

Transforming Transformation

Position Statement

Submitted to:

The Positive Design Conference

Creating New Models of Possibility For All

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Making Sense of Cross-Disciplinary Innovation Now!

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Transforming Transformation

How might we Create New Models of Possibility For All?

This is a great innovation challenge not only for the design, technology and management communities but for humanity. At Humantific we might differ from some of the organizers of this Positive Design Conference in that we see this broad and fuzzy challenge as one that does not necessarily lead to “Appreciative Inquiry”. Understandably, this might be a provocative comment to make in the context of this particular conference.

As we begin this session we advocate keeping an open mind rather than converging on the narrower notion that this is an “Appreciative Inquiry” conference or a collective “Appreciative Inquiry” application session operating under a banner of “Positive Design.” From our perspective “Positive Design” and “Positive Organizations” are open terms that can yet mean many things. Hopefully this conference will enhance their possible meanings.

For us “Appreciative Inquiry” is one of several transformation methods and there are multitudes of methods and approaches out there in the marketplace. In our organizational transformation work we have, over the years, encountered many super smart professionals from many fields of expertise and thus many models, systems, tools, techniques, approaches and methods of inquiry. Unpacking, understanding and mapping models across multiple disciplines is often a key aspect of transformation work.

While many of the methods encountered have attributes that map to or differ from other methods, at the end of the day what is most important, from our perspective, is the ability to make sense of them. This Sense-Making ability is an important part of what we believe next generation innovation leaders need to be able to do and are already doing. This involves high degrees of Sense-Making precisions in the strategic challenge space, in the process space, in the human-centered innovation space. Historically such precisions have not been central to technology, design, or management but certainly are important to those operating in the Design 3.0, organizational transformation activity space today. It is possible that this might still be news to some.

In business organizations and in academic institutions, now all part of a competitive global marketplace, methods are often packaged from a differencing (Strange-Making) perspective rather than from a Sense-Making one. As part of a competitive landscape the underlying purpose is often to create difference from one method to another. This is quite different from Sense-Making where collective understanding is the goal. As Sense-Makers we are interested in understanding methods in context. In this regard we are most interested in what is underneath differencing language, differencing models, differencing postures:

Here is a simple example: Take the statement: How might we Create New Models of Possibility For All?

Is this a “positive Appreciative Inquiry question” or simply a creative problem solving challenge?

How we each answer that question probably has a lot to do with our best practice knowledge of each realm of inquiry as it exists today, not ten years ago, and whether our objective is Sense-Making or differencing (Strange-Making).

Suffice it to say there are many such examples in the “Appreciative Inquiry” literature. ☺

One of the complexities in the transformation and innovation literature in general is that many false differentiating arguments are constructed by conveniently comparing new best practices in one inquiry realm to outdated or even non-applicable practices in another. This makes for challenging Sense-Making.

It was ten years ago that Elizabeth Pastor and I began working together. It was in 1999 that we began presenting on the subjects of inclusive innovation, cross-disciplinary co-creation, the role of Sense-Making in innovation acceleration and new forms of adaptable innovation leadership that incorporate visual thinking.

Enabling deliberate inclusion is all about harnessing the diverse brainpower in organizations and “creating new models of possibility for all.” We think of Inclusive Innovation as a positive form of organizational intervention but what we do at Humantific is quite different from the methods and modes of “Appreciative Inquiry.” Suffice it to say we see multiple Positive Design routes, not one, leading to enabling “possibility for all” and “Positive Organizations”.

Whether you choose to call it Design Science, Transformation by Design, Innovation Architecture, Participatory Design, Conscious Cooperative Design, Innovation Enabling, Strategic Design, Organizational Transformation, Human-Centered Innovation, Positive Design or something else, it is no secret that most of the design oriented firms operating in the arena of organizational transformation do so with hybrid methods and tools. It is the era of hybrid human-centered practice in keeping with the many hybrid opportunities and challenges facing the planet.

When we launched the Transforming Transformation list community in August of 2007 we sought to create the beginnings of a global discussion platform related to emerging issues and developments in organizational transformation, transformation by design, adaptable innovation enabling, and the future of human-centered innovation.

We welcome discussion related to what happens when design tools and knowledge are combined with knowledge and tools from other disciplines with the goal of creating a new breed of human-centered transformation capabilities. The list is called Transforming Transformation because we believe it is likely that new forms of transformation are emerging as disciplines collaborate and combine knowledge, skills and tools like never before in history. We welcome participants from all fields of knowledge who are interested in this subject and or already working in the realm of transformation. Today organizational transformation itself is being transformed and that is the focus of the Transforming Transformation discussion forum.

Much of our own work, over the last ten years, has been connected to five interlinked revolutions underway:

The need for and rise of

1. new forms of strategic co-creation and transformation.
2. new forms of cross-disciplinary innovation leadership skills.
3. new forms of information shaping as part of innovation acceleration.
4. new forms of human-centered systems.
5. new forms of what we call Super Sense-Making.

Super Sense-Making involves not only adapting social science based skills such as anthropology to consumer product, service or experience creation but the much broader application of numerous human-centered skills to all kinds of innovation challenges including organizational transformation and beyond. This is the new Super Sense-Making that is already being incorporated into innovation enabling. This is Super Sense-Making as FUEL for transformation.

Organizational leaders call us up and ask for skill-building around that “design thinking stuff”. Unpacking what they really seek has helped us better understand what is missing from many everyday work lives.

We created the Complexity Navigation Program for executives seeking a new combination of 21st century skills. In that program participants learn “Design Thinking” in the form of three interconnected skill sets and a five dimensional Sense-Making model that super charges their ability to navigate all kinds of complex situations in organizations and elsewhere.

The Complexity Navigation Program consists of:

Strategic CoCreation
Design/Innovation Research
Visual Sense-Making

The five dimensions of Complexity Navigation Sense-Making consist of:

1. Understanding the opportunity/challenge space
2. Understanding the humans in the opportunity/challenge space
3. Understanding the information in the opportunity/challenge space
4. Understanding the humans on the transformation team
5. Understanding the humans on the client team

In practice we find that what our clients need and want is a form of what might be called Authentic/Adaptable Inquiry. They want tools and methods that are practical, real and adaptable to many different contexts in their continuously changing world. Most often they have significant appetite for being authentic with each other and for the opportunities and challenges facing them. Most often they have oodles of content knowledge. They seek relatively hard process skills, not touchy feely kumbaya sessions. They tend to want methods and skills that directly connect to the challenges and opportunities facing them. In their world this can involve daily multiple scale transformation not just the transformation of entire organizations. Organizational leaders are smart today. They want and expect method adaptability. We view the Complexity Navigation Program and the inclusive innovation strategies within as forms of Authentic/Adaptable Inquiry.

One key aspect of this form of inquiry is the notion that Sense-Making (making the strange familiar (R1) precedes Strange-Making (making the familiar strange (R1)). Increasingly robust research tools and methods play an important part in Sense-Making long before Strange-Making begins. The purpose of Sense-Making research is not to advocate any particular position, but rather to understand. It will be interesting to see at the conference how this aspect of Authentic/Adaptable Inquiry maps to or differs from “Appreciative Inquiry”.

In the Complexity Navigation Sense-Making Program we have two popular sayings:

- Happiness is a Complex Problem!
- Get Real! Get Ready!

We are looking forward to seeing everyone at the conference soon!

Reference:

R1: Gordon, W.J.J. 1961. *Synerctics*. New York: Harper & Row

Further Reading:

For anyone interested in further reading on this subject see these NextD publications available for free online:

Beyond Hostility (2007)

Finding & Creating Inclusive Models for Co-Creation

GK VanPatter

NextDesign Leadership Institute

<http://nextd.org/03/index.html>

Revolution in Motion (2008)

That “design thinking” thing might not be exactly what you expected!

Rick Poynor & GK VanPatter

NextDesign Leadership Institute

<http://nextd.org/03/index.html>

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Making Sense of Cross-Disciplinary Innovation Now!

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