

# SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS GENERATIVE PROCESS

ABOUT PLAY, POETRY AND PROVOCATION

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**NYENRODE**  
BUSINESS UNIVERSITEIT



**INAUGURAL LECTURE**

# **SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS GENERATIVE PROCESS**

**About Play, Poetry and Provocation**

## **INAUGURAL LECTURE**

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## **To Suresh Srivastva...**

You see, inquiry is not about being intellectual or esoteric.

It's about understanding the simple things.

Seeing the rose, smelling the rose, touching the rose.

Appreciating how it blooms and then dies.

Knowing how you and the rose are one.



# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Organizational Development in the Context of Sustainability</b>	<b>11</b>
Appreciative Lens	12
Discursive Lens	13
Artful Lens	14
Relational Lens	16
<b>Generativity as Guiding Value</b>	<b>18</b>
Generative Inquiry	18
Stretching Sustainability	19
Generative Processes of Relating	20
<b>The Infinite Game of Play, Poetry and Provocation</b>	<b>22</b>
Play to Liberate and Explore	23
Poetry to Imagine and Articulate	25
Provocation to Invite and Disrupt	26
<b>Sustainable Organizational Development as Generative Practice of Daring and Caring</b>	<b>29</b>
Facilitating Spaces	30
<i>Liberating Disruption</i>	31
<i>Imaginative Exploration</i>	32
<i>Inviting Articulation</i>	34
Scholarly Voices	35
<i>Activist Voice</i>	36
<i>Adventurous Voice</i>	37
<i>Artistic Voice</i>	38
Summing up Sustainable Organizational Development	38

<b>Moving from Talk to Action</b>	<b>41</b>
Research	41
<i>Pathways for Organizational Renewal</i>	42
<i>Designing Organizations for Innovation</i>	42
<i>Dynamics of Collective Inquiry and Learning</i>	42
<i>Generative Approaches to Action Research</i>	43
Teaching	43
Further Collaborations	44
<b>Words of Appreciation</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>48</b>

*Sir Rector Magnificus,  
Fellow colleagues,  
Honorable guests,  
Dear family and friends,  
Ladies and gentlemen,*

Let me start by sharing a story...

*Imagine an airy Western Cape hotel nestled in the rugged coastline that runs parallel to the migration route of the mighty whales. Inside, people are getting ready to party. The marimba band from Khayelitsha township has arrived. With visible joy, my black colleagues take the lead and lure even the reserved British director into dancing to a new beat. Soon after, the entire kitchen crew joins in the dance floor fun. This is South Africa toward the end of apartheid. Change is in the air and tables are turning. The morning after our playful intermezzo we, the Shell HR professionals, continue our timely conversation about a vision and a strategy for a new Shell in the new South Africa. The OD & training department, to which I belong, is facilitating similar dialogues in all regions and divisions of the company. We have adapted the corporate quality management toolkit to a strategy of change in which improvement projects are guided by vision. Ignorant about the appreciative approach that is budding on another continent, we intuitively choose to create a higher ground by inviting organizational members to articulate their dreams for a shared future. We use Martin Luther King's evocative speech to spark the imagination of the possible whilst not shying away from the reality of present woes. These are both exhilarating and difficult times. I celebrate the triumph of freedom with a befriended colleague, as we watch de Klerk announce apartheid's ending on a television tucked away in our departmental storage room. Is it because of his new responsibility that my friend half-jokingly shares the wish to grow potatoes in his beloved Swaziland? On a different occasion, I witness a conversation between two white managers who worry about their children's future in a changed country. They portray a similar sense of responsibility from an opposite angle. Clearly, there is a lot at stake. How to bring contrasting perspectives together? We use our training sessions and quality management meetings as opportunities for bridging dialogue between people who literally live in different worlds. We show the documentary "A Class Divided," as an entrance into a conversation about the dynamics of discrimination. In the Free State we use "veldskoene" as a*

*symbol to reinforce the message that there will be place for tradition and continuity in change. In Forestry in Natal, we visualize quality improvement by depicting the contours of a bull on a wall. In a country where people bond around the “braai” it is clear to all what will happen once the image is completed. Passionately we pave the way for a new culture and new leadership. In our efforts to empower the frontline to better serve the customer, we insist that the hierarchical pyramid needs to be turned upside down. We overplay our hand. Once senior management wakes up to the possibility of losing too much control, our activities are quickly limited. In a more humble way we continue our work of organizational renewal in the context of a changing world.*

My years in South Africa were a pivotal life experience. I plunged into the field of organizational development when change was most palpable and meaningful. Striving for impact we played, we were poetic and we provoked. I lived the question of what should and can be the role of business in society. When the world turned its back on South Africa, Shell faced boycotts because of its decision to stay put. Friends questioned my moral stance. Public affairs invited me to explain to concerned Dutch employees how our company used its business leadership as a catalyst for change. I discovered the power of the managerial classroom for honest inquiry and the potential of strength-based approaches in imagining and enabling possibilities for better futures. Most importantly, I learned about the promise of relationship. Embraced by a community that believes a person is a person through other persons. Nurtured by nature in what must be one of the most stunning places on earth.

Twenty years have passed since I left Cape Town. Again I feel that change is in the air. Our confidence in financial, political and other institutions has been jolted. Nature humbles us by showing its mighty force. North Africa and the Middle East are in turmoil. The possibility of clean, safe, abundant energy, water and food seems an illusion. Yet, many actively work toward the eradication of poverty and disease, protest and negotiate for peace, or design technical and other solutions for our global troubles. Many more believe that reform is necessary, rather than repair. With capitalism at a crossroads (Hart, 2005; Tideman, 2009) it is perhaps not surprising, that a growing number of business organizations play a leading role

in the creation of a more just and sustainable society. For them, business as usual is no longer enough.

In 1987 the Brundtland Commission set a widely accepted standard for sustainability by stating that sustainable development “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability for future generations to meet their own needs”. In language that resonates with business, this standard was translated into an attendance to the “triple bottom line” of people, planet and profits (Elkington, 1997). The UN Global Compact has since further specified these 3Ps in ten principles in the areas of human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption. At a minimum, business organizations have to comply with the shifting rules and regulations that are the outcome of norm-setting national and international deliberations. In an era of “radical transparency” (Laszlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011), companies also know they need to act in sufficiently convincing sustainable ways in order to avoid image damaging reports in social and other media. However, business leaders who are frontrunners approach sustainability from a different angle. They no longer believe in an unavoidable trade-off between profit-making and societal contributions. Instead, they embrace the notion that companies can “do well by doing good” (Laszlo & Cooperrider, 2008).

Sustainability becomes a win/win proposition when value creation is defined in terms much broader than the optimization of short-term financial performance (Porter & Kramer, 2011). When “shared value creation” replaces the focus on maximizing shareholder value, a whole new domain opens up for entrepreneurship and innovation (ibid). This is potentially an inclusive domain for collaboration across the boundaries of organization, nation, political or economic privilege, and age. As business schools and companies are quickly discovering, “sustainable innovation” is a challenge to which many of the young and talented feel most attracted (Cooperrider, 2008).

In short, there is much to gain for business, society and the natural world when we learn how to embed sustainability in the very DNA of enterprise (Laszlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011).

How can we envision, design, develop and manage organizational settings as places that nurture the creation of sustainable value for all their stakeholders? With this question I want to explore the “human dimension” of sustainable enterprise. Where others create new technologies and strategic options, I will make contributions to the development of our capacity to renew our repertoires of organizing, leading and changing. Indeed, we need new ways of seeing and thinking and acting in order to solve the problems that are caused by our ingrained perspectives and habitual practice (Zandee, 2008). I argue that we need to be more boldly imaginative, more playfully challenging and more caringly perceptive in our dealings with one another and the larger world.

These are exciting times for those of us who work in the field of organizational development and change. Contrary to what some may say, we have important contributions to make, especially if we believe that a sustainable global society is still within reach. Organizational development in the context of sustainability implies a focus on the underlying narratives, the guiding values and the collaborative capacity that will inspire, enable, maintain and renew processes of shared value creation. As in South Africa, I again feel that we may be at a tipping point. If that is true, we face new possibilities and responsibilities in facilitating the emergence of sustainable alternatives for organizational practice.

Today I gladly accept my position as professor of Sustainable Organizational Development at Nyenrode Business Universiteit. In this inaugural lecture, I give my vision on organizational development in the context of sustainability. I will describe it as a generative practice of daring and caring. This practice revolves around the enabling of play, poetry and provocation as relational processes for organizational renewal. I will describe these 3Ps in both poetic and more practical terms. My argument is that when we engage in these three processes, sustainable possibilities for action will emerge that are both imaginative and feasible. At the end of this lecture, I will share my plans for the coming years. I see many exciting opportunities for collaboration in the practice, research and teaching of sustainable organizational development at Nyenrode.

## Organizational Development in the Context of Sustainability

Organizational sustainability can be understood in at least three related ways. We can talk about sustainability *of* organizations when we have those outward directed activities in mind that create shared value for business and society. This is the idea of doing well by doing good. It makes intuitive sense that such sustainable action can be best developed in organizational settings that are themselves sustainable. This sustainability *in* organizations goes well beyond notions of efficiency and effectiveness. It refers to organizational vitality and flourishing (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003). Internal sustainability is about organizations that do not just work, but “sing” (Barry & Rerup, 2006, p. 262). A third understanding of organizational sustainability is to think about the processes that nurture sustainability in and of organizations. These are the processes that have to find their way *through* organizations in order to develop the spaces, sensibilities and capabilities for the co-creation of embedded sustainable practice. The design and facilitation of such enabling processes is at the core of what I call sustainable organizational development.

The existing repertoires for collaborative thought and action lag behind our technological capability to create a more just and sustainable global society. We are somewhat puzzled by how to organize for sustainability in and of organizations. Who should lead and how? With whom to work and talk? How to innovate? What to coordinate? Where to push? When to do nothing? Clearly, there are more questions than answers. When nobody really knows, we have ample opportunity to figure it out together. That is why organizational development as participatory approach to reflective action for renewal is so well positioned to have a powerful impact. According to Cooperrider and Godwin (in press) a “spirit of inquiry” is one of the overarching values that founded the field. This inquiring spirit is an attitude of discovery and curiosity embodied in a willingness to expose ideas and beliefs to experimentation and reflective dialogue. Through inquiry we search for innovative *and* workable alternatives to unsustainable actions. For the exposure and

testing of existing habits and budding ideas it helps to look and talk from multiple angles. We need fresh perspectives to question and replace our outworn practice. I propose that for our inquiry into sustainable organizing we utilize a set of appreciative, discursive, artful and relational lenses.

## **Appreciative Lens**

More than two decades ago, Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) articulated the idea of taking an appreciative stance in inquiry. Since then, appreciative inquiry has developed into a well-known strength-based approach for the study and change of organizational realities (Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008). The appreciative lens compels us to explore the “deeper life-generating essentials and potentials of social existence” (Cooperrider & Avital, 2004, p. xiv). When we appreciate, we value what gives life to a human system however small and nascent that may be.

With its focus on life-giving forces, appreciative inquiry gives a promising perspective for organizational development in the context of sustainability. It helps us to overcome the limitations of a problem-centered approach. When we see sustainability as a problem, we will find solutions for how to become less unsustainable. But striving for the reduction of unsustainability is not the same as the creation of a truly sustainable world (Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 4; Hoffman & Haigh, in press). For that we need the aspirational capacity (Ehrenfeld, *ibid*) to envision possibilities for world betterment. That is what we intuitively understood in South Africa. In the appreciative mindset, appealing future aspirations are grounded in an affirmation of the human and organizational potential to play a beneficial role in society.

Times are difficult as we walk a thin line between global collapse and a sustainable future. However, there are many examples in companies, communities and multi-party settings of people coming together to envision and develop sustainable alternatives. When we appreciate, we choose to illuminate those examples and to ask questions that help us fully understand their special qualities. Such inquiry develops energizing insights that inspire us to replicate and

innovate in other places. Our inquiry is already an intervention. By focusing attention we emphasize, and thereby create, the realities we can see and find. Appreciative inquiry embraces the constructionist premise that, since it is our own creation, nothing in our social reality needs to be taken for granted. If that rings true, why don't we create what we really want?

## **Discursive Lens**

We understand and shape organizational reality through language. The use of a discursive lens highlights how the way we talk and write influences the scope of possible and legitimate actions (Zandee & Bilimoria, 2007, p. 469). These actions will subsequently become accepted as "how we do things" in a specific context. From this perspective, habitual practice is developed and maintained through its underlying discourses which are "interrelated sets of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination and reception" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 3). The prevailing discourse of capitalism, for instance, makes certain business activities seem logical and acceptable. However, if we want to move toward organizational sustainability, an alternative green narrative (Starkey & Crane, 2003) will probably be more helpful. Indeed, words create worlds. When we realize that language has this constitutive power, we can facilitate change by introducing new vocabularies and different ways of talking.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the potential of dialogue for creating and transforming social worlds (Gergen, Gergen & Barrett, 2004, p. 5). The increasingly popular, new "dialogic" approaches to organizational development (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Marshak & Grant, 2008), look at organizational settings as networks of meaning-making conversations. Instead of focusing on managerial processes or behavior, these approaches use interventions that aim to influence the texts, stories and images that make certain organizational activities feasible. The idea is that the possibility of change is derived from new forms of intelligibility and that new languages of understanding augment the range of possible actions (Gergen, 1994a, p. 59-60).

Dialogic approaches such as appreciative inquiry, “open space” and “world café” (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, p. 352), all invite large groups of people to join in change-seeking conversations. If we want to talk in order to change, we appreciate that people come to the table with different and competing versions of truth. We must realize however, that not all of these versions are valued equal. Power processes are central to the creation, dissemination and change of reality shaping discourses (Marshak & Grant, 2008, S17). Moreover, “linguistic devices such as particular images, metaphors, stories and narratives carry the structures that enable, or dupe others in specific ways” (Fineman, 2006, p. 282). The discursive lens thus opens our eyes to the political dimension of organizational development. It matters who are involved in reality-changing conversations and how we listen to what they have to say.

A discursive perspective invites us to look critically at the guiding narratives and root metaphors that underlie our dominant institutions (Ehrenfeld, 2004; Starkey & Crane, 2003). Do these mindsets impede or enable the emergence of sustainable enterprise? What about the anthropocentric story that places humankind above nature? Or the ingrained idea that maximizing growth will make us wealthy? If we want to create new stories for a sustainable world, it may be wise to include the marginalized and forgotten voices of, for instance, indigenous people and generations yet unborn.

## **Artful Lens**

If we create our world through language, where do we find language for new creation? If we need daring innovation in how we do business, in what we provide and in how we organize for what we deliver, how can we learn to be more innovative? In the search for renewal and creative solutions, many turn to artists, their artistic expressions and art making processes for guidance and inspiration (Adler, 2006; Darsø, 2004; Zandee & Broekhuijsen, 2009). An artful lens helps to balance our dominant analytical way of knowing and a “technocentric view of innovation” (Brown, 2009, p. 3), with a more sensory understanding and a pragmatic attitude of giving form.

Inspired by architectural practice, Boland and Collopy (2004) articulated the idea that managers should become more like designers and less like decision makers. Those who embrace the now popular notion of “managing as designing” argue that we need to develop desirable new alternatives, instead of making smart choices between approaches that have succeeded in the past (Adler, 2006, p. 488). Upon entering the new terrain of sustainable enterprise, managers will often find they have no readymade options to choose from (Laszlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011, p. 127). Thus they explore the practice of design firms such as IDEO to learn how to develop sustainable solutions. At a time in which the challenges we face vastly exceed the creative resources we bring to bear on them, design thinking is in high demand (Brown, 2009, p. 3).

Design and other processes of “artful making” (Austin & Devin, 2003), help us to replace a passive intellectual mode of “talking about” what could be done with an active mode of doing what might work (Zandee & Broekhuijsen, 2009, p. 11). Practices such as theatrical rehearsal and jazz improvisation make us appreciate ways of engagement that go beyond the dialogic possibilities of the discursive lens. The limits of our language are not the limits of our world, when we are open to a more visceral, embodied way of knowing. In our efforts to be imaginative and “dream up novel ideas” (Adler, 2006, p. 492), it helps to develop an aesthetic sensibility that is more perceptive to the ineffable and tacit dimensions of human existence.

The field of organizational aesthetics makes us aware of the “more sensory and less rational sides of organizational reality” (Taylor & Hansen, 2005, p. 1227). This rich sensuous realm remains mostly unexplored, unarticulated and unmanaged. When we use an artful lens for our inquiry into organizational life, we get closer to its mysterious, hidden and ambiguous qualities (Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008, p. 194). Our heightened ability of seeing more and seeing differently (Barry & Meisiek, 2010), will help us to notice and value the most subtle and surprising possibilities for sustainable organizing.

## Relational Lens

From a discursive perspective, we understand that we need the other to figure things out. Participation in conversation provides the necessary variety in expertise, opinions and ideas to develop novel insights into the complex issues of sustainability. With the whole system in the room, we feel more confident that the shared knowledge we create will be innovative and actionable. When we invite multiple stakeholders, we expand our notion of “organization” into a focus on inter-organizational and multi-party collaborations (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004). Shared value creation is only possible when we include all players in the value chain and the local “cluster” to which the company belongs (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

We need collaborative capacity to create a more just and sustainable society. However, the current financial, economic, political and environmental crises make it apparent that we do not yet know how to operate together in what UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called our “global village” (2004). We struggle to fully grasp the idea of an interconnected world and a common destiny in our being, thinking, acting and language. What does it mean to be a global citizen? Do we feel related to a little boy who lives in one of São Paulo’s favelas? Do we know that we breathe the same air as the birds that live in our yard? Do we realize *we* could be the homeless person seeking shelter downtown? What would happen if not individuals, not separate entities such as companies and governments, but relationships were prime in how we think and talk?

So far I have been talking about sustainable organizational development in bounded terms of organizations, management and my personal experiences and opinions. Even in our search for sustainability, we are tempted to focus on leaders instead of leading activities. We tend to turn inside for higher consciousness instead of reaching out for relational awareness. Why does it matter that we move beyond our underlying essentialist, individualist perspectives and how do we proceed?

When we look through a relational lens we take an ecological perspective and see that “in both human and natural systems, sustainability is an outcome of relationships among the parts” (Ehrenfeld, 2004, p. 8). Relationship is what gives and sustains life. Our sense of relatedness influences the quality of relational practice such as organizational change and thereby the life circumstances that we create for ourselves and others (Lambrechts, Grieten, Bouwen & Corthouts, 2009). We become who we are through how we relate in human community and a “more-than-human world” (Abram, 1996). Everything changes once we realize that “we are interwoven threads in the intricate tapestry of relational process, in which our destiny is among us as opposed to within” (Cooperrider, 2009).

Of all the lenses I propose for our inquiry into sustainable organizing, I find the relational perspective the most vital in its ground-moving potential. It urges us to appreciate what connects in otherness, to find new words for the nurturing of relationship and to value artful creation for its holistic nature. Much can be achieved when we realize that “the future well-being of the planet depends significantly on the extent to which we can nourish and protect not individuals, or even groups, but the generative processes of relating (Gergen, 2009, p. xv).

## **Generativity as Guiding Value**

The field of organizational development is not value free. Even the new and dialogic approaches are still guided by the foundational humanistic values of participation, free and informed choice, and a trust in the human capacity to cooperate and learn (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Cooperrider & Godwin, in press). Appreciative inquiry, for instance, is upfront about its transformative and emancipatory intent and “invites, encourages, and requires that students of social life rigorously exercise their theoretical imagination in the service of their vision of the good (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987, p. 140). In the facilitation of today’s complex whole system settings, ideals of world betterment are combined with a pragmatic understanding of disparate visions, voices, and intentions. Such idealistic pragmatism in the adherence to values and aspirations, makes organizational development practice well suited to play a role in the context of sustainability. We urgently need expansive, ambitious visions of a sustainable world (Ehrenfeld, 2005, p. 24). But in making those visions real, we also need the ability to reach across difference and to join the reality and language of the other. I therefore propose that we embrace generativity – defined as the interplay between open-endedness and connectedness (Zandee, 2004) – as the guiding value in our enabling work.

### **Generative Inquiry**

Lewin’s well-known saying that “there is nothing so practical as good theory” points to the potential creative significance of scholarly contributions in society (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987, p. 133). Significant, constitutive contributions have “generative capacity” (Gergen, 1978, 1994a, 1994b), which is the ability to challenge the status quo in organizational and social life, to create a sense of possibility, and to thereby open up new repertoires for thought and action. Generative theorizing aims to be a catalyst for social transformation by “telling it as it might become,” rather than “telling it like it is” (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996, p. 370). The sharing of generative ideas in meaning-making conversations is a key source for dialogic change (Bushe & Marshak, 2009, p. 355). Such ideas

interrupt the flow of common sense, invite us to rethink outmoded ways of organizing and create attractive pathways for organizational renewal. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) conceptualized appreciative inquiry as a form of action research with generative capacity. When action research results in generative knowledge for sustainable action, it becomes a powerful strategy for the development of sustainable enterprise.

### **Stretching Sustainability**

Erikson gave a psychosocial meaning to generativity by defining it as “the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation” (1950, p. 267). With this concern for the nurturing of life into the future, Erikson’s notion of generativity seems related to the Brundtland definition of sustainability as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (1978). Indeed, a “generative society” should at least seek to be sustainable (de St. Aubin, McAdams & Kim, 2004, p. 6). But generativity goes beyond the mere survival of future generations, as generative adults “seek to pass on the most valued traditions of a culture, to teach the most valued skills and outlooks, to impart wisdom, to foster the realization of human potential in future generations” (ibid). In short, the value of generativity invites us to help make society a better place than the one we found.

Generativity stretches the meaning of sustainability from survival into more lofty aspirations. Ehrenfeld comes with a promising expanded definition of sustainability as “the possibility that human and other forms of life will flourish on the Earth forever” (2004, p. 4). This definition takes our responsibility for sustainability beyond the human group, it extends our temporal horizon and it awakens our yearning to create a future reality that is not available yet.

Of course we need to be good housekeepers of society and stewards for future generations. But perhaps we can do better than that. When we take a generative stance, we ask what might be the noblest possibilities for human existence on earth and commit to engage with one another and the larger world in relational processes that bring those possibilities within reach.

## Generative Processes of Relating

Organizational development is about enabling renewal through participatory processes of action and reflection. Such processes can be more or less successful. They can help to break new ground by energizing experimentation whilst strengthening bonds. They can also fail to open up attentive conversation about conflicting agendas and instead succeed in diminishing trust. Erikson (1950, p. 266 ) contrasted generativity with stagnation in human life. This contrast can also be made for life in organizations. We experience processes that inspire, create capacity and helpful new meaning. We also live through experiences that stifle, alienate and dampen our enthusiasm for novel acts.

Gergen (2009, p. 46) describes how relational flow can move toward constraint or openness. The flow in relational process is generative when what someone says or does evokes a response that keeps the process of shared meaning-making afloat. The flow of relating is degenerative when someone's contributions are negated or responded to with silence. Such responses will bring "co-action" to an end. Gergen (*ibid*, p. 47) describes forms of generative process as:

...those in which new and enriching potentials are opened through the flow of interchange. A successful teacher, for example, may engage students in such a way that their taken-for-granted assumptions about the world are suspended, and delight enkindled in new worlds of possibility. In the sciences, the generative challenge may be one that introduces a theory contradicting or suspending the commonplace assumptions of a discipline in such a way that new forms of inquiry are stimulated. In day-to-day relations, generative challenges can make the difference between boredom and excitement. It is when life as usual is disrupted by humor, irony, thoughtful reflection, a compelling fantasy, and the like, that we avoid the slide into deadening repetition.

Generative processes of relating are vital for the continuous renewal of possibility in our social and organized existence. They create

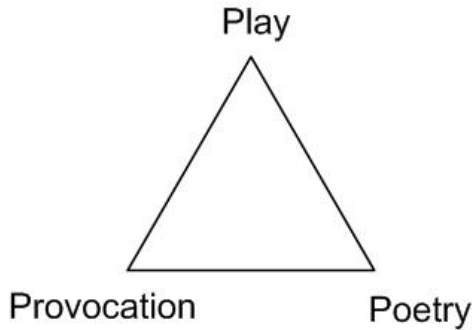
openings in our thinking whilst strengthening the relational fabric that gives confidence for new endeavors. We need original thought and we need each other in our striving toward a sustainable world. Through how we engage now, we shape our future. It is up to us – “we may sustain tradition; but we are also free to innovate and transform” (Gergen, 2009, p. 49). How to develop and utilize that freedom for transformative engagement? I propose that we explore the generative capacity of play, poetry and provocation as fruitful processes of relationship.

## **The Infinite Game of Play, Poetry and Provocation**

What we accept as structures and patterns of social life, we created and maintain through how we interact. Well established institutions of education, healthcare and business have developed out of trials of what might work in acts of teaching, healing and selling. Our social arrangements evolve through experimentation, re-assembling and discarding. It is helpful to remember that play precedes culture (Huizinga, 1955). When our play becomes serious (Gergen, 1991), we attach formal rules and roles and skills. Play thus turned into game, gives us the conventional cultural rituals and institutionalized practices by which we live most of our daily lives together (ibid, p. 197). If we seriously want to move toward sustainability, we need to invent new games with different possibilities for interaction.

Carse (1986) made an important distinction between finite and infinite games. A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play (ibid, p. 3). Finite games involve elected skilled players, in an infinite game all players are welcome. Finite play is bounded by predefined rules, infinite players make their own rules. We can play many finite games, but there is only one infinite game. Carse invites us to perceive life as an infinite open-ended, inclusive game in which we can play many temporary, finite games. If we take guidance from the vision of sustainability as “the possibility that human and other forms of life will flourish on the Earth forever” (Ehrenfeld, 2004), we turn sustainability into an infinite game. From this perspective, we can oversee the terrain of our finite games and rise above their limitations. We can engage in relational processes of play and poetry and provocation, in order to expand our playing fields and create more hopeful games.

**Figure 1: The Infinite Game of Play, Poetry and Provocation**



### **Play to Liberate and Explore**

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet and play (Tagore, 1913). They play and learn through imitation, fantasy, and improvisation. They play and become friends. As adults we may think that play is silly. But in reality it is vital to individual and society's continuous well-being and health. Beyond the joy of childlike meeting, we must play to liberate ourselves and explore new worlds.

Though finite games are helpful because they provide coherence and predictability, they also bound and exclude. They restrict our freedom to act together and hamper the emergence of something new. Thus we need to break loose from their fixating rules, labels and boundaries. That is why we engage in play that liberates our mind and spirit. Such play is about looking differently at taken-for-granted conventions. We can do so, for instance, by applying an appreciative or artful lens. When we reframe problems as aspirations, we lure ourselves out of deficit ways of thinking and into the discovery of previously unconceivable solutions (Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990). When we introduce art, like fiction or drama, as analogical artifacts, we may learn to reconceive the way we work (Barry & Meisiek, 2010). Shifting between work and art, we start

seeing differently and new alternatives will come into play. Humor is another helpful perception-shifting tool. It ridicules the familiar in ways that entertain and bring relief (Vermaak, 2009, p. 295).

Through humor we level the playing field for more egalitarian forms of interaction. In humor and other play to liberate our spirit, we show our more mischievous and rebellious streaks. Like teenagers we defy authority, bend rules and stretch limitations. We refuse to be labeled, experiment with authentic expression and demand that restrictions are lifted.

Play that liberates is transitional (Wyss-Flamm & Zandee, 2001). It invites us to test, question and demystify habits, rules and titles. Through transitional play we awaken from the habitual, loosen mindsets, induce variety and enter ambiguous spaces that are not ruled by games. This takes us to new beginnings and exciting playing fields for exploration.

Explorative play is adventurous. When we play to explore, we embark on expeditions in unknown territories. Such explorations may be cognitive or physical in character. In both cases, we vigorously move beyond the safeties of the past and known. We are drawn by what lies beyond the horizon. In our agile play with ideas, we display a quality of discovery and put curiosity before control (Bateson, 2000, p. 186). In physical play, we energetically experiment with alternatives for action and build on what seems workable (Zandee & Broekhuijsen, 2009). We improvise, say “yes to the mess” and move to the edge of our competence (Barrett, 2000). In doing so, we have fun and get surprised. By being attentive to one another in explorative play, we develop a sense of “ensemble” which makes it safe to carry on. Our explorations may take us outside. When we venture into nature, we experience how we belong in the grander scheme of things. We realize again how human flourishing is embedded in the well-being of the natural environment (Hoffman & Haigh, in press).

## Poetry to Imagine and Articulate

Whitehead (1967) wrote about the power of imaginative thought as the precursor of adventure in its physical form (1967, p. 277). He saw adventurous ideas as a necessary source of renewal in civilization. Without this imaginative force, staleness sets in and convention dominates (*ibid*, p. 277). With it, we can envision and reach new worlds. The importance of imagination in the context of sustainability is clear. How can we create a sustainable world if we cannot imagine what it might look like? Indeed, we need evocative images as the affirmative basis for innovative and collaborative action (Cooperrider, 1990).

The imaginative mind is nurtured in the animated childhood world of fantasy and dreams. This is the realm of wondrous reality in which poetry is also at home. When we wander into this realm, we develop the intuitive sense to imagine possibilities beyond the thinkable.

Great works of fiction and good everyday stories can both open our imaginative eye (Zandee, 2008, p. 139). When we listen to their poetic language, rich imagery arises that asks us to suspend our disbelief. Plausible stories teach us that even the most bizarre and fanciful might be true. Poetic language is ambiguous. Metaphors, for instance, point to the elusive and ephemeral nature of our lived experience (Chia, 1996). They don't give fixed and sure interpretations, but leave ample space to roam and breathe. When we tell good stories, find new metaphor and share evocative poems, we make sense together in re-enchanting ways. We literally "enliven the senses" and rejuvenate our felt awareness of the world (Abram, 1996, p. 265).

I believe that "poetic wisdom" grounded in a fresh perception of our surroundings and an absence of certainty (Barrett, 2000, p. 231), is a crucial dimension of generative, relational being. Through poetry we can reach further and see more. It gives us entrance to the magical, the mysterious and the sacred. A poetic sensibility makes us receptive to the hidden, subtle messages of others and otherness. In turning to one another, we take time to go beyond appearances (Wheatley, 2009). We listen with our heart and make intuitive

connections. We appreciate our embodied participation in a spirited world and feel an intimacy with the whole (Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008, p. 195). When we pause to contemplate and daydream, we participate quietly in life that goes on around us. All of a sudden, we may be struck by how extra-ordinary the ordinary really is. The laughter of a child. A meadow touched by early morning sun. Lost for words, we respond with stillness and wonder. The mysterious defies the grip of our rational understanding, yet we are fascinated by it. Under the spell of the infinite, we eventually find ourselves on the edge of our named existence, where we try to articulate what has not been said exactly like that before. Like the “true artist,” we are moved to “help the world by revealing mystic truths” (Nauman, 1996). Thus we become “poietai” – inventors, makers, artists, storytellers, mythologists – who are makers of possibilities rather than actualities (Carse, 1986, p. 76).

### **Provocation to Invite and Disrupt**

Through processes of play and poetry we escape from outworn patterns, explore new terrains, embrace our adventurous imagination and open ourselves to the ineffable realm of relational being. In doing so, we create new possibilities for sustainable living. But how will our articulations of the possible be noticed and valued by others? If we fail to liberate ourselves, how will unsustainable practice be disclosed and dislodged? Clearly, we need provocation to lure and jolt naïve and invested parties out of existing finite games to consider more just and sustainable alternatives. Such provocation needs to combine seduction with patience and troublemaking with understanding. The intent is to expand the relational flow to a full and creative sharing of meaning, not to constrain it (Gergen, 2009, p. 46). How can this be done?

We can lure others to experience what we see as wonderful and worthwhile by striving for the most compelling expression of what we have come to know. Georgia O’Keeffe understood that, when she decided how to depict what she saw as beautiful in just a small flower (O’Keeffe, 1976):

Nobody sees a flower, really – it is so small – we haven't time, and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time. If I could paint the flower exactly as I see it no one would see what I see because I would paint it small like the flower is small. So I said to myself – I'll paint what I see – what the flower is to me but I'll paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it – I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see of flowers.

When we provoke to invite, we want to create what Bruner called a “shock of recognition” (1979, p. 72). We want to communicate in ways that resonate with others and awaken a longing for something that rings true and promising. Successful articulations trigger a feeling of connection with personal experiences and dreams. They touch and evoke a generative response. If we enrich and renew the “internal dialogue” of society (Cooperrider, 1990) with attractive stories, images and vocabularies for possible futures, we may induce change. In an era of high connectivity through social media, we know that what attracts attention will travel fast.

In contrast to mounting attention, oblivion may also be our fate. Important stories may go unnoticed and the most passionate voice may go unheard. Power plays a role in the weight others attach to our messages. We may attempt to sway the discourse that underlies institutionalized practice through acts of “textual deviance” (Zandee & Bilimoria, 2007). But our success in doing so will depend on the authority with which we speak and write. Once practice gets institutionalized, it becomes difficult to alter. However, forceful disruption by outside events or actors will challenge the status quo of the commonly accepted. Such interruptions may create moments “where a plot can take a turn” (Czarniawska, 1997, p. 97). In their fight for sustainability, critical “dark green” voices (Laszlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011, p. 213) have worked to expose the wrongs of current practice. Though their provocation has brought awareness, they struggle to bring about change (ibid, p. 214). Fear of pending calamity alone does not move embedded actors to invent new games. From an appreciative perspective, this is understandable. To avoid the nihilistic pitfall of wanted deconstruction, we concurrently need

inviting images of better worlds. We need to be critical and yet reach out. This more pragmatic approach, may come from those who play the game but can also see its limitations. Such less embedded players are “tempered radicals” (Meyerson, 2003), who succeed to rock the boat whilst staying in. Because they operate at the outskirts, they can oversee the playing field and show the way to better options. Since they are recognized skilled players, their voices may bear weight and their strategies may work.

**Figure 2: Generative Dimensions of Play, Poetry and Provocation**



## **Sustainable Organizational Development as Generative Practice of Daring and Caring**

The co-creation of a sustainable world is not a simple feat. The sustainability challenge seems like a constellation of “tough issues” (Vermaak, 2009, p. 35), characterized by a wicked complexity that overwhelms our current intellectual and collaborative capabilities. Indeed, in the search for sustainability, there will be no quick fix (Ehrenfeld, 2004). Still, we urgently need to act. How to proceed in innovative and constructive ways? I argue that organizational development practice can play an important role. With its belief in human potential, its focus on participatory processes of renewal and its spirit of inquiry, it can guide the questioning, searching and learning on the edge of what we know and need to discover.

New and dialogic approaches to organizational development (Bushe & Marshak, 2009; Marshak & Grant, 2008), assemble a practice that sees organizations as interrelated, continuously evolving systems. Its interventions aim to energize and facilitate wanted directions in the flow of meaning and action through conversation, experimentation and the interlocking of “small wins” (Weick, 1984).

In the context of sustainability we should engage in such practice, not as dispassionate outsiders or intellectual observers, but as caring enablers of possibility and relationship. We need to join others in their aspirations for sustainability with our own visions of world betterment. What are the noblest possibilities for human existence on earth? In light of that question, what should we be doing and how can we improve our ways of doing that?

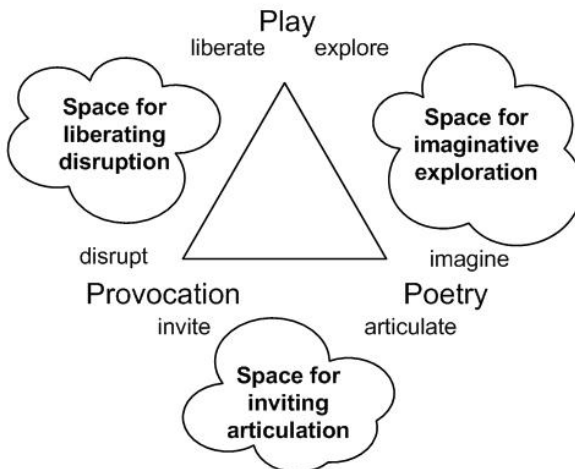
I propose that we enrich our practice with processes of play, poetry and provocation that help stretch the understanding of sustainability and develop collaborative capacity to make it work. So far I have been talking about these processes in rather abstract and poetic terms. In what follows, I will pave the way to concrete action. We can facilitate spaces in which the infinite game becomes accessible, and we can speak with scholarly voices that help bring forth a sustainable world. If we take guidance from generativity as

overarching value, we foster open-endedness and connectedness in what we do. We approach organizational development as a continuous interplay of daring and caring and help others to imagine and create.

### Facilitating Spaces

Play, poetry and provocation are three related processes with two generative dimensions each. We can play to liberate and explore. We become poetic to imagine and articulate. We provoke to invite and disrupt. In the spaces framed by those dimensions, we find opportunity for inquiry with the potency to expand the flow of meaning and relationship. Play combined with provocation, creates space for “liberating disruption.” Play touched by poetic sensibility, becomes space for “imaginative exploration.” Poetry and provocation open a space for “inviting articulation.” These relational spaces can be temporary and spontaneous. They can also be deliberately designed to experience the promise of sustainable life. We can facilitate these spaces inside organizations, in multi-party settings, in virtual networks, in nature and on university grounds.

**Figure 3: Facilitating Spaces**



## ***Liberating Disruption***

*How to change without a sense of urgency? A business leader decides to involve his employees. He invites them to study the company's identity, ambition and strategic options. Who are we at our best and who do we want to become? We guide the group who explores this question, with an appreciative approach. They interview many colleagues and enjoy proud stories, receive wish lists and hear complaints. Their inquiry is contagious. People demand to be interviewed or volunteer to take an active role in interviewing. Throughout the organization new initiatives sprout. Group members take bold actions and bump up against the way work is normally done. The organization is abuzz with talk that things will happen differently now. Many employees come to an appreciative summit, where they combine identity, ambition, and strategic options into new directions. Choices are made, commitment is high. Line management takes responsibility in designing and planning an organization that fits the chosen strategy. In their more common "blue" approach they leave less room for participation. When change turns into a downsizing reorganization, the employees protest. In an often signed petition they share worries, remind management of shared aspirations and state their wish to get re-involved. Change implementation is halted, attempts to connect through conversation are made.*

This anecdote reminds us that appreciative inquiry is a powerful intervention. It sparks and energizes change by connecting the recollection of life giving experiences with future wishes. When people engage in appreciative conversations, they share what really matters and discover their commitment to what they say. They create knowledge that enlightens and empowers them to change the environment in which they work and live (Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008, p. 192). Leaders who embrace an appreciative approach should realize that they may launch a "positive revolution in change" (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Once people get into an affirmative participatory mode, they may enthusiastically start initiatives without permission. Such acts of "positive deviance" (Zandee & Bilimoria, 2007) will probably create friction with habitual practice. Smart facilitation will utilize such friction as opportunities for transitional play. When deviant acts are stifled, precious openings for novelty are missed and people may lose their trust in change and leadership.

Appreciative inquiry and other dialogic approaches to organizational development promote egalitarian dialogue for change. When the whole system gathers in the room people will talk, but there is no guarantee for genuine conversation. To productively speak across difference, participants need to be “willing to be disturbed” and have their beliefs and ideas challenged by what others say (Wheatley, 2009, p. 38). For such dialogue to occur, they need to enter what Wierdsma (2004) has called the “zone of discomfort.” This is a space in which conflicting differences are manifested and worked through. We facilitate true meeting, when we succeed in bridging disparate positions and make sure timid or silenced voices are also heard. The success of large group conversations lies in their relational quality, not in how many people are physically there.

### ***Imaginative Exploration***

*In the unconventional setting of a cruise ship dining room, we have cleared a corner as a space for play. A small number of conference participants are attracted to our workshop about igniting change through “artistic fire.” In the coming hour, they will experiment with the dynamics of fiery performance. They will also explore “warmth” as a contrasting form of relational expression. They get a few minutes to read through a theatrical script that depicts a dialogue between a husband and wife, who have just arrived at their vacation home. Without contextual information, the scene is ambiguous and wide open for interpretation. To enact it, participants only have their imagination, voice, gestures and some simple theatre props. My colleague, who is an actor, invites a duo to come forward and starts to direct their performative attempts. Do you see what happens when you lower your head and speak in a whisper? Can you feel the dramatic tension when you use the space to create distance between the two of you? Do you notice the confusion when you shout in response to his friendly sounding plea? Other duos take the stage to continue the experimentation. Each interaction has a somewhat different flavor and direction. It shows us how even subtle differences in interchange will influence the flow and outcome of conversation. We end the workshop with a discussion of how fiery and warm energy of a change agent may influence the course of organizational action.*

Artists are invited into organizations to inspire and guide organizational vitality, innovation and improvisational capacity. Organizational members who encounter artists, are often impressed by their feisty energy and creative daring (Darsø, 2004, p. 152). In the serious business we have made of work, they reawaken our longing for “free play” (Nachmanovitch, 1990). When we grow up, we tend to turn play into game and may lose touch with the more spontaneous, playful sides of our being. When we then contrast work with play, the latter seems childish and frivolous. How to recover the capacity to be curious, imaginative and adventurous? Meyer (2010) proposes a shift in mindset “from workplace to playspace.” She encourages a move from a place where product is more important than process, to a space “where the lively, creative process of innovating, learning and changing invites passionate commitment and enthusiastic participation” (ibid, p. xviii).

When we see organization as playground, we can facilitate spaces for imaginative exploration. The organizing principles of the theatrical rehearsal, for instance, show possibilities for the design of such spaces (Zandee & Broekhuijsen, 2009). The related principles of unsettledness, workability, embodiment and responsiveness, give the contours of a setting in which liquidity and openness are combined with sensuous understanding and relational attunement (ibid, p. 15). In a similar fashion, the idea of “managing as designing” (Boland & Collopy, 2004) inspires the creation of design studios or “innovation rooms” on organizational and business school premises (Cooperrider, 2008). Design thinking is actualized by moving through three overlapping spaces for processes of “inspiration,” “ideation,” and “implementation” (Brown, 2009). In these spaces challenges motivate the search for solutions, ideas are developed and tested, and chosen alternatives are made marketable. Rehearsal and design are processes of artful making that show us how to engage in imaginative exploration for the emergence of novel, workable solutions.

Space for exploration can get a semi-permanent physical form, but may also be rather short-lived and hidden. People can start small experiments on the fringe of their organization to try out something

new and learn from the experience. Such experiments can be encouraged as action learning opportunities for purposes of organizational or managerial development (Raelin & Coghlan, 2006).

### ***Inviting Articulation***

*At the start of a program about inspirational leadership, we create a comfortable space in which participants take turns to introduce themselves. For this after-dinner session, tables are regrouped in a café like setting, lights are dimmed and curtains closed. The high-level executives are invited to tell their story, rather than to announce position, titles, business income and FTE's. We asked them to bring a book, a video clip or piece of music that stands for something special in their life. They read, show and play this fragment as entrance into revealing accounts of found love, battled disease, unfortunate mishaps and sudden success. Those who listen ask questions to better understand choice, turns and implications in the moving personal stories that are shared. We start to realize how much normally stays hidden behind the certainty of managerial roles and faces. A sense of growing intimacy quietly settles amongst us in the room. This night the group shapes into a beginning community which later proves to be a welcoming environment for learning, further disclosure and the discovery of common challenges and dreams.*

Stories are the language of relationship. In the sharing of stories, teller and listener turn toward one another and in the space between them they connect. They meet beyond titles and appearances and find a language to speak from and to the heart (Kessels, 2006, p. 13). Through such conversation a poetic meeting space emerges in which the infinite game becomes available (Zandee, 2010). When we tap into this game we can sense, nurture and articulate the potential for more sustainable ways of living. Together we can create new and more hopeful stories for the world.

If we want to facilitate poetic meetings, we need to be sensitive to the choreography of intimate spaces. Poetic dialogue is enabled in an environment that nourishes the senses and the soul. People need to quieten down to be perceptive to the small emerging stories. We may find that the most conducive space for touching conversation is patiently awaiting us outside.

Dialogic approaches to organizational development embrace the generative potential of storytelling. In appreciative inquiry practice, stories are celebrated as a potent catalyst for change (Barrett & Fry, 2005, p. 49). We know from experience, that uplifting stories illuminate life-giving forces in ways that heighten the relational capacity for organizational transformation (Zandee, 2008, p. 135). Such stories carry and awaken evocative images of aspired futures.

For the crafting and dissemination of appealing articulations of sustainability, organizations can use their existing skills in formal communication. Through a careful interweaving of multiple small and local stories, a coherent and attractive corporate story of sustainability can be authored (Tesselaar & Scheringa, 2008). Such an outward oriented story may move the organization to act in accordance with the image it portrays. It may also invite others to perform in similar ways.

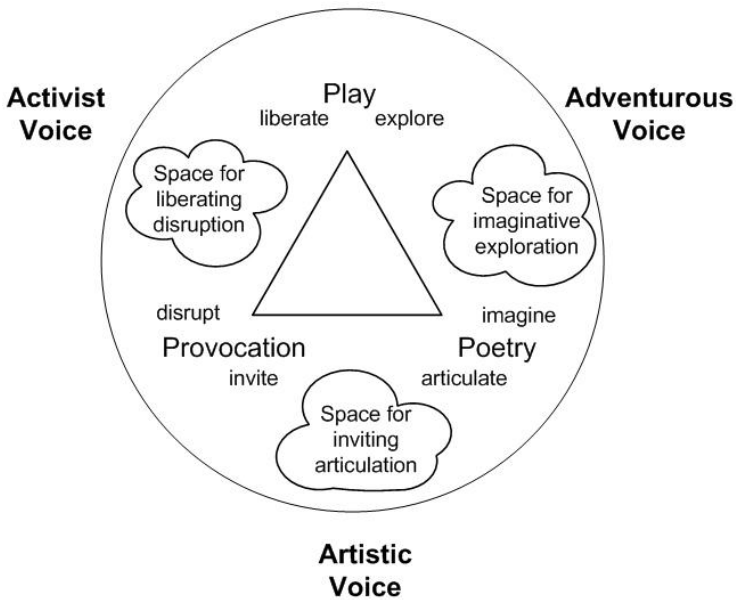
### **Scholarly Voices**

Sustainable organizational development as generative practice, creates innovative knowledge with practical relevance for organizational and societal renewal. The aim is to develop new repertoires for thought and action. This means that we enable the creation of actionable knowledge. These are ideas and understandings that will be brought to use where they originated by the people who developed them. However, if we want to have true world changing-impact, we also need to produce transferable knowledge. These are articulations of theoretical insights that inform and inspire novel ways of thinking and acting in distant and diverse situations and places. Ideally our knowledge enriches and expands the flow of meaning-making in ever more sustainable directions. For that purpose we need to speak with scholarly voices of consequence.

We are deliberate in our choice of voice, because we understand that generative theorizing is a form of “poetic activism,” that “asks us to take a risk with words, shake up the conventions, generate new formations of intelligibility, new images, and sensitivities” (Gergen, 1999, p. 117). We also understand that knowledge travels and gets traction through connection. Thus we want to challenge and reach

out. We want to play with thoughts and words in ways that create acceptance and change (Zandee & Bilimoria, 2007, p. 479). Therefore, we approach our scholarly inquiry and “writing as relationship” (Gergen, 2009, p. 221). In doing so, I propose that we speak with alternating activist, adventurous and artistic voices.

**Figure 4: Scholarly Voices**



### ***Activist Voice***

As practical scholars who want to help shape a sustainable world, we are not dispassionate bystanders, but take a stance against what we believe to be unjust and unsustainable. Even though we affirm the human capacity to do good, we see that not all is well in our organized existence and we have an emancipatory agenda. Thus we enter the space for liberating disruption with our activist voice. This

is a critical voice that we use to challenge and question the status quo. We engage in a scholarship of critique and dislodgment (Gergen, 1994a, p. 59), in order to disclose and interrupt unhelpful and unfair institutionalized practice. With our activist voice, we enter the arena of politics and power from a critical, discursive perspective (Marshak & Grant, 2008, S12). Here we work to deconstruct the prevailing and privileged underlying discourses that maintain structures and conventions which hamper progress in wanted directions. We provoke out of passionate concern for human kind and Earth. As thoughtful scholars we want to know how others respond to our disruption and are willing to listen to what they have to say.

### *Adventurous Voice*

In the space for imaginative exploration we are at home with our adventurous voice. This means that we “drop our heavy tools” of paradigms and monologues (Weick, 1999b, p. 804) and dare to travel light. Free from overused concepts and methods we can take a fresh look and playfully enter new terrains. Here we become avant-garde scholars who scout new paths for more conservative voices. In this role, we fully honor the power of our imaginative mind. We use it in our efforts to bridge the gap between what we observe and our subsequent conceptualizations (Gergen, 1994b, p. 135). With our imaginative concepts we intend to enable the creation of new worlds. With our “audacious theorizing” we hope to construct a route to social change (Gergen, 1999, p. 116).

Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) promoted inquiry as a life-giving force. Obviously, we as scholars, need to be alive in inquiry in order to give our work such potency. Dutton (2003), looked at how we can breathe life into ourselves and the people, groups, and organizations that we study. We can, for instance, work with people who inspire us and explore questions that we feel deeply passionate about. When we use our adventurous voice in inquiry, we pursue our scholarly endeavors with vigor rather than rigor (Zandee, 2004, p. 160). In setting new courses of action, we accept that we are sometimes less precise.

## *Artistic Voice*

In our work toward sustainability, we want to create theories that move people into action. Theories that matter have emotional resonance (Weick, 1999a). We can develop them when we dare to live in the things we study. Up-close we feel more of the world and can better share what we sense. As scholars we have learned to conduct objective research from a distance. This may make us analytically sharp, but also less in touch with the intricate nuance of life as it unfolds around us. For such attunement, we need to wander into the space for inviting articulation where we speak with our artistic voice.

In inquiry, we can take guidance from our visceral responses rather than our intellectual mind (Zandee, 2004). When we do so, we create the feeling connections that guide heartfelt theorizing. When we engage with what we study as lived experience, we are inspired and enabled to think with our poetic mind and speak with our artistic voice (ibid, p. 249). Theoretical insights that result from a careful pondering of concrete experience, can be expressed in ways that make others pause and listen. If we hope to make a difference, “we need to produce narratives that are more evocative and visceral in style” (Whiteman, 2010). Such narratives say something profound about life and possibility in a way that is both eloquent and deceptively simple. Ultimately a scholarship of “profound simplicity” (Schutz, 1979), may help weave the fabric of compassionate connectedness that can nurture courageous images for the flourishing of all life on earth.

## **Summing up Sustainable Organizational Development**

Before I move to a discussion of my plans for the coming years, I want to give a summary of how I see sustainable organizational development. My plans will get more meaning when they are linked to a coherent and concise depiction of the scope and focus of my chair.

My starting point is the expanded definition that Ehrenfeld (2004) gives of sustainability as “the possibility that human and other forms

of life will flourish on the Earth forever.” With that definition as a perhaps idealistic beacon, we can make sustainability a win/win proposition and work towards the creation of shared value. Where others will focus on technology, or business strategy, organizational development can make unique contributions by paying attention to the human dimension of sustainable enterprise. We need to develop collaborative capacity to successfully mobilize intellectual and technological resources for world betterment.

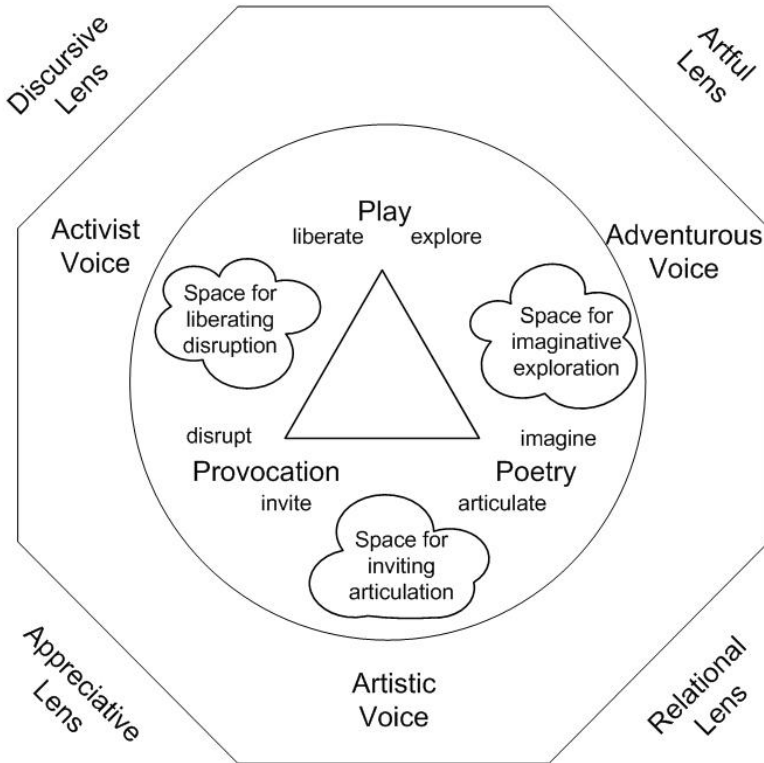
Sustainable organizational development designs and facilitates the processes that develop the spaces, sensibilities and capabilities for the co-creation of integral sustainable practice. With its belief in human potential, its focus on participatory approaches and its spirit of inquiry, organizational development practice is well positioned to play a role in the rise of sustainable enterprise.

When nobody really knows how to move ahead, we need to figure it out together. For new alternatives to emerge, we need fresh perspectives to question and replace existing practice. I propose that we utilize appreciative, discursive, artful and relational lenses to renew our current ways of looking and thinking. I also suggest that we take generativity as the guiding value in our enabling work. When we engage in generative processes of relating, we create openings in our thinking whilst strengthening the relational fabric that gives us confidence to move in new directions.

What are the noblest possibilities for human existence on earth and how can we proceed to bring those possibilities within reach? I propose that we engage in processes of play, poetry and provocation. When we do so we experience the infinite, inclusive game that sustainability really is. Each of the 3Ps has two generative dimensions. Sustainable organizational development facilitates the spaces that are framed by those dimensions. These are spaces for liberating disruption, imaginative exploration and inviting articulation. In these spaces we create actionable knowledge through questioning, listening, experimenting, reflecting, imagining and wondering. For our knowledge to have legs and be transferable to other places, we need to speak with scholarly voices of consequence.

I propose we embrace our inquiry and writing as open-ended relationship and speak with activist, adventurous and artistic voices.

**Figure 5: Sustainable Organizational Development as Generative Practice**



## **Moving from Talk to Action**

Today I formally accept my role as professor of Sustainable Organizational Development at Nyenrode Business Universiteit. With this title, I enter the conversation about sustainable enterprise and world betterment. I do so from a position of privilege. I can speak with an authority that other voices may never have. Clearly, my new position comes with both possibility and responsibility.

With “stewardship” being an integral part of its strategy, it is no coincidence that Nyenrode is one of the first institutions to establish a chair for organizational development in the context of sustainability. At Nyenrode, the chair is liaised with the Center for Sustainability and with Executive Education & OD (EEOD). From this position I can combine innovative knowledge about sustainability and its creation, with expertise in the design and facilitation of collective learning processes.

In this lecture, I have introduced sustainable organizational development as a promising generative practice of daring and caring. What will I be doing to live up to that promise? How will I make meaningful contributions to the renewal of organizational practice? It is time to move from talk to action. In what follows, I share my plans for research, teaching, and other collaborative endeavors.

My work always has a combined focus on process, relation and inquiry. I facilitate and study organizational renewal as it flows through time. I promote participatory approaches, because I believe they enrich our thinking and strengthen our acting. I celebrate the spirit of inquiry, because we need curiosity, imagination, experimentation and reflection to find new truths and discover better options.

### **Research**

I work on the edge of theory and practice. There may be nothing so practical as good theory, but we find seeds for new thinking in the midst of acting. I enter practice and reflect on acting with four related research streams in mind.

### ***Pathways for Organizational Renewal***

How do we get sustainability embedded in the DNA of an organization? What is the nature of organizational renewal that has sustainability at its core? I experiment with the relational processes of play, poetry and provocation and study how they may enrich the theory and practice of existing new, dialogic approaches to organizational development.

### ***Designing Organizations for Innovation***

How can we design organizational settings that are conducive for processes of experimentation and innovation? Here I want to elaborate on my notion of spaces for liberating disruption, imaginative exploration and inviting articulation. Can we, for instance, organize for play in ways that don't stifle its spontaneous character? In my elaboration I draw from experience with artful approaches to organizational development practice and teaching. I make conceptual linkages with design thinking and aesthetic discourse. Executive education at Nyenrode has a tradition of bringing arts into the realm of organization and leadership. Together with others, I will rejuvenate that practice.

### ***Dynamics of Collective Inquiry and Learning***

Organizational development initiatives and management development programs are platforms for the shared experimentation with transformative ideas. How can we facilitate these platforms as learning communities in which participants experience the promise of sustainability in organizational life? How can we improve the quality of conversation in small and large group settings? Here I will contribute to the theory and practice of appreciative inquiry and other large group interventions. I also want to take our inquiry outside. At Nyenrode we have ample experience with the facilitation of management groups in the context of nature. With stewardship high on the agenda, it seems timely to rediscover this outdoor practice.

## ***Generative Approaches to Action Research***

Nyenrode is known for its action learning approach in teaching and management development. Action research can be seen as a natural extension of our action learning expertise. Through action research we can develop transferable knowledge about sustainable organizational development. How can participatory action-oriented inquiry open our eyes to the noblest organizational possibilities? What are the qualities of action research that will enable true progress toward just and sustainable practice? In the Center for Sustainability we are developing and strengthening our action research capabilities. In the Sustainable Enterprise Action Learning (SEAL) Initiative that was launched at Nyenrode last January, I will coordinate the action research work. I guide PhD students who study the human dimension of sustainability with the use of action research methodology.

## **Teaching**

I see the managerial classroom as a great environment to teach the current and next generation of leaders about the possibilities of shared value creation and their role in making it happen. As director of the Advanced Management Program of Nyenrode, I use this platform to develop executive level knowledge for sustainable enterprise. How may we more fully embrace a relational understanding in our approaches to leadership, organizing and change? In collaboration with the MacMann Berg consulting group in Scandinavia and the Taos Institute, I work toward an international Executive Master program in Relational Leadership and OD. I teach new ways of organizational change in Nyenrode degree- and customized programs and guide the thesis work of Master students. In all my teaching I intend to inform and inspire students to take a fresh look and consider novel action. I want to explore how at Nyenrode we can give arts and the humanities a more prominent place in business school education.

## **Further Collaborations**

At Nyenrode I collaborate with my colleagues in Executive Education, with members of the Center for Sustainability, with partners of the SEAL initiative and with others who share an interest in organizational development, sustainability and change. I also seek collaborations with other institutes and professional networks. In the Netherlands, I work with Sioo and the network of appreciative inquiry professionals. Internationally I am active as an associate of the Taos Institute for social constructionist scholarship and practice. In the Academy of Management I currently serve on the board of the Organizational Development and Change Division.

I am passionate and idealistic in my efforts to help fulfill the possibility that human and other forms of life will flourish on the Earth forever. However, I am also pragmatic in how we may bring a sustainable world within reach. In line with the mission of Nyenrode to work with and for business, I want to make contributions that have practical relevance. The aim is to stretch the imagination toward innovative new options whilst giving guidance on how one might change to realize those aspired actions. From this stance of “pragmatic idealism,” I welcome collaborations with companies, organizations, their leaders and others who are willing to start a shared journey toward a sustainable future. Together we will discover what can be done and how.

## Words of Appreciation

In this lecture I have given my vision on sustainable organizational development and I have shared my plans. Though I speak alone today, many have contributed to how I think and act. Indeed, I have become in relationship and I stand on the shoulders of giants whose legacy I proudly nurture and advance. I want to say words of appreciation to people who are present in the room, to colleagues in other places and to mentors who are no longer on this Earth.

Let me start by thanking Kees Boeke, who nearly a century ago opened a school on the idealistic premise that through education we can create a better and more peaceful world. I am a child of his “Werkplaats.” Here I first experienced the joy of learning in community and nature.

Nyenrode is my alma mater. Here I learned how through the spirit of enterprise dreams can be made true. I want to thank Gerard Bomers, Maurice Punch, Nic van Dijk, Joop Swieringa, André Wierdsma and others for opening my eyes to the human dimension of how we live and work together.

Today I give special thanks to the “College van Bestuur” of Nyenrode and to colleagues Willem Burggraaf and René Tissen for their belief in me and their support. They made my appointment possible. I am glad to join the ranks of Nyenrode professors.

Four years ago I returned to the Netherlands from a twelve year stay in Cleveland, where I studied and worked in the Organizational Behavior department of Case Western Reserve University. This department is truly one of the founders of the field. I have no words to express my gratitude to Suresh Srivastva, Don Wolfe and David Cooperrider. Because of them I embrace a scholarship of daring and caring. Through them I met great other scholars like Ken Gergen.

Since I came back home to Nyenrode, I have enjoyed working with my colleagues in the Executive Management Development Center (EMDC). I especially thank Nel Hildebrand for creating space for my writing and Maaïke Rol for her friendly support. I also thank

Anke van Hal and other members of the Center for Sustainability for how they welcome me in their midst. Sander Tideman and Muriel Arts of the SEAL initiative I thank for including me in their plans. I enjoy working with colleagues in the Advanced Management Program. I especially thank Sanne Zweers for being a great support and playful companion.

I thank Sanne and also Laurien Stakenburg-Kooij, Judith van der Kroef, Michel Avital and Marijke Broekhuijsen for their help in the preparation of this lecture.

I like to venture into practice because there is so much to do and learn. I greatly appreciate how Vitens invited me to help facilitate a courageous journey of organizational renewal. I enjoy working with MacMann Berg toward a stellar degree program around generative processes of relating. I truly enjoy the company of newfound friends Marijke Broekhuijsen en Hans Vermaak. They both have opened up new fields of play. Obviously, I thank all executive students who are willing to listen to what I have to say.

In case you wonder why I insist on using my second initial, it is because I'm not the first Zandee to become professor. Today I finally follow in the footsteps of my father who is professor D. I. Zandee. I'm happy he is here, together with my mother and my brother. I thank them for nurturing my intellectual mind and for learning how to live with this always busy daughter and sister.

I don't know how to thank Michel Avital for being who he is. My life partner and fellow scholar. I wish we could settle down and find time to smell the roses.

I dedicate this inaugural lecture to Suresh Srivastva my mentor in inquiry and life. He challenged me to play again, he nourished my poetic voice and he provoked me to think in original ways. He passed away, but he is alive in spirit and dear to my heart.

Friends, colleagues, family and other guests, I am very happy you could come today. All of us have a role to play in the creation of a

sustainable future for humankind and the land on which we live. I am convinced that together we can make a difference.

With that I have spoken. Ik heb gezegd.

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