CHAPTER

56 Positive Organization Development

Innovation-inspired Change in
an Economy and Ecology of Strengths

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Abstract

This chapter presents a framework for *innovation-inspired positive organization development* (IPOD); IPOD is presented as both a radical break from the problem solving approaches that have come to dominate the field, as well as a homecoming to OD's original affirmative spirit. The converging fields that inform the theory and practice of IPOD are detailed: appreciative inquiry, positive organizational scholarship, positive psychology, design theory, and the rise of sustainable enterprises. The theory of change underlying IPOD is articulated, including the three stages in creating strengths-based organizational innovation: the elevation-and-extension of strengths, the broadening-and-building of capacity, and the establishment of the new-and-eclipsing of the old. Recent work from the city of Cleveland, Ohio, illustrates how these stages unfold. The chapter concludes with an agenda for evolving the field of IPOD, calling for a focus on designing *positive institutions* that refract and magnify our highest human strengths outward into society.

Keywords: Innovation-inspired positive organization development, appreciative inquiry, managing as design, sustainability, positive institutions, strength-based management, innovation, theory of change

Fields change. And the field of organization development (OD) has been changing more than most (Cooperrider, Sorensen, Yaeger, & Whitney, 2005; Bushe & Marshak, 2009). Not only are the rules of the game changing for OD, but the very foundation of the field upon which it is played is transforming, thanks to the convergence of some exciting forces. There is currently a rewriting of many of the conventions of organization development and change thanks to breakthroughs in our theories of leadership–what has been called "the strengths revolution in management" (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001); the growing emergence of appreciative inquiry as a paradigm-altering form of action research that is permeating the fields of organization change and social innovation (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987); the mounting new database of human science research in fields of positive organizational scholarship (POS; Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003) and positive psychology (Seligman, Steen, & Peterson, 2005); the growing permeation of design theory into management practice (Boland & Collopy, 2004); and the emergence of a social mandate to create sustainable enterprises that give back more (in all forms) to society than they consume. Increasingly, the call for OD *innovation* is eclipsing the call for OD *intervention,* and OD practitioners are needed to help build anew in organizations, not simply fix the old. Thus, the time has come to explore the foundations for a new, 21st-century field of organization development—what we refer to as *innovation-inspired positive organization development* (IPOD).

In this chapter, we present a framework for the nascent discipline of IPOD. To set the stage for this work, we first ascend into OD's history, highlighting the utopian spirit that set it apart and propelled its creativity. Names like McGregor, Lewin, Follett,

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Shepherd, Schein, Boulding, Seashore, and Bennis stand out. Yet, the early days of OD were so much more than great personalities; there was a *positive ethos* that we want to underscore. In some ways, IPOD represents a radical break from some of the now-common OD assumptions; but, in another way, it is actually a homecoming to this original spirit. Next, we detail the forces noted above that are informing and shaping the development of IPOD and describe some of the innovative methodologies emerging around IPOD. We then outline the theory of change behind these methodologies, what we call *profusion*—the positive fusion of strengths—and the three stages in the process of creating strengths-based organizational innovation: the elevation-and-extension of strengths, the broaden-and-build approach to capacity, and the establish-and-eclipse stage of innovation. Using the bold steps currently being taken by the city of Cleveland to create a "Green City on a Blue Lake,"[1] we illustrate how these stages unfold in a live system. Last, we conclude the chapter with an agenda for evolving the field of IPOD, proposing that our future work will revolve around the design of positive institutions that not only elevate and connect human strengths, but also refract and magnify them outward into society.

Returning to Our Roots: Rethinking Our Approach to Organizational Change

In one of the first books on OD, Warren Bennis heralded what he saw as a signature theme in the field: the idea that OD was becoming an applied behavioral science built upon a "new attitude of 'optimism' or 'hope' or even conceit" (1969, p 3). Indeed, this "optimism" or "conceit" as Bennis so aptly amplified, had the feeling of a revolution. But what exactly was being overturned? In our view, it was nothing less than a rejection of the metaphysical pathos or bleak melancholy toward the idea of intentional change in human beings and their institutions that had dominated mindsets to that point.

Most change theories of the time had been erected on Weberian and Freudian foundations, resulting in a despairing zeitgeist in which the world was largely empty of choice. Bennis reflected on this proclivity, stating, "students of psychoanalysis and bureaucracy view their relevant units (people and organizations) as being mulishly resistant to most forms of alteration. Freud once said that he would be delighted if he could transform neurotic despair into normal unhappiness" (Bennis, 1963, p. 129). Weber pessimistically predicted that the march of

bureaucracy, along with modernity's drive toward instrumental rationality, would advance like an automatic machine with a life of its own. He grimly forecast that bureaucracy would advance the more it was dehumanized, resulting in the routinization of every aspect of human life. In a word, Weber prophesied that we would see an ever-increasing "disenchantment"—with work in general, and in our institutions in particular (Weber, 2002).

The human sciences had their work cut out for them, as bureaucracy and neurosis were quickly becoming *the* macro forces of industry and modern society, with the issues associated with rigid hierarchies—authoritarianism, group conflict, stress, labor–management mistrust, etc.—being treated as givens to be managed. Imagine taking on Freud and Weber—and announcing, with confident fervor, that human beings and their institutions could be changed for the better. This is exactly what the OD pioneers did. They did it early on, with their interventions. For example, the invention of the T-group methodology was so powerful in terms of individual and group development that Carl Rogers called it "the most important social innovation of the 20th century" after using it in apartheid-riddled South Africa (Bradford, 1974). They did it in their writings, such as Maslow's visionary volume, *Euspsychian Management* (a title so audacious it was barely accepted for publication) (1998) and McGregor's *The Human Side of Enterprise* (1960), which became a classic resource for positive assumptions about people. They also did it in their institutes, such as the European Tavistock Institute[2] established in 1947, and MIT's Research Center for Group Dynamics,[3] established in 1945 around Lewin's new conception of action research. Likewise, they did it in the field. For example, University of Michigan's Survey Research Center demonstrated how systematic feedback of attitude survey data allowed for people to play a participative role in their organization's change process (Mann, 1961). In the late 1950s, Herb Shepherd, founder of the first doctoral program in organizational behavior at Case Western Reserve University, along with collaborators such as Robert Blake, helped coin the term "organization development" (French & Bell, 1973).

Soon, the field of OD took off, as Shepherd, Blake, and others demonstrated that the dehumanizing ills of bureaucracy could be countered through "planned change"—a daring notion at the time. In their classic on OD, French and Bell stated boldly, "this book is about an exciting and profound idea. The idea is this: it is possible for the people within

and organization collaboratively to manage the culture of that organization in such a way that the goals and purposes of the organization are attained at the same time that *human values* of individuals within the organization are furthered" (1973, p. xiii). A new field was born, and OD became a champion for human values; organizational effectiveness and human development were now part and parcel of one another.

The Animating Spirit in Early Organization Development

The early work of OD was not only a call to repair and transform bureaucratic systems, it also protested the ivory tower, detached view of science and the hierarchical view of change that dominated organizational interventions at the time. Three overarching values gradually evolved to provide a foundation for the field. These included: a spirit of inquiry, an attitude of discovery embodied in a new willingness to expose ideas and beliefs to action, observation and reflection, and consensual conversation that countered the traditional advocacy-based approach of organizational change; *a collaborative design approach,* a belief that individuals' commitment to change is directly proportional to the degree to which they are engaged in designing the change and that everyone in the system—not just researchers and consultants—are potential "experts," with valuable insights for the change process; and *a positive view of humankind*, a belief in the fundamental potential of people that led to placing human development at the forefront of organizational work. These values secured OD's unique place in change management history. Change no longer needed to be something coercive or external. Organization development instead embraced Lewin's (1946) call for action research as a guide for organizational interventions, and sought to advance collaborative change approaches based on experiential learning and dialogical processes, and contextually conditioned through inquiry into the content *and* process of a human system.

IPOD: Completing Classical Organization Development's Incomplete Revolution

Somehow, the positive assumptions inherent in early OD, however, gave way to a storehouse of problem-focused interventions and diagnostic methods of analysis. Change became about diagnosing organizational ills and following up, albeit collaboratively, with carefully designed "interventions" to move from a problematic state to normalcy—a toss back to the Freudian psychoanalytic model. Action research, the heart of OD, became formulated into a set of standardized steps: diagnosis, information gathering, feedback, and action planning, which were popularized by books such as Levinson's *Organizational Diagnosis* (1976). Bushe and Marshak (2009) trace the "problematizing" trajectory of classical OD, concluding that, like medicine, OD became a clinical science of what is wrong, focused on correcting the ills and excesses of bureaucracy. Whether intended or not, OD became almost exclusively a problem-solving science—what Bushe and Marshak labeled *Diagnostic OD* (2009, p. 3).

Unfortunately, the legacy of this diagnostic approach has become an approach and obsession that says, "Let's fix what's wrong and the strengths will take care of themselves." In fact, deficit-based management has itself become a self-perpetuating industry, with a mass-produced culture that revolves around sophisticated technologies for studying "what's wrong." Its error-focusing tendencies are woven tightly into everything from the global consulting industry, to Six-Sigma methodologies, to reengineering studies, variance analysis, and low-morale survey work. This type of consulting industry represents a $350 billion[4] market focused on problem analysis, error reduction, and repair. The deficit-based culture of consultancy has even led to tongue-in-cheek humor, reflected in a memo pad we saw recently that said, "Consulting: If you are not part of the solution, there is a lot of money to be made in prolonging the problem."

Since the days of Taylorism, organizations have regrettably become "problems to be solved." True to Maslow's observation, "It is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail' (1966, p. 15), managers and consultants have become quite good at finding, analyzing, and solving organizational problems, armed with tools such as "gap analysis," "organizational diagnosis," "root causes of failure," "needs analysis," and "threat analysis." Deficit-based thinking has virtually become synonymous with the idea of any "helping profession." In management circles, it results in the 80/20 trap—where the pull of the problematic, the broken, and deficient leaves us with an organization in which only a small minority of employees (only 20% globally) agree with the following statement: "At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day" (Gallup, 2001). Sadly, the economic consequence of a severely underappreciated workforce is not just a demoralized "other 80%"; the disengagement that accrues as a result is estimated

to cost the U.S. economy more than $300 billion annually (Gallup, 2001).

It is time for the organizational change revolution to surpass this deficit-based detour and come full circle, back to its positive roots. The emerging field of IPOD is cut from the same richly woven cloth of values as classical OD—except it does not have the same problematizing focus. As we will detail, IPOD embraces and advocates for the discovery-oriented spirit of inquiry and extends that spirit in its second-generation form of action research called appreciative inquiry (AI). It solidly preserves collaborative approaches and even expands those values in its large-group methodologies. The change theory underlying IPOD, however, illustrates a shift from collaborative *intervention* toward collaborative *innovation.* Furthermore, in IPOD, the idea of positivity becomes not just an end state to which we should aspire, but rather a catalytic resource for framing organizational change from the outset and a means for creating change. This new form of OD posits that change is not simply about moving from a "–7" to a neutral "0," but it also about a qualitatively different kind of change that moves us from a "+2" to a plus "+20" or "+200." That such a seemingly subtle shift can create seismic changes in the field is what the rest of this chapter is about.

Like classic OD, this new trajectory is emerging from exciting interdisciplinary connections and developments across the human sciences, including foundations in AI and strength-based management, positive psychology and POS, design theory, and the new sustainability domain of biomimicry. We now turn our attention briefly to each of these fields to detail how they form the foundation of this next generation of OD.

Appreciative Inquiry and Strengths-based Management

Contrasted with the dominant, deficit-based management culture, it is easy to see why the strengths-based movement is being called a revolution. The radical idea at the core of this movement is that, just as the Heisenberg principle holds true for the physical world (1949), so it is true for our social systems. In other words, the process of studying a phenomenon actually changes that phenomenon: We create new realities during the process of inquiry. The birth of AI extended this idea to the realm of organizational life by suggesting that the very act of asking a question has profound impact. Inquiry and change are not separate moments. Our questions focus our attention on what is "there" to be noticed. Reflecting its social constructionist roots (i.e., Gergen, 1982), AI refers to this as the *constructionist principle*, highlighting the relationship between inquiry and the simultaneous construction of reality (Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995). An organization-wide survey on low morale, for example, produces ripple effects through the mere act of asking: "What are the causes of low morale?" This question concentrates attention on what or who is causing the low morale; it provides a more precise language for speaking about low morale, and provides a presumptive assurance that something can be done to help solve the problem. If we "figure out the problem," then we can apply the right intervention to help the system return to a more normal state. Most unfortunately, however, is the fact that one more expensive low-morale survey, even with all the good intentions, will not tell us one thing about how to create a supercharged, highly engaged workforce.

Appreciative inquiry offers a new change imperative by suggesting that we be aware of the negativity bias that pervades our investigations into organizational life. Appreciative inquiry posits that human systems move in the direction of the questions they most frequently and authentically ask; knowledge and organizational destiny are intimately interwoven; what we know and how we study it has a direct impact on where we end up (Cooperrider & Avital, 2003; Gergen, 1994). Given this new understanding of the power of questions, AI began to change the focus of what we typically study in organizational life, questioning the mindset that organizations are problems to be solved (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Inspired by their fieldwork at the Cleveland Clinic and Schweitzer's work on reverence for life (see Martin, 2007, for overview), Cooperrider and Srivastva engaged in a radical reversal of the traditional problem solving approach. They proposed that organizations are not machines incessantly in need of repair, but instead are mysteries and miracles of human relatedness; they are living systems, webs of infinite strength and limitless human imagination (1990). What emerged from this vantage point was an entirely different approach to organizational inquiry and change built fundamentally upon a new line of questions such as, "What gives life to the system when it is most alive?" The strengths-based philosophy that AI has helped inject into management practices is summarized in Table 56.1.

Because AI is so central to the emergence and practice of IPOD, we will return to discussing its

Table 56.1 Principles of strengths-based approaches to positive organization development and change

We live in worlds that our inquiries create; no change initiative outperforms its "return on attention," whether we are studying deficiencies or the best in life.

We excel only by amplifying strengths, never by simply fixing weaknesses; therefore, beware of the negativity bias of first framing because excellence is not the opposite of failure.

Small shifts make seismic differences; strengths-based change obeys a tipping point; instead of focusing 80% on what's not working and 20% on strengths, it is important to put this 80/20 rule in reverse to harness the transformative power of the "positivity ratio."

Strengths do more than perform, they transform—strengths are what make us feel stronger and therefore magnify "what is best" and imagine "what is next" in order to create upward spirals.

We live in a universe of strengths—the wider the lens, the better the view. The appreciable world is so much larger than our normal appreciative eye. What we appreciate (seeing value), appreciates (increases in value).

innovation-igniting methodologies, which are in direct contrast to diagnostic OD's focus on intervention or repair. We will explore how many of the exciting projects emerging in this realm are guided by the new action research phases of AI known as the *4-D cycle*—discovery, dream, design, and destiny (summarized in Figure 56.1).

For now, we will underscore one overarching point: We live in worlds that our inquiries create (Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995). When we study excellence, there will be an impact. When we study low morale, there will be an impact. The questions we ask determine what we find, and what we find becomes a powerful resource for planning, imagining, and creating the future realities of organizations.

Positive Psychology and POS Create a Tectonic Shift

Failure and success are not opposites; they are merely different, and thus must be studied separately. Unfortunately, our research in the social sciences has not always reflected this truism. Until recently, the field of psychology—an important foundational discipline for organizational studies—had become consumed with a single topic: mental illness. Through decades of rigorous research, it built a rich understanding of the various psychological conditions that render the population below "normal." "This progress has come at a high cost," writes Seligman, "Relieving the states that make life miserable, it seems, has made building the states that make life worth living less of a priority . . . (if you were hoping for this) you have probably found the field of psychology to be a puzzling disappointment" (2002, p. ix). Indeed, when Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) and then Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn (2003) called for a new positive psychology and POS, respectively, another tectonic shift happened, opening a new frontier in our knowledge of human sciences.

In a mere decade since these initial calls for a science and scholarship of the positive, the impact has truly exploded. From the work on emotional
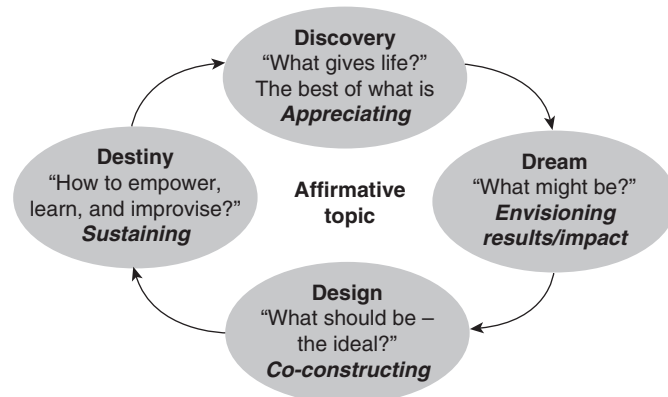

Fig. 56.1 The 4-D model of appreciative inquiry.

intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002), to better understanding of upward spirals of emotions in organizations (Fredrickson, 2003), to the continuing advances in AI (Cooperrider & Avital, 2003; Fry, Barrett, Seiling, & Whitney, 2001), to knowledge leaps on the science of happiness (Seligman, 2002), the implications for OD are vast. Even academic programs have begun to transform as a result. For example, in 2002, the University of Michigan established the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship.[5] Then, in 2004, Case Western Reserve University, the birthplace of graduate education in OD, decided that the prolific research productivity of positive psychology was so profound that they changed the name of their top-ranked master's program from the masters in OD, to the masters in *positive* organization development (MPOD).[6] This simple change was a fork in the road, signaling that the knowledge base and scholarship of this generative form of study was so massive, an entire degree could be devoted to it. Similarly, Marty Seligman followed suit in 2005, with the establishment of the masters degree in applied positive psychology[7] at University of Pennsylvania.

Although other chapters serve to discuss positive psychology and POS in more detail, it is important to highlight three decisive components that make this whole arena one of the fresh foundations for the new discipline of IPOD. First, there has been a generation of a rich vocabulary of the positive. As Wittgenstein (1981) once reasoned, "the limits of language are the limits of our worlds," meaning that if we do not have nuanced vocabularies available, then not only will we not be able to converse about a phenomenon, but we also will be unlikely to act collaboratively in relation to the phenomenon. Thus, it is fitting that one of the very first pieces of scholarly work done in positive psychology was the production of an encyclopedia of human strengths, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), which offers a classification in contrast to the American Psychiatric Association's classic *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* (1994). All of a sudden, with a rich professional vocabulary of human courage, wisdom, love, vitality, emotional intelligence, gratitude, awe, open-mindedness, bravery, and many others, new forms of research proliferated.

The second significant component of the positive psychology–POS tandem came from an illuminating framework proposed by Cameron (2003). To help portray the idea of higher-order strengths (which had, to date, gone largely underdiscussed in the social sciences), Cameron created a continuum depicting a state of normality or healthy performance in the middle, with a condition of negatively deviant performance on the extreme left and extraordinary positive performance on the farthest right (2003). At the individual level, the left would be a focus on illness, in the middle the topic shifts to health, and on the right, topics shift to human flourishing. The same dynamic can be applied to organizations. Take, for instance, the notion of quality: on the left would be *error prone* organizations, the middle might be framed as *reliable*, and the positive deviance framing on the right is *flawless*.

Finally, it is in this search for positive deviancy that some of the most influential and exciting research of our times is taking place (i.e., Prahalad, 2004; Thachenkery, Cooperrider, & Avital 2010; Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003). As such, POS does not represent a single theory, but rather provides a compass to understanding dynamics described by words such as excellence, thriving, flourishing, life-giving, flawless, and extraordinary. Combined with positive psychology's inauguration of a science of human strengths, POS's razor-sharp clarifying framework truly sets the stage for a fundamental shift in our understanding of the human condition and its prospects.

The Design Thinking Movement

In the late sixties, Nobel Laureate Herb Simon outlined the three pillars of organization and management: intelligence, choice, and design (1969). Yet, somehow, over the years, the design pillar was conspicuously glossed over in favor of a decision-analytic stance. This is now changing as organizations everywhere discover the power and promise of design thinking. Increasingly, managers are turning to architects, creative artists, graphic specialists, and product designers as inspired models for innovation, improvisational leadership, and collaborative designing. Volumes such as *Managing as Designing* (Boland & Collopy, 2004); *Artful Making: What Managers Need to Know About How Artists Work* (Austin & Devin, 2003); *Discovering Design* (Buchanan & Margolis, 1995), and *The Design of Business* (Martin, 2009), are changing our conceptions of management. They portray the essence of management not as a science of rational decisions within a stable world, but rather as the art of generating artifacts and designs of a better future, rapid prototypes, feedback loops, and agile interactive

pathways embedded within an increasingly uncertain and dynamic world.

Capitalizing on this new wave of innovation-inspired change in organizations, design firms, such as the acclaimed IDEO[8] in Silicon Valley, have expanded their mission from product design into organizational transformation. Their work is all about the art of creating, which is often quite different from solving. Extending this trend backward toward management schools that are responsible for preparing our future business leaders, many are beginning to ask what if our classes looked more like design studios, alive with hot interdisciplinary teams and innovation labs, bringing together the latest and best in applied creativity (Boland & Collopy, 2004). In line with this thinking, the head of *Harvard Business Review* recently wrote an article titled, "Magic by Design," in which he argued that the design field has much to teach managers, especially those with the explicit goal of succeeding at rapid, profuse innovation (Stewart, 2008).

The bridge between product designing and the spirit of design-thinking for the field of OD was outlined in a recent article in the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences* (Coughlan, Suri, & Canales, 2008). Although the OD lexicon has traditionally included the word "design," and there are many epistemological ties between OD's roots in philosophical pragmatism and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), a "rediscovered" pragmatism has emerged from the field of design thinking that argues for a new kind of logic beyond inductive or deductive reasoning. It is called *abductive reasoning* (a phrase coined by Peirce, 1938), which happens via "logical leaps of the mind" from even a single deviating data point that does not fit with the existing models (Martin, 2009). Ironically, many of the methods in the design field, for example group brainstorming on a flip chart, had their origins in the early days of OD (Marrow, 1967). Yet, it is design firms such as IDEO that are becoming the "go to" places for organization development. One reason, argues Avital, Boland, and Cooperrider (2008) is that design thinkers see the world through a positive lens, where even mistakes are valued as "material" for new possibilities. Similarly, Barrett (1998) describes how artists see everything as positive possibility; for example, jazz musicians who regularly say "yes to the mess." Indeed, an innovation-inspired positive OD discipline is rapidly emerging today, and it is being enriched by the question: What can we, as an OD field, learn bout nondeficit positive change from architects, performing artists, musicians and product designers—especially the ways in which they create real-time change through the tools of visual representation, metaphor, and revolutionary innovation?

Biomimicry As Inquiry into Sustainable Value—and Life

Just as AI is the search for what gives life to human systems, biomimicry is a field of work dedicated to the conscious emulation of life's genius—it is all about innovation inspired by nature (Benyus, 1997). *Bios*, from the early Greeks, literally means "life," and unlike the Industrial Revolution, the biomimicry revolution is a call to relate to nature, not on what we can *extract* from it, but what we can *learn* from nature, with implications for organizations and industries. For example, biomimicry raises the question of how organizations, like true living organisms, can not only create less waste, but eliminate the very concept of waste (where every "waste" in transformed into a "food" for another part of the system), thus creating sustainable enterprises that help build a better world. Biomimicry invites OD to explore the fertile crests where ecology meets commerce, computing, human flourishing, energy, manufacturing, community, organizational design, and most importantly, the creation of *sustainable value*. What might it look like if we ran a business like a redwood forest, or compute like a cell, or gather energy like a leaf? The invitation is to appreciate the miracle of life and notice nature's strategies and strengths, sculpted over billions of years, then echo them in our own institutions.

Some of the most exciting and profoundly innovative work happening in OD today is at the intersection between AI, positive psychology and POS, design thinking, *and* biomimicry for the creation of sustainable value. With these forces taken together, we now see the earmarks of a breakthrough moment in the field of organization development and change. We see ideas coming together that can spread like an adaptive gene throughout our culture. The fresh approach to managing change is become clear: We need innovation inspired by the best in life.

From These Roots a New Branch Emerges: The Nature of IPOD

With the stage now set, we can now more fully consider the possibility of a theoretical and methodological transformation for the field of OD. Building on and extending the concepts of AI, positive human science, biomimicry's emulation of life, and

the designer's mind, we now ask: What is the collective potential presented by merging these streams? To answer this question, we outline here the developing idea of IPOD—what it is, what it tries to accomplish, several illustrations, its new change theory, and directions for future research. Although our sketch remains high-level, we hope to demonstrate the enormous potential IPOD holds for the whole of OD. To begin, we situate these contributions by exploring what we call the *three-circles of the strengths revolution* (Cooperrider, 2008).

The Three Pillars of IPOD

Whether working with individuals, organizations, or broader social systems, there are three primary tasks in almost all positive organization development work: the *elevation* of strengths, the alignment or connected *magnification* of strengths, and the creation of strengths-based organizations to become positive institutions—vehicles for elevating, magnifying, and *refracting* our highest human strengths outward to the world. Figure 56.2 depicts these three interrelated spheres that form the framework for IPOD. At the center of the overlapping circles is the individual capacity to see the world not as a problem-to-be-solved, but rather an invitation for inquiry into what gives life to a system when it is most alive. In this framework, strengths are defined as those things that make us feel stronger—the things that bring our institutions and ourselves to life. It is also important to highlight that AI provides the action research methodological architecture for this collaborative search into "what gives life." Although not exhaustive, this model begins to connect the many seemingly diverse streams of work that underpin the emerging discipline of IPOD.

With the aim to elevate strengths, the first circle highlights knowledge domains such as positive psychology and POS, the work on appreciative intelligence (i.e., Thachenkery & Metzker, 2006), and the leadership work on emotional intelligence and strengths-based management (i.e., Buckingham, 2006; Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Exciting tools and resources for this domain include the VIA strengths-survey (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), best-self analysis (Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, & Quinn, 2005), resonant leadership tools (i.e., McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008), strengths-finder surveys
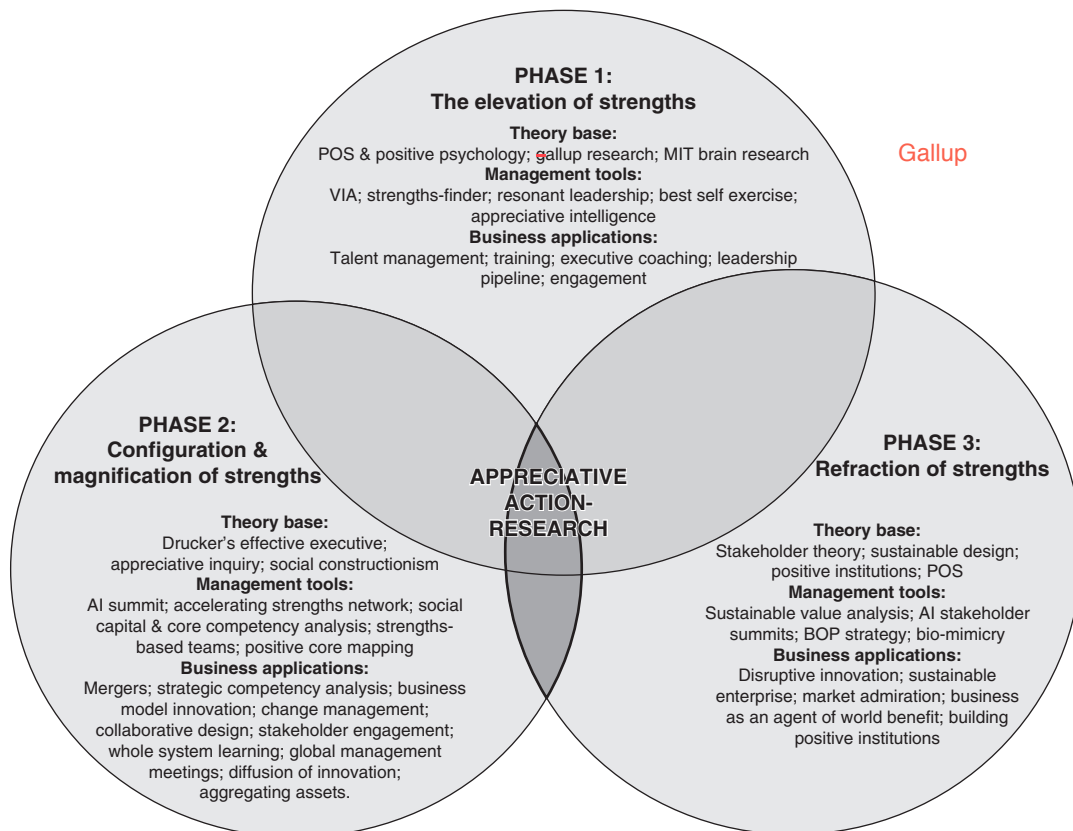

Fig. 56.2 Three circles of the strengths revolution for positive organization development.

(i.e., Rath, 2007), and appreciative coaching methodologies (i.e., Orem, Binket, & Clancy, 2007). The focus of this domain of work is largely at the individual and small group or team levels, and the applications range from corporate talent management, executive coaching, career and job crafting, to strengths-based leadership education and more.

The second circle goes beyond the lifting up of individual strengths and works with configurations and constellations of the whole. The primary work of this realm is to intensify and leverage existing positivity with an eye toward creating intentional *transformational uses* of a system's positive core. The guiding question here is: How do we take isolated strengths and help take them to a new octave? The social constructionist literature in anthropology, with its illustrations of the power of narrative and story (i.e., Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, & Mintz, 1990), the magic of intergenerational connections (i.e., Whitehouse, Bendezu, FallCreek, & Whitehouse, 2000), and the identity shaping power of symbols and ritual moments (i.e., Powley & Cameron, 2006), provides a rich array of approaches for amplifying individual strengths into a symphony of the whole. At this level, one also finds the management philosophy of Peter Drucker and others who wrote about the importance of the *alignments of strengths* (Drucker, 1966) and high-quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Methodologies include the macro-management method of the AI Summit, which brings together whole systems of 500 to 1,000 people, such as the recent business leaders summit at the United Nations (Cooperrider, 2010). Coupled with new web technologies, there are now AI Summits and similar "IBM Jam Sessions"[9] with 10,000 to 60,000 people combining their strengths and drawing from the positive core of the system. Other tools for this realm include the Strategic Core Competency work (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990), the World Café[10] model, Asset-Based Community Development (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1994), Future Search (Weisbord & Janoff, 1995), and an exciting new business planning and strategy approach called SOAR (versus SWOT). SOAR is an acronym for "strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results" (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009) and is further detailed in Chapter 63 (Stavros & Wooten, 2011). These methods are quickly demonstrating the effectiveness that ensues when everyone becomes an organizational designer.

The third circle represents the largest frontier for transforming OD. This level goes beyond the elevation of internal strengths; it involves the discovery and design of positive institutions—institutions that elevate, combine, magnify, and *refract* our highest human strengths into the world. In business, for example, it bespeaks of the stakeholder theory of the firm (Freedman, 1984), the call for sustainable value (Laszlo, 2008), and the search for business to act as an agent of world benefit (BAWB) (Piderit, Fry, & Cooperrider, 2007). Tools for accomplishing these lofty aims include the bottom of the pyramid protocol,[11] biomimicry (Benyus, 1997), cradle-to-cradle design (McDonough & Braungart, 2002), the next-generation AI Summit or "the sustainable design factory" (Cooperrider, 2008), and the BAWB world inquiry.[12] The work unfolding in this arena is increasingly informed and shaped by the lens of sustainable value creation. It is an innovation engine for management unlike anything we have ever seen, and it is becoming the driving business opportunity of the 21st century (Laszlo, 2003). In OD terms, it is the human dimensions of sustainability that we want to underscore. The myriad of terms surrounding the concept of sustainability—eco-efficiency, social entrepreneurship, social responsibility, triple bottom-line, sustainable development, green enterprise, and others—too often serve to mystify and cloud the underlying message of this concept. Today's pressing mandate for OD is to help create positive institutions—institutions that elevate, connect, and then help refract our higher human strengths, like a prism, into the world around us (Cooperrider & Dutton, 1999).

Taking these three circles as a coherent whole, we offer the following definition of IPOD: it is a strengths-based approach to organizational innovation and change that is *appreciative and inquiry-driven*, applying AI-based, action research methods for everything that gives strength and life to organizations and their surrounding ecosystems of stakeholders; *innovation inspired*, focused on amplifying widespread assets or constellations of strengths (systemic positivity) for transformational purposes—positioning an enterprise for distinctive breakthrough leadership in its domain; informed by the theory and technologies of the *positive human sciences*, especially social constructionist thought; an embodiment of the heart of *classic OD values,* including collaborative designing, the spirit of inquiry, and positive assumptions about human systems; seeking to *build positive institutions* that are increasingly exceptional at the connection and magnification of strengths and the extended refraction of our highest strengths into society; and applicable to *any* innovation or change agenda in organizational and societal

life that can benefit from a strengths-based approach to innovation *as* change.

Establishing the New and Eclipsing the Old

The new model of OD is spreading rapidly around the world. With a blossoming array of initiatives informed by IPOD principles emerging across the globe—from Boeing to the United Nations (UN), to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to World Vision, to women's empowerment projects in Nepal—it is easy to understand the popular spread of the strengths perspective. What is still missing in the scholarship of change, however, is a solid understanding of the term "positive change" versus "deficit change." What is needed now is a better articulation between ideas like OD *intervention* and OD *innovation*, between solving and creating. We need to understand the stages through which organizations progress as they move toward creating environments of *transformational positivity*—the intentional use of positive assets, strengths, positive emotions, and whole system network effects to initiate, inspire, and better manage change.

In diagnostic OD, the stages of change are commonly understood, such as the classic "unfreezing" "changing," and "freezing" model (Lewin, 1947). The negative assumption deeply ingrained in this and most OD change models is that people will instinctively resist change. Beckhard and Harris (1987), and later Jacobs (1994), codified the change model in the following formula: $D \times V \times F > R$, where D = Dissatisfaction with how things are now; V = Vision of what is possible; and F = First, or the concrete steps that have been taken toward the vision. If the product of these three factors is greater than R (Resistance), then change is possible. Because of the multiplication of D, V, and F, if any one element is absent or low, then the product will be low and therefore not capable of overcoming the resistance of restraining forces.

Guided by this formula, successful deficit-based change programs have worked to magnify urgency; the organization must recognize and accept the dissatisfaction that exists by communicating industry trends, customer dissatisfactions, and competitive analysis to build the necessity for change. Sometimes this is called "creating the burning platform" (Christensen & Shu, 1999). In his now classic HBR article, Kotter writes about how important deficit analysis is—even if it needs to be manufactured—to raising the state of dissatisfaction, stating that the most successful cases of change begin when "an individual or group facilitates a frank discussion of potentially unpleasant facts. . . . The purpose of all this activity . . . is to make the status quo seem more dangerous than launching into the unknown" (Kotter, 1995, p. 60). Bad business results, he concludes, are, in a way, a "blessing" for mobilizing the change agenda. Not pumping up the urgency, argues Kotter, is the "#1 error" in change management and the main reason why transformation efforts fail. With this framework guiding change initiatives, is it any wonder that our institutions are filled with cultures of fear and trembling? Positive OD proposes an alternative, perhaps more powerful, model of change. As William James championed over a century ago, "Emotional occasions, especially violent ones, are extremely potent in precipitating mental rearrangements. The sudden and explosive ways in which jealousy, guilt, fear, remorse, or anger can seize upon one are known to everybody. Hope, happiness, security, resolve—emotions characteristic of conversion, however, can be equally explosive. And emotions that come in this explosive way seldom leave things as they found them" (1902, pp. 163–164). Today, with the help of the latest in positive psychology research, we are able to more fully realize James' vision for more systematic attention to the kind of nondeficit positive change that happens when things are "hot and alive within us, and where everything has to re-crystallize about it" (James, 1902, p. 162).

Taking this thought from the ethereal to the organizationally pragmatic, we offer an alternative to the stages found in the formula of $D \times V \times F > R$, which places priority on the generation of dissatisfaction, fear, anxiety, anger, and the like. We propose that the most effective transformational change is really about *establishing the new and eclipsing the old*. In economics, this has been called "creative destruction" (Schumpeter, 1975), whereby something like the industrial age's oil problems will never be solved logically on their own terms (i.e., fixing one oil rig at a time), but will be eclipsed and made irrelevant through the invention of something new, like a bright, green solar economy. But how does this kind of change happen?

Building on the model proposed by Cooperrider and Sekerka (2003), we assert that the positive change embodied by IPOD moves through three phases: elevation-and-extension, broaden-and-build, and establish-and-eclipse. These stages are based on three assumptions: change is all about strengths and new creative configurations of strengths; we live in a universe of strengths, in which the appreciable world is profoundly larger than our normal appreciative
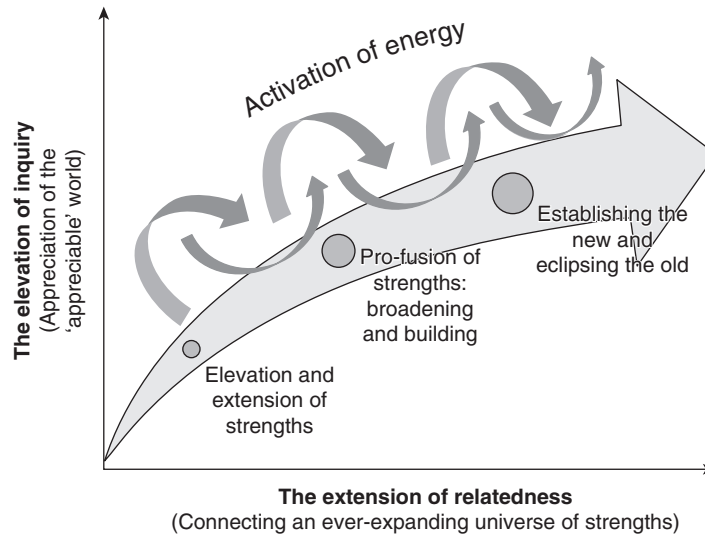
Fig. 56.3 The elevate-and-extend theory of positive change.

1 eye; and positive change is a powerful, self-renew-
2 ing, and clean resource—much like an energy source
3 that is abundant and renewable. As summarized in
4 Figure 56.3, the DNA of positive change resembles
5 a double helix—the *elevation* of inquiry, along one
6 dimension, and *extension* of relatedness, which com-
7 bines and connects strengths, along the other
8 dimension. The process of positive change is initi-
9 ated when one or both begin.

10 This dynamic change phenomenon is illustrated
11 by the economic development work unfolding in
12 Cleveland, Ohio. Determined to surmount their
13 pollution-ridden industrial history as a city whose
14 river infamously caught fire in the 1970s, Mayor
15 Jackson called for an AI Summit in 2009, to bring
16 700 business leaders, entrepreneurs, scientists, and
17 inventors together to envision a "Green City on a
18 Blue Lake." The process included external compa-
19 nies such as IBM and its Smarter Planet technolo-
20 gies, as well as sustainable energy innovators from
21 Sweden (Glavas, Senge, & Cooperrider, 2010). The
22 AI process produced aspirations for green urban
23 farming, fuel cell innovation, and visions of Lake
24 Erie becoming a leading green energy provider for
25 the nation.

26 Commenting on the surprising energy unleashed,
27 the former editor of *The New Yorker* wrote, "sum-
28 mit-goers, exhausted but awakened to their new,
29 collective power, gave the mayor a standing ovation.
30 It was like uncorking a giant bottle of champagne
31 left too long on the shelf and seeing the bubbles
32 explode" (Michner, 2009, p. G-6). The AI Summit
33 produced 21 prototype initiatives for Cleveland,

34 including a major partnership with General Electric
35 for the city to become a premier freshwater wind
36 energy location. New perspectives, new energy, and
37 new vision were generated, and the traditional prob-
38 lem solving approach to OD was replaced by inno-
39 vation-oriented IPOD. The city initiated a new
40 positive trajectory.

Future Directions

42 We must still explore many questions within each of
43 the three pillars of IPOD. First, as we seek to foster
44 the elevation of strengths, we must improve our
45 methods for identifying strengths within others and
46 ourselves. Emerging work on appreciative intelli-
47 gence (Thachenkery & Metzker, 2006) offers a
48 beginning insight into why some individuals are
49 better able to see hidden potential in situations and
50 people. But, can this capacity be developed? If so,
51 what methods are best at helping develop this type
52 of strengths intelligence? Such queries have implica-
53 tions for affecting our management education peda-
54 gogies. Even as we seek to better recognize the
55 strengths embedded in individuals and systems, we
56 also need more rigorous tools to help measure and
57 categorize strengths. Building on the strengths clas-
58 sification of Peterson and Seligman (2004) and the
59 VIA strengths-survey (Peterson & Seligman, 2003),
60 new instruments—even new language—are needed
61 to help us catalogue all the strengths that exist in
62 individuals and organizations.

63 Another needed area of research relates to AI
64 Summits. Thus far, practice and application have
65 outstripped research, so investigating what aspects

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of AI are most important, what processes are connected to what outcomes and why, what processes differentiate effective AI Summits from less-effective summits, and how the temporary positive energy associated with summits can be prolonged, all are areas in need of rigorous investigation.

Finally, investigations of the three pillars of IPOD will create an empirical foundation needed to lead planned, positive change efforts in organizations. Investigating not only how to *elevate* strengths but also how to *magnify* them and *refract* them, so that other individuals and organizations are affected—that is, to create upward-tending, virtuous cycles—is an important area of scholarly endeavor. The goal is to create the scholarly foundation that was missing in the early OD literature which, in its absence, produced a problem-centered, negative orientation in OD.

Notes

1. See www.gcbl.org
2. See www.tavinstitute.org
3. See www.rcgd.isr.umich.edu/history
4. See www.plunkettresearch.com
5. See www.bus.umich.edu/positive
6. See weatherhead.case.edu/mpod
7. See www.sas.upenn.edu/lps/graduate/mapp
8. See www.ideo.com
9. See www.collaborationjam.com
10. See www.theworldcafe.com
11. See www.bop-protocol.org
12. See worldbenefit.cwru.edu/inquiry

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