

Dynamic Relationships

**Unleashing the Power
of Appreciative Inquiry
in Daily Living**

**Jacqueline M. Stavros
and**

Cheri B. Torres

Foreword by David Cooperrider

Taos Institute Publications
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DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIPS
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COVER ART: What a powerful image of dynamic relationships the ocean expresses. At the macro level, the ocean represents the unseen paradigm in which all ocean life exists. The currents and the ocean's relationship with the elements above and below it affect the animals and plant life of the sea without their even knowing that it is present. The ocean itself is in relationship with the planet and the other elements of our world—the wind, the sun, and the land. When the earth quakes in the depths of the ocean, the sea responds and a swell that gathers the force of a powerful tidal wave devastates the land and all that inhabit it, in turn impacting the human condition and inspiring our capacity for compassion and courage. When the full moon rises, the tide responds. At the micro level, when the winds blow hard and the sun shines hot, the ocean transforms itself, one drop of water at a time to fill the air with vapor, which becomes clouds, then rain, where drops of water once again become part of their whole.

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by Jacqueline M. Stavros and Cheri B. Torres

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jstavros@comcast.net
cheri@mobileteamchallenge.com
or www.dynamic-relationships.com

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Foreword

The world is venturing into a new paradigm in which we *consciously* co-create meaning in our world. With these exciting words, Jackie Stavros and Cheri Torres offer us a wonderful volume for learning to live into the appreciative paradigm as well as ways to unleash the positive resources for change that lie omnipresent in our relatedness to everyone and everything that exists.

The key is recognizing the dynamics of our relationships and the significance of our actions, and then living with appreciative intent, say the authors. It is all about unleashing the “true”, the good, the better, and the possible—tapping into the universe of strengths—with elevated and ever expanding awareness, in every encounter and relationship. And “yes” it is something that can be cultivated, easily. In many ways, say the authors, we as human beings are born to appreciate and to express love, to see the best in others and in turn to reap the benefits of others’ appreciations of who we are and might become. *Put most simply: relationships come alive where there is an appreciative eye, where people are able to see the best in one another and create new visions together—with the desire for building not just new worlds but better worlds.* There is a sense of adventure in what the authors are proposing here. The perspective they speak about is literally limitless in its applications.

A short time ago, just as one example of the significance and relevance of this, I shared some of these ideas at a leadership conference. The presentation was apparently well received, as one could sense from the buzz in the room. And then a senior executive of a Fortune 500 company came up to me immediately after the talk. I will not forget his words. He said:

These ideas have implications for every aspect of our business—for literally everything we do as a business...but I only wish I had heard these ideas when I was raising my children.

Surprisingly, little has been written on applying Appreciative

Inquiry—or “AI” as it is increasingly called—in one’s life. And this is the achievement of this terrific book! While the literature on AI as a constructionist approach to organization development is burgeoning, precious little has been written *about* AI beyond the workplace to the family, the carpool, the children’s athletic or art groups, the community, or wherever we gather to connect or play or collaborate. The significance of this is profound, because to really sustain AI in our communities and organizations, propose the authors, we need to practice AI in the more inner and intimate areas of our daily lives—ongoing, a way of life, not just an episodic organization development or change management project.

This work is unique in that it translates complex concepts and research into easy to understand language, exercises, daily experiments, and expansive questions for personal and cooperative reflection. There are applications of recent breakthrough research that is taking place in the positive psychology movement, positive organizational scholarship, and social construction. For instance, here is one example from Chapter 2 that is easily understood:

- Pick one person each day and find something to compliment them for. The compliment should be sincere and genuine. For some, this will not be a stretch. It is something you have thought but not said out loud. Choose a different person each day; be adventurous and choose people with whom you are not usually in the habit of socializing or working. This is especially powerful if you choose someone who says, asks, or does something that doesn’t fit your frame. Pause and reflect before responding the way you are immediately inclined to respond. Look for the gift, insight, creativity, or beneficial perspective they are offering. You might even pick complete strangers. When you have seen the “gift” in their perspective or through their eyes, compliment them in some way for it. Ask for nothing in return, and watch the effect your compliment has on the person. More importantly, reflect on what effect your shift in understanding has on your relationship.

I will tell you what happened to me when I did this exercise. First, it changed my questions. Instead of our normal problem-solving state which can limit us by focusing on everything that is “wrong” and can narrow our attention to available “fixes”, I had to pay attention in a fuller, appreciative way: *what is it that is best, most worthy of compliment and gratitude that I see in the other?* Secondly, with this question guiding me, I started to learn—I saw things in Hannah, my daughter, I had not noticed nearly enough. Hannah is in high school and I was amazed by her provocative thoughts on the political dynamics during the U.S. Presidential elections. When I really listened to her—at one point she asked “Daddy, if we have such a large impact in the world and if we believe in democracy, why don’t we let people around the world have a voice and vote in our election?” Instead of jumping in to explain why not, I paused. I began to see her as a young adult with leadership potentials I had scarcely noticed. My compliment back to her was to share how *her* remarkable thoughts and questions changed my teaching the next day at the University and how she made me think about how proud I was to be a citizen—a world citizen! How she lit up! Next, right after the compliment exercise, she started asking me new things about my work and field. That night, she asked if we, privately, could talk about some tough things happening behind the scenes at school with people she had trusted and thought were friends. I felt sadness in the things she shared, but was overjoyed by the opportunity to talk, to relate, to bond father-daughter. A mini-miracle happened, the gift of each other in a vital developmental sense.

This is not trivial. Carefully embedded in this micro-social chain reaction is an upward spiral theory of change. We make our world significant. This book shows that

1. By the courage of our questions (the deep search for what is best in life and the strengths of those around us), we change the world around us,

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2. It is in the depth of our connections and conversations with others that we change ourselves and our relationships one conversation at a time, and
3. This happens through the relational resources that are born and shared in settings of mutual appreciation and discovery that results in fostering love, empathy, hope, inspiration, respect, and joy.

If you choose only one of the dozens of exercises in this book, please don't overlook this one. We literally live in worlds our questions create. Hannah and I will never be the same. Why? Because I am going to repeat and repeat the exercise until it becomes, as the authors suggest, a new and automatic action—an “appreciative action.”

As I say, this is the first book to bring Appreciative Inquiry straight into our personal lives. I hope it is the start of many more, for the appreciable world is so much larger than our normal appreciative capacity for knowing it. Walt Whitman once said, “As for me I know nothing else but miracles”; guess what Whitman could see? He was aware of poetic possibilities everywhere. This is what Jackie Stavros and Cheri Torres get us to understand: that it is a conscious choice. *Dynamic Relationships: Unleashing the Power of Appreciative Inquiry in Daily Living* will help all of us unleash unexpected positive change everywhere we apply its life-centric principles.

David L. Cooperrider, Ph.D.
Professor of Organizational Behavior
Weatherhead School of Management
Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, Ohio

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engage in positive dynamic relationships. We especially wish to acknowledge with love and appreciation: our husbands, Paul Stavros and Michael Torres, and our children, Laura and Carmen Torres, Ally and Adam Stavros. Thank you to our parents, Stan and Fran Baran, Ed and Martha Kimball, and Barbara and Joseph Bogert (who began the journey with us) for their enduring support and love.

We have been affected in pivotal ways by our relationships with all of you, which bring home the very heart of this book. We are deeply grateful. *Dynamic Relationships* is what it is because of our shared journey.

Relational Identity

By Patrick Riney

*We
 Are who we are
 Until
 Someone views us
 As someone other
 Than who we think ourselves to be.
 Instantly
 We become also
 Who we seem to be to them.
 It's true,
 As society's children
 We are so much more
 Than who we are to ourselves.
 We also are
 Who we are
 To everyone else.*

Prologue

*“We cannot live for ourselves alone.
Our lives are connected by a thousand invisible threads,
and along these sympathetic fibers our actions run
as cause and return to us as results.”*

~Herman Melville~

This book is designed to open the doorway into the *appreciative paradigm* in daily living. It describes how living with the intent to create positive, expansive ways of relating and knowing actually increases the sustainability of positive change in and beyond previous applications of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to organizational life. *Dynamic Relationships* invites you to unleash the power of AI in your life, influencing the generation of communities that construct positive meaning. It will also influence your way of being in the world.

This book is about living Appreciative Inquiry. It is about seeing yourself in relation to and integrated with whole communities. We use this venue to offer the practice of the principles of AI as the foundation for being in relationships. Living AI requires enhancing awareness through cycles of reflection and action:

- *Reflection* calls us to ask questions such as:
 - Q. How are we responding or reacting to one another?
 - Q. What are we aware of (assumptions, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, etc.)?
 - Q. What are we working to create and how are we creating meaning together?

The hope is that this might lead to further reflections like:

- Q. How did I come to understand things the way I do when it seems so different from you?
- Q. How can we come to understand one another and create shared meaning?
- Q. What meaning will my actions have for others?
- Q. How are my actions influencing the relationship?

- *Action* calls for [or includes] consideration for the options I choose. Such consideration addresses the impact my choices have on the environment and others; the way my action changes the relationship or community; and the impact of my actions on my relationships, my organization, or family.

When we recognize and understand the dynamics of relationships, we discover new ways of knowing or understanding, new ways to be in relationship with the world and everyone in our life. We have the opportunity to generate more joy and abundance in our lives by relating in appreciative ways. This book is about entertaining the possibility that our lives and the world in which we find ourselves cannot be held apart from our reflections or actions. Ken Gergen suggests that by “reflecting critically on our taken-for-granted worlds, and the way in which our lives are affected by these constructions, we may be freed to consider alternatives.”¹ *Dynamic Relationships* is about considering and choosing to work with the appreciative paradigm. It is about entertaining the idea that we are inseparably related to one another and that by relating with positive intent, we can create more effective and joyful communities.

The *appreciative paradigm* is a perspective that invites us to attend to the positive dynamics in our relationships and communities:

- Q. What is working?
- Q. What gives life to the relationship?
- Q. What is right?
- Q. How are we successful because of our dynamics?
- Q. How can we achieve our greatest dreams together and discover our positive core?

This paradigm calls us to recognize that we are relational beings: we do not act alone in the world, and every action has a relational impact. This book is a personal call to become aware that *you are integrally related with others*—including us, the authors, as you read this book—and that you are a part of creating meaning in the world through your actions and interactions with others. Further, it is a call for you to have a positive impact in all of your various communities of choice—with significant others, family, friends, communities, organizations, and beyond.

Who Should Read This Book?

We invite anyone interested in creating and sustaining positive change in the world to join us. We intend the term ‘community’ to be understood in the broadest sense of the word. We understand community to include the intimacy of your relationship with your partner, the small community of your family, the larger community of friends and neighbors, your community of faith, your communities of learning and education, your work community, as well as any other group with whom you share an interest and a relationship. In the smallest sense of community, we include your relationship with yourself; in the grandest sense of the word, we include the world. Your immediate communities; however, are those with which you relate on a daily basis. It is in these relational communities that positive change in the world is potentially constructed and sustained.

We have written this book for those who have experienced AI or some type of strength-based approach to change and want to sustain it at work by seeing the impact of it in daily living. Yet it is relevant for anyone who wants to *consciously* have positive dynamic relationships in their life. For those new to AI, we invite you to read more about its origin and use in organizational life. The reference list at the end of this book includes a wealth of resources, though reading these is not necessary to gain value from *Dynamic Relationships*. For everyone it encourages you to embrace life by recognizing your connections and the inherent relevance and value of your actions.

What this book calls for may require a significant shift in your perspective. It requires leaving a paradigm that may be familiar and comfortable, one that may have proven highly successful for you. The current dominant western worldview, which espouses rugged individualism, autonomy, independence, and progress through problem-solving, has delivered wealth to many (you may be one) and incredible technological advances for the world (which have benefited many). We have been influenced by this cultural paradigm as well as participated in continuing to reinforce it by the

way we live. This individualized paradigm is part of the way we frame our world, how we understand, and how we make decisions. This book is about re-framing how you see and experience your relationship to your communities and the world.

Dynamic Relationships is a call to change the way we live and work together. It is an invitation to develop a new set of beliefs for how you perceive and make sense of the world. It is also intended as a guide for a new way for all of us to make meaning together. Many corporations, communities, and families are doing just this as they flatten their structures. They are seeing themselves as dynamic systems and calling for leadership at every level because of the value of engaging the full potential of every person.

The idea of systems thinking has been around for more than 50 years in the engineering and scientific world. Jay Forrester is responsible for introducing the concept of systems thinking to organizational change in the 1960s. He suggested that an organization was a complex whole of interrelating and interdependent parts, stressing *relationship* as the process that created the context of the organization. Peter Senge is responsible for bringing this concept into the public forum with *The Fifth Discipline*. Steven Covey's *The 8th Habit* calls for the awareness of *real* relationships as the critical factor for the power of an organization. Organizations are networks of relationships between people. This power is the connection between the people, the quality of relationships.

The shift is spreading to communities that are calling for their members to have a voice, to recognize their relationships are dynamic, and to take an active role in creating their community of choice. Families share decision making in family meetings where children can be heard. This book is about sustaining such positive change by supporting your ability to recognize the dynamics of your relationships and to act with appreciative intent.

What's in This For *You*?

Imagine a life of opportunity, one full of possibility and potential. Imagine a life where you have a sense of wholeness and connectedness with others. This kind of connection is fluid, positive, enriching, and dynamic. It is a life where anything that can be imagined has the potential to be developed and brought into being. Imagine celebrating conflict as a catalyst for discovering diversity in knowledge and opinion as well as differences in underlying assumptions. Ponder the value of such collaboration in the generation of new knowledge and innovative thought. Consider the resulting value to your organization and to the world. Imagine families relating in ways that make them strong, whole, and mutually supportive, acknowledging strengths in differences and celebrating individual gifts that make the whole so much more than each person alone. Imagine feeling alive, vibrant, curious, empowered, safe, valued, and joyful—the sense of life that a young child has, but recaptured with the kind of awareness that only an adult can develop.

Does this sound too good to be true? Our experiences of taking appreciative action in our communities affirm that such a world is possible, and there are people who are moving toward it already. You may even know some of them or know *of* them. You may have said, “They’re so lucky” or “I wish I were more like them,” never imagining that it is possible for your life to be different. There is nothing stopping you from moving towards this imagined world except you and your way of making sense of the world. As soon as you can see and accept that you have options in creating a meaningful life, that you can perceive, interpret, and act differently from the way you are right now, you have the option of moving toward the world you imagined.

Moving toward your imagined world is a gradual process, simply because it calls for changing old habits of being in relationships. We cannot predict how long it will take you to step into this promising world. We, ourselves, are still moving toward it—but

we can predict that you will experience moments of what you imagined as you practice the exercises and complete the journal assignments that you find throughout the book.

Positive dynamic relationships are based on six core principles explained in Chapter 1. The more dedicated you are to practicing these six principles, the more you will experience relationships that uplift and elevate. Be encouraged that it is a continual process of moving toward the appreciative paradigm where your actions are governed by positive intent. With every step—no matter how small—you will be moving in that direction. But don't take our word for it, try it yourself. If you do, as David Cooperrider suggested in the *Foreword*, you will not be disappointed. In fact, we predict you will be delighted.

This book is about discovering your current habits of thought and action and—with awareness—learning to be in relationships with appreciative intent. You will find exercises, activities, journal reflection questions, and other ideas to support your ability to live into this new paradigm. Your ability and dedication to living in the appreciative paradigm will be determined by your willingness to try the activities, practice new ways of thinking and acting, and apply each principle in daily living. The principles are²:

1. The Constructionist Principle—the way we know affects our actions.
2. The Principle of Simultaneity—change happens the moment you ask the question.
3. The Poetic Principle—life is an open book.
4. The Anticipatory Principle—we move in the direction of the images we hold.
5. The Positive Principle—the more positive the image or question, the more positive the action.
6. The Principle of Awareness—self-reflective awareness is needed to apply the principles in your life.

The concept of *Dynamic Relationships* is based in large part on the groundbreaking work of David Cooperrider and his colleagues into what has come to be known as Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Therefore, Chapter 2 of this book introduces the five core principles of AI and the new Principle of Awareness. We explore the ways that these principles enhance relationships and sustain positive change in families, organizations, and communities. Deciding you want to engage consciously in dynamic relationships is easy; transforming the way you relate and living the six principles requires change. It calls you to question assumptions, change old habits, beliefs and values, and entertain new perspectives. This is the challenge we address in Chapter 3, where you will learn a technique to develop self-reflective awareness regarding the dynamics of your relationships and expand the possibilities for what can be created in those relationships. In this chapter we bring in the concept of the *collective person*, as developed by Jane Seiling. In Chapter 4, we share a useful framework for bringing the power of AI into your life through the practice of appreciative intent. Chapter 5 provides key illustrations and exercises to help you sustain positive change in daily living. Chapter 6 is our closing invitation for you to join us in seeing the world from the appreciative paradigm in hopes of changing our world—through dynamic relationships!

How to Get the Most Out of This Book

There are a couple of ways to read this book. One way is the standard approach, where you start at the beginning and read straight through to the end. This approach will give you the big picture, after which you can go back and begin to practice the exercises and ponder the questions. The second technique is to read a chapter or section of a chapter and then experience what you have read by answering the questions or doing the activities sequentially as laid out in the book.

To get the most out of any book you must act—and, in this case, maintain an ongoing determination that doesn't wax and

wane. Thus, we offer the following suggestions for nurturing that determination:

- ***Work with a partner or collaborative learning group:*** Find another person or group and form a Dynamic Relationships collaborative group (a DR partner or group). DR partners or groups should be others who are interested in positive dynamic relationships, systems thinking, and discovering new ways of making meaning in life, specifically using a strength focused, appreciative approach. You can even develop an on-line dialogue with a cohort of people who are collaborating to bring about a new way of relating in their department or organization. If you prefer to work on your own, we encourage you to use a journal as your DR partner. It is important to allow other voices to surface in your journal assignments by imagining how your colleagues, friends, and family might respond to a given question. Listen to these voices and reflect deeply on your experiences. It is valuable to do your work in relationship, even if it is in relationship with yourself and the many perspectives you can imagine.
- ***Practice and live the six principles:*** Applying these will change your relationships and your world as you know it.
- ***Act:*** Do at least one activity a week, preferably one every few days.
- ***Reflect:*** Pay attention to your thoughts and actions—reflect, and be aware of how the world reflects back on your actions. Be aware of the options that arise when reflecting on your thoughts and actions. Be aware of the possibilities that you and others have, and when possible explore these options together.
- ***Be curious*** about the dynamics of relationships and how it is that people bring about the best in each other in any situation.

If you follow these five suggestions, your world will change, most of your relationships will improve, and you will discover a whole new sense of freedom.

You may find that friendships deepen and expand, and you may also lose friendships. There is much to be gained by sharing experiences, discovering each other's stories, and having support for a change process. We would never have discovered and learned all that we have if we had not been in dialogue with one another, as well as with all those who have given valuable feedback and insight on this book. If you join us in this dialogue, together we will discover and learn even more about positive dynamic relationships. We invite you to work with us in discovering all the positive possibilities we can create together in coming to know what it means to live in dynamic relationships with appreciative intent.

Co-authoring this book has been challenging, enlightening, exciting, energizing, and rewarding. Though we began our conversation about writing together in 2003, we did not understand fully what we would create together until its completion. It has truly been an experience of collaborative learning and emergent knowledge, sharing our hopes, insights, and assumptions. What we have experienced through the process is what happens when Appreciative Inquiry is unleashed in dynamic relationships. This book truly is a living testimonial of what is contained in its pages.

Asking each other to explain and clarify helped us move beyond our assumptions and tacit understandings. Defining concepts and ideas coherently enough to write them could only have happened in collaboration with one another and others. It meant discovering the dynamics in our relationship and learning how to maximize our strengths in our work together. Those who reviewed our early manuscripts asked questions that challenged our views and pushed us to go deeper in our understanding. In doing so, our way of knowing and speaking about what it means to live in the appreciative paradigm were transformed. This book is by no means the final product on this paradigm; it is the beginning of an exciting new adventure.

Finally, as authors and learners, we invite your comments on this *Focus Book*. We invite you to join us on this collaborative journey by sharing your stories and giving us feedback. Your comments on what you read and how you are applying it in your life will contribute to the emerging knowledge pool associated with dynamic relationships and appreciative action. With your insight, experience, and input into the process everyone learns more. Please contact either of us at jstavros@comcast.net or cheri@mobileteamchallenge.com or www.dynamic-relationships.com.

Jackie and Cheri

Chapter 1

Introduction

*“Change always starts with confusion;
cherished interpretations must dissolve
to make way for the new.”*

~Margaret Wheatley~

The incredible challenges facing today’s countries, organizations, communities, families, and individuals, as well as our global and environmental problems, require creative solutions. They require us to recognize the dynamics of our relationships and to work constructively with the dynamics of those relationships. They require innovative thinking generated through enlivened and motivated conversation. We need an approach that focuses on possibility, inspires creativity, and taps our full thinking capacity. This is the appreciative paradigm in action.

The Origin of the “*Appreciative Paradigm*”

A paradigm is a model or way of understanding or representing something. Thomas Kuhn brought this term into public use with his paradigm-shifting book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. He defines a paradigm as a set of beliefs that govern the way the world is perceived and understood. A paradigm is a way of organizing and explaining what is happening (in your world), which is governed by a set of (spoken or unspoken) rules or principles.

The *appreciative paradigm* is so named because of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), one of today’s most recognized and popular approaches to systems change. AI is being used by thousands of companies and communities around the world to undertake change initiatives, including companies like McDonald’s, NASA, Hunter Douglas, Tendercare, Roadway, and community organizations like Imagine Chicago, Imagine Nepal, the United Nations, Girl Scouts—USA, Save the Children, and World Vision. Systems change can be large scale—like Chicago, Nepal, or NASA—or small—like a family or a relationship. The appreciative paradigm is applicable to them all.

AI is “the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves a systematic discovery of what gives a system “life” when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms.”³

To appreciate is to simply value something. It's the act of recognizing the best in people and things. It is also to increase in value.

To inquire is the act of exploration or discovery. It also refers to the act of asking questions and being open to seeing new potentials and possibilities.

At its broadest level, AI is about discovering value in people, places, and things. It is about discovering the positive core. These are the strengths, life-giving forces, and the greatest opportunity in a situation or an organization's process of discovering and moving toward even greater value. AI is a way of embracing life that gives hope and opportunity to each day and every situation. A fundamental concept related to AI is that every person, place, and thing has something of value, some worth, some untapped opportunity; one simply has to inquire into it. The appreciative paradigm is a model for living that encompasses AI and its principles.

Since we use the word "positive" throughout this book, we feel it is important to provide you with *our* understanding of the term. We use 'positive' as Kim Cameron and Arran Caza define it, as "referring to an affirmative bias focused on the elevating processes and dynamics."⁴ In using this point of reference we understand that the dynamics of these elevated feelings, processes, and outcomes generate communities with increased capacity for learning, innovation, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. We propose that relating with such positive intent creates dynamic relationships that expand our capacity to respond to the challenges of our world.

The Problem-Solving Paradigm

We are born into the world without boundaries or lines of separation between us. Research on early childhood development has led to the conclusion that infants do not experience *I* and *Thou*, but rather they simply experience. They explore the world through touch and taste. "What is this?" "What does it taste like?" There is little

regard for safety or fear of harm as infants and toddlers explore the world with curiosity and wonder. Language development pushes a child's inquiry further into the world. They question, "who, what, where, when, how, and why, why, why?" A young child's interest is simply about exploring and experiencing; they naturally ask learner-oriented questions. "What can I do with this?" "What happens if I do that?" "How does this work?"

Their unbridled curiosity and experiential drive are curtailed in the name of safety, language development, and socialization. Staying safe in order to stay alive becomes a primary focus. Learning to fit in and behaving in socially acceptable ways become the primary lesson. The child comes to make sense of the world through language that frames us as distinct individuals and develops a foundation for relationships which is associated with you and me, right and wrong, winner and loser, safe and harmful, etc.

For generations children have developed within a framework of differentiation, separation, limited resources, and the concepts of competition and danger. They have been encouraged to be careful to judge the comparative value and safety of everything. "What's wrong with this picture?" "Which one is different from the rest?" "Am I good enough?" "Am I better than?" "Be careful of the dark." "Don't smoke, don't drink, don't run, and don't speak unless spoken to." This type of questioning and thinking leads us to inquire into the world around us in ways that focus our attention on what is different, what separates us, what is wrong, and what needs fixing. This leads us to judge all that we experience. We call this approach *deficit inquiry*; it leads to deficit-based solutions to problems.

As a perspective for moving forward in the world, such inquiry has been useful. Society reflects incredible advancements: inventions and improvements, highly successful corporations, technological and medical advances, and scientific discoveries about the nature of living cells. Individualistic deficit-based thinking informs the very foundation of our thinking process and for most people it is hard to imagine a different way, much less a better way. Along with all of the benefits; however, we have generated striking divisions among groups of people in the world. We are a nation

divided, a world at war, and a planet threatened by environmental crisis. The cost of individualism, competition, autonomy, and deficit-based inquiry is immense.

Shifting Paradigms

Current research in psychology, education, science, and organizational behavior raise important questions about the merits of looking at the world solely in this way. Such research suggests that a different way of understanding the world is essential. The notion of dynamic systems is now showing up everywhere. This notion is that nothing happens in isolation, but rather every change—even a small one—results in an instantaneous shift for everything that is related to that which changed. With this realization comes the opportunity to ask questions about how our actions actually impact our relationships and communities.

This is a different way of inquiring into and being in relationship to the world. It offers even greater potential for planning, growth, education, improving relationships, and innovative change. Current research in the field of Positive Psychology is finding that focusing on what is wrong in an effort to fix it actually narrows our thought repertoire, thereby restricting our access to the very skills we need for creativity and critical thinking.⁵ Engaging in activities, thoughts, and behaviors that produce positive emotions, for example, uncovering what *is* working and dreaming about the ideal, actually expand our thought repertoire and increase creativity.⁶ Greater capacity for change, growth, learning, effective relationships, and solution-finding is the outcome.

This is not to say that there is no place for the traditional problem solving approach. When the electricity goes off, we celebrate the electrician who can figure out what is wrong and fix it. But inquiry into deficits does not serve us well when our goals are to develop trust within relationships, educate our children, or create innovative change within an organization or political system. Deficit inquiry is actually an obstacle in such situations.

A simple example may provide clarity. Senior management has called for your department to “do more, faster!” (A novel idea, eh?). You have met with your department several times and looked over your entire process searching for ways to eliminate wasted time, energy, and resources. You have streamlined to the fullest extent. There is nothing more that can be cut without jeopardizing the end result. Your team has looked for all the possible ways to fix the system (as it exists) and there is nothing more to be done. Management says, “Not good enough! Do more, faster! Our competition is doing it twice as fast for half as much money!”

Being the bright, intelligent, person that you are, you realize that if someone else can do this faster and better, so can your team. You recognize that you have been given a benchmark and realize that this calls for innovative change. You now address the situation in a completely different way with a different set of questions. You move into an inquiry. Your first question to management is, “What exactly is it that you want us to do more of and faster? Tell me what you really want.” Based upon the answer, your second inquiry then, is “how can we do ‘that’ in the fastest way possible, with great results?” Now your team comes together around an entirely different project. You have a different goal and you are free to bring the combined creative capacities of your team to achieve that goal. This time you allow yourselves to move toward the actual goal, instead of trying to make an old process do what it can’t do. Your solution will undoubtedly look quite different from the one found via old process of deficiency. The nature of your questions must change; the solution is integrally connected to the vision.

Stepping into an Emerging Paradigm

Dynamic Relationships is about stepping into this emerging paradigm. As noted earlier, we refer to it as the *appreciative paradigm*, where we come to make sense of the world as a dynamic system and we relate in appreciative ways. This paradigm is based on

recognizing that everything is integrally related and these relationships are governed by a set of six principles. These six principles include the five original principles of AI—the Constructionist Principle, the Principle of Simultaneity, the Poetic Principle, the Anticipatory Principle, and the Positive Principle—plus a sixth principle, which we introduce: The Principle of Awareness. We believe self-reflective awareness—*people’s aware of their relationship to others in a community*—is essential to unleash the full power of AI in your life.

To explain dynamic relationships, we offer the following definitions. The first two are dictionary definitions; the third is taken from systems design work related to civil engineering:

Dynamic: *characterized by continuous change, activity, or progress; characterized by vigor and energy.*

Dynamics: *the physical, intellectual or moral forces that produce motion, activity, and change in a given sphere; the conduct of an interpersonal relationship.*

Dynamic Relationship: *a model where objects in a design are aware of their relationship to other objects in the design; make a change and the entire design updates and changes automatically. The objects are products of the design and automatically react to changes in the design. It is a model rather than a static entity. With dynamic relationships, design changes and “what if” scenarios can be done faster and in multiple iterations to see how the changes affect the site design.⁷*

Thus, we offer you the definition used in this book:

Dynamic Relationships: *Communities where members are self-reflectively aware of the richness of their relationship with and to others. Their awareness extends to understanding that relationships are dynamic; any action taken on the part of any member will result in changes for other members and potentially for the community as a whole.*

Furthermore, dynamic relationships imply that the members of the community can impact the whole system by their actions and they, as part of the system, will similarly be affected by the actions of others in the community. Dynamic relationships mean that community changes and “what if” scenarios can be accomplished fast and in multiple ways when responding to the challenges or opportunities presented to the community.

The addition of AI into these relationships allows the underlying intent behind actions to progress in the best way possible for the community and to increase value by relating in ways that generate elevated feelings, processes, and outcomes. We refer to relating in this way as living with *appreciative intent*. Dynamic relationships governed by appreciative intent will inevitably lead to appreciative actions by members, resulting in greater participation, joy, happiness, and value. Taking appreciative action in your relationships is living the six principles with positive intent. From the appreciative paradigm such actions are natural.

Whenever new paradigms emerge, they emerge across many disciplines and social sectors. The most current research in psychology, education, medicine, and organizational scholarship, reveals dialogue and learning that reflect the appreciative paradigm. This research assures us that we are indeed significant players in creating meaning and generating knowledge in our associations. We act and create change and we are changed when others act. Our actions within our communities are generative. Quantum physics tells us that, at the most detailed level, the universe is less a statement about what *is* and more an invitation to *probabilities*. Current research in physics indicates that “material stuff” is really more a probability statement that is highly correlated with not only what is going on the instant before it is observed or measured, but also with what happens the same instant that the observation or measurement takes place. What *is* is inherently relational and dynamic—it is connected through time and space.

We are relational beings, integrally connected to one another and our environment. our relationships deeply inform who we are and how we act, which in turn impacts others at “this moment”—

impacting the “next instant” in the relationship. Our actions and their impact on others are inseparable. We are interconnected. This is the very nature of dynamic relationships. Our collective experience today determines what our tomorrow will look like. The appreciative paradigm suggests that changes in our relationships and communities come about through our conversations—the words we choose to use, the questions we decide to ask, and the way we hear and understand the answers informs our thinking and knowing.

This means we play an integral part; we are a link. Most significantly, how we choose to interact in a relationship matters. This concept explains why traditional problem-solving inquiry—with its focus on comparative-judging questions—is likely to lead us down a path towards an awareness or outcome very different from the path resulting from questions based upon discovering, valuing, imagining, designing, and learning.

Judging questions set us apart from the situation and result in statements that lead to deficit-based answers (what is wrong, who is to blame, how could such a thing have happened?).⁸ Such questions imply and reinforce individualism and separation; as Parker Palmer says in *The Courage to Teach*, “either-or-thinking has given us a fragmented sense of reality that destroys the wholeness and wonder of life.” “What is wrong with ‘that’?” or “What is wrong with him?” implies a very different kind of relationship than “What strengths does he bring to the group?” or “What aspects of ‘that’ are working well for us?” In the first sense we look for the misfit, why something or someone is not part of the community. We seek solutions in the other rather than in the relationship. In the latter case we are looking for the fit, how something or someone enhances the community or our process; how it or they fit into the *whole*. In this way we seek solutions through relationship. In actuality, the extent and breadth of the research supporting the appreciative paradigm tells us self-reflective awareness is essential to living together in ways that bring joy, abundance, and wellness to our organizations, communities, and families on an on-going basis because our relationships are dynamic.

As significant members of a community, our actions very quickly become a responsibility. This responsibility requires our full awareness, not only of our part in the whole, but also in how our part impacts others, how others impact us, how we want to be together, and what we want to create together. When we no longer see ourselves as standing alone, apart, and separate, our every action becomes significant, because we understand ourselves as integrally related to all that is around us.

Whether we want to or not, as relational beings, each of us impacts those around us in important ways. Our actions are part of creating and recreating our relationships with everyone everyday. The probability of any given outcome for those relationships is in part dependent upon us. Palmer encourages us to “find our place in the ecosystem of reality, that we might see more clearly which actions are life-giving and which are not—and in the process participate more fully in our own destinies, and the destiny of the world.”¹⁰ If our action makes someone’s day great, we are likely to have a very different interchange with him (or her) than if our action “gets him (her) before he (she) get us.”

The process of applying self-reflective awareness requires the following three steps:

1. Pause for a moment, step back, and consider the actions you are about to take and accept responsibility for your part in the dynamics of your relationships with your family, your friends, your colleagues, and your community.
2. Consider the likely impact of those actions on others. How are they likely to respond? What other possible actions might you take and with what consequences?
3. Discover the meaning of your words and actions (as others understand them) by listening carefully and attending to what comes back to you—the responses from others to your actions.

This cycle of reflection and action—based upon active awareness—is what characterizes relating from the appreciative paradigm. This simple yet powerful process changes everything.

In the appreciative paradigm we accept that we are relational beings and that, by staying actively aware, we can act together in ways that increase value for everyone. This paradigm offers significant benefits for accepting responsibility for our lives and social systems. It calls us to relate in ways that work for all those involved. Instead of the world happening to us, we happen *with* the world. A wonderful example of this is presented by Harlene Anderson in *Conversation, Language, and Possibilities: A Postmodern Approach to Therapy*. Anderson explores the question of how “therapists and clients can create relationships and conversations that allow both parties to access possibilities where none seemed to exist before.” She emphasizes the importance of “therapist and client engaging in *collaborative relationships* and *generative conversations* to form *conversational partnerships* toward powerful transformations in people’s lives and toward successful futures.”¹¹ This describes a relationship where those involved are aware and work together to create meaning that is positive for both people.

Dynamic Relationships is about learning to step into this appreciative paradigm to become both aware and responsible and to subsequently relate in ways that develop healthy, vibrant relationships in communities that are able to create and re-create themselves in effective ways. It’s about changing your actions and the nature of your listening. Our experience is that this paradigm promises an increasing ability for all of us to generate more joy, abundance, and wellness in our lives, families, organizations, communities, and the world.

Appreciative Inquiry in Action

AI offers a profoundly pragmatic and effective frame for the appreciative paradigm, which is both simple and straightforward. AI is about inquiring into what is of value, what is working when we

are at our best. Such inquiry as a way of making meaning together generates positive images and positive actions.

Within the field of organization development and change management, a methodology (known as the 4-D Cycle)¹² for creating innovative change using AI has been used effectively, offering a proven approach for positive change. This way of relating at the organizational level has been positively impacting strategic planning and change management initiatives for more than 25 years. Sustaining that positive change is a major challenge for most organizations. A short experience of AI is typically profound for people; however, it is easy to slip back into old ways of relating because of our habits of thought and action as well as established relational patterns. For an organization to truly shift to the appreciative paradigm and to sustain an appreciative way of organizing, a significant number of people must work and live from the appreciative paradigm and its core principles. They must organize with self-reflective awareness as a dynamic community. This will be the focus of Chapter 2.

An appreciative organization or a successful, on-going positive change effort within any system (be it a business, community, church, or family) requires those within the system to live and work within the appreciative paradigm. They must be responsible for creating value, supporting best practices, and building relationships that uplift the members and the organization. When an entire organization or community is aware of the positive dynamic possibilities for working together anything can be achieved. When they do work together utilizing the principles of AI, the entire community will experience greater joy, happiness, respect, and value. Sustaining positive dynamic relationships requires members of a community to practice ways of connecting, relating, acting, and being together that are congruent with appreciative intent.

FOCUS BOX

In closing Chapter 1, we offer a couple of reflections:

- ❑ Think about someone—from different perspectives: Think about a family member—preferably a spouse, partner, child, or someone with whom you live or work. First, reflect on the things about that person that you would like to fix, change, or adjust in some way. Imagine trying to help them “be a better partner or person” by telling them how to fix or change those things you believe need fixing or changing. Now answer this question: How will they hear your suggestions? What will they experience? How does this thinking inform your relationship with them?

Now think about that same person. This time, reflect on the things about that person that you love, the things they do that warms your heart, the things you appreciate most about this person, the things he or she does really well. When is he or she at his or her best? Imagine telling this person what you respect, admire, and understand about him or her at his or her best. How will he or she hear these acknowledgments? What will he or she experience? How does this thinking inform your relationship with them?

- ❑ Pause Before Acting: When you are at home tonight pause and reflect for a moment before you interact. (If you live alone, pause and consider your time spent with yourself.) What kind of interaction do you want to have with those at home? Consider what kind of evening you want to have with others. Are your anticipated actions likely to support the kind of interaction you want to have, the kind of relationship you seek?