Chapter IV
The Generative Potential of Appreciative Inquiry for CoP:
The Virtual Enterprise's Emergent Knowledge Model

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ABSTRACT

The chapter investigates an actionable framework of knowledge sharing, from the perspective of appreciative inquiry. This framework should accommodate the creation of appreciative processes that would encourage or better institutionalize knowledge sharing among people of interest in an organization. The idea is extensible to the building of communities in cyberspace so much facilitated in today's Internet and World Wide Web, and it is increasingly visible that such a model of knowledge sharing is quite promising for today's virtual enterprises. The premise in our exploration is that organizations were beginning to understand the power of unleashing knowledge among individuals. What they struggled with was how exactly to unleash that power, albeit that the very behavior of hoarding knowledge is what makes employees successful. The presence of an explicitly appreciative format rendered by the enterprise should allow many to say what is on their mind without being questioned, critiqued or put on the defense. And it could be done using the many electronic services of technology-enabled appreciative systems made available. However, the task of identifying what to watch in building a knowledge-sharing community online is not at all straightforward. For example, community can be examined by focusing on how users or participants work with and learn from the experience of community participation, or on the nature of collective imagination and feelings of identity as a tool for understanding belonging and attachment to particular virtual communities. Our investigation should provide a basis to think about the generative potential of some appreciative processes on a virtual community's knowledge activities. The design and refinement of technology as the conduit for extending and enhancing an organization's appreciative systems is an essential issue, but the role of the individuals as participants

in a virtual community is as important. The emergent challenge is to de-marginalize the concept of appreciative sharing of knowledge among members of the organization, expositing on the effective meaning behind the organization's creation of the appreciative framework for knowledge work through which purposeful individual or organizational activities could be supported with the elaboration of suitable information technologies.

INTRODUCTION

Today, an organization's ability to learn is often considered as a process of leveraging the collective individual learning of the organization to attain a higher-level organization-wide goal. This is a continuous process of creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge accompanied by a modification of behavior to reflect new knowledge and insight. We identify with Peter Senge (1990) that the organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn, and to produce a higher-level organizational asset. In the pages to follow, we write about the restoration of a basic human drive to share what we know, which is traceable to our hunter-gathers' organizational structure (Ehin, 2000) dating back to 10,000 BC, providing a powerful testimony of the value of knowledge sharing. We re-position that age-old knowledge practice at the intersection of the modernizing organization and the expanding electronic network, both of which could be considered as the habitat of our human social beings.

Realistically, organizations today cannot afford the high cost of replacing the knowledge of people they have trained and lost. Instead, to support knowledge sharing, organizations must change intelligently and constantly. Ongoing high-quality conversation (knowledge sharing) is a key to making that kind of change possible. Putting conversation to work means bringing the right people with the requisite knowledge together and motivating their online interaction solve real and immediate problems for the organization. To

reach that level of practical impact, there must be trust and commitment among the participants apart from software and online connectivity. For our organizations, that often means leading and fostering the kind of culture that mobilizes people to share what they know with their peers (co-workers) without a fear of being questioned, critiqued or put on the defense. In the specific context of our discussion, this culture of sharing which should be in the driver's seat for selecting and configuring the technology is developed from the idea of appreciative inquiry (AI) (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

The word appreciation carries with it the recognition of the quality, significance, or magnitude of people and things, and a judgment or opinion, especially a favorable one, as well as an expression of gratitude according to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Therefore, appreciation is feeling validated for our opinion, our efforts, and the unique qualities we bring to bear on a situation. In appreciative inquiry, there is a deliberate action of selectivity and judgment. The inquirer is choosing to look at some stimuli intently and in the process see them more fully. Interestingly, when changing the way we perceive a new situation, we have the power to keep clear of the deficit thinking that is inherent in an organization, though the way we are trained mostly makes it easy to focus on the negative and what is not working in a situation. Yet, it may seem simple and obvious that people who appreciate one another in the workplace will have a better working relationship than those who have an adversarial relationship. So, what then makes it so hard to create an appreciative

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