

International Journal of Appreciative Inquiry

August 2015

Volume 17 Number 3

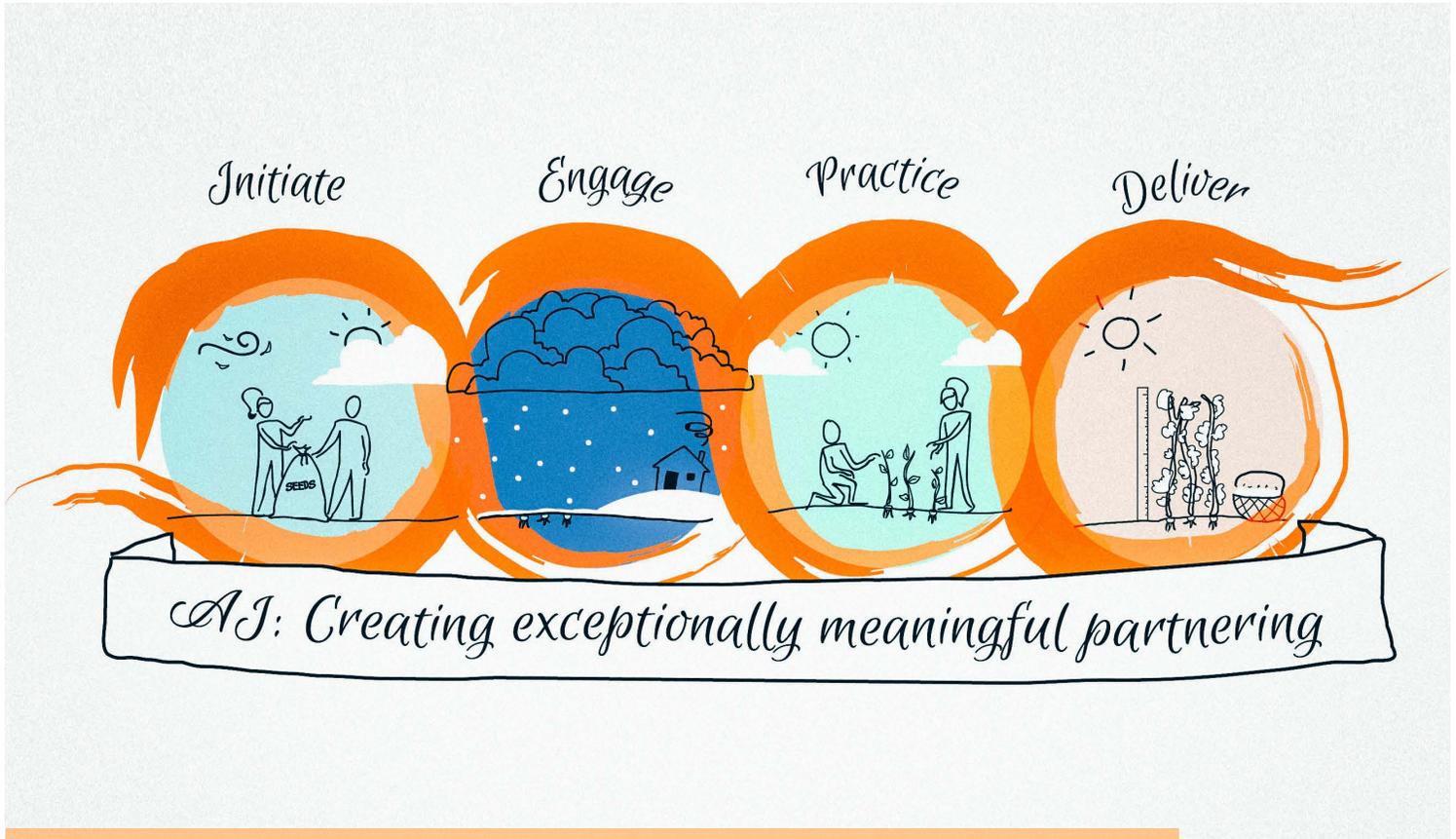
ISBN 978-1-907549-24-3

 dx.doi.org/10.12781/978-1-907549-24-3

AI Practitioner



www.aipractitioner.com/subscriptions



Consultants & Clients Co-authoring Sustainable Results in Organisations and Communities

Edited by

Ralph Weickel

Sponsored by

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Consultants & Clients Co-authoring Sustainable Results in Organisations and Communities

Inside this issue

Welcome to August 2015 issue of AI Practitioner

Consultants & Clients Co-authoring Sustainable Results in Organisations and Communities reflects the creative and new ways practitioners are delivering results while leveraging strengths and engaging the whole system. The articles show how clients are using the principles, processes and methodology of Appreciative Inquiry in rapidly changing environments.

David Cooperrider and Lindsey Godwin highlight what we have learned about

non-deficit, life-centric and full-spectrum strengths-powered change in the Feature Choice article, "Elevation-and-Change: An Eight-Step Platform for Leading P.O.S.I.T.I.V.E. Change".

In Research Review & Notes, Ron Fry at Case Western Reserve University in the United States summarises recent research on the generative power of the Appreciative Inquiry Discovery phase.

AI Resources focuses on resources to help practitioners improve the impact of AI processes and research studies that empirically highlight the impact of AI processes.

We would like to thank Corporation for Positive Change for sponsoring this issue.

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Feature Choice

by David Cooperrider and Lindsey Godwin

Elevation-and-Change: An Eight-Step Platform for Leading P.O.S.I.T.I.V.E. Change

The task of this article is to sketch out the essence of an early articulation of *conscious co-elevation*, an affective theory of social construction that is to meaning-making human systems what genetic change is to biological systems. It is a uniquely human evolutionary process of positive change, and implications for change are vast. What have we learned about non-deficit, life-centric and full-spectrum strengths-powered change?

“Awe is what moves us forward.” Joseph Campbell

The power of elevated experience to transform – when we consciously co-elevate the strategic strengths spectrum in a way that creates not “power over” but “power to” – is enormous. Unlike other change processes that are gradual and cumulative, a growing implosion of literature shows that positive core affect, when savored, amplified and used to propel co-creation, can be generative, relationally empowering and rapid – and even more so when united with the exponential inquiry effect of a rigorous Appreciative Inquiry (AI) into everything “that gives life” to a living human system when it is most alive. Consider just a few of these transformations:

Green Mountain Coffee Roasters – When they started using AI, their revenues were in the neighborhood of \$200 million in sales. Their first organization-wide AI, prophetically, was called “Preparing for an Era of Phenomenal Growth and Positive World Impact”. Soon they went on to help architect the whole fair trade coffee movement and by 2014, ten years later, their market value was over \$24 billion. Under the leadership of Robert P. Stiller, Green Mountain became one of the business successes of our century (stock market and social responsibility). And actions speak louder: Bob Stiller was so clearly inspired by the contribution that AI made, that he stepped forward with a \$10 million transformational gift to Champlain College, establishing the first-ever academic center for Appreciative Inquiry. His comment: “We believe that to redefine business, it is necessary to introduce new thinking into how business is taught to the next generation of leaders and entrepreneurs, and Appreciative Inquiry brings out the best in business, in people, and society.”

United Nations Global Compact – When Nobel Prize-winning Secretary General Kofi Annan called on AI early on nobody knew how rapidly the business for good movement could be magnified. But the largest strategy meeting in history between the UN and C-suite business leaders took place on June 24, 2004. It was historic and game changing, and one of the best AI-inspired projects ever. Within three years – by the next world summit in Geneva, Switzerland – the Global Compact had surpassed its plan, and grown from 1,500 firms to over 8,000 of the world's largest corporations – a 433% growth rate, averaging 144.4% per year. "I would like to commend your innovative methodology of Appreciative Inquiry," said Kofi Annan in a letter, "and to thank you for introducing it to the United Nations. Without this, it would have been very difficult, perhaps even impossible..."

Apple is a large company to move – but today it is one of the leading lights in its progress to become powered 100% by clean, renewable energy and the advancement of sustainable value. But it wasn't always this way. A New York Times article went viral, for example, about working conditions and toxicities across the supply chain. But way before that the company was architecting systemic transformation. Today Apple stakeholders are taking the positive core of their system – for example their DNA for "insanely great products" – and emulating this core strength, energy and insight to "Apple's New Green Manifesto" and the analogous idea of "insanely great supplier responsibility." It is improving the lives of millions while simultaneously lifting the success of the business. Is it noticed? The answer certainly surprises: one of the world's most notorious "keeping them honest" critics, Greenpeace, just this past year, selected Apple as the number one leading force, industry wide, for a sustainable economic system. Said the head of Greenpeace: "Many companies practice greenwashing while doing little...Apple has put its money where its mouth is." How did they do it? We wish we could share more, for the story is telling: it is about how strengths do more than perform, they transform...but how?

These results are not isolated or atypical achievements. Over the years we have been struck by the constructive "change power" of emotions such as hope, inspiration and joy, and especially feelings of awe, when combined with experiences of collective empowerment. What a contrast all of this is to the contagion effect of scarcity emotions such as fear, despair, cynicism, depression and out-of control anger, for example in our American gridlocked and conversationally toxic Congress. In a world where close to 70 to 80% of all corporate change efforts falter (see the recent McKinsey 2014 analysis, and the growing cynicism about "the next change program announcement") and then in even more personal domains like dieting, where 98% of the "deficit-based" initiatives fail – we in the field of change theory need to aim higher, dig deeper conceptually, and better articulate what we mean by the far too casual term "positive change", for it is and can be deep and powerful – certainly not superficial at all.

The task of this article is to sketch out the essence – based on years of research into successful large scale change efforts – of an early articulation of an affective theory of social construction that is to meaning-making human systems what genetic

While evolutionary selection is genetic and slow, co-elevationary selection and co-creation can be autopoietic and fast.

change is to biological systems. We will call this, the uniquely human evolutionary process of positive change, conscious co-elevation (in distinction to conscious evolution) to signify the relational dance involved: for example, the co-elevationary interplay between an artist such as Michelangelo and the experiencing of the David masterpiece, as it was coming to fruition. While *evolutionary selection* is genetic and slow, *co-elevationary selection* and *co-creation* can be autopoietic and fast. Yes, it is a big idea and this is just a tiny start, but implications for change are vast. The question for practice: can all of this be codified, for example in an eight-step change leadership platform (not a program), in a way that reflects everything we have learned about non-deficit, life-centric and full-spectrum *strengths-powered change*?

It starts with a new equation

Before you read one word further, we want to invite you to pause and experience just a bit of the new elevation-and-change model of change we're going to explore, by clicking on two stories, first J-Mac¹ and then Susan.²

The first video scene is the narrative of an autistic boy who, with an extraordinary coach in a co-elevationary connection, transforms a whole community: together they change people's career trajectories, and bring a school-system into a state of joint attention and synchronous resonance, spontaneous flourishing, celebration of difference, and lasting achievement.

The second scene is the clip of a transformational moment in the lives of an array of persons who experienced Susan Boyle on stage: that is, when she astonished critics with her outer limits and inner beauty. Starved of oxygen at birth, she grew up with many health issues, was bullied, became medically defined as obese, and never was kissed or had a date in those 47 years. And yet in spite of sneers, looks and the negative assumptions nearly everyone makes (you will see it in the respective judges in the video) the negative assumption tendency of every onlooker is suddenly hurled away. Minds are opened wide: here is a woman that isn't perhaps pretty, does not look the part, and at first glance is easy to dismiss. But then the surprise. Millions have now seen it. And the change waves, successful far beyond the common programs in corporate change, continues. Yes there were some ups and downs with the rapid rise, but the trajectory endures. Consider Boyle's newest new album on "Hope" and her growing philanthropic outreach.

What's crucial, now, as it relates to our more "mundane" organizational lives, is that we place remarkable stories such as these right alongside everyday business experiences. For example, how about the epic growth of Apple and the role of everyday epiphanies?

Entrepreneurs often see what works in the world, what is possible, and what is next in ways most of us would likely gloss over. The Steve Jobs leadership story has much nuance in it, but you may remember what he said when he saw "the very flawed work"

1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-nMab6XDNI>

2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxPZh4AnWYk>

We change best when we are strongest.

at Xerox. The work in the Xerox lab was at an early stage viewing and not beautiful at all. But do you know what? There was a tiny seed that could have propelled Xerox as industry pioneer; they could have been an Apple. Obviously, that did not happen. The year was 1979, and Steve Jobs was visiting Xerox's R&D labs. His host downplayed and dismissed much of what Steve was about to see: it was some kind of graphical interface. Where most would see failure and longer term headaches, Jobs had a complete epiphany. Listen to the hope, inspiration, and hints of sheer joy in his voice, for he almost sang about it: "I thought it was the very best thing I'd ever seen in my life," he said, "it was very flawed yes...still, the germ of the idea was there and *within*, you know ten minutes, it was obvious to me that all computers would work like this someday."

What's the relationship between the J-Mac, the Susan Boyle story and Steve Jobs?

Elevation is not just a spiritual term

The word elevation suggests a vertical dimension to life experience and it has an unusual versatility. On the one hand, it is totally mundane: a huge mechanical crane elevates the steel crossbeam for a bridge. To elevate, in this sense means to lift up, and there are tools such as cranes and pulleys to do so. Elevation also, simultaneously and perhaps originally, points to ways human cultures have ordered social space in terms of a vertical dimension running from the holy and pure above to the evil and disgusting below. Can we ask you to hold both images – the steel-*and*-the-spiritual sense of physical power and mutual inspiration – together? For that is how we want to use the term co-elevation – it is a strong, perhaps even mechanical way to lift up all the strengths and assets in a system (that is the steel part) and it is an experience of that concentrated core that inspires us beyond our best.

With all this in mind, we want to argue that we change best when we are strongest: as human beings, we change best and in the most elevated way when we experience the magnified and resonating power of every relevant resource available to us *across the entire systemic strengths spectrum*, outside and inside the system, including social and cultural assets, technical and economic ones, psychological and spiritual strengths, ecological strengths of nature, and the strengths of moral models, positive deviations and collaborative creativity. And if we change best when we are strongest, or have access to everything needed (encircling the change in a kind of "surround sound of strengths"), then the reverse is also true. For there is a mean paradox inherent in situations where change is needed most, for example when a person is in a dark depression or there is the imminent threat of a company facing bankruptcy. At precisely that moment when we feel the weakest, we are being asked to change? This mean paradox should be reversed, shouldn't it?

The positive change equation

One way of looking at the whole development of this strengths-powered view of change since William James in 1902 and of the positive human sciences since Maslow, and now thinkers such as Barbara Fredrickson and Marty Seligman, is that

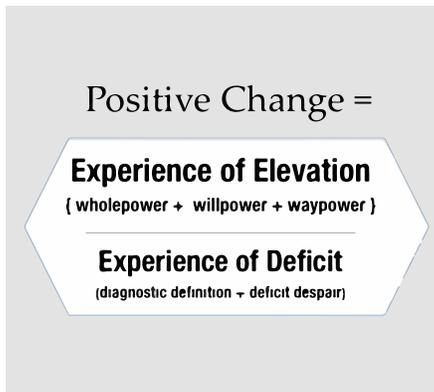


Figure 1: Magnifying the 'power to' of the Strategic Strengths Spectrum

In every compelling study available, we are seeing that positive states also produce optimal change capacities.

it represents a massive detailing and clarification of the idea of being in flourishing states (Cooperrider and Godwin, 2011.) Certainly, positive states *signal* optimal functioning, but this is far from the whole story. In every compelling study available, we are seeing that positive states also *produce* optimal change capacities.

This is *the* unifying insight that stands above all others, whether we are probing Barbara Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions or Jonathan Haight's great work – where for the first time the concept of “elevation” was defined conceptually and studied as an up-building force. Optimal states broaden thinking and action repertoires, they blunt or down-regulate despair and adversity, and often undo or replace past negative patterns. They build creative resources, in the moment and for the future; for example, in the establishment of more relational being (Fredrickson, 2004; Haidt, 2000; Gergen, 2010; Cooperrider and Godwin, 2012). The second great insight is equally, if not more, important. It is that all of this – the experience of touching a concentrated version of the systemic strengths spectrum – can be potentialized (Bryant and Veroff, 2007).

In Figure 1 we want to offer a glimpse of what we are writing about in our next book, where we are looking at the next phase in the field of organization development. Successful initiatives, we want to propose, involve a simple positive change equation:

$$C=cE/D$$

Your change initiative success is predicted by the collective experience of co-elevation divided by your experiencing of deficit definition. Nutritional excellence studies, by analogy, have proposed their own equation, $H=N/C$, where health is predicted by nutrients divided by calories – the more *high nutrients-per-calorie* foods you eat (rather than high-calorie, nutrient-empty foods such as fries or cake) – the greater your health and the better your weight. The key concept is *nutrient density*.

In a similar way we are proposing a concept we call the “strengths-density of the change initiative”. It is made up of three things. The first is *wholepower*: it is the state where we experience the magnified and resonating power of every relevant resource available to us across the entire systemic strengths spectrum, outside and inside the system. However, far too often this strength spectrum is not leveraged or even considered. For example, in one of the most counterintuitive organizational studies we have seen in a long time – it is called “Outsourced Inspiration” – Adam Grant (2014) noted how people working in call centers are isolated. Stories of rapid increases in productivity in this domain are virtually nowhere in the literature. Leaders could grab the loudspeaker, give a motivational speech, and hope for the best in these call centers.

But Grant had a hunch. He noticed the ways the people working in the call centers were transforming lives (fundraising for student scholarships). So he asked: why let those outside stories, truly meaningful ones, stay outside? Hence the study: one

For change to happen there needs to be collective willpower, certainly, but perhaps even more important – is *waypower*.

group of callers were given letters of thanks from a person they had helped; another group got nothing; with the third group, the outsider was brought inside to share the way in which their life had been changed. It was only a five-minute interaction. So what do you suppose happened?

Those receiving the letter from the outside had no changes in effort or productivity. But the ones who had the five-minute interaction? Their productivity doubled and fundraising revenue went up 171%. The study was replicated five times. In one case, weekly revenue went up more than 400% from about \$400 to \$2,083.52. How could such a tiny intervention have such a reverberation? It is called co-elevation, and union with the systemic strengths spectrum ignites it. The outsourced inspiration is magical; for example with customers, supply chain partners and communities in the room. We've documented this extensively, with six corporate case studies, in the article "The Concentration Effect of Strengths: How the Appreciative Inquiry Summit Brings Out the Best in Human Systems." Working with all stakeholders is motivational: this is the way meaning-making happens, it is the way the power of purpose grows, it is how *whypower* emerges (Cooperrider, 2013; Fry, Barrett, Seiling and Whitney (2001).

The second and third elements in the Figure 1 equation involve Snyder's (1994) hope theory: for change to happen there needs to be collective willpower, certainly, but perhaps even more important – in everything from personal dieting to changing whole industries – is *waypower*. That is why the positive inspiration of designers in the mix is so effective: they go beyond words and design rapid prototypes, things you can touch and see. Prototypes are beacons of hope. They make *waypower* so potent that willpower grows. They are inseparable forces. When *wholepower* + *whypower* + *and waypower* combine, a system can transcend or down-regulate the many deficit aftereffects that have long been documented in the field of change.

How do you put this into full motion? See Table 1 for a visual summary of the easy-to-remember way we are bringing this to organizations, cities, communities, UN meetings, whole industries and even "individual" change. It's probably the best guide we've created. CEO Scot Lowry of Fathom, one of the first to make this eight-step guide the change model for the company said: "I didn't realize how much I've been waiting for a guide like this; it's something I've been wanting for a very long time."

What do the most successful change efforts teach? They teach us that the future is in the hands of methods that can give us valid reasons to hope.

Table 1: Making it work: Putting the positive change equation into practice

AI P.O.S.I.T.I.V.E. Change Platform: Eight Steps (The Cooperrider–Godwin Positive Change Model)	
P.	<i>Pre-frame:</i> With full situational awareness of the appreciable system, this step is all about positive re-framing (pre-framing) for an epic opportunity inspired by urgent optimism. We live in a world our inquiries create, and so to create the best liftoff to change you need to ask: what do we most want to create? What has our rich history prepared us for, and what is the world calling for—customers, communities and our world? What is a situated opportunity so compelling and strategically significant that the call feels epic, filled with meaning, value and significance, and hence urgent optimism?
O.	<i>Open-innovate:</i> create an AI co-elevation platform via stakeholder macro magic. A change catalyst's core task isn't to design a change program but a change platform – one that opens the opportunity to unite with the universe of strengths, the supra-strengths spectrum. An epic opportunity is like an artificial reef metaphor: it is amazing what happens when biologists place a structure, like an antique sailboat, on an ocean floor. It is not long before the biodiversity attracted to its potential fuses into a living, flourishing ecosystem. Positive change moves from mechanistic to organic, and thrives on wholeness. A good change platform attracts success, attracts investment, and attracts the best.
S.	<i>Strengthen:</i> you change best when you are strongest – or have access to everything needed. The hard truth is, at precisely that moment when we feel the weakest, we are often faced with the most difficult changes. But fortunately the AI tools are there to consciously co-elevate and intensify the power of every relevant resource available to you across the entire systemic strengths spectrum, within and universally. Take your change opportunity and, as in a surround sound theatre, encircle it in the richest theatre of assets and strategic strengths possible, where the strengths density is at least 4:1 over the deficit density.
I.	<i>Imagine:</i> strategically create the heroic emotional attractor. Breakthrough change often requires heroic energy. Positive emotional attractor or magnetic images of the future call out the hero within and attract everything needed from all around. Imagination sees a vivid victory that provides the whypower to sustain.
T.	<i>Translate:</i> transform dreams and designs into grounded hope. For change to happen, there needs to be collective willpower certainly, but perhaps even more important—is waypower. That's why the positive inspiration of designers in the mix is so effective: they go beyond words and they design rapid prototypes. Seeing the future in the texture of the actual creates the attitude of “we know it's possible” because we are living it now, even if only an early prototype.
I.	<i>Improvise:</i> Improvisation (and rapid iteration) is better than “communicating for buy-in.” Everyone can be invited into prototyping iteration. Substantive engagement in co-creation is worth a thousand efforts of “communicating at.” Even if the communication is glitzy or even dialogical, it will fall short. Slightly overstated think this: “down with dialogue and up with design.” Why? Because people are tired of just having good conversations or meetings, they want engagement-as-communication. Improvisation and iteration for trust for all.
V.	<i>Value:</i> During this phase people need to see “progress moments”, and this requires rigorous valuation. Much like time-lapse photography, we need to see change-progress moments in full motion toward flourishing. Time-lapse metrics do three things: (1) they allow for reverse innovation, (2) allow us to put a value on progress and invest it (pay it) forward in order to (3) scale it.
E.	<i>Eclipse:</i> This is not so much a step as a reality. Positive change happens when you establish the new and eclipse the old, while carefully extending the vitally needed continuity threads. As Buckminster Fuller said: “You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” In any change initiative where should at least a 4:1 Robson Ratio of your attention (and your tools) go? Remember the 4Es: <i>Elevation of strengths. Extension of relationships. Establishing the new. Eclipsing the old.</i> This is what positive change, in distinction to reverse-ratio, deficit-defined change, is all about.



March 4, 2015, Linda Robson's dissertation defense

'My research and my own experiences tell me not to discount challenges or negative information, but to pay attention to such things wisely.' Linda Robson

The Robson Ratio

David: On March 4, 2015 the room swelled to full capacity; soon it was standing room only. It was for me, in over 30 years at Case Western Reserve University, the best-attended Ph.D. dissertation defense I had ever experienced. Linda Robson had written a great piece of scholarship, and she was touching the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, at our school. But more telling, most of us could not conceive how this student had written such a brilliant dissertation.

At the launch of her ambitious work, Linda was hit by the kind of news that would strike most to despair. Imagine it, just starting your research: that is when Linda was informed that she had extensive breast cancer and surgery and chemotherapy had to take place quickly. Moreover, after the rounds of chemotherapy were completed, there were grueling side effects that made conducting her research almost impossible. Almost.

Three years after receiving a life changing, and from her perspective "life giving" experience here we were, listening to her speak about how her research and her own elevation (and healing) were intertwined. The crowd was so attentive you could hear a whisper.

She said:

My research and my own experiences tell me not to discount challenges or negative information, but to pay attention to such things wisely. Where we let our attention settle, so too will go our actions and our results. I know many in the field want to hold onto the deficit-based change theories, even if only in partial ways, but it's time to let go of those tired theories. We need to follow where our science and studies are taking us – what the data is certainly showing – but I don't even need the proof of science to convince me. All I need to do is listen to my own body, to quiet my own cleverness and simply recognize all the opportunities for upliftment available to me, in each interaction and in every precious moment. This awareness and practice began with my experience with breast cancer, but there is real value here for our organizations and human systems.

Robson's (2015) dissertation was compelling. She sought out seventeen organizations involved in system-wide change. All were at the ground floor of launching into the sustainability revolution and all were part of an industry-wide initiative. Yes, it was voluntary, but with one caveat: there would need to be rigorous reporting of results: for example, actual reductions in CO₂, waste, energy efficiencies, organizational goal alignment and the like. Using something like the change equation in Figure 1, Linda's research was to track the ratio of what we have called the experience of co-elevation over deficit. She carefully gathered data. It involved a rigorous code of positive and negative discourse categories – the way people in the organizations talked about the change opportunity; the way they wrote about it

High-success change efforts, based on all data combined, had a positively biased imbalance of over 4:1 in their strengths density scores.

internally; the ways they communicated externally; and the actual strengths density of their meetings.

Ultimately there were ten participating organizations and the results started pouring in: there were three base (poor) performers; three moderate; and four high-performing (change-successful) organizations. Her analysis of language and the positive or negative emotions, unfolded in three ways: first, she conducted one-on-one interviews with leaders (and coded the utterances in all the transcriptions); second, she tape recorded live meetings of the change-leader group meetings (and again transcribed and coded positive and negative discourse across all the tape recordings.)

For example a positive discourse label would be assigned to statements that articulated, “any mention of strengths” or “hope toward the future” or “active effort to include others” or “mention of surprise, curiosity or excitement.” Next, she did the same with website articulations. And with all three sets of data, she compared the elevational focus with deficit articulations, for example the deficiency statements having to do with negative valuing or seeing “deficiency in self or others” or articulations of “unfulfilled expectations” or “predictions of a negative future.”

I share all this because, while studies of this kind have been done with successful marriages and individuals in states of languishing or flourishing, nothing of its kind have ever been done with organizations in the midst of systemic change, with ten simultaneous examples.

Bottom line? Data demonstrated the poorest performing change efforts had a 1:4 deficit-bias and imbalance, for example, in their face-to-face group meetings; high-success change efforts, based on all data combined, had a positively biased imbalance of over 4:1 in their strengths density scores. Linda coded over 52,000 words.

In the powerful closing, she returned to “the evidence” in her life. People were in tears. She spoke about the magic of the 4:1 ratio in ways that spoke to the heart of the matter:

The most radical form of change any system can experience is to become more fully whole, more fully who or what it is, with comprehensive acceptance of all parts of the system, even and especially the alienated ones. This is full spectrum acceptance, this complete being of what we fully are; I believe is an act of love and a path to upliftment.

That day, Linda graduated to a standing ovation. I had tears, of joy, for her. She stirred something special in all of us. She spoke about the “cognitive power of love” and she brought out the best in our community.

So now, whenever I launch a new change initiative, I am going to savor that day. And what is going to help me remember it more vividly is what I want to call “the Robson Ratio” – not as a concept, but as a north star and guide.

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This publication is for people interested in making the world a better place using positive relational approaches to change such as Appreciative Inquiry. The publication is distributed quarterly: February, May, August and November.

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ISSN 1741 8224

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