above it and occasionally we fall back to a previous level, depending on our circumstances. For this reason, some scholars refer to a person's "center of gravity."

A COMPARISON OF THEORIES OF COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL PROGRESSION

Eras (traditional)	Hunter-Gatherer	Agrarian	Modern/Industrial	(no consensus on this era's name)	
Eras (revised)	Convergence	Relationship	Divergence	Integration	
"Triune" brain	Reptilian	Mammalian	Neo-cortex	Integration	
Stages of human lifecycle	Infancy	Childhood	Teen Years	Adulthood	Maturity
Abraham Maslow	Physiological Survival & Safety	Love & Belonging	Self-Esteem	Self-Actualization	Self-Transcendence
Jane Loevinger	Impulsive/ Self-Protective	Conformist	Self-Aware/ Conscientious/ Individualistic/ Autonomous	Integrated	
Jean Gebser	Magic	Mythical	Mental	Integral	
Spiral Dynamics	Instinctive-Survivalistic	Magical - Animistic	Egocentric-Narcissistic/ Purposeful-Authoritarian/ Scientific Modernism	Communitarian-Egalitarian	Integrative/ Holistic
Robert Kegan & Lisa Lahey		Socialized Mind	Self-Authoring Mind	Self-Transforming Mind	
Paul Ray		Traditional	Modern	Creative	
Sigmund Freud	Id	Superego	Ego		
Carl Jung	Collective Unconscious	Collective Consciousness	Personal Conscious & Unconscious	Self/Integration	

3.2

THE LIVING ORGANIZATION

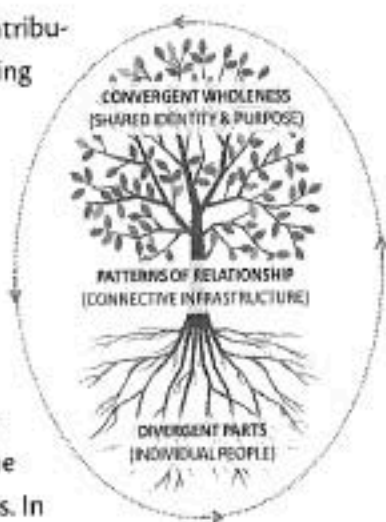
THE STARTING POINT in our exploration of the practice of thriving is to make sure we have a good understanding of what we're working with – a living organization. To that end, this chapter will first revisit the four living systems patterns as they are present in our organizations, offering a working model we can carry forward. It will then address several common “conceptual stumbling blocks” that can make it difficult to fathom an organization as, literally, “alive.”

In revisiting the living systems patterns in an organizational context, the metaphor of a tree offers useful guidance. It gives us a way of thinking about an organization holistically and dynamically, highlighting how the patterns work together. It helps us recognize how those patterns are present at any scale, from the mom-and-pop shop to the multinational corporation. And it offers additional clues about how we can cultivate the conditions of thriving in our organizations.

- **Divergent Parts:** At the base of the tree, we can imagine that the roots represent the different people in the organization, with their many talents, interests and perspectives. A tree needs a broad, divergent root base both to have access to different sources of nutrients and to be able to support the weight of the trunk and branches. Similarly, an organization hoping to thrive

and adapt over time needs the diverse contributions and perspectives of the people working within it.

It is at the level of the roots that life first flows into the tree, just as life enters the organization through the living people who comprise it. In our organizations, then, the challenge is to invite and cultivate as much of that life as possible, so that people bring the best of themselves to the workplace and are nourished in the process. In other words, the ongoing opportunity is to engage the **Passion** of the people working within the organization.



- Convergent Wholeness:** At the top of the tree, we can imagine the branches, leaves and fruit represent the organization's offering out into the world – its shared, convergent **Purpose**. After all, people generally come together in organization to make some collective contribution to a customer or community. *Without* that shared purpose, they are just a crowd, serving merely as context for each other. *With* a convergent purpose, the organization can take on a life of its own, remaining coherent and consistent over time – even as individual people come and go – and demonstrating new characteristics and capabilities previously not present at the level of the individual alone.

Just as the tree raises up its leaves to receive light and life from the sun, an organization extends its offering out into the world in order to receive life in the form of relationships with customers and community, along with money or other forms of value. Here, then, the task is to ensure that the Purpose is, indeed, convergent – that it is shared and compelling for those within the organization and that it engages those being served, inviting and nurturing

3.3

Story #1: *Espace pour la vie*

THE BACKGROUND: ORIGINALLY called the Montreal Nature Museums, this organization consists of four institutions: the Botanical Gardens, the Insectarium, the Planetarium and the Biodome (several ecosystems recreated under one roof). Each is owned by the City of Montreal, which several years ago merged them administratively and then hired one director to oversee them all. The director's mandate was to create cohesion among the four and to create one powerful brand that would add significantly to Montreal's global reputation.

The challenge: Across all four institutions, passion and commitment were high among employees. However, the infrastructure was heavy and bureaucratic, and employees were weary from lack of resources. The museums were well-loved by citizens and visitors, but generally not enough to inspire regular visits. Worse than this, their message was not powerful enough to incite more environmentally responsible behavior – the ultimate goal of their efforts. Also, despite cost savings, the staff at the four museums were not pleased with being merged; they perceived themselves as fundamentally distinct, with different scientific disciplines, histories and sizes. They were hopeful about the change the visionary, charismatic new director represented. But as scientists and educators, they were also nervous; he came from the world of the arts and spoke quite a different language. Finally, they were skeptical about branding

3.4

THE TRIFOCAL LENS*

SO, WHAT CHANGES – and what becomes possible – when we acknowledge our organizations as living systems and we enter into the practice of thriving?

The answer is: it depends.

THE POSSIBILITIES THE LIVING SYSTEMS PATTERNS HOLD DEPEND ON THE LENS WE USE TO SEE THEM.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the book, the living systems view has gained significant traction over the past two decades. And yet what I have observed is that not every organization or community has enjoyed equal benefit from it. Most achieve only modest improvements to their culture and operations, leaving plenty of opportunity on the table. But a small number cultivate something vibrantly generative – and even regenerative – creating unimagined benefits, so that:

* Some portions of this chapter originally appeared in a Huffington Post article entitled, "What You See Is What You Get: The Full Promise of the Living Systems Lens," published on February 25, 2015. Other portions appeared in a paper, co-authored with Michael Jones, called, "Living Systems Theory and the Practice of Stewarding Change," within the June 2015 issue of the journal, *Spanda*.

3.5

STORY #2: ZENITH CLEANERS

[Written by Tolu Ilesanmi, Cleaner and CEO of Zenith Cleaners, a successful Montreal-based business offering commercial and residential cleaning services. You can learn more about Zenith at www.zenithcleaners.com.]

THERE IS PERHAPS no service or job that seems more mundane and more lacking in promise than cleaning. The work of a cleaner tends to be transactional, impersonal, perpetuating a sense of shame and stigma. I came into it from business school because I loved its simplicity in comparison with complicated b-school theories and models of change. But I had to face the fact that cleaning is considered by most to be a dead-end job or at best a temporary stepping stone.

And yet I was drawn to the side of cleaning that we as a society were not engaging with – the idea of cleaning as a practice and a metaphor. My sense was that the business of cleaning was preventing cleaning from fulfilling its potential as a transformative practice that affects both object and subject, both cleaner and the thing being cleaned, both the agent of change and the object of change.

In fact, as I and the people I am very privileged to attract into cleaning for the love of it persisted in bearing witness to this other side of cleaning, we could not escape the

3.6

THE CALL TO STEWARDSHIP

THERE IS A certain amount of *reverence* that comes when you see something – really see it – as alive. When you understand that it has a life of its own. That it exists for its own ends. That it has potential that can't fully be known and that may or may not be completely realized, depending on countless influences and interactions. There is mystery and magic in something that is alive.

For a direct and simple experience of this kind of reverence, find the point on your neck where your pulse is strongest. Take a moment to feel the rhythm, silently breathing in a sense of wonder at the life flowing through you, animating you, powering you all these years, creating you, healing you, propelling you for a time. You are alive. That is something to marvel at and be grateful for. Your aliveness is something worthy of profound reverence.

With reverence comes an invitation to care. We are wired with a sense of care – care for ourselves and those close to us, certainly, but also a broader compassion for all living things, with an inherent sense of kinship and responsibility - even the most hardened among us.

And when reverence and responsibility are ignited together within us, the result is a personal call to stewardship.

3.7

STORY #3: CLC MONTREAL

[Written by AJ Javier, founder and General Director at CLC. You can learn more about this thriving Montreal-based language school at www.clcmontreal.com.]

THE THREE LETTERS of our school's name stand for *Culture & Language Connections*. As evocative as those three words are, there is more to us than even they reveal.

In fact, in our marketing, we say that CLC feels like home, no matter where you're from. And it's true.

If you think about it, that's kind of surprising. Learning a new language always changes you – you can't help but grow, as you learn new words and sounds... as you come to understand a different culture... and as you build new relationships with people from other parts of the world. In our space, people grow and change, always in unexpected ways.

So how is it that, in the middle of all this newness and change, people find a deep sense of belonging, as if they've arrived home, at last? How can it be that they discover themselves along the way?

3.8

EMBODYING ALL THE PATTERNS

AS WE EXPLORE the concept of thrivability and the practice of stewardship, it becomes clear that what we are really talking about is embodying all four of the living systems patterns in our work together. And that can be challenging to grasp. For example, what does it mean to act like a divergent part? Or a self-integrating property?

We may find helpful support for this in an unexpected place. I was fascinated to learn that the four living systems patterns are mirrored again in a set of archetypes discovered originally by psychologist Carl Jung and developed further and popularized in the 1990s by several authors (most notably Robert L. Moore and Douglas Gillette).¹⁰⁵ According to Jung, these archetypal images are patterns of thought and behavior present in all cultures and all people across all of human history. Importantly, they do not represent personality types or personal roles. They are timeless “energies” that each of us is capable of bringing forth in different circumstances, though we may generally have more comfort with one than with the others. As with the living systems patterns, each of the archetypes is needed in any project team that hopes to generate new possibilities. Moreover, I find that they help unlock the deeper implications of the patterns, describing, in a way, how we *live* the patterns together.

The first archetype is the **Warrior**. It is the push for individual expression – for bringing forth our unique gifts, talents and inner truth – and it carries the energy of

3.9

STORY #4: EXPERIENCING MARIPOSA

RE-IMAGINING A MYTHIC STORY OF COMMUNITY

[Written by Michael Jones, long-time resident of the town of Orillia, Ontario, as well as a leadership educator, author of a series of books on reimagining leadership, and accomplished pianist with 16 albums of original piano compositions.]

AS WE ACKNOWLEDGE aliveness in our organizations and communities, we're increasingly able to draw on a broader form of knowing that some call a "mythic worldview." Author Karen Armstrong writes that in most pre-industrial cultures, "there were two recognized ways of thinking, speaking, and coming to know our world. The Greeks called them *mythos* and *logos*. Both were essential and neither was considered superior to the other. They were not in conflict, but complementary." *Logos* was the voice of reason, and timeless *mythos* the language of the imagination and our felt life together.

For too long, we have relied upon the harsh glare of the flashlight to illuminate our world and failed to realize how much it blinded us from seeing the subtle and opaque forms of the mythic world that the flickering light of the candle brings into view. To

3.10

MEASURING THRIVABILITY

FOR SOME REASON, it's only MBA students who ask me: how do you measure thriving? Maybe other people assume that thriving lies somehow beyond quantification. But the question of measurement is solidly at the heart of every self-respecting MBA program.

In fact, it's a valid question, though it might need rephrasing and reframing.

If the standard MBA refrain is, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it," then we have to ask: What do we hope to manage within a living organization and, therefore, what do we want to measure? Who needs to do the measuring and who needs to know the results? And what about the things that lie beyond both management and measurement?

Within the mechanistic view of organizations, the goal is constant growth of output and profit. And what we want to manage (meaning: predict and control) are the resources and processes that lead to those outcomes.

What we have learned about living organizations, on the other hand, is that their goal includes far more than just growth of output and profit, and only *some* things

STORY #5: CRUDESSENCE

[Written by Julian Giacomelli, CEO of Crudessence at the time of writing in December 2012. The company is a successful Montreal-based food services company with multiple restaurants, a catering business, an academy, and in-store and online sales of prepared foods and related products.]

AT CRUDESSENCE, WE feel very strongly about sustainability and strive to go even beyond to transcend the commonly held vision of sustainability. Coming from deep in our collective values is the belief that there is a new way to be in business, in community and in life. And we are out to live that vision.

The company has grown significantly in many ways over the past five years, and in good part due to our expanding diversity. Diversity in the customer base, the employee pool and even in our offering. We have grown over ten times in that period. As the reach and size of our ecosystem has grown, what was once a clear vision among a handful of employees started to become less so. We started hearing disagreements among staff and confusion from our customers as to what Crudessence was all about. There was a growing and apparent need to clarify and perhaps expand on the original vision of the founders, who had strong intentions, but had not imagined the size of this endeavour. So we decided to undertake a vision quest for Crudessence, and set out to create a manifesto.

THE VITAL ROLE OF DEATH

IT SEEMS APPROPRIATE to close our exploration of thriving with a chapter about the role of death.

The common misconception is that thriving is all about peak experience – vibrant health and joy, all the time. Rainbows and unicorns all the way.

For some, this can be very appealing. In all of today's stress and distress, many are drawn to the idea of feeling constantly happy and connected within their organization, of non-stop smooth collaboration, of feeling clarity and progress without end. They are then disappointed and disillusioned the first moment they realize this is not a reality that can be supported for long.

For others, the misconception can have the opposite effect, turning them away at the very outset with the assumption that such Pollyanna promises can't possibly be true. And, of course, they are right, in part.

Full, vibrant health and joy clearly can't be our sustained state for all time. We know that life also includes death. And conflict. It includes confusion, challenges and difficult emotions. In nature, there are seasons. There are ebbs and flows. There is day and also night. These are not unwanted, yet unavoidable aspects of life; they are

4.1

THE NEED FOR PRACTICE GROUNDS

HOW DO WE actively embrace our organizations and communities as living systems and work to cultivate thriving within them? How do we move forward into the Age of Thrivability that the living systems patterns suggest is just within reach?

Part of the answer is: follow the signs. A path forward is becoming clear, as pioneers lead the way. In cities around the world, there is a positive frenzy of activity around "social innovation" – new, systemic approaches to problems that plague society at large. Participatory organizational models and life-affirming investment methods are sprouting up *and* flourishing. Communities are being gathered and stewarded in novel ways, inviting unprecedented levels of inclusion, connection and creativity. Young people, in particular, are jumping into action to change the way things are done. Experimental spaces are being created – social labs, festivals, art hives, fab labs – in which the new story can be tested and experienced. And the language of living systems thinking is present throughout, with concepts like resilience, ecosystems, emergence and agility as the implicit mantras of the movement.

Within this flurry of new practices, there are countless examples of relatively small design changes that can have a surprisingly large impact, creating the conditions for what futurist Venessa Miemis calls "emergence by design." Short daily stand-up meetings within the Agile movement offer inspiration, for example, with everyone sharing

4.2

WHAT BECOMES POSSIBLE

BEYOND THE DETAILS of patterns, models, archetypes and designs, this book has most of all charted the emergence of a new guiding story, one in which we can more clearly see and cultivate the qualities of aliveness in our organizations, in our communities, and in ourselves.

Indeed, fundamentally reconceiving the organization and our role within it is the most powerful “social innovation” possible. This is systems scientist Donella Meadows’ premise that the highest leverage point within a system is changing the guiding paradigm.¹¹⁴

To move into an Age of Thrivability, we need to look up to see the landscape stretching out ahead of us, the horizon beckoning from the distance. We need to see ourselves more fully as active stewards of life’s unfolding process and as part of a larger living world.

With this broader view, we can see that our organizations have the potential to be places where we are nourished by our relationships and by the opportunity to contribute and develop our gifts. Where we can be held appreciatively by people and place. Where we can experience beauty, wholeness and healing within our communities and our workplaces. Where we can grow into wisdom alongside each other, with trust

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RESOURCES

INVITE YOU TO visit www.ageofthrivability.com, a site where you can:

- Discover articles, slideshows, videos, practices and stories;
- Talk about the concepts in this book, connect with others, deepen your understanding, contribute your stories, make connections with other models, tools and perspectives, explore, experiment and play with the concepts.
- Find out about upcoming events.

Also, the following communities may be useful in your practice of stewardship (they have been for me):

- There is a global community of practice called the Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter, teaching a range of participatory meeting techniques to catalyze the purpose and passion – the life – that brings people together.
- OpenSpace Agility is a straightforward methodology for effectively introducing culture change through engagement, game mechanics, leadership storytelling and more.
- The Applied Improvisation Network uses playful methods to help people achieve shared intentions and to unleash creativity and life along the way.
- Non-Violent Communication is a widespread practice that enables people to express their individual needs within healthy relationship.
- The Social Lab process brings together the full social ecosystem affected by a shared challenge, in shared experimentation and learning.

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