Radical Reorganization

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Abstract

Modern science has advanced to the place where we now have access to a systemic understanding of life that matches up with what many wisdom traditions have shared for a long time, pointing to the wholeness and interconnectivity of all things. Such a view offers a new way to approach change in the world, and also offers new context on how our society has gotten itself into the situation it is now, rife with inequities and divisions. If we are to bring about true change in the world, it is important to look at the fundamental assumptions we make about life, or the paradigm from which we are constructing reality. By embracing a systems view of life, valuing relationships and connection, and understanding self-organizing networks as the fundamental pattern of life, we are able to effectively work to bring about change within our society, starting by bringing about change in the human organizations we are participating in.

Table of Contents

Radical Reorganization

Our global context is calling for a radical change in much of human society. It is within our capacity to recognize this call, as it echoes throughout our human and non-human world, and it is also within our capacity to respond to this call in novel ways, to bring beneficial change throughout our relationships. We each will respond to this call in different ways, but we must start with addressing the way we are living, and how we are relating to ourselves and to the world around us. This change is one that is rippling throughout our society, affecting and including us all, it is up to each of us to find our place in it.

We can recognize the need for change when we start to tune in to the major divisions within our society, to the massive harms we have perpetuated against many groups of people, and to the inequity and violence continuing to be perpetuated against people based on ethnocentric beliefs placing one group and their ideas above another. We can also see this clearly when we look at the massive pollution taking place in our oceans, in our air, and on our land; alongside the continued loss of biodiversity upon this planet, as human growth continues to push other life forms out of their natural habitats. This anthropocentric belief that views humans as superior to other life forms is threatening the very balance of the living systems of this planet. These seemingly different views, of human superiority over the rest of life, and of the superiority of certain groups of humans over others, represents a very interconnected issue with the ways we perpetuate division between ourselves and the world around us, and addressing these issues will require us to approach it in a unified way. Now more than ever, we need to see a shift in society towards a worldview that recognizes the interconnectedness of all life, and looks to understand our integrated place within this grand web of life. This will require that we understand how worldviews emerge and how they change.

Humans find meaning, we identify patterns; it is what we do, it is one of the things that makes us pretty unique as a species. This patterning instinct is what has led to civilizations rising and falling with the passing of time, as we see cultures emerge, converge, and diverge, and human relationships transform with them, changes in social structures leading to changing cognitive patterns in humans, and changing cognitive patterns in humans leading to changes in social structures.

If we trace the evolution of culture throughout history, we can see a continual dance between worldviews emphasizing interconnectivity, and worldviews emphasizing division. Today, much of the modern world is immersed in a paradigm that can be traced back to the scientific revolution of the 1600s, although its roots go much further back. It is a worldview that sees mind and matter as separate entities, and sees humans as the ultimate form of life, with our ultimate goal being to conquer the natural world. Understanding this worldview and how it came to be will be integral to understanding a better way forward together.

That better way forward together is one that can be seen when looking at much of the worldview described by traditional wisdom traditions, such as Taoism, Buddhism, and many traditions indigenous to America. Beyond just ancient wisdoms pointing the way, we can now find this same worldview being pointed at by modern science, particularly with new insights in systems theory; which enable us to understand more clearly that everything in the universe is connected, and that nature is a web of relationships; that we are not above but are fundamentally included in. With this convergence of views described here, we can now conceive of a change within our society towards one that is truly inclusive and honoring of all life. This worldview also helps us to understand in novel ways how change comes about, to support effective participation.

Background

I remember having a conversation with my dad, Joe, many years ago in which he brought forward this idea that humanity was approaching a radical revolution of consciousness, similar perhaps to what happened in ancient Egypt long ago, where over a relatively short period of time, there was a tremendous boom of advancements in science and technology, that seemed to radically reshape the structure of their society. Joe died from brain cancer on April 23, 2015, but many of the conversations we had together have stayed with me, this one perhaps more than most. Since then, I have come to find this idea particularly interesting and have discovered many others exploring a similar view, using terms such as turning point, great turning, great transformation, or more simply, a paradigm shift in our world view. It seems clear to me now that this shift is perhaps more necessary than ever, but also more possible than ever. Humanity faces increasingly dangerous crises that threaten our continued existence on this planet, and simultaneously we see an increasing number of people moving to address these issues. What is of particular interest to me is an exploration of how we can most effectively facilitate this paradigm shift and bring forward a radical restructuring throughout the whole of human society that will restore our place in the web of life and end our destructive path of domination over life.

This interest has brought me into the field of Ecopsychology, which takes a fresh look at the human psyche by recognizing our embeddedness within a greater web of life; ultimately taking a fresh look at what it means to be alive. Studying intently in the field of Ecopsychology for 2 years at Naropa is what has allowed me to cultivate many of the ideas I am presenting here. If we are going to bring about a change in the world, we must look to understand who we are in this world, how to participate in this life, and how to facilitate such an understanding emerging throughout society. This is fundamental to the radical reorganization I am speaking of here.

Entering the field

In studying the idea of paradigm shift and the ideas discussed here, I have come across authors such as Fritjof Capra, who articulates very clearly his view of this new paradigm, based on an understanding of living systems; as well as Jeremy Lent, who deeply explores different paradigms that humanity has moved through and the metaphors that underlie them, such as the "Conquest of Nature" metaphor that has been driving humanity for the last few centuries, and a new metaphor of nature as a "Web of Meaning" that he proposes as a move into that new paradigm. I have also been introduced to authors such as Kate Raworth who explores this paradigm shift in the context of our economy, as well as authors such as Carol Sanford and Frederic Laloux, who explore it in the context of our business organizations. Writers such as Mukara Meredith, adrienne maree brown, Brene Brown, and David Ehrlichman all played a role as well in helping to ground these insights into new styles of leadership and participation in networks. All of these voices will be woven throughout this paper, as I look to express this essential idea of actualizing a radical reorganization of our social systems.

The shift and the ideas expressed in this paper are ones I find shared in one form or another by many others around the world. What we are exploring is a fundamental shift in how we are thinking, and many thinkers are exploring this shift and the view that emerges from it, in all fields, from biology to psychology to sociology to agriculture to infrastructure and everything beyond and between. Exploring all these fields is beyond the scope of this paper, and my hope is to share a healthy synthesis of this topic from a wide lens, and then demonstrate how this view can apply most strongly to our social systems and relationships, to help facilitate a clearer understanding that lets us discern these distinctions in our human organizations, and give us tools to facilitate this change in the world in a more impactful way, starting with our own lives.

What is a living system?

This paper will be exploring how change comes about within our human organizations, from the level of small groups to business organizations to the whole of human society, all of which are networks of living beings that can themselves also be considered living systems. And so, to set a clear foundation, I will begin by looking to answer the question, "what is a living system?", looking to understand the essential characteristics of a living system and exploring how these similar characteristics help us to understand a fundamental unity between the biological, cognitive, and social dimensions of life. This section will be the densest in terms of information, a necessary side effect in looking to set a solid foundation upon which the exploration can build.

To begin this exploration, I will put this subject in historical context, as it is important to understand how the systems view of life first developed and then emerged as a respected field of study. First off, we should recognize that much of this view is not necessarily new, but has been held by indigenous wisdom traditions for a long time. What is new is the scientific evidence and language required to be able to express this in our modern context. This subject first began to emerge as a proper field of study in scientific circles in the 1930s; first in fields such as organismic biology, Gestalt psychology, and ecology, and then gradually spreading to other fields across the academic world. Researchers began to look at organisms, parts of organisms, and communities of organisms as whole living systems, and were thinking in terms of connectedness, relationships, and context. As opposed to seeing reality in terms of the smallest possible components, they began to look at whole systems, and to investigate how systems are embedded in other systems and how interaction between all of these is essential to sustaining them all. At the same time, insights from quantum physics were beginning to lead scientists to see the

universe as an interconnected web of relationships whose parts can be defined only through their connections to the whole (Capra, 2014, p.63-83).

Further progress was made in the 1950s and 1960s, as fields such as systems theory and cybernetics began to facilitate similar understandings emerging into the fields of engineering and management. In the 1970s and 1980s, we saw the emergence of complexity theory in mathematics, along with major advances in computation that led to us being able to describe, analyze, and model self-organizing systems. Also in the 1970s, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela with their Santiago school published their theory of autopoiesis and their theory of cognition, which played a crucial role in understanding the fundamental characteristics of a living system. All of these developments together facilitated the emergence of a new level of systems thinking and provided a foundation for a much more sophisticated formulation of the systems view of life (Capra, 2014, p. 84-97).

Now, with proper context, let us begin to explore what we now understand about life. What the systems view of life implies is "looking at a living organism in the totality of its interactions". Through focusing on bacteria as the simplest living organism, scientists such as Varela and Maturana were able to characterize a living cell as "a membrane-bounded self-generating organizationally closed metabolic network" (Capra, 2014, p. 129). This characterization applies to a living cell, but is now also demonstrated to apply to living systems at other levels, such as complex organisms like humans. As Lent (2021) points out, "The principles that apply to complex, self-organized systems in the natural world also apply to our own nature and to human culture" (pp. 199).

A living system is membrane-bounded, it has a dissipative **structure**. A cell is contained within a cell membrane, just as a human is contained within its skin, this membrane creates a

boundary between ourselves and the environment through which energy and matter is continually exchanged. A living system is self-generating and organizationally closed, which is another way of saying its core **pattern** is an autopoietic (self-making) network. A cell is continually regenerating itself from within, just as we as living organisms are regenerating ourselves from within, we are a complex web of relationships that is capable of healing ourselves in profound ways.

This pattern and structure represent two of the core characteristics of living systems. The third one, which represents a really major shift in our way of looking at ourselves, comes from the theory of cognition, which posits that life is a **process** of cognition, that cognition [knowing] is the fundamental process of living. This is a big break from the old cartesian split that states that mind and matter are separate things, the thinking thing (res cogitans) and the extended thing (res extensa). Cognition is the process that enables the self-generating network that we are to interact with the environment that is beyond our membrane layer, which is a process known as structural coupling. We shape our environment just as our environment shapes us (Capra, 2014).

The systems view of life not only moves us beyond the duality of mind and matter, it also helps resolve the tension between science and spirituality. The words soul, atman, psyche and anima, all point to and translate to one breath, or breath of life.

> Since respiration is indeed a central aspect of the metabolism of all but the simplest forms of life, the breath of life seems to be a perfect metaphor for the network of metabolic processes that is the defining characteristic of all living systems. Spirit - the breath of life - is what we have in common with all living beings. It nourishes us and keeps us alive. (Capra, 2003, p. 67-68)

With a systems view of life, we are able to navigate the balance between science and spirituality, continually cultivating and refining our insights and models about the nature of things, without closing ourselves off to the mysteries of life. Just as wisdom traditions have pointed to for a long time, there is a fundamental unity to life that can be understood now through a systems view.

> We share not only life's molecules but also its basic principles of organization with the rest of the living world. And since our mind, too, is embodied, our concepts and metaphors are embedded in the web of life together with our bodies and brains. We belong to the universe, we are at home in it, and this experience of belonging can make our lives profoundly meaningful. (Capra, 2003, p. 69)

This experience of belonging plays a key role in this exploration, as cultivating a sense of belonging within our organizations and our society can lead to the ways in which we participate and contribute being more meaningful, and helping to facilitate that same sense of belonging throughout these communities can lead to a greater proliferation of meaningful relationships and meaningful participation among more and more people. Which also brings us to the topic of meaning, which plays a crucial role here, understanding how we bring forth meaning and how meaning plays into the organizational dynamics of our social systems.

To understand how social systems emerge and how meaning plays into it, we need to touch back on one of the characteristics of living systems, the process of cognition. One phenomenon observed is that in sufficiently complex systems, cognition can evolve to allow for the emergence of self-reflective consciousness. We develop the capacity to not only relate to context, but to recognize ourselves in context. This is a phenomenon observed especially clearly in humans, but also in certain other highly advanced mammals, and that many suspect may be present in other life forms as well. What has been clearly observed is that this self-consciousness

emerges most clearly in social animals, and that there is a clear relationship between complexity of cognition such as this, and complexity of social systems. What we know about this is that as self-consciousness emerges, it facilitates us relating to one another in more complex ways, which in turn increases complexity within our consciousness, demonstrating one of the most important feedback cycles that has led to the complexity we now see in human civilization.

The inner reflective consciousness that emerges from this complexity is what we refer to with the term meaning. "Meaning is essential to human beings. We continually need to make sense of our outer and inner worlds, find meaning in our environment and in our relationships with other humans, and act according to that meaning" (Capra, 2003, p. 84-85). **Meaning** then emerges as a fourth perspective or characteristic of sufficiently complex living systems, in relation to the three previous ones we have mentioned as **pattern** (which we can also call **form)**, **structure** (which we can also call **matter)**, and **process.**

> Integrating the four perspectives means recognizing that each contributes significantly to the understanding of a social phenomenon. For example, we shall see that culture is created and sustained by a network (**form**) of communications (**process**), in which meaning is generated. The culture's material embodiments (**matter**) include artifacts and written texts, through which **meaning** is passed on from generation to generation. (Capra, 2003, p. 74)

A living system is a membrane bound self-organizing network, in constant interaction with its environment. This same definition applies for social systems, with a slight difference, in that the nodes and links of a network are not merely biochemical, but are first and foremost "networks of communication involving language, cultural constraints, relationships of power, and so on" (Capra, 2003, p. 87).

In social systems, we can look at culture much the way we look at the membrane of a cell, or the skin of a human. Culture creates a boundary in which we relate. As Capra (2003) points out.

> The social network also produces a shared body of knowledge - including information, ideas, and skills - that shapes the culture's distinctive way of life in addition to its values and beliefs … Cultural identity also reinforces the closure of the network by creating a boundary of meaning and expectations that limits the access of people and information to the network. Thus the social network is engaged in communication within a cultural boundary which its members continually re-create and renegotiate. (p. 87)

This plays a crucial role in our discussion, since if we are looking at a reorganization of our social systems, we will need to understand the way social systems self-organize (communication), and the boundaries in which they interact (culture), and particularly the way that culture and communication are dynamically inter-linked.

Life expresses similar patterns at all levels, which allows us to address things in a much more holistic way, as the similarities between a cell, an organism, and a society mean that we can approach change in a way that is effective at all levels simultaneously. As we look to approach change at the level of social systems, it is especially important to understand that meaning derives from the complex self-reflective consciousness demonstrated by humans. In a holistic view, what this points to is a need for our meaning to derive from a fundamental understanding of the unity of all life, including our own. "The interdependence of all things means that everything - including each of us - is dynamically related in some ways to everything else" (Lent, 2021, p. 120).

What happened in humanity's search for meaning?

Having understood that we are an intimate and interconnected part of life, we might be wondering what happened that led us in our modern industrial growth society to disconnect from an integrated way of living? How did we come to destroy our climate so badly and to have a society where so few have so much and so many have so little? What this really comes back to is humanity's search for meaning and the different cultural identities that have emerged in that search. To understand this, we will need to understand more clearly how culture forms, which as we have described in the previous section, relates deeply to our capacity to find and create meaning. This capacity is what Jeremy Lent (2017) calls "The Patterning Instinct" in the book by the same name, and he argues that "different cultures construct core metaphors to make meaning out of their world" and "these metaphors forge the values that ultimately drive people's action" (p. 13-14).

Lent (2017) goes on to point to the different metaphors that have emerged throughout history. In early hunter gatherer civilizations, the complexity of conceptual thought was still young and we had not divided ourselves from the world nearly as much, and people in general lived from the metaphor that "Everything is connected". As we became more advanced in our technology and we began to settle down into more of an agrarian society, a new metaphor emerged, looking at nature as a "Hierarchy of the gods", in which everything that happened in nature was the act of some divine power beyond our knowing, the sun god greeted us each morning and when they were angry the sky gods rained down thunder and lightning upon us. At some point in our history, we saw a fragmentation of culture, in which the west and the east went in very different directions. In the east, where we saw philosophies such as Buddhism and Taoism emerge, the predominant metaphor was of nature as a "Harmonic web", and our role was

to participate harmoniously within that web. This harmonic web was referred to with terms such as the Tao. In the west, we saw a very different direction emerge. With philosophers such as Plato in Greece, we saw the predominant philosophy became one of "Split cosmos, split human" which essentially proposed the idea that the cosmos was split into a basic earthly realm and an abstract heavenly realm, and that the human was similarly split as an eternal soul imprisoned in an impermanent physical body. The western view is the one that ultimately became dominant upon much of the earth, and it was further exaggerated by thinkers such as Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon in the early 1600s who perpetuated the idea of the "Conquest of nature" proposing that humans, and in particular the human intellect, is superior over all forms of life and that the purpose of the human intellect is to conquer nature, including even our own animate self.

The conquest of nature has become the primary metaphor that dominates much of society today, and is ultimately based around viewing nature as a machine, and seeing god as an engineer who designed the machine and who imbued humans with the potential to understand how the machine works and to control it as god's emissaries. Even without the religious context always present, it is very easy to see how this paradigm has dominated our western culture, in which we tend to be so fixated on figuring things out and fixing things to be how we think they should be, engineering the world in our own image. Even many modern attempts to address climate change are not beyond this tendency, as oftentimes the solutions that emerge still look to suppress what is happening in the natural world rather than learning how to flow with it.

To understand more clearly this mechanistic paradigm of seeing nature and self as machinery, we can look to see how this worldview has touched various parts of our society, such as in the context of our economic thinking, and also our organizational management. In "Doughnut Economics", Kate Raworth (2017) points to the modern economy with its primary

goal being continually increasing GDP. This is perfectly in line with a view of society as a machine, in which we want to continually optimize for greater efficiency and output of that machine. What is often missed is what the greater cost is, in overall human well-being, but also planetary well-being, which is becoming more apparent in our modern climate crisis. This is made apparent in the 2014 G20 conference (world leaders discussing the global economy), in which "the summit's Australian host, then-Prime Minister Tony Abbott, had been determined to stop the meeting's agenda from being 'cluttered' by climate change and other issues that could distract from his top priority of economic growth, otherwise known as GDP growth" (Raworth, 2007, p. 27).

In "Reinventing Organizations", Frederic Laloux (2014) discusses the evolution of organizations in a similar way to how Lent in "The Patterning Instinct" discusses the evolution of civilizations, particularly the ways they are guided by metaphors. Looking at the evolution of organizations from an impulsive style of leadership where an organization is run like a wolf pack, to a more conformist style, with an organization as an army, and to a more achievement driven style, running an organization as a machine. He goes on to point to a populist style, with an organization as family, and finally an evolutionary view, with organization as a living system, which will be discussed more in the next chapter. The predominant metaphor in organizations today, which lines up with our discussion around the mechanistic paradigm, is viewing organization as a machine, in which employees are seen as cogs in the machine, and there is a top-down way of organizing in which decisions are made at the top, and people at the bottom are forced or manipulated into performing as the best cog to allow the whole machine to function well. With that organization dynamic, Laloux points to various issues and shadows, the most pressing one being individual and collective greed.

While the mechanistic paradigm can be clearly witnessed in our organizations and in our economy, it ought to also be evident that the underlying assumptions revealed here are affecting all parts of our modern society. As Lent (2017) describes

Our global civilization is on an unsustainable course because the meaning we've derived from the world has historically been based on disconnection. Beginning with the dualistic conception of human being and cosmos in ancient Greece, Western civilization (more recently becoming global civilization) has followed a path of cognitive separation. By prizing reason over emotion, splitting human existence into mind and body, and then defining humanity only by its mind, we set the cognitive foundation for the scientific and industrial revolutions that transformed the world. In our relationship to the external world, we pursued a similar path of disconnection, finding meaning in transcendence while desacralizing the earth, creating root metaphors of nature as an 'Enemy to be conquered' and a 'Machine to be engineered". (p. 440-441)

We have lost touch with our place in the world, and from that disconnect, we have caused tremendous damage to ourselves and to this natural world of which we are a part. If our search for meaning has led us here, perhaps understanding this search, and understanding how we create meaning can help to move us to the next stage of humanity's evolution, one which I suspect may be one that moves us back into harmony with this living world and facilitates a transformation of our society towards one that is genuinely life-enhancing.

At this point, we've gotten to see pretty clearly the harm and the damage that is caused by this mechanistic and reductionist way of looking at the world that has unnecessarily valued the human intellect over all other forms of nature, including the human body. From here, we could be tempted to judge conceptual thought and the human intellect as the problem that has created

this, and therefore to think we should shed ourselves of technology and seek to go back to a simpler way of living, such as one demonstrated by our hunter-gatherer ancestors. In other words, let's all do as the hippies suggested and get naked and go live in the forests. I suggest this extreme of an approach to be not only impossible, but also unwise, and that a proper approach would be to seek a more integrated way forward, that includes much of the advancements we have made over the recent centuries, but in a way that is balanced with a recognition of our interdependence.

To put this in context, we will look to Jeremy Lent (2021) again who expresses "Conceptual consciousness has enabled civilization, but also causes humans to be separated from the effortless behavior of wu-wei" (p. 30), wu-wei translating approximately to flowing water, and pointing to the unforced nature of life. Civilization clearly has value, and demonstrates many potential benefits from conceptual thought, but it has also wrought tremendous damage, demonstrating many of the dangers of conceptual thought. Moving forward from here will not come from a rejection of concepts, but rather an integration of conceptual consciousness with animate consciousness, a coming together of the living networks with the identity that emerges from and encapsulates them.

In the next section, we will explore what this integration looks like, and how this more integrated worldview is emerging throughout our society. Where we go for humanity is still a big question. Whether this emergent worldview will gain enough momentum to become the prevailing view throughout our society is yet to be seen, but one thing we can observe is that this new more integrated worldview is emerging throughout our society, and that we can support that emergence through our awareness and engaged participation.

What is emerging from a systems view of life?

What I would describe as the new paradigm has already been articulated a lot in the first section, "What is a living system?". This is the systems view of life. It is a view that is new in some ways to our modern society, but is also a view that has been clear to many wisdom traditions for a long time, and has been expressed in eastern philosophies such as Taoism and Buddhism, as well as in many indigenous traditions, such as those native to the Americas. It is a worldview that thinks in terms of connectedness, relationships, and context. It is also a worldview that resolves the cartesian split of mind and matter as two separate entities, and starts to recognize the fundamental unity of living systems. As Lent (2021) describes in "Web of Meaning", "Rather than conceptual and animate consciousness being in opposition, it is possible to integrate them" (p. 30).

The emergence of this more integrated world view has been discussed by many thinkers of our time. Joanna Macy, a well known systems thinker and buddhist philosopher, refers to it as The Great Turning. Jeremy Lent, who we have discussed earlier, uses the term Great Transformation.

> A Great Transformation would need to be founded on a worldview that could enable humanity to thrive sustainably on the earth into the future. In place of root metaphors such as 'Nature as machine' and 'Conquering nature', the new worldview would be based on the emerging systems view of life - recognizing the intrinsic interconnectedness between all forms of life on earth and seeing humanity as embedded integrally within the natural world. (Lent, 2017, p. 434)

The question we move to now is how is this transformation emerging in our society, and what will be required to bring it about?

To begin, we will look back at what Lent said about integrating conceptual and animate consciousness. From looking at "What happened?", we can see how conceptual consciousness became the dominant voice for a long time, and our world reflects that. Understanding the value of animate consciousness will be necessary to find proper integration. Lent (2021) points out that "Animate intelligence is highly complex and exists all around us, in every sentient being" and that "By connecting with our own animate intelligence, we can recognize our deep interconnectedness with all of life on Earth" (p. 57). What this means is starting to recognize the value inherent in our relationships, both the relationships with other living beings, but also the relationships within ourselves, such as how the lungs bring air into the system and relate to the heart to help oxygenate the blood that flows through and moves us in a very literal way. These relationships are fundamental to living and it is through recognizing this intelligence within our own selves that we can begin to recognize that within the rest of this living world.

As we touched on before in the "What is a living system?" section, any living system is a membrane-bound self-generating network embedded within a greater network. When looking at the level of complex social systems within humanity, the question of meaning may arise, and a human social system can be seen as a culturally-bound network of communications embedded within a greater network. In many ways, this is the same dance as Lent discusses between conceptual and animate consciousness.

In the previous section on "What happened in humanity's search for meaning?", we explored how the mechanistic paradigm had influenced many parts of society, and we put a special focus on our economical thinking and our organizational management. As the word economy approximately translates to "rules of the household", it is important for us to look at how we think economically because that will ultimately define the way we interact and relate

within this one earth home that we are all part of. As living beings, we are structurally coupled with the world around us, it changes us just as we change it. The same can be said of organizations within the economy. Organizations change the economy just as economies change organizations.

We can observe this coupling betweens organizations and the economy by looking at how values have changed over time and how businesses have adapted to that change. In the great depression, an issue of food-scarcity, combined with an overabundance of chemicals, led to a radical transformation of our agricultural system to focus increasingly on output while ignoring the impact on planetary and personal health, which is an example of the mechanistic paradigm at work. In more recent times, a greater awareness around issues of climate change and sustainability are leading many organizations to put a greater emphasis on their own sustainability and on offering sustainable products and services to the world, demonstrating the emergence of this new culture through our economy here and now.

This emergence towards more sustainable values in our economy is articulated well in Kate Raworth's book mentioned earlier, "Doughnut Economics: How to think like a 21st century economist" (2017). She looks to transform the way economic thinking is done with a new model called the doughnut, with the inner ring of the doughnut representing the social foundation, meeting the needs of all of the people in the world, and the outer ring of the doughnut represents the ecological ceiling, the limits to growth naturally imposed on us by the natural world, limits we ignore when we cause biodiversity loss and excess carbon in the atmosphere.

In the doughnut model of economics, there are a number of major shifts in perspective that are described, and the shift they represent seems to point to the same one being discussed here in the move from a mechanistic paradigm to one that is holistic and regenerative. One of the

first shifts described is about understanding our context, which moves us beyond thinking of the

market as a self-contained thing, isolated from the environment, as we start to see the economy

as an embedded network within the natural world, that is deeply interconnected within this

greater web of life. It also invites a shift in how we are thinking about humans, moving beyond

our conditioning of looking at humans as simple rational agents within a machine, and beginning

to recognize that we are socially adaptable beings capable of navigating a very complex world.

Further shifts include deeper recognition of how systems work, moving beyond a dated

concept of mechanical equilibrium and beginning to operate from an understanding of the

dynamic complex systems at place, that operate far from equilibrium, which facilitates greater

emergence. This systemic understanding also gives us a new understanding of growth, finally

releasing our present day infatuation with material and industrial growth and with it, our

assumption that growth will naturally clean up its problems and even things out; and we begin to

relate to a more natural and unforced growth process, designing systems to be distributive and

regenerative.

This emergent transformation within our existing economy, this movement in what we

are valuing as a society, is already beginning to happen in many spaces and can be witnessed

both in what people are buying and valuing and also in the ways that many businesses are

starting to conduct their affairs. While the number is still relatively small, more organizations are

thinking in regenerative ways, and building businesses that operate with a greater degree of

responsibility for the greater world, and a greater care for being sustainable or even regenerative

in our business models. Examples of businesses operating in more regenerative ways are

demonstrated both in "Reinventing Organizations" (Laloux, 2014) as well as in "The

Regenerative Business" (Sanford, 2017).

Laloux (2014) points to three primary characteristics of what he calls evolutionary organizations, operating with a metaphor of organizations as living systems. For one, there is a foundation of wholeness, which means looking at humans as whole beings in the workplace, and also as part of a greater whole, encouraging an embodied participation in which we bring our whole self to work. Second, is a self-managing organization style, recognizing that individuals need to have autonomy to organize themselves and participate in a way that allows for their creativity to flourish, and also work together with others (self-managed teams) to organize and collaborate and affect change in a creative way. Finally, evolutionary organizations align around an evolutionary purpose, having a positive impact on this web of life and the continued surviving and thriving of life and of humans within it. This vision or purpose serves as a bonding agent for an organization to gather together around. We might notice how these three characteristics, wholeness, self-management, and evolutionary purpose can correlate very strongly to the three fundamental characteristics of living systems described earlier: dissipative structure, self-generating network, and cognitive process.

As we see this change emerge within our organizations, it will bring the potential of greater contribution to the world around us, and simultaneously be an act of participation in this emergence throughout the rest of the economy. With this emergence starting to become clearer throughout our economy and organizations, we begin to look at how we can actually affect change and participate in this emergence. Once we recognize this emergent transformation, and we see the importance of it, it is natural for us to look at how we can be a part of it, how we can help it along, and support its emergence throughout this whole world. To approach that, it's important for us to look at how change actually happens, which is our next question.

How does change happen?

As has been demonstrated up to here, the economy is intricately linked to the organizations within it. We can relate to the economy as a multi-layered network with many participant nodes, primarily organizations and individuals. As with social systems, this networked economy can be viewed as a network of communications that brings forth a membrane of designed structures and cultural identity, all as ways of communicating, integrating and expressing meaning. To affect change in our modern economy, we will need to first and foremost affect change in our organizations. The natural question from here emerges; how can we affect change, particularly in the context of our organizations? Capra (2014) speaks to this directly.

In order to resolve the problem of organizational change, we first need to understand the natural change processes that are embedded in all living systems. Once we have that understanding, we can begin to design processes of organizational change accordingly and to create human organizations that mirror life's adaptability, diversity and creativity" (p. 316)

With the fundamental pattern of life being a network, we can look to understand the networks that organizations are part of, such as the economy, but also the organizations that they include, such as the people (employees, leaders, participants, etc…). As these different levels of life are all connected, affecting change in any one will affect change in them all. In other words, as the economy changes, the organizations change, and as the organizations change the people change. And the same is true in reverse, as the people change, the organizations change, and as the organizations change, the economy changes.

Looking specifically at the organization of people, we can explore how we can network together as evolutionary participants in this web of life, creating a potential to catalyze an evolutionary shift within the organizations we are participating in. Laloux (2014) states that individuals who operate at this level of (evolutionary) consciousness help catalyze greater organizational change, and organizations operating at this level help cultivate that change within their members, demonstrating this same interconnectivity of different levels that has been pointed to many times now. This is pointed at again by Capra (2014).

> As far as human organizations are concerned, we can now see that their dual nature as legal and economic entities, on the one hand, and communities of people on the other hand, derives from the fact that various communities of practice (a term denoting the informal, self-generating networks within organizations) invariably arise and develop within the organization's formal structures. Within every organization, there is a cluster of interconnected communities of practice. The more people are engaged in these informal networks, and the more developed and sophisticated the networks are, the better will the organization be able to learn, respond creatively to unexpected new circumstances, change, and evolve. In other words, the organization's aliveness resides in its communities of practice. (p. 317)

Another way of pointing to this is looking at the concept of emergence. In "Emergent Strategy", adrienne maree brown (2017) discusses how in complex systems, change happens from relatively simple interactions. Jeremy Lent likewise points out that "In a complex system, the ways in which things connect are frequently more important than the things themselves" (2021). Within this context, we can recognize how important it is to look at the ways we are interacting and relating within complex systems, as a vehicle through which we can affect real change.

We pointed earlier to "The Regenerative Business" and "Reinventing Organizations" which both refer to this turning happening in our organizations, and look to describe what an alive, evolutionary, and regenerative business can look like. In "The Regenerative Business", Sanford (2017) writes that the purpose of creating a regenerative business is "to create the organizational framework that will inextricably link our development and expression of human potential to the evolution of business effectiveness" (p 111).

 In looking to bring about such a change in a business, Sanford (2017) offers a model describing five phases of innovative work disruption. These five phases are strategic disruption, evolving a courageous culture, evolving people and thinking processes, evolving business work systems, and finally evolving work structures. For the purposes of this paper, we will group the last four phases together, looking at all of these holistically as facilitating a radical reorganization, which comes from transforming our culture and with it, facilitating a transformation in the associated systems and structures. In this framework, expressed slightly differently, we are looking at two primary questions. How can we bring about a meaningful disturbance within our human organizations? And how can we utilize that disturbance to facilitate a radical reorganization in our culture?

Starting with this question of meaningful disturbance, which Sanford (2017) also points to with terms such as strategic disruption and conscious shock, she shares that "a conscious shock often takes the form of a question intended to wake people up from their unconscious habits of thought so they can become more conscious of what is true about themselves and their world" (p. 105). These questions typically come from looking at things systemically, while also cultivating a deep curiosity about the people an organization is serving. Sanford suggests that these questions intended to bring about such a disturbance, should start first within a core team

who is actively exploring such a reorganization, and should then ripple throughout the organization, through inviting others into this shared inquiry. "The most direct and immediately available first step to building a regenerative business is to become aware of the paradigms that lie behind its decisions and actions, and to evolve those paradigms" (Sanford, 2017, p. 162).

With a meaningful disturbance, a context is created that is more open to change. In other words, once we start looking deeper at many of our cultural assumptions, there is space for a new culture to emerge. This is where the question of meaning comes forward strongly once again; as we pointed earlier, it is important that our meaning is derived from a holistic understanding of life, which is where it is key that we look at things systemically. Such a systemic and regenerative worldview is expressed through Sanford's description of a courageous culture, in which she outlines six core characteristics: imperturbability in the face of uncertainty, purposefulness beyond reproach, developmental means, regenerative thinking, unifying strategy and self-to-self relationships (p. 115-117). This worldview is further expressed through the later phases, as Sanford suggests evolving our business processes to "view the world as it actually is - alive, dynamic, in motion, and filled with opportunity for innovative action - which is only possible when you are awake" (p. 135).

To summarize this, we can begin to bring about a meaningful disturbance within our organizations by coming together with others, looking to understand things in a systemic and holistic way, and asking real and honest questions that get to the root of many of our cultural assumptions present in the ways we are organizing. We can further look to bring forward a regenerative culture by understanding life from a systems perspective, placing a strong value on connectedness, and from this worldview, looking to relate in a meaningful way with other people within our organization.

To take this a step further, let us touch on another model, expressed in "The Tipping Point" by Malcolm Gladwell (2000). Gladwell explores the idea of social epidemics and how they spread. As I write this just over 2 years into the covid pandemic, the awareness of epidemiology in our society is at an all time high. Using the spread of viruses as a metaphor for the spread of ideas, we gain new insights into how an idea may spread effectively, which can point us towards how we might support the spread of a new culture throughout our society, or at a smaller level, throughout our organizations.

One of the key insights that Gladwell discusses here is what he calls the tipping point. Essentially, once an idea reaches the tipping point, or it hits a critical mass, it spreads like wildfire, and change throughout the system happens essentially overnight. Up until this tipping point, what we see is usually gradual growth, but the virality of an idea is what creates a real change throughout society. A clear example is facebook, which saw steady growth over time, with more and more people using it, until it reached a point where it was the norm, and everyone had to have one. This will be essential as we look at facilitating a radical reorganization throughout our society and our human organizations. But what leads to such a tipping point?

Gladwell points to 3 primary characteristics of social spreads; the law of the few, the power of context, and the stickiness factor. The law of the few states that social epidemics ultimately emerge from a relatively small number of people, who play 3 important roles. First off is the maven, who serves as an information hub. As Gladwell points out, if you are looking to buy a car, you go to that friend who knows everything about the auto industry, who reads all the auto magazines and can give you a clear answer about what is what; that friend is the maven. Second is the salesperson, they are of course the one who can sell you on the car, really demonstrate to you why you want or need it. And lastly is the connector, they are the one who

knows a thousand people across many different social spheres, and so when they start driving the

car, a wide diversity of people are instantly exposed to it and likely want one themselves. The

power of context demonstrates that context is crucially important for a social epidemic to spread.

The increasing awareness of the climate crisis for example is likely a big part of what allowed

Tesla to go viral, just as the increasing prevalence of air travel facilitated coronavirus going viral.

Finally the power of stickiness points to a message needing to be sticky to go viral. Coronavirus

is naturally a very sticky virus, it infects others easily and tends to stick with them for a bit,

making them more likely to transmit it to others. Tesla is likewise pretty sticky, their cars

represented a novel concept and stuck out in people's minds because they were very unique

compared to many other cars.

        We can apply these same concepts in exploring how a holistic paradigm can go viral

throughout our social systems. The power of context lends well, as we are in a time where events

such as the climate crisis and the covid pandemic are bringing greater awareness to our

interconnectivity as one global society, as well as our interconnectedness within the natural

world. When looking at the stickiness, this is really going to be a matter of understanding

cultural context and understanding the transmission of ideas. Seeing how memes and viral videos

spread throughout our society very quickly, and what lands well and what does not, can be very

informative in looking to bring forward new ways of articulating the new paradigm that can be

truly sticky. And finally, we come to the law of the few. To facilitate a transformation such as we

are describing, we will need people to play the role of maven, to hold a clear understanding of

the evolution of humanity and human culture, and of this emergent field of systems thinking, to

play that role of the information hub. We will need people to play the role of the salesperson, to

be able to articulate this message in a clear way and to be able to build relationships with other

people to help them recognize the importance of this worldview within their own lives. And we will need people to play the role of the connector, who have wide networks of influence and who can share a message in such a way that it can reach far and wide.

We have looked now at two models for facilitating change within social systems. We have looked at the spread of social epidemics, but also a phased approach to catalyzing regenerative change within organizations. In looking at the evolution of regenerative culture through this lens of the tipping point, we can explore both of these models within one context. Firstly, we approach meaningful disturbance, particularly how it is facilitated through honest questions expressed from a systemic understanding. And then we explore how we can approach a context that has experienced disturbance and facilitate a culture of regeneration and interconnectivity. In particular, we look at how understanding the systems view of life supports the emergence of a community that embodies various characteristics, having clear hubs of information and facilitating effective and efficient transmission of that information throughout a network.

The takeaways from this are that we need to come together with other people and look to understand our organizations through a systems view of life, and we need to begin to ask ourselves and our organizations questions that can bring about a disturbance and cause us to question many hidden cultural assumptions embedded in our organizations. Further, we need to look at how such a systems view of life can be expressed in a clear and articulate way that is also contextually relevant and attractive, and how we can utilize the power of our networks to help such a message ripple powerfully throughout our organizations. We can approach such change with a kind of radical trust, understanding that while growth may seem slow at times, the potential is always here for a radical and seemingly instantaneous transformation.

Networking for change

Carol Sanford (2017) points out that "Evolving the paradigms that shape your own thinking and the thinking of your business's people is something that you can do as an individual, beginning today if you choose. But it becomes far more powerful and far easier to sustain when you do it with a community". Likewise, we have seen Gladwell describe 3 core roles that play a part in such a spread, and while it is very plausible for one person to look to play all of those roles, the same wisdom applies, it is far more powerful and far easier to sustain when you do it with a community. In looking at how this can effectively emerge, it is important to look at how we can network together effectively, and create a bigger impact.

In "Impact Networks", David Ehrlichman (2021) explores how we can utilize this understanding of networks to more effectively come together to bring about change in the world. In looking at this in the context of organizations, he states that "organizations—even hierarchical organizations—contain organic and informal networks that connect people and departments together" (p. 48). Exploring how we can better catalyze, facilitate, and participate in these networks can help guide us towards effectively coming together to bring about change inside of our organizations.

Ehrlichman (2021) outlines three different types of impact networks, specifically learning networks which focus on connection and learning, action networks which include connection and learning and expand that as well to collaborate together on addressing complex issues, and movement networks that show up as a network of networks, including many different action networks and learning networks, and often also including a core network that facilitates organization throughout the movement. He goes on to describe core activities of impact networks

as clarifying purpose and principles, convening the people, cultivating trust, coordinating action, and collaborating for systems change (p. 56-57).

As we have touched earlier, the fundamental pattern of life is not just a network, but is a self-organizing (or autopoietic) network. Erlichman (2021) touches again on this point.

Self-organization is what gives networks a sense of aliveness. The capacity of self-organizing systems to combine the wisdom of large, diverse groups has led June Holley to assert that self-organization is "without a doubt, the aspect of networks that is most likely to bring transformation. (p. 65)

This plays a crucial part in looking at how we show up as leaders and participants within networks. "One of the primary responsibilities of network leaders, then, is to cultivate the conditions for greater levels of self-organization to arise" (p. 65). This is a big shift from the old top down style of leadership, where leaders are responsible for essentially controlling the direction of the whole. It helps bridge us into this new paradigm of looking at things from a living systems perspective, in which work can show in a less direct way.

Coming together to affect genuine change within our human organizations will require us to look at things from a living systems view. Because networks are the fundamental pattern of life, organizing in networks is integral to participating with life in bringing about change throughout our society. To do so, we can look to utilize understandings of how networks interact to more effectively collaborate together for change. In particular, it is important that we look to cultivate shared vision, bring people together in a way that cultivates trust and builds meaningful relationships, and coordinate actions together to more effectively bring about systemic change in our organization and in the world around us.

Groups as living systems

Looking at large impact networks may be a bit out of reach for some people, and so it is important to also understand the way these insights can reach a more intimate level. One level that is familiar to most is the level of a small group. Perhaps you work in an organization where the majority of their work is done in a team composed of maybe 5-15 people, or there may be another context where you collaborate intimately with a relatively small group of people, this could even apply to a small family or group of friends living together, which could even be a smaller learning or action network inside of a larger movement network. Here, we can look to understand how a living systems perspective can facilitate a different style of relating within that group context.

In "MatrixWorks", Mukara Meredith (2017) offers techniques for facilitation to support the emergence of group genius, weaving together neuroscience, living systems theory, and buddhist philosophy to create a grounded theory that supports understanding more effective ways to relate to groups. Pointing to the necessity of this change in our small group context, she says:

> To really integrate a new worldview there needs to be a structure of support for this new
> possibility. As groups, facilitators, and organizations, we are called to create a structure
> going forward by making use of the small group in evolutionary circles. (p. 164)

Further, as has been pointed out throughout this paper, she speaks to the importance of a living systems view in looking to facilitate such change and relate in novel ways.

> Living systems provide the framework for understanding how a group can come back to
> life after falling flat. It can be used as a diagnostic tool for understanding what needs to
> change. When we come into partnership with the organic nature of living systems, our

organizations naturally shift to support the life of those within and to nurture the life

outside the organization (p. 9-10)

Some fundamental characteristics of living systems that are useful to presence when looking at

group dynamics are wholeness, connectedness, identity, balance, creativity, openness and

flexibility. Living systems are "wholes" with emergent properties and we can not reduce the

operations and characteristics down to individual components. Living systems are interconnected

in complex and non-linear ways, and they organize around a central idea, strong identity, or

sense of purpose that transcends the changing structure. Within a living system, agents have

autonomy but also act in integrity and harmony with the whole. Living systems establish a

dynamic balance and seek to optimize, not maximize. Small disturbances and changes are

suppressed through negative feedback while novel and creative changes are amplified as positive

feedback, supporting a system continuing to renew itself and evolve to new levels of order and

complexity. Living systems are continually adapting to match environmental conditions,

maintaining stability through identity and boundaries, and enhancing creativity through rich

diversity, free flows of information, and plentiful interaction by its agents, both internally and

externally. (Meredith, 2017, p. 7-9).

Applying an understanding of living systems gives us many novel ways of approaching

group dynamics. While much of it can be complex, Meredith points out that "the most important

take away is that living systems serve life. All living systems have the capacity to learn, grow,

and evolve" (p. 11). As we look to understand ourselves and the groups in which we are

participating as living systems, we can discover new ways of approaching change and leadership.

Starting near with meaningful connection

Having explored this at the level of impact networks, and networks of networks, as well as at the smaller level of small groups such as collaborative work teams (which can also show up as an impact network), we can look and see an even more intimate level where we can participate in this change. That is within our actual relationships with one another. As we have pointed out in networking for change, one of the keys to healthy networking is convening the people to build meaningful relationships. And within groups as living systems, we have also pointed to how connectedness and interactions are fundamental to the effectiveness of a group. Building meaningful connection is essential to this change at all levels, and simply having an honest conversation with a colleague at the watercooler, or with a random person walking down the street, facilitates a greater flow of aliveness and meaning in the system on the whole, and should never be underestimated in its potential importance. Which raises a question, how do we participate in meaningful connection? What does it mean to truly communicate honestly?

In "Braving the wilderness", Brené Brown (2017) explores such topics as vulnerability, honesty, communication, and belonging. She shares such core insights as "People are hard to hate close up. Move in. Speak truth to bullshit. Be civil. Hold hands. With strangers. Strong back. Soft front. Wild heart" (p. 157-158). Each of these is of course a huge topic to unpack in itself, but the essence of it is, we need to stop seeing ourselves as so separate from one another. It is important that we lean into connection, get up close to one another where it is easier for us to see not just the things that make each of us unique, but also all of the many things that unite us all. We have to be willing to take a stand for what we feel is right in the world, but we also can not let our own righteousness get in the way of genuine connection. We need to come together in moments of joy and sorrow and recognize our common humanity through these powerful

experiences. And we need to be strong within ourselves, while also being open to share and open to listen, and through that, finding a deeper sense of connection with ourselves and with one another.

We have been conditioned to look at things with such a lens of division. An impassable line between you and I, between us and them, between work and school and life. We think all of these divisions are actual and we act as if it is so, continuing to perpetuate a story of separation in our world. Perhaps this is not the case for you, and if so, I congratulate you and commend you for being part of bringing about a more connected world. But for many of us, I think we can find plenty of examples where we are continuing to live a story that has been given to us, one in which we continue to sacrifice true and genuine connection in favor of maintaining an old and dated sense of who we are.

If we can start to see the ways we perpetuate this division in our own lives, I really fervently see that a choice will be available for us, that can lead us to move towards a more connected reality, one that is truly inclusive, and that be tremendously meaningful for all of us. It may take time for us to really see this together at the scale of humanity, but we can start in our own lives, and we can bring this into our relationships, into our small groups, and into the networks that we participate in. We can look to understand ourselves as whole human beings, and we can look to relate with other whole human beings and come together to participate in greater and greater wholes. Every time we do so, even just making one tiny choice that moves us in the direction of connection, we are helping to bring about a more connected and alive society around us, which is ultimately a society that acts in greater service to the whole of life.

Integration

We have been conditioned to think of life and the world and ourselves as many disjointed parts, a separate heaven and earth and a separate body and mind, and a separate humanity destined to conquer nature. Today, both modern science and traditional wisdom agree, that this conditioning presents an inaccurate idea, and that in actuality, life is one whole thing, expressing itself as a self-repeating pattern with slight variations allowing for a tremendous diversity of forms. We are understanding now that humans are inseparable from this unity, as are the social systems that we create as we network together. This understanding gives us a unified framework through which to approach many of the problems in today's world.

In our search for meaning, we have lost our way in some senses, lost touch with this intuitive understanding of the interconnectedness of life, and in its place we have perpetuated an idea of our disconnection from the web of life. Emerging from this idea of disconnection, we have done tremendous damage, to ourselves and to the beautiful living planet that we are part of. In context, we can see this phase of existence as part of humanity's evolution, and rather than trying to use excessive force and control to attempt to solve all of our problems, we can look to network together as participants in our evolution. Doing so involves stepping into a way of seeing and relating to the world from a perspective of wholeness and interconnectivity.

Facilitating a transformation in the world will require approaching things holistically, which means seeing things as whole things which are also parts of something else. Within this approach, it is integral to explore our economy, and the way that we value things in the world, as well as our organizations and the ways that we come together for a purpose. In all of these explorations, we have to understand the dance that takes place between animate and conceptual

intelligence, this dynamic balance of the emergent networks of life with the structures of design that we use to give things meaning.

In looking at how we can facilitate this integration and reorganization within the context of our social systems, we can explore various models that have been outlined that look at how ideas and culture spread, and how we can facilitate an emergence towards a regenerative culture and organization. Most importantly, we need to understand the context of disturbance, and apply the systems view of life in how we organize ourselves to effectively facilitate the organization and transmission of this information in a way that integrates well throughout our networks.

In order to effectively organize together, we have to apply this view of wholeness in our own lives, and begin to explore how we are relating with ourselves and with those who are close to us. It will be important that we begin to relate to things from this view, and see that our small groups and teams we are part of represent a living network themselves and can simultaneously be approached from this unique view. We can go further and work to catalyze and facilitate impact networks to help bring about change in a unique and purposeful way.

As we come to understand systems holistically and we truly recognize the network that we are and the networks that include us, we can begin to participate in a radical transformation of the culture encompassing these network, and help support the emergence of a culture that supports us truly operating together as one whole, stepping into our integral place within this grand web of life. We are part of an extraordinarily complex system that is facing some extraordinarily complex issues. The solutions to this will likewise be complex, but participating in these solutions can be incredibly simple, simply by starting to look at how we relate with one another and with ourselves, and seeing if we can do so with a little bit more compassion and a little bit more inclusion.

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