The Wonder of Interpersonal Relationships VIf: Webs That Sustain Relationships Midst Differences

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We have much to learn about our intricate relationships with other people—especially when we are engaged in relationships with people who see and act in our mid-21 Century world that differs in significant ways from the way in which we see and act in the world. We try to learn about these relationships by looking back in history to those who have "pulled this off" – such as the Back family and Abrahan Lincoln's team of rivals. We can also look at more recent examples of sustaining relationships midst differences. We can turn to Carol Gilligan, who exemplifies her own espoused "ethics of care."

Perhaps this is all we need—some exemplars and a few words of advice. However, this doesn't see to always "do the trick." As I have already noted in this series of essays, unconscious forces prod us to splitting and enforcing our "difference" from other people with whom we disagree. There is also the matter of socio-economic and political forces that set us apart from other people who reside on the "other side of the line."

I would suggest that this still doesn't "do the trick." We are involved in a tightly-interwoven interdependence with other people that suggests we relate to and separate from other people in a manner that precludes independent judgement regarding these relationships. We are involved not just in many relationships—which makes our interpersonal world quite complicated—but also in many relationships that are all interwoven with one another – which makes our interpersonal world quite complex.

We could look beyond interpersonal relationships to gain insights about our complex (rather than just complicated) relationships with other people—especially relationships that are in some manner contentious. We might want to look at other segments of our living world to see how complex relationships are nurtured and sustained.

We could study the interdependence of bees and flowers, as many social biologists have done. The behavior of lion prides hunting in Africa (which I have observed) can provide us clues. There is no leader among the lioness who do all of the hunting. They circle their victim (usually an antelope) and slowly move closer with one lioness suddenly launching the attack. The hunt is beautifully choreographed without a choreographer or lead "dancer." We could learn from the swarming fish or flocking birds as I suggested in the second essay in this series (Bergquist, 2023b). Perhaps, we could learn from octopi—as Karen Bustamonte and I have done with several colleagues in response to the movie about octopi as teachers (Bustamonte and Bergquist, 2021).

Our Forests Can Teach Us About Complex, Interdependent Relationships

Another source of insights about complex relationships has recently come into prominence. This source is the teaching being done by the forests of our world. There is much to learn from our forests, and we are now getting to know our forests. While we dwelled in them for many years and have more recently done a pretty good job of destroying them, the forests of planet Earth are now being studied and

appreciated for what they are: complex ecosystems that are dependent on diversity and interconnectedness for their survival. I would suggest that we might find a similar need for diversity and interconnection in our study of human systems.

Diversity

What does it mean for a forest to be diverse? One need only spend some time wandering through an “old growth” forest (which are now rare) or at least a “second growth” forest. We will find trees and plants of many different kinds in these forests. We will also find some old tress and some new trees. Moss, mushrooms, and flowers litter the forest floor.

Perhaps of greatest important are the trees that have fallen over. They are often covered in moss or lichens of many kinds. They provide nourishment as they are “dying” and returning to the soil from which they came. These forests are also home to many animals—ranging from birds to small mammals and from the squirrels who scurry up and down the trees to the deer and bear who are most likely to attract our attention.

By contrast, we can walk through a homogenous forest that we humans have created. There are many former Christmas tree plots near my home in Maine. Trees of a specific type (e.g. spruce or pine) were planted many years ago at the same time and in straight lines. Today, these trees have grown tall and scraggly, competing with one another for sunlight.

The bottom sections of these trees tend to be barren with only a few branches with a few needles sticking out in need of light. The forest floor is without any life—just depleted soil with a few new trees seeking to survive under the canopy of the old, “warn-out” and unused Christmas trees. These “artificial” forests are easy to spot and leave one with a lingering sense of sterility and despair—they also teach us in dramatic fashion that diversity is critical if forests are to remain vital (and beautiful).

Interconnection

There is also the matter of interconnection among the living organisms to be found in a forest. Many recent articles and books have been written about this interconnection—leading to the declaration that forests are intricate webs of interconnection. At the heart of this forest web are the fungi that serves as messengers and conveyers of resources. A noted writer about nature, Robert Macfarlane (2019, pp. 90-91) introduces this remarkable fungi-based web:

> The fungi and the trees had 'forged their duality into a oneness, thereby making a forest, . . . Instead of seeing trees as individual agents competing for resources . . . the forest [is] a 'co-operative system' in which trees “talk” to one another, producing a collaborative intelligence . . .described as 'forest wisdom'. Some older trees even 'nurture' smaller trees that they recognize as their 'kin’, acting as 'mothers'. . . . .[T]he whole vision of a forest ecology shimmered and shifted - from a fierce free market to something more like a community with a socialist system of resource redistribution."

This remarkable interconnected eco-system was fully appreciated by many aboriginal societies and was honored in their animistic religious traditions. For those of us who are living in “more advanced” societies, wisdom of the web of wood has been lost on us until recent studies of the forests in which we dwelled (or have chopped down).

The Forest Web: Relationships and Empowerment

I propose that there is much to learn from the forests and other relationship-based webs. I devote time later in this essay to these various kinds of webs—especially as they sustain connection in the midst of difference. I have already set the stage for this journey through the forest by dwelling briefly on the more human matter of the diverse perspectives we taken on the very human world in which we are all living. In the fifth essay in this series, I introduced three domains that can be engaged when addressing interpersonal challenges (Bergquist, 2023e). These domains concern information, intentions and ideas.

I revisit this analysis because all three of these domains also are to be found in the eco-system of a forest. We might better understand how the web of wood operates by noting how the fungi transmits information between trees and plants in the forest; furthermore, there is a shared, inherent recognition by all living beings in the forest that they must collaborate to survive. Obviously, there are no town council meetings held in the forest to establish and maintain this shared intention (preservation of life and a viable ecosystem).

Self-Organization

Much as in the case of all other living systems, there is a strong tendency and capacity of forest systems to "self-organize" (the concept I introduced in the fourth essay in this series) (Bergquist, 2023d). Much as our own brain operates without a central coordinating mechanism, so does the forest operate without this central coordination. Yet, in both the human brain and forest there is a powerful guiding intention that is manifest in all of the distributed functions of the brain and forest.

The forest eco-system is also filled with ideas and actions that are guided by these ideas (alongside the self-organizing intentions). Macfarlane (2019, p. 98) offers the following description of the remarkable ways in which the forest eco-system generates and makes use of "ideas":

> The possibilities of the wood wide web far exceed this basic exchange of goods between plant and fungi . . . . [T]he fungal network also allows plants to distribute resources between one another. Sugars, nitrogen and phosphorus can be shared between trees in a forest: a dying tree might divest its resources into the network to the benefit of the community, for example, or a struggling tree might be supported with extra resources by its neighbours.

Three Domains

I have often written about the critical role played by three domains in our life (information, intentions and ideas) as problem-solvers and planners. These three domains served as the foundation in my fifth essay in this series for the presentation of strategies to sustain relationships midst differences (Bergquist, 20223b). Fundamentally, like in our forests, we must dwell in the domain of information if we are to be "realistic", in the domain of intentions if we are to find purpose, and in the domain of ideas if we are to move from the current state (information) to the desired state (intentions).

We find an interplay between information, intentions and ideas in Macfarlane's (2019, p., 98) description of forests in operation:

> Even more remarkably, the network also allows plants to send immune-signaling compounds to one another. A plant under attack from aphids can indicate to a nearby plant via the network that it should up-regulate its defensive response before the aphids reach it. It has been known

> for some time that plants communicate above ground in comparable ways, by means of diffusible hormones. But such airborne warnings are imprecise in their destinations. When the compounds travel by fungal networks, both the source and recipient can be specified.

Without dismissing the fact that trees, fungi and plants don't "think" and "coordinate" in ways that are uniquely human, we must acknowledge that something is occurring in the forest eco-system that is indeed reminiscent of human behavior at its best. Macfarlane (2019, p. 98) concludes:

> Our growing comprehension of the forest network asks profound questions: about where species begin and end, about whether a forest might best be imagined as a super-organism, and about what 'trading', 'sharing' or even 'friendship' might mean between plants and, indeed, between humans.

Given its remarkable dynamics and outcomes, what might we learn from the web of wood—especially as related to our defining question: how relationships are sustained midst differences. How might we also find ways to be productive in traversing the domains of information, intentions and ideas—as forests do in building and maintaining their viability.

Webs and Empowerment

Human webs come in many different forms. Each form has something to learn from the web formed in forests. I propose specifically that there are three kinds of human webs. They exist in the structures, processes and attitudes that exist in a team, organization or community (Watson and Johnson, 1972). Furthermore, I propose that the webs to be formed within structures, processes and attitudes are found in many human systems. We have our own interpersonal forests.

However, these structure, processes and attitudes are viable only if they empower the people who operate within the web. This empowerment, in turn, is associated with the communication, conflict management, problem solving and decision making that takes place in these systems (Bergquist, 2003). Empowerment requires a web. And a web requires empowerment. They are interdependent—like those who are working with one another in the web.

I have just offered a very condensed set of propositions regarding human webs and processes of empowerment. I will unpack these propositions by describing each type of human web in a bit more detail and offering several examples regarding how these webs best operate in human society.

Structure: Web of Interdependence

Much as in the case of the complex structure of the forest web, there is great value in designing human webs that foster interdependence. Functions are distributed across different entities in forest webs and should also be distributed across different entities in human systems. Silos of information, intentions and ideas should be dismantled and replaced with open, interlocking entities (people, groups. Departments, divisions) that represent different viewpoints, competencies and priorities.

Structures need not be "innovative" for an organization to operate like a forest web. It is only a matter of ensuring that the span of control, accountability, responsibility and support are properly adjusted so that interdependence among units of the organization is reinforced. Robert Simons (2005) has specifically addressed in the important of adjusting spans in each of these four areas of functioning. Two of the spans measure the *supply* of resources the organization provides to project teams. The span of

control relates to the level of direct control a team has over people, assets, and information. The span of support is its "softer" counterpart, reflecting the supply of resources in the form of help from people in the organization.

The other two spans—the span of accountability (hard) and the span of influence (soft)—determine the team's *demand* for organizational resources. The level of a project team's accountability, as defined by the organization, directly affects the level of pressure on team members to make trade-offs; that pressure in turn drives the team's need for organizational resources. The team's level of influence, as determined by the structure of the team and the broader system in which the team is embedded, also reflects the extent to which team members need resources. We typically have substantial control (internal locus of control) with regard to two of the four elements (Control and Influence) but have very little direct control (external locus of control) with regard to the other two elements (Accountability and Support).

Sources of Supply

The first two spans concern how we fuel the teams that are addressing a specific issue. As human forests how do we transmit nutrients?

Span of Control: [Internal Locus of Control] [Supply Element]: This first span defines the range of resources—not only people as resources but also assets and infrastructure—for which an employee or team is given decision rights. The team is held accountable for performance resulting from deployment of these resources. To narrow the Span a leader reduces the resources allocated to specific positions or units, while **t**o widen the Span, the leader allocates more people, assets, and infrastructure. Interdependence is increased when this span is narrowed.

Span of Accountability: [External Locus of Control] [Demand Element]: This second span concerns the range of trade-offs affecting the measures used to evaluate a team's achievements. The setting of this span is determined by the kind of behavior the team's supervisor wants to see. As Simons noted, the span of control and span of accountability are not independent. They must be considered together. The first defines the resources available to a team; the second defines the goals the team is expected to achieve.

By explicitly setting the span of accountability wider than the span of control, leaders can force an employee or members of a team to become more entrepreneurial. In order to narrow the Span, a leader standardizes work by using measures (either financial, such as time-item budget expenses, or non-financial, such as head count) that allow few trade-offs. To widen the Span, a leader typically uses non-financial measures (such as customer satisfaction) or broad financial measures (such as profits) that allow many trade-offs—and encourage interdependence.

Sources of Demand

The third and fourth span concern how information is being conveyed via the networks of the human forest. Specifically, these two spans convey information about what is needed and what support can be expected among the various elements of this human forest.

*Span of Influence: [Internal Locus of Control] [Demand Element]:*_The span of influence, according to Simons, corresponds to the width of the net that a team needs to cast in collecting data, probing for new information,

and attempting to influence the work of others. Leaders can widen the span when they want to stimulate their employees and teams to think outside the box to develop new ways of serving customers, increasing internal efficiencies, or adapting to changes in external markets. Leaders can widen a team's span of influence by redesigning the task assigned to this employee or project team. For instance, the team can be encouraged to enter into a cross-functional relationship with another team, In this way, interdependence is increased.

Leaders can also adjust an employee's or team's span of influence through the level of goals they set. Although the nature of a team's goals drives its span of accountability (by determining the trade-offs team members can make), the level or difficulty, drives her sphere of influence. As Simons observed, a team that is given a stretch goal will often be forced to seek out and interact with more people and other teams than a team or person whose goal is set at a much lower level. Interdependence will be more likely to take place when aspirations are high.

Leaders can narrow the Span by requiring members of their organization to pay attention only to their own jobs; do not allocate costs across units; use single reporting lines; and reward individual performance. Conversely, they can w*iden the Span by i*njecting creative tension through structures, systems, and goals. For example, the leader can form cross-unit teams, matrix structures, and cross-unit cost allocations. These all encourage (or even require) interdependent perspectives and practices.

Span of Support: [External Locus of Control] [Supply Element]: This fourth span concerns the amount of help a project team can expect from teams and individual people in other organizational units – how much commitment from others the team needs in order to implement strategy—and how much interdependence is required (or at least requested).

Teams cannot adjust an employee's span of support in isolation —for these teams reside in an interpersonal forest. This span is largely determined by people's sense of shared responsibilities, which in turn stems from an organization's culture and values. For a leader to narrow the Span of support they can use leveraged, highly individualized rewards, and clearly single out winners and losers. For them to widen the Span, leaders must build shared responsibilities through purpose and mission, group identification, trust, and equity-based incentive plans. The "softer" sides of span are critical. This is where empowerment comes to the fore.

True and enduring support in an organization comes not just from connecting with and receiving tangible or intangible support from other people, another project, another initiative or another agency in the organization. It comes from a *Triangulation,* wherein both you and the other entity link positively with a third entity (a shared mission, a shared vision, a shared commitment to and capacity to enable a more general and critical project in the organization). It is with the presence of a third entity that we find a form of love and shared commitment tht the Greeks called *Agape* and that Martin Buber (2000) identified as an *I/Thou* relationship. A triangulated structure is always stronger (able to withstand powerful external forces) than a structure with only two anchor points (or two sets of anchor points: a four-sided structure).

Job and Team Design: There are several notable crises that are associated with poorly designed jobs and teams. *A crisis of resources* is most likely to occur when leaders who oversee the work of specific employees or teams spend too much time thinking about control, influence and accountability, and not enough time thinking about support. *A crisis of control* is likely to occur in highly decentralized organizations and in organizations where separate operational divisions are created to be close to specific customers (or types of customers).

Supply of resources (span of control plus span of support) exceeds a leader's ability to effectively monitor job or team trade-offs (span of accountability) and to ensure coordination of knowledge sharing among employees and teams (span of influence). Silos of craft and artistry prevail.

A crisis of red tape can occur in any organization where powerful staff members or staff groups overseeing key internal processes (such as strategic planning and resource allocation) are inclined to design performance management systems that are too complex for the organization. Spans of accountability and influence are very high, but resources are insufficient and misdirected. The demand for resources exceeds supply. Genuine interdependence is likely to be nonexistent under each of these crisis conditions.

Alternative Designs: Instead of devoting attention to the existing spans in a traditional organization, one can instead redesign an organization so that interdependence is encouraged or even required. Simon identified several of these alternative designs: cross-unit teams and matrix structures. In the case of both designs, members of the system are required to embrace different priorities, perspectives and practices while working in different unis of the organization. They might be part of a functional unit (such as finance or marketing) while also working on a specific project or in a specific geographic region.

The alternative design might instead consist of temporary and collateral operations that enable members of a human system to engage in a variety of tasks and relate to other members of the system in a variety of ways. I will have more to say about these alternative organizational designs when I address the need for webs of collaboration. All of this enhances the capacity of any system to embrace diversity of perspective and practice while sustaining the collaborative spirit of those working in the system.

Process: Web of Collaboration

The forest web is not only a structure. It is also a process. Information and nutrients must flow through the existing forest web—otherwise this web serves no purpose. Similarly, human webs must not only reinforce interdependence, they must also promote effective collaboration. It is in this promotion that we find empowerment (Bergquist, 2003). Specifically, empowerment comes from the training of those who are operating within the web and from the introduction of facilitation tool that enhance collaboration. I briefly consider each of these promotional strategies.

Training

While the design of a human organization can enable collaboration and effective engagement in diversity, this organization can only operate with this design in a successful manner if it also provides the empowering capacity and willingness of its members to engage in Interdependent communication, conflict management, problem-solving and decision-making. This, in turn, requires that the organization provide training in these four areas of empowerment, as well as incentives that align with the consistent and effective provision of these four areas. For instance, an organization might provide all employees with a training program on effective communication that includes tools of active listening and of appreciation. Similarly, strategies for dealing with differences of viewpoint (such as identified earlier in this essay) might be offered as a way to increase effective conflict management, problem-solving and decision-making.

I find it particularly important for individual employees to identify their own preferred styles of communication, conflict-management, problem-solving and decisions-making—and have created

several self-assessment tools to help employees identified their preferred styles (Bergquist, 2023a) There is one factor that makes training in these four areas a bit easier. In designing these instruments and applying them in many training programs, I find that that there are certain common features in the way that certain people communicate, address conflicts, solve problems and make decisions. Five categories of interpersonal relationships capture these different stylistic differences (Bergquist, Sandstrom and Mura, 2023).

First, there are those people who tend to push back against other people. They are assertive in their communication, confrontative when engaging in conflict, focus on the domain of ideas when solving problems, and push for immediate action when making decisions. I use the color "Ruby Red" and emphasize the Firey orientation of this first group. A second group consists of people who are likely to be highly nurturant in their interpersonal communication, conflict-avoidant, focused on intentions when solving problems, and inclined toward visionary thinking when involved in decision-making activities. I assign "Azure Blue" to these people, and portray them as "up in the sky/clouds."

A third general style is found among those people who are highly analytic in their communication with other people, tend to confront conflict as rational disagreement, focus on the information domain in addressing problems, and look to formal procedures when involved in decision-making processes. I assign "Golden Yellow" to these people and portray them as often a bit "distant from the Frey." They might provide "illumination" but are not themselves fully engaged.

Finally, there is a fourth group of people who are oriented toward interpersonal engagements. They are tolerant (even welcoming) of differing viewpoints when communicating with other people. Conflicts are viewed as important sources of new perspectives and practices. Problem-solving processes tend to be "free-willing" with shifts between the domains of information, intentions and ideas being common. Decision-making is often founded on the search for consensus. The assignment of "Rainbow" to this group seems appropriate and they might be best portrayed as fully engaged in the interpersonal "frey."

Perhaps the most important lesson to be conveyed in any training that involves differential of style is that no one style is always the most useful and appropriate. In some instances, our strength and reliance on a specific style gets us in trouble. We either need to be flexible in our use of styles or look to other people to provide leadership and facilitate an important interpersonal or group relationship in some circumstances. This is a particularly critical area in which differences of perspective and practice should be respected, fully appreciated, and engaged when appropriate.

Collaborative Communication

Even without training regarding the effective engagement of Empowerment strategies, there are important ways in which individuals and especially a team can form a web of collaboration. All it takes is a skillful facilitator and processes that stimulate effective communication, conflict-management, problem-solving and decision-making. I suggest several of the process-based tools that can be of assistance.

one of the tools is readily available and helpful in virtually any team setting—especially a setting in which there are differential levels of power, experience and inclination toward contributing to the team's deliberations. This tool is the *Talking stick.* Each person who is speaking determines the next person to speak and hands them the stick. This simple facilitation tool encourages people to listen to one another rather than plan for their own (often interrupting) command of the conversation, as well as

more equitably distributing the amount of time each person speaks. The talking stick can also facilitate the generation of diverse viewpoints if a person holding the stick is asked to pass it on to someone who they believe holds a viewpoint that is different from their own

At a more challenging level is the combination of a talking stick with an appreciative perspective. As used with Spectrum Analysis (Gordon, 1961) (there is the "seed" of a good idea in everything that is contributed), the person who is handed the stick must first identify three strengths or contributions inherent in the idea presented by the previous speaker (the person who handed them the stick). They can then offer their own idea—though often they are distracted by their appreciation of the previous contribution and find themselves building on this idea rather than their own.

There is also the possibility of creating a temporary system—such as *World Café*—that provides an opportunity for collaborative communication. World Café is usually engaged with a rather large team or a cluster of people who are interested in (often stakeholders associated with) a specific issue. Specifically, World Café is a collaborative multi-round process involving the open sharing of ideas and perspectives. It is a collaborative communication tool rather than serving as a tool specifically designed for solution of the convening issue. Four to eight participants sit at tables that come with a "host", a flip chart and an ample supply of markers. Each table is also assigned a specific question related to the overall issue being addressed at the café.

The process begins with the first of three or more rounds for those seated around each table. At the end of each round, all members of each group move to a different table. Sometimes they all move to the same table; at other times they go to different tables. Only the table hosts stay at a specific table for all rounds. The table host welcomes new guests at the start of each round, summarizes briefly the previous conversation(s) and motivates the further discourse.

After all rounds are completed, participants at each table work with the host in producing a summary of their table's contributions. Each host then shares this summary with all café participants. The facilitator seeks to bring together the diverse findings by offering their own integration as well as inviting café participants to contribute their own integrative insights. As in the case of a "real" café, collaborative communication is intended to be free flowing and non-competitive. The verbal conversation is sometimes supplemented with drawings on flip chart paper and/or the telling of stories and offering of analogies and metaphors (Bergquist, 2021).

Collaborative Conflict-Management

The real challenge of staying connected in the midst of differences is posed when these differences result in conflict between the two parties involved in the differences. The nature of this challenge (and one specific solution) is portrayed in an animated short documentary that we introduced in our fourth essay in this series. "Is it Always Right to Be Right?" (Schmidt, 1970) was a cartoon in which it took only one person on one side of the chasm to ask if it is possible that those on the other side of the chasm might be offering a valid perspective.

As the narrator, Orson Welles declared: "They might be right!" This didn't mean that those on the other side were right about everything; however, they might be right about at least one thing. With this declaration, the chasm collapsed and the two sides shared perspectives and solved problems. Perhaps it doesn't take Spectrum Analysis, a World Care or even a talking stick to close the chasm. Maybe the only thing needed to bring about resolution of a conflict is a moment of appreciative inquiry. An appreciative

culture might be based on nothing more than one person's inquiry regarding the validity of an alternative perspective or practice.

At other times, a more elaborate conflict-process might be needed—especially if the conflict involves groups rather than individuals. Modified from a process first described by two noted organizational consultants, Robert Blake and Jane Mouton, the *Intergroup Mediation Process* is founded on an appreciative perspective and exemplifies the creation of a temporary system that encourages collaboration.

Two groups in conflict are brough together in a safe and supportive setting where three skilled facilitators are asks to manage this process. One of the facilitators is assigned to each group and the third facilitator manages the other all process. The three facilitators approach this meeting from an appreciative perspective by focusing on the moments when each group "is doing it right" and by leaning into the future in encouraging the constructive work to be done by each group after this meeting. [Note: just the creation of this setting is a step toward resolution of a conflict).

Each group is given the task of preparing six flip chart documents:

(1) our own group's perspectives on the contentious issue (or one of several contentious issues) that is keeping our two groups apart,

(2) a list of the strengths and competencies that make our group invaluable in their organization or community,

(3) what we anticipate will be the other group's perspective regarding the contentious issue that is keeping us apart,

(4) what our group predicts regarding the other group's list of the strengths and competencies that makes them invaluable in their organization or community,

(5) what our group thinks the other group will predict regarding the perspective our group will take concerning the contentious issue that is keeping our two groups apart, and

(6) what our group thinks the other group will predict regarding what is on our group's list of strengths and competencies that we bring to our organization or community,

These six lists require complex thought and analysis on the part of both groups. Thinking must slow down when both groups are given the task of identifying their own perspective on the differences that exist between the two groups and the resources they bring to their organization or community. Both assumptions and biases surface when asked to make predictions about the other group's perspectives regarding the convening disagreements and their own contributions to the organization or community. Perhaps of greatest importance are the two lists to be prepared that ask each group to consider what the other group is seeking when they look across the table at "our" group.

It takes a while for each group to prepare all six lists. Disagreements are often found among members of each group regarding what to put on one or more of the lists. In some cases, a list will contain multiple responses and several alternative perspectives. Important insights and rich learning often emerge from this first phase of the exercise especially if the group facilitators are skillful and engage an appreciative perspective when helping their group identify their "best" and "most insightful" perspectives.

The next phase of this collaborative conflict management process involves taping the six lists prepared by each group on the wall and inviting all members of both groups to view and seek to fully appreciate what is on the six lists prepared by members of the other group. It is as if those viewing the lists were connoisseurs at an art museum, pausing at each painting to determine what this work of art is seeking to convey. Informal conversations among members of both groups might take place, though any debate regarding the merits of a specific list is discouraged at this point in lieu of the third phase.

This third phase consists of a convening of all members of both groups. The facilitator of each group spends a few minutes reporting (from a neutral, external perspective) on the deliberations that took place in their group regarding the preparation of each list. Typically, the two group facilitators each report on the same list prepared by each group—with the two perspectives (list one) on the primary point of contention being presented consecutively. The general facilitator often takes notes on a flip chart regarding themes that seem to overarch the two groups. The two facilitators then move on to the second list and so on.

A fourth phase consists of the general facilitator reporting on what they see to be the overarching themes. Of particular importance are:

(1) the areas of agreement and disagreement regarding the contentious issues,

(2) assumptions and biases that might be questioned, and

(3) the potential for self-fulfilling prophecy (where actions taken by own group on the basis of a false assumption produces the assumed reaction by the other group).

An open conversation then occurs. The general facilitator poses such questions as:

(1) what is surprising on one or more of these lists,

(2) where do you see points of leverage where conflict might best be addressed,

(3) where do we go from here?

Group members are encouraged to ask questions of the general facilitator, the two group facilitators, or members of the other group.

The fifth phase consists of the general facilitator suggesting steps that might be taken by both groups to resolves or manage their conflict. This distinction is important. Some elements of disagreement between the two groups might be resolved in a successful manner. The conflict "goes away." Through this appreciative process, the two groups have found that there is a way in which they can collaborate that leads to the accomplishment of both group's goals. For instance, rather than the two groups fighting over the portion of the "pie" that each of them can claim, they work together on increasing the size of the pie (finding more resources). The span analysis I introduced earlier in this essay can be of value in this regard.

Alternatively, conflict can be resolved by inviting each group to readjust their assumptions regarding the other group. The flipchart lists can guide each group's future actions regarding the other group (especially if these actions break up old self-fulfilling patterns) An appreciative approach can also be taken in identifying ways to make fuller use of the resources brough by the other group to one's organization or community. The two groups might even engage complementary resources on behalf of

a joint project. Yet another way in which the conflict can be resolved is by find ways in which members of the two groups can continue learning from one another and engage the other group's perspectives and practices to be increasingly creative in one's own planning and problem-solving ventures. "Diversity is good thing" might be the new motto for both groups!

This is all well and good. However, the conflict will frequently not go away. This occurs when the conflict is based on fundamental (and appropriate) differences in priorities, values and sources of contribution to be made by each group to their organization or community. When this is the case, then there should be a focus on the "management" of the conflict rather than on "resolution." This means discovering or creating ways in which to work with the conflict when it inevitably arises. There might be a sequencing of actions (each based on a high priority for one of the groups). It might instead be facilitated process of finding compromise.

At an even deeper and appreciative level, the reemergence of conflict might be viewed as a repeated opportunity for gaining new insights regarding the work to be done by the organization of community in which both groups operate. As Ken and Mary Gergen (2004) proclaimed, "truth is only found within community." More specifically, they would suggest that truth is found in trusting relationships: "constructivism favors a replacement of the individual as the source of meaning with the relationship." Even more to the point, truth is found in dialogue – and disagreement.

Ken and Mary Gergen insist that someone in conflict respect and learn from those with whom they are in conflict: "one is invited into a posture of curiosity and respect for others." Of greatest importance is the respect we show for the distinctive perspectives (and sources of insight) which people from all backgrounds bring to a conflict. Though collaborative conflict-management is filled with differing and even contentious priorities, perspectives and practices, we can sustain a relationship in the midst of these conflictual differences. It only takes appreciation and the willingness to say "You might right!"

Collaborative Problem-Solving

While the Word Café is primarily intended for the sharing of perspectives and ideas, and the Intergroup Mediation process focused on conflict management, there are other temporary systems that are convened specifically for the solving of a convening issue. One of these collaborative systems is called Future Search and another temporary system is called Open Space. Originally developed by Marvin Weisbord, another noted organization consultant, *Future Search* is a planning meeting procedure that is task focused. It builds on the basic principle that the meeting (as a temporary system) should bring in a large number of people (as many as 100) from diverse backgrounds. In this way, the "whole system" is represented when a specific problem is being addressed.

Typically held over several days, Future Search begins with creating a picture of the past (often graphically portrayed on a long sheet of butcher paper). As is the case with most of the Future Search activities, small group discussions are held first. Report outs from these groups to the whole group follow (thus ensuring the initial contributions of all participants in the small groups). Bringing the focus to present time issues, a "mind map" is often produced (once again often making use of graphic portrayals on a large sheet of paper). Butcher paper often "reigns supreme" at a Future Search meeting.

The mind map includes not just current issues, but also anticipated trends as viewed from the diverse perspectives offered by Future Search participants. Given these varying views of the future, participants break again into small groups to imagine themselves in the near (and more distant) future. What would their life and work be like in a very positive future—and how would they get to this future? Consensus is reached in the small groups and their findings are reported out to the entire group.

The primary task of the Future Search group is now to find "common ground" and to build an action plan that enables participants to take steps required (or at least identified) as a way to reach a shared positive future. Connections have been created during the Future Search process that make possible the ongoing collaboration among participants in working toward realization of the steps envisioned during the Future Search meeting. Follow-up activities and "check-ins" are identified, and the Future Search meeting is concluded. The Future Search process can become a collateral organization that is convened on a regular basis by an organization or community.

A quite different collaborative problem-solving model is to be found in the more recent enactment of a temporary system called *Open Space*. Originally offered by Harrison Owens (yet another noted organizational consultant), Open Space provides a much less structured process than is the case with Future Search for addressing the diverse issues facing a specific organization or community. Like Future Search, Open Space is a method for organizing and running a meeting or multi-day conference where participants have been invited to focus on a specific, important task or purpose. Unlike Future Search, Open Space is participant-driven and less organizer-driven.

Pre-planning remains essential in preparing for an Open Space meeting. However, less pre-planning is needed than when Future Search is being engaged. The lack of substantial pre-planning is in keeping with an emerging perspective in the sciences regarding complex and chaotic systems that are "self-organizing." As we now know is the case with many living systems, few hierarchical controls are present in the operation of Open Space. This type of temporary system is to some degree "self-organizing." As noted, Open Space participants "drive" the agenda through the decisions they make throughout the meeting regarding the topics to be addressed and the extent to which any one topic sustains their attention.

Given the self-organizing nature of "open space" meetings, it is important that some "container" be present throughout the meeting—such as is also the case with the World Café. This Open Space container is a set of assumptions that provide a foundation for this distinctive temporary system. These assumptions represent (and enforce) the "spirit" of Open Space. Following is a typical set of Open Space assumptions:

> Whoever comes to this Open Space event is the right person (an appreciative perspective)
>
> The topics being addressed are those that are most important, and those about which participants have a passion.
>
> Whenever a particular topic emerges, it is the right time
>
> When the dialogue regarding a topic is over, it's over
>
> Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened

There is one Law: the "Law of Two Feet: Shoes are made for walking” (participants should feel free to move to another group and another topic)

With these assumptions in place, the Open Space facilitator or facilitation team become much less visible as the Open Space process begins. It is important to note that Open Space facilitators do play a role, but it is one that does not drive the agenda. Along with the guiding assumptions, the facilitators are providing the informal container for this temporary system. They are "holding a space" for participants to self-organize. The facilitators are definitely not micro-managing either activities or conversations; however, they are attending carefully to ongoing interactions among Open Space participants and will gently intervene if the informal leader of a small group gets heavy handed or if there is any kind of pressure for participants to join (or leave) a particular group.

Unlike what we find in Future Search, the agenda and anticipated outcomes of an Open Space meeting can’t be fully specified prior to the formation of this temporary system—precisely because of the self-organizing and evolving nature of any specific Open Space meeting. That is why I previously mentioned that any requirement is controversial if the conveners of an Open Space system are to specify desired outcomes or leadership roles ahead of time. Open Space meetings operate as a dynamic, complex (and often chaotic) living entity. We can’t anticipate what exactly is going to happen or which issues are to emerge and be addressed by Open Search participants. As noted in the basic assumptions we offered, there is an abiding belief that the right topics with emerge and will be handled by the right people.

While those initiating Open Space meetings might not be considering task-based outcomes, there are several process-based outcomes that are meaningful and ultimately critical to the success of an Open Search meeting. These outcomes have to do with safety, trust, courtesy—and appreciation. The assumptions identified at the start of the meeting and reinforced by Open Space facilitators throughout the meeting ensure or at least create conditions for realization of these process-oriented outcomes.

Open Space meetings are usually convened for several hours or for a few days. As in the case of Future Search, World Café and the Intergroup Mediation process, much of the work in Open Space is done in small groups—with occasional report outs to the entire group. Unlike in the Intergroup Mediation and Future Search systems, the small group discussions are often quite fluid in an Open Space meeting (and in World Cafes) . Participants easily leave one group and join another—or start a new group that will address a new topic or engage an existing topic in a new way. Butcher paper and flip charts once again “rule the day.” Updates of small group topics and initial points of inquiry related to these topics are posted on these charts along with the place and time where and when this group will be convened.

I find that there are two critical structural components of Open Space that should not be overlooked. First, someone in each small group should be designated as the recorder to take notes (often writing them on a flip chart). Second, at the end of each or at least most open space sessions, a summary document should be compiled from the notes taken by the recorder in each of the small groups. This summary is distributed as a paper or electronic document to all participants. The distributed documents are used as the basis for prioritizing issues, identifying next steps, and continuing work beyond the meeting itself.

This critical component, in turn, points to one other structure that is introduced at the end of the Open Space meeting: all or most of the small groups then report to the whole group on follow-up activities. If one of the assumptions I listed above is accurate—that passion is inherent in the topics being

addressed-- then this passion (shared by World Café, Intergroup Mediation, and Open Space participants) should extend beyond the Open Space meeting. The passion should motivate continuing attention to the issues being identified and addressed at the Open Space meeting. Without extensive formal monitoring, follow up activities should "self-organize" and important actions should emerge from this temporary system.

The fresh breeze of freely generated ideas, perspectives and practices just might circulate around an existing organization or community following a Future Search or Open Space meeting. This fresh breeze might be welcomed as it swirls around the heads and hearts of those living and working in the organization or community. It should also be noted, however, that heads and hearts might be troubled by this breeze. Members of the organization or community might remain intransigent and resentful of the "non-realistic" outcomes of this "chaotic" and wasteful meeting. Thus, the new viewpoint might be both welcomed and rejected. Products of Future Search and Open Space are both friend and enemy, strong and weak, active and passive. Ambiguity and contradiction abound—as does diffuse anxiety (Bergquist, 2020).

We have indeed found that participants in many collaborative problem-solving engagements (like Future Search and Open Space) face ambivalent attitudes when they return to their home organization or community. Nevertheless, long after the Open Space (or Future Search) meeting concludes, its participants (and those affiliated with the participants) often find that the heart-based habits of this temporary system will linger. They are prepared for the ambivalence and are likely to be persistent in their attempts to bring about reform in their organization or community. Unlike those who gather ideas from the passive attendance at a traditional conference or training program, the participants in collaborative problem-solving events are actively involved in the creation of the new ideas and are engaged in co-active problem-solving with other participants.

Collaborative Decision-Making

The special settings and limited times for intense planning and visioning of the future that I have just described are wonderful gifts to be bestowed on a team. These temporary settings benefit teams that wish to engage in the clarification and expansion of shared intentions, the collection of valid and useful information, and the generation of ideas that can span the gap between the real and ideal. However, these temporary settings must complement sustained webs of collaboration that exist "back home" (and back in daily reality). The domain of information must be visited repeatedly during the daily routine of looking at the numbers and observing the ongoing operations.

Regular revisiting of the team's intentions must also occur—with the purpose of specifically convened meeting being articulated at the start of the meeting and an assessment of the meeting's outcomes being identified at the end of the meeting. Tactically based (short term) Ideas must be generated and plans modified and monitored each day—often addressed at the start of each work day ("Morning Huddle"). Strategically-based (long-term) ideas should also be generated at regular extended meetings which build on and integrate the tactical ideas. All of this tour through the three domains is required if generative collaboration is to take place.

There is one other critical matter that must be kept in mind. Just as the forest must be diverse, so the sources of information, range of intentions, and variety of ideas must represent multiple perspectives and practices. This diversity must be honored not just in words, but also in the representation of people

who offer differing information, intentions and ideas when problems are being solving and (in particular) when decisions are being made.

As behavioral economists such as Kahneman (2013) and Ariely (2008) strongly suggest, the first question to be asked of every team is: "who is at the table" These economists and those studying complex adaptive systems find that diversity is likely to yield creative solutions and the capacity of a team to be agile and adaptive in addressing challenges associated with an environment that is complex (and filled with volatility, uncertainty, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction: VUCA-Plus) (Bergquist, 2020).

I would add to this commitment to diversity and an expansive invitation to the table. I would propose that diverse perspectives and practices are not only to be honored—they are also to be appreciated. As I have noted in other essays in this series, it is not only enough to listen to and respect views that differ from our own. We must also articulate our appreciation for these views, noting how the information, intentions and ideas being conveyed by those who differ from us actually contribute to a generative dialogue. It is for those of us who offer differing viewpoints to point out (as is done in Spectrum Analysis) how the views offered by "the other side" contain at least "the seed" of a good idea, valid information, and appropriate intentions.

Abraham Lincoln learned from his team of rivals. Carol Gilligan acknowledged that her own work built on observations offered by a mentor with whom she disagreed. The Bach sons honored the significant contributions made by their now "dated" father. In the case of these politicians, researchers and artists, it was a matter of embracing a personal attitude of deep appreciation. In some cases (under the leadership of a caring and thoughtful leader such as Abraham Lincoln), this personal attitude of appreciation was complemented by the creation of a culture that supported diversity and appreciation. It is in this final creation of a web of collaboration that we move into the complementary web of appreciation

Attitude/Culture: Web of Appreciation

In essence, an appreciative perspective concerns a willingness to engage with other people from an assumption of mutual respect, in a mutual search for discovery of distinctive competencies and strengths—areas of expertise-- with a view to helping them fulfill their aspirations and their potential. This simple statement might at first seem to be rather naive and idealistic, but at its core it holds the promise of helping to encourage and make use of collective expertise. Furthermore, this perspective comes in several different forms and has several different meanings that build on one another.

Appreciative Communication

We are searching for, acknowledging and leveraging strength and success through conversation, dialogue and questioning within an appreciative culture. We are recognizing distinctive sources of expertise regarding the collection and interpretation of information, the clarification and building of commitment for specific intentions, and the facilitation and generation of valuable ideas to bridge the gap. Appreciation in a collaborative setting also refers to recognition of the distinctive expertise and potentials of people working within this setting.

Even in a context of potential competition, appreciation transforms envy regarding the other person's expertise into learning from this expertise. Personal achievement and individual contribution of expertise is transformed into a sense of overall purpose and the collective valuing of this expertise. An appreciative

culture is forged when an emphasis is placed on the realization of inherent potential and the uncovering of latent strengths rather than on the identification of weaknesses or deficits. People and organizations "do not need to be fixed. They need constant reaffirmation." (Cooperrider, 1990)

From yet another perspective, the process of appreciation concerns our recognition of the contributions that have already been made by another person: "I appreciate the efforts you have made in doing research regarding this matter." We are "catching people when they are doing it right" (rather than catching them "when they are doing it wrong"). This tool of appreciative requires not only that we note that what they have just said or done is helpful on behalf of the collective venture, but also an articulate statement regarding Why it has been helpful: "When you said XYZ, I noticed that we have become more ABC and have achieved QRS). Appreciation is not only about what, but also about why. We learn more about the ongoing process of a team when the impact of a specific statement or action is traced. The collaborative team learns from this appreciative tracing of cause and impact.

Appreciation is exhibited in a more constructive manner through the ongoing interaction between those engaged in the building of collective expertise. It involves mutual respect and active engagement, accompanied by a natural flow of feedback, and an exchange of ideas. More specifically, appreciation is evident in not only the processes being engaged, but also the attitudes accompanying these appreciative tools regarding the nature and purpose of work done on behalf of building collective expertise.

These are the three most common uses of the term appreciation. We appreciate the expertise offered by other people through seeking to understand them, through valuing them, and through being attentive and thoughtful in acknowledging their ongoing contributions to the organization. The appreciative perspective can also be engaged in three additional ways that are distinctive—yet closely related to the first three. These three appreciative strategies offer a bridge between expertise-enhancing processes and expertise-enhancing attitudes.

Appreciative Conflict-Management

Under condition of disagreement and conflict, it is tempting to abandon any appreciation of the person with whom one disagrees or with whom one is in conflict. Yet, as we have seen throughout this set of essays, it is possible to remain in relationship with another person even in the midst of disagreement. An understanding and appreciation of another person resides at the heart of the matter when engaging an appreciative perspective in bringing about resolution or at least management of a conflict.

Appreciation, in this instance, refers to a clearer understanding of another person's perspective. We come to appreciate the point of view being offered by our colleague and with this understanding, we can receive and build on their own knowledge—as well as their passion and commitment. The tools of active listening are engaged to enable this understanding to take place. We offer a paraphrase of what another person has said so that we might not only benefit from what they have said, but also gained greater insight into their own perspectives by testing the accuracy of what we have heard (as processed through our own perspective).

This appreciative tool arises not from some detached observation, but rather from direct engagement. One gains knowledge from an appreciative perspective by "identifying with the observed." (Harmon, 1990) Empathy is critical. One cares about the matter being studied and about those people with whom one is collaborating. Neutrality is inappropriate in such a setting, though compassion implies neither a loss of discipline nor a loss of boundaries between one's own perspectives and those of the other person. Appreciation, in other words, is about fuller understanding, not merging, with another person's perspectives. It is about being open to, not necessarily uncritically embracing, another person's apparent expertise.

Appreciation also refers to the valuing of another person with whom one might disagree. With appreciative valuing come an increase in worth. A painting or stock portfolio appreciates in value. Van Gogh looked at a vase of sunflowers and in appreciating (painting) these flowers, he increased their value for everyone. Van Gogh similarly appreciated and brought new value to his friends through his friendship: "Van Gogh did not merely articulate admiration for his friend: He created new values and new ways of seeing the world through the very act of valuing." (Cooperrider, 1990)

Peter Vaill recounts a scene from the movie *Lawrence of Arabia* in which Lawrence tells a British Colonel that his job at the Arab camp was to "appreciate the situation." (Vaill, 1990) By appreciating the situation, Lawrence assessed and helped add credibility to the Arab cause, much as a knowledgeable jeweler or art appraiser can increase the value of a diamond or painting through nothing more than thoughtful appraisal. Lawrence's appreciation of the Arab situation, in turn, helped to produce a new level of courage and ambition on the part of the Arab communities with which Lawrence was associated.

When we seek out a fuller and more accurate assessment of another person's perspective—though the use of active listening—then we are "valuing" what they have to contribute. When we fully appreciate our colleague's unique perspective in the engagement and use of collective expertise, then we have raised their worth as contributors to this collective effort. Furthermore, we may have seen them, understood them, and valued them in ways that neither our colleague nor other participates in this collaborative effort might have seen them before—thus opening new vistas for their growth and further maturation of the collaborative venture. Paradoxically, at the point that someone is fully appreciated and reaffirmed, they will tend to live up to their newly acclaimed expertise, just as they will live down to their depreciated sense of expertise if constantly criticized and undervalued.

Appreciative Problem-Solving

Another mode of appreciation is evident in a collaborative setting when efforts are made to form complementary relationships and recognize the mutual benefits that can be derived from the cooperation of differing constituencies and the valuing of varying sources of expertise. Appreciations in this regarding centers on acknowledgement of Diversity and the value this acknowledge brings to the problem-solving enterprise. This series of essays is filled with examples of diversity being beneficial—whether we are describing the team of rivals in Lincolns' cabinet or the ethics of care to be found in Carol Gilligan's vision of a vibrant 21st Century society.

This appreciative strategy requires not only the recognition of diverse perspectives and differing backgrounds, but also the engagement in processes that brings about a search for common understanding, non-judgmental acceptance, and potential integration of diverse perspective and accompanying practices. Bohmian dialogue (named for David Bohm) can be of great value, with dialogue being engaged that has no predefined purpose. There is no structured sequence of conversations.

As in the case of the open space structure I described earlier, this form of dialogue is intended as an inquiry into and reflections on the way both parties are thinking and on ways in which they might "think together." This dialogue can allow people with divergent ideas to examine their own preconceptions and prejudices, as well as to explore the potential intersection of their thoughts and ideas. I would also refer to the process of Spectrum Analysis that was engaged for many years by the Synectics Group (Gordon, 1961). At the heart of this analysis was the search for the "seed" or "kernel" of validity and usefulness in any idea being proposed in a problem-solving group.

Appreciative Decision-Making

The description and analysis provided by Robert Macfarlane regarding the workings of a forest is but one of the analyses he offered in *Underland*. He explored many phenomena that tend to play out over time and continue to be present over many years and centuries. He offers all of these analyses on behalf of what he called Deep Time. It is when we extend out observations and analyses over long stretches of time that we are likely to gain some important and often startling insights—such as the complex network found in a forest. Macfarlane (2019, p. 15) makes the following case:

> We should resist . . . inertial thinking; indeed, we should urge its opposite - deep time as a radical perspective, provoking us to action not apathy. For to think in deep time can be a means not of es<aping our troubled present, hut rather of re-imagining it; countermanding its quick greeds and furies with older, slower stories of making and unmaking. At its best, a deep time awareness might help us see ourselves as part of a web of gift, inheritance and legacy stretching over millions of years past and millions to come, bringing us to consider what we are leaving behind for the epochs and beings that will follow us.

Macfarlane (2019, pp. 15-16) portrays the positive outcomes to be generated by one's assumptions of a long-ranging deep time perspective:

> When viewed in. deep time, things come alive that seemed inert. New responsibiliti4es declare themselves. A conviviality of being leaps to mind and eye. The world become eerily various and vibrant again. Ice breathes, Rock has tides. Mountains ebb and flow. Stone pulses. We live on a restless Earth.

It is in Macfarlane's deep time perspective that we find the power ("vibrance") of appreciation ("conviviality of being"). Diversity ("eerily various") is alive and well. The world is seen as a system of dynamic complexity. The deep time perspective also calls for a "learning into the future" (Scharmer, 2009) – for the dynamic complexity is only fully seen and appreciated from a distance and in a slow and thoughtful manner (as Kahneman suggests). All of this speaks to the need and capacity of those engaged in appreciative decision-making to engage in planning that is long-term and agile. Contingency planning

takes preference over either short-term tactical planning or long-term strategic planning that tends to be set in stone (even though, as Macfarlane notes, stone itself "pulses" when viewed over time!).

By establishing a deep time perspective, we discover the critical elements of a positive collective image of the future. An appreciative perspective is not just referring to successes in the past but also point forward to a vision of success in the future. It is in the enduring patterns of life that we find an image of the future that is both viable and compelling. Past is engaged so that it can be brought into the future. That which is positive and has enduring in the past can become the foundation for our future.

In essence appreciation refers to the establishment of a positive image of the future based on our appreciation of the past. the present and that which endures over time. We grow to appreciate our collective effort at finding and enforcing an enduring image of our world. We invest this effort with optimism and Macfarlane's "vibrance". Our own institutions, like the mountains, ebb and flow when viewed from a deep time perspective. We invest our world with a sense of hope about its own future and the valuable role potentially it plays in our organization or society. Effective appreciative participation in a collaborative decision-making venture must be "not only concerned with what is but also with what might be." (Frost and Egri, 1990) We come to appreciate our own role and that of other people with whom we are participating regarding the contributions we make jointly in helping to realize these images, purposes and values.

Put somewhat differently, appreciative perspective is always *leaning into the future*. There is consistent and frequent attention to what will happen (anticipation) and what should happen (aspirations) in the days and years ahead. Rather than focusing conversations on reconstructed narrative of the past, the conversations are directed toward construction of a new narrative concerning the future that builds off the deep time analyses of enduring patters. While we appreciate that which has been successful in the past, we don't dwell with nostalgia on the past, but instead continually trace out the implications of sustained and shared expertise, acquired wisdom and past successes regarding our vision of the future.

Shift in Mind Set

Clearly, it is not easy to be appreciative when faced with differing perspective and practices—especially when the person with whom we disagree views us as the worthy (or unworthy) opponent. As one of my socially-activist colleagues has noted, "I don't want to appreciate the perspectives of practices of the people against whom I am struggling. I want to block them, not understand them!" It takes heavy lifting to sustain a relationship of minor or profound differences. It takes a fundamental shift in mind set. It takes an effort to learn from the inter-connected forest. Robert Macfarlane (2019, pp. 103-104) puts it this way:

> Certainly, orthodox 'Western' understandings of nature feel inadequate to the kinds of world-making that fungi perform. As our historical narratives of progress have come to be questioned, so the notion of history itself has become remodeled. History no longer feels figurable as a forwards-flighting arrow or a self-intersecting spiral; better, perhaps, seen as a network branching and conjoining in many directions. Nature, too, seems increasingly better understood in fungal terms: not as a single gleaming snow-peak or tumbling river in which we might find redemption, nor as a diorama that we deplore or adore from a distance - but rather as an

> assemblage of entanglements of which we are messily part. We are coming to understand our bodies as habitats for hundreds of species of which Homo sapiens is only one, our guts as jungles of bacterial flora, our skins as blooming fantastically with fungi.

Macfarlane (2019, p. 104) borrows a term from Lynn Margulis to define an outcome of shifting mind-set:

> Yes, we are beginning to encounter ourselves - not always comfortably or pleasantly- as multi-species beings already partaking in timescales that are fabulously more complex than the onwards- driving version of history many of us still imagine ourselves to inhabit. The work of the radical biologist Lynn Margulis and others has shown humans to be not solitary beings, but what Margulis memorably calls 'holobionts' - collaborative compound organisms, ecological units consisting of trillions of bacteria, viruses and fungi that coordinate the task of living together and sharing a common life', in the philosopher Glenn Albrecht's phrase.

It seems that we are entangle with people with whom we disagree and well as those with whom we agree. As members of a *Holobiont* (or perhaps several holobionts), it is incumbent on us to find or invent structures, processes and attitudes/cultures that enhance interdependence, collaboration and appreciation.

Conclusions

In closing this essay, and this set of essays on sustaining relationships midst differences, I travel from the world of the Bach family, Abraham Lincoln, Carol Gilligan, Forest networks and Holobionts, to the world of early 20th Century theater and mid-20th Century musicals. In 1913, the Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw, offered *Pygmalion*, a play about a young woman from the lower class being prepared for life in the upper class. As a noted socialist (Fabian) critic of British society, Shaw was depicting the way in which small changes in behavior (in this case, dialect) can lead to assumptions other people make about social class, which leads, in turn, to a total change in the way people perceive another person. Shaw's Pygmalion tale became even better known (at least in the United States) in a Broadway musical version called *My Fair Lady*. This tale also has traveled to the halls of Harvard University.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Robert Rosenthal, a young psychologist at Harvard decided to study how one change in behavior (grade reports from a school teacher) can influence the overall impression (and performance) of a student during the following year of school. When positive and negative reports on performance were given to a student's teacher for the following year, the students work during this following year improved or declined as a result of the report of their previous year's performance. Rosenthal (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 2003) called this *the Pygmalion Effect* and set the stage for many other studies of Self-Fulfilling Prophecy. These studies included one conducted by Rosenthal himself in which lab assistants were told that one group of rats were Maze bright while another group of rates were told that the rats were Maze dull. Though these labels had been arbitrarily assigned, the Maze Bright rats actually performed better on mazes then did their Maze dull compatriots.

Other called the Rosenthal Effect by other psychologists, this powerful (and controversial) dynamic has been found to influence many interpersonal relationships. I propose that it plays a major role in the interactions that take place among two people or two groups that strongly disagree regarding special perspectives and practices. While the disagreement might focus initially on one specific viewpoint or

action, it can easily expand into a major chasm between the two people or groups in large part because of self-fulfilling prophecies. For example:

> You and I hold different views about the funding of child care in our community. When we meet one another at a town meeting, I am very guarded, not wanting to offend you because we have been friends in the past. You sense my guardedness and easily interpret this as "defensiveness" You wonder what I am hiding. I then notice your own guardedness and become even more guarded myself. I wonder what you are hiding. Self-fulfilling prophecy kicks in for both of us. We perceived another person being defensive and in our own protection against this perceived defensiveness we are encouraging the other person to actually become more defensive. Pretty soon, the two of us decide to avoid each other in the future—which further increases our own fear-based assumptions about the other person's motives and images of us (including assumptions about how they see us and why they are annoyed with us).

A disagreement about child care policies has morphed into suspicion and even hatred of our former friend. The relationship has not been sustained in the midst of differences. Our former friend has become the "Other."

The Other

In this essay, I have introduced several strategies for countering and closing the chasm that can be fostered by self-fulfilling prophecy. I have encouraged an appreciative perspective and slow, reflective thinking (cf. Schön, 1983; Kahneman, 2013). I have suggested that we need to consider the way the other person in not only seeing the world but also seeing us and our own perspectives and practices. It is in the testing of our own assumptions that we are likely to finally listen to the differing views of another person and learning from these views. Perhaps, as we did in an earlier essay in this series, we might look to Barry Oshry (2018) as our teacher and guide regarding sustaining relationships midst differences:

> Purity is one solution to encountering the "other,"
>
> and Tolerance another.
>
> Both are grounded in varying degrees of Power over Love.
>
> . . . there is a third possibility,
>
> one that requires a fundamental transformation in
>
> how we see and experience one another,
>
> a transformation based on the understanding that:
>
> the interaction patterns we fall into
>
> shape how we see and experience one another.
>
> What seems to be a real and solid picture of the "other"
>
> is merely the consequence of the pattern we have fallen into.
>
> Change the pattern of interaction
>
> and our experiences of one another will change.

The possibility of Power and Love will emerge.

There is also the matter of creating and maintaining a web of interdependence, collaboration and appreciation. Robert Macfarlane (2019, p. 113) can once again be our teacher in this regard:

> If there is human meaning to be made of the wood wide web, it is' surely that what might save us as we move forwards into the precarious, unsettled centuries ahead is collaboration: mutualism, symbiosis, the inclusive human work of collective decision-making extended to more-than-human communities. You look at the network, and then it starts to look back at you. Writing of mycorrhizal fungi, Albrecht proposes that we rechristen the Anthropocene, naming it instead the Symbiocene - an epoch characterized in terms of social organization 'by human intelligence that replicates the symbiotic and mutually reinforcing life- reproducing forms and processes found in living systems ... such as the wood wide web.

As noted in the title of an Ursula LeGuin (1984) novel, the word for world is forest. And the word for the world of human beings as social animal is *Mutualism* (Macfarlane, 2019, p. 97)

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