WHOLENESS:

The Development of a New Philosophy, Model and Process of Organization

(Modified August 1 2001)

1. The Challenge

The development journey began some thirty years ago when I began to search for the principles that would explain an extraordinary increase in performance brought about when I worked for British Overseas Airways Corporation. In less than six months Rome became the best performing airport in a network of more than eighty overseas airports. The increase was brought about without having the managerial control to be able to tell the staff what to do or to reward or punish them. As Rome was run by an Agent and not directly by BOAC, I had no direct authority over the staff that handled our aircraft.

What was so surprising about the change in Rome's performance was that it took so little effort. Apart from more personal contact with staff, the only significant change I made was to add a newsletter that tracked performance in a positive way. Using industrial engineering concepts, (the closest to systems thinking in those days), I tried to review each department, traffic, operations, cargo, catering etc. to uncover what had been changed but found nothing. I was aware of the literature on social psychology and had read of the Hawthorne effect. (Workers were studied as various changes were made in their physical environment. Performance increased not because of the changes in environment but because of the attention to the workers). Skinner was not yet published but his exaltations regarding performance increases through constant feedback did not seem to fit the circumstances.

My search had led me to James D. Thompson, a sociologist teaching at the Business School in Indiana. He was the first writer to point out, in his book "Organizations in Action" (McGraw Hill 1962) that organizations ran not on norms of rationality but on norms of power. Taking leave of absence from BOAC, I became his student and studied airline performance for my master's thesis. I interviewed or sent questionnaires to all 120 people who carried out the job I had in BOAC to try to uncover a pattern of behavior that correlated with high performance. No such pattern emerged. The only factors that showed any correlation with performance were those linked to the handling agency. It appeared that the characteristics of BOAC Representatives, like me, did not affect performance but those of the Agents had a great deal more impact. This common sense finding led to a policy shift. Instead of sending in more BOAC staff to help Agents improve poor performance BOAC changed the Agent. In the Caribbean, (a particular focus of the

research), BOAC hired different agents for each island instead of one Agent for all the islands.

This research, far from solving my initial problem, complicated it. Now I knew that no general pattern of behavior existed in BOAC that people like me, who had to operate without direct control, used to create higher levels of performance. Nevertheless, the fact remained that I had created such high levels of performance. I guessed, therefore, that personality and power relationships were key variables in the equation.

Disappointed with the academic approach I returned to the private sector. Operating as an internal consultant for the President of the International Division of a pharmaceutical company, we focused our efforts on teams consisting of three levels of management. Our process consisted of integrating line and staff functions in a common process of planning, organization, team and individual leadership development. Again we began to experience results reminiscent of Rome. With very low cost, low key interventions we were able to bring about considerable change. The problem was that it was much easier to do than to explain. I searched but did not find any conceptual framework or model that would give such explanation and the closest I could find was a combination of ideas from three people, Russell Ackoff, Eric Trist and Hasaan Ozbekhan. Imagine my astonishment when I discovered that all three were teaching not only in the same University but also in the same program the –Social System Sciences Department at Wharton

2. Social System Sciences

Russ Ackoff ran the Busch Center, financed by Anhauser Busch and other corporate sponsors. He had the clearest explanatory framework - Interactive Planning (See Ackoff, 1974). His ideas gave me great insight and understanding into the purposeful, systemic nature of the work that I was doing (Ackoff 1972). It fell short, however, of giving me any insight into the extraordinary levels of performance I knew were possible without a great deal of managed change or intellectual exposition.

Eric Trist, who ran the Behavioral Science Center, on the other hand, did not have an easily implementable conceptual framework - particularly as he was working, then, on the concept of Social Ecology - how the whole works together (Trist 1975). However, something in his personal approach evoked in me the same kind of feeling that I experienced in Rome and elsewhere when these high levels of performance were being achieved. Whereas Russ created intellectual structures of steel and diamond clarity, Eric found the diamond in every student's contribution. Eric empowered the students he worked with to produce more than they thought they could. I felt that something like this on a much larger scale was happening in Rome and in the other high performing systems. If we could understand the principles, we could make them work on even larger scales.

Hasan, who was not as well known as the others, produced one paper that made a radical shift in my thinking. In my practice up to that point I had focussed my thinking on organization, particularly on design. His article showed a hierarchical relationship

between embedded levels of planning. He encouraged me to think of organizing as a process rather than as the design of structures.

These three streams of thought were brought together and applied in an action research process that took place within the World Bank between 1978 and 1986 (See Smith 1980).

3. International Development

To pull out a set of principles consistent with my experience, I instinctively knew that I had to make a significant change in my experience base. I wanted to be able to give equal weight to both experience and explanation as I learnt a new world. My experience up to that time had been in first world companies with single organizations with no lack of resources and with very privileged conditions. I chose to study the organization of rural development in the third world which involved multiple organizations, was starved of resources, had very low priority and status, and very poor conditions. I felt that if I could work out principles that worked in this setting which also explained performance in previous settings, they would be applicable almost anywhere.

This combination of experience/learning did finally succeed in revealing a new philosophy and model of organization that incorporated all the principles I sought. The first cut at the concepts was published in a paper for the World Bank "The Design of Organizations for Rural Development" (1980) Lethem, Smith and Thoolen. It had considerable influence in the Bank, even beyond rural development and among other things, was responsible for introducing the concept of 'stakeholders' to the development field.

Two further steps were required to convince me that the concepts lived up to the promise of Rome. They had to be implemented on a larger scale than the single organization and they had to be carried out by others without my direct involvement. The first test was passed in 1985 when the new philosophy was applied to a crisis in the energy sector in Colombia. (See Weisbord et al.1992). Turid Sato, the Senior Loan Officer in the World Bank for Colombia, overcame great resistance to use the new process to engage all sectors of Colombian society in resolving the crisis.

Some 5-7 years later between 1991-1993 the second test was passed. Thirty people in Thailand were trained in the approach for application to village development. The process, however, spread from them to many other sectors, to the private sector, to Universities until the government as a way to formulate the eighth five-year eventually adapted it Plan in 1996. Many iterations of the process beyond the village development happened without our intervention or assistance. We had succeeded in replicating the Rome experience on large scale without telling people what to do and at very low cost. (The AIC Process: Generating Shared Visions for Community Development in Southeast Asia James MacNeil Center for International Education)

What had emerged was a new philosophy and model of organization. The Philosophy holds that purpose, not wealth, authority or knowledge, is the source of power.

Identifying the purposes to be served, finding those whose needs are addressed by that purpose, and pursuing that purpose over a whole time cycle provide the potential power underlying accomplishment of purpose. Every Purpose creates a power field

The model (AIC), Chart 1, illustrates the relationship between purpose and power. Purpose creates a power field that consists of three fundamentally distinct parts. These are -- the field that consists of relationship to the whole (the appreciative field), the field of relationships between the parts of the whole system (influence), and the field of relationships of the individual part to itself (control). Just as the mixing of three primary colors can give millions of different colors, so can the mixing of A, I and C field relationships give millions of shadings of power relationships, (See Notes 1 and 2).

AIC is an organizing process that consists of:

> a) Identifying the purpose to be served
>
> b) Framing the power-field around that purpose -- those who have control, influence and appreciation relative to the purpose
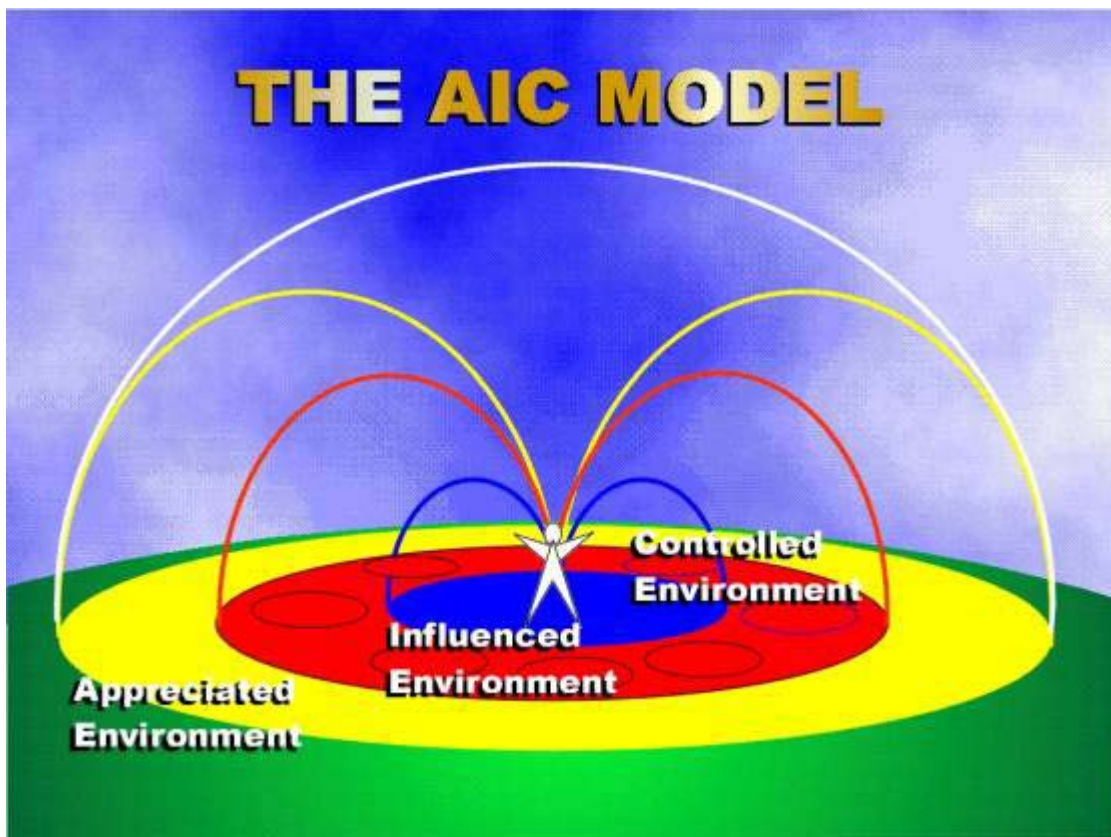

Chart 1

c) Selecting those with the most influence relative to the purpose (stakeholders) from the three circles and designing a process of interaction between them; and

d) Facilitating a self-organizing process which ensures that the stakeholders:

- step back from the current problems to appreciate fully the realities and possibilities inherent in the whole situation:
- examine the logical and strategic options and the subjective feelings and values involved in selecting strategies:
- allow free and informed choice of action by those responsible for implementing decisions.

4. The Resolution

So what was it that accounted for that performance increase in Rome and what are the implications for Organization Theory and Practice? I believe that in Rome, the control level was well managed. Rome had very good, well-trained staff, and excellent equipment. The influence level also operated well. Priorities for performance were clear and the Italians had their very special way of dealing with relationship issues. Many quick *expressos* throughout the day provided a natural means for mutual adjustment of expectations, review of results and suggestions.

What was missing was any sense that their daily work mattered. Inadvertently, I provided that. I would contact them individually to find examples of good performance to put in the newsletter. The questioning and searching around potential for improvement provided the appreciative field. As, by chance, the influence and the control fields were well developed; the resulting increases in performance had enormous cost benefit. (At other airports that tried to emulate the newsletter, the influence or control systems were probably not developed enough).

By my curiosity and constant searching for reasons for good performance both through the newsletter and my personal contact - I provided the appreciative field, the relationship to the whole that was missing. I also discovered along the way that personality can be described in terms of preference for appreciation, influence and control. (The well-known Myers-Briggs, personality preference indicator, based on a Jungian typology, correlates perfectly with AIC).

We appreciate, relate to the whole, through our polar opposite perceptive powers "intuition" or "sensing." We sort our relationships to the whole or influence through the polar opposites of "thinking" or "feeling." We make choices about action through the polar opposite attitudes of "introversion or extroversion." The most appreciative types

stress intuition, introversion and feeling whereas the most controlling types prefer extroversion, sensing and thinking. Influence types have varying combinations of both).

Being an appreciative type and having the freedom in Rome to develop my own approach, I naturally developed an appreciative approach and by good luck that was what was needed. At other airports where the control or influence levels were not working well or the BOAC Representative was not an appreciative type, the newsletter, etc. would not be enough to produce the result. Similarly, in the first conscious application of the AIC philosophy in Colombia, our basic contribution was to provide the appreciative level - the whole that contained the conflict between the parts.

Improvements in control systems bring payback in the tens of percentage points, improvements to the influence system bring potential payback in the hundreds of percent, and improvements in the appreciative domain have almost infinite potential. This increase in potential however, is attenuated by probabilities. Improvements in control systems cost the most but they provide very high levels of certainty of direct payoff. Improvements in the influence system have more moderate costs and more moderate probabilities of payoff. Improvements in appreciative systems have the lowest cost but also have low probability of a direct payoff. In the long term however, as we have seen for Rome, if the influence and control systems are functioning well, payoffs from improvements in the appreciative system can be very dramatic.

With advances in technology to improve the control level and the mainstreaming of improved human systems, many organizations and institutions are now in positions similar to Rome. The control systems are working well. Human systems and relationships are adequate. What is missing is attention to the appreciative level of the system to give meaning and perspective to life and work.

5. Relativity

However, it is not enough to apply these concepts in the expert mode. This is where Eric's teachings become salient. The human figure in the center of the model is always we - the individual me or the collective us. Our current purpose determines the relevant power field. This relationship between purpose and power brings relativity to the social field. Our power is directly correlated with our purpose enacted within the space/time constraints that we choose. We are always the individual(s) in the center that is (are) in control. We make our choices (i.e., exercise control) based on the whole, of our appreciation and influence no matter where it comes from no matter how conscious or unconscious.

The richness of the social field that Eric valued so much is brought into play through this relative perspective. No matter what happens in our influenced or appreciated environments that information is passed through us as whole individuals, as whole social units, families, organizations, communities. What goes through each individual passes through a unique set of filters - we cannot control the output. The uniqueness of each individual and each social unit has to be appreciated. By developing systems and

processes that recognize that it is only the individual part of the system that has control, we automatically recognize the uniqueness of each individual. After appreciating the whole situation, after sorting priorities and relationships with the other interested parts, the individual part makes its choices based on its own unique sense of the situation and its interests both conscious and unconscious. When we design, systems and process that value equally the appreciative, influence and control relationships, we make much more power (capacity to achieve purpose) available to that system.
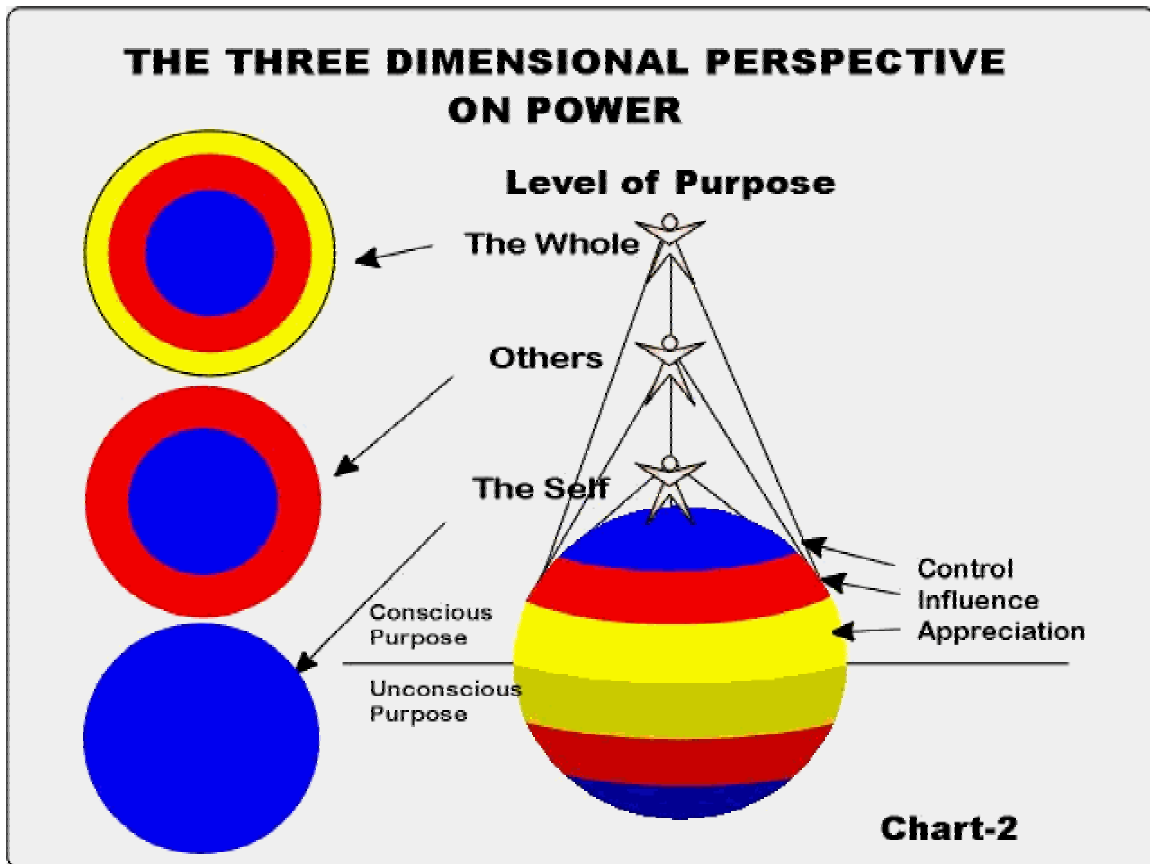
6. The Dimensions of Power

When we begin to deal with large systems over long periods we have to face the problem of the relationships between nested levels of system. At the micro level, we deal with a single human being as a system and at the macro level; we deal with the known universe as a whole system. In between, depending on our purpose, we can define hundreds and even thousands of intermediary levels of system. The concept of relativity gives us a practical way out of this dilemma. In practice, we can get by as long as we consider a minimum of three levels. We place ourselves, the client or focal system in the center - the influenced level - and define one system level above and one system level below. (In theory if all individual systems behaved in this way, the whole would be produced from an interlocking set of influenced and appreciated environments).

These three vertical loops are shown in Chart 1. Each of the three loops has its own AIC relationship. For example, if our focus in a country is regional development, we place the region in the center at the influence level. The system above, the national level, becomes the relevant whole - the appreciative level, while the district level below us becomes the control level. We can best understand the AIC relationship between levels of systems as dimensions of power.

The lower level of a multi-layered system is the operational level. It produces the final form or product of the system. It is the control-centered level of the whole system. In the regional development case, the districts provide the final product about goods and services. Chart-2 shows the power-field from a control-centered perspective. It is shown as a three dimensional sphere. Defined by and centered in purpose, the power-field incorporates both conscious and unconscious levels. The shadowed lower half of the sphere represents unconscious levels. Levels of purpose are indexed using the three primary system relationships, the self, others and the whole (in more generic terms - the individual part, the parts, and the whole). Unconscious levels are the collective unconscious purposes of the whole, the group and the individual part. All conscious and unconscious forces affecting achievement of purpose are incorporated into the power-field.

In this three-dimensional, control-centered, power perspective, the actor places himself on top of his world, in the center of control. Influence and appreciative relationships are in service of and subordinate to those of control. The controller carries out only enough influence and appreciation necessary to maintain control.

THE THREE DIMENSIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON POWER

Level of Purpose

The Whole

Others

The Self

Control
Influence
Appreciation

Conscious Purpose

Unconscious Purpose

Chart-2

If the actor's purposes are basically selfish, then his view of the world is encompassed entirely by the blue circle of control the center. He is blind to his influenced and appreciated environments. If he becomes more willing to take into account the purposes or interest of others, then he moves up a notch on the level of purpose and his purview now includes the red circle of influence relationships. If he is willing to raise his level of purpose to take into account the whole of the community of interests relative to his purpose, the yellow circle, then he can see all three bands. However, his three-dimensional perspective will always distort the relative value, width, of each circle - no matter how high he sets his purpose, the appreciative band will always appear narrower than it really is. Then the influence band in turn will always appear narrower than the control band. Thus control-centered systems are "appreciatively and influence challenged." No matter how well intentioned (purposed), they are less sensitive to their environments and so are less able to learn and adapt. The systemic distortions of control-centered management can be seen in our own times, as undervaluing wholes at every level - undervaluing environment, community, families, even the whole self.

To overcome the distortions of a three-dimensional perceptive, we need to add a forth dimension to our image of the power-field. The controller in Chart 3 could augment his vision by adding other eyes. He could place people in strategic places around the sphere and ask them to report to him what they see. According to where they stood, their perceptions would also be distorted but in different directions. If the various observers could trust each other and work out an adequate system of communication, they could

arrive at the truth - that although none of them could actually see it, the bands are equal in width.

Another option is to add the dimension of time - either she or the system can move over time. To see the whole surface of the sphere, the sphere would have to rotate both on its horizontal and its vertical axes. As the sphere rotates, the actor would see that the bands are of equal width. Again her observations are not direct because she has to remember the width over time. However, in order to observe the sphere over time, she has to change his "attitude" relative to it. She can no longer be "on top of things." She is in the center with the power-field moving around her.
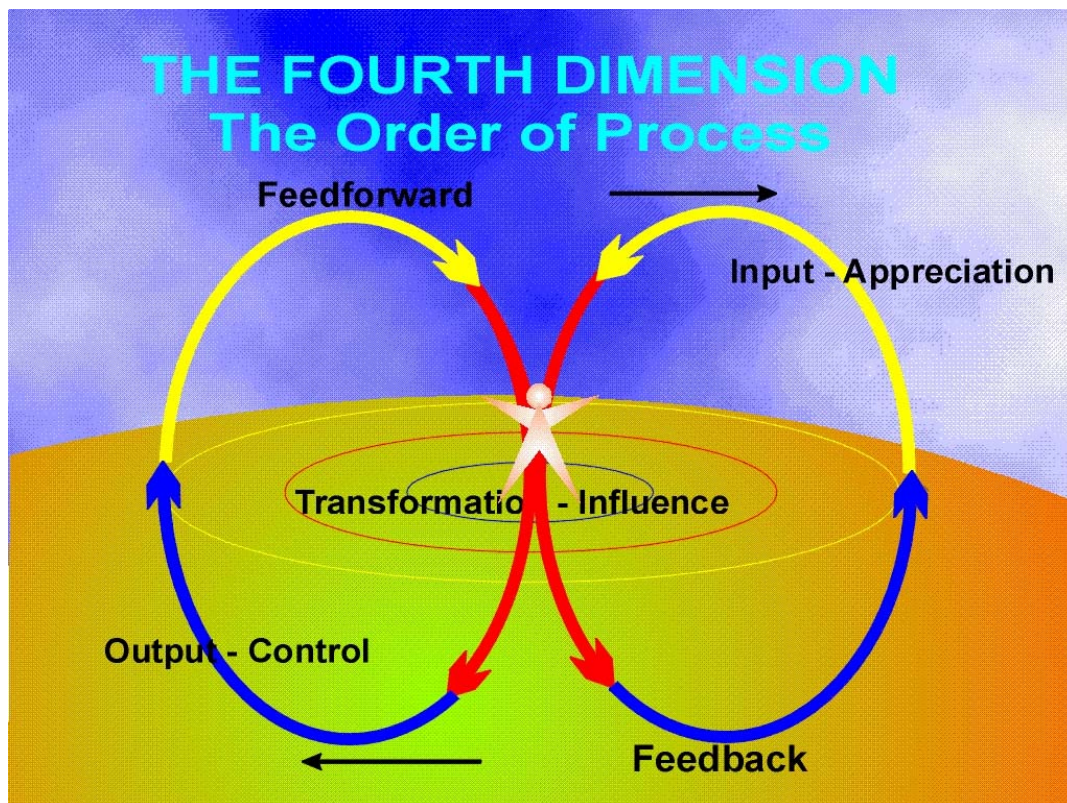
A cross-section through the torus simplifies and dramatizes the difference among the three-dimensional control-centered perspective and the four dimensional perspectives. Time in Chart 3 is shown as the circular rotation of the sphere through both feed-forward and feedback loops. The three relationships, AIC, now become phases of a process over time. In both the feed-forward and feedback cycles, Appreciation is equated to the input phase, Influence to the transformation phase and Control to the output phase. Notice that our actor now stands in the center of the two streams of process: the influence phases of both the feed-forward and feed back cycle. The two flows cross over in the influence phase. Hence, the center of a four dimensional power-field is rooted in influence. The Influence centered organization is a higher order of organization than control centered. It can process more information with less distortion than control-centered organizations. It gives greater capacity to see all parts equally. In the practical world, this is the arena of politics, of mediating, of coordination.

To understand the appreciative-centered organization, we have to stretch our imagination a little. We have to imagine the internal and external space around our sphere and torus. Imagine that as we go inside the sphere toward the center, all the colors darken until they reach the point of complete blackness in the center. Imagine also that as we move outside the sphere we create a larger sphere in which the bands of color become successively lighter. We stop when all bands are equally white. This sphere represents an ideal of wholeness where all powers (colors) are operating together at the full capacity of all systems. (The systems version of heaven?) Imagine further that the process of moving from the sphere of total whiteness to the point of blackness happens through a process of in-folding and out-folding between system levels - self, others and whole. If you can conjure up this dynamic unfolding image then you can see the fifth dimension - you have x-ray and extra-ray vision. You see the fifth dimension as a *religio* between levels of purpose. You might go on to imagine the total religio from the deepest levels of unconscious collective purpose to our highest levels of collective conscious ideals.

Again, in practice, we do not have to deal with the *religio* in its entire span for all humankind for all time. We have only to incorporate the three levels relative to our purpose in the time and space parameters about that purpose. We only have to deal with the regional planning problem, for example, in the space of national boundaries and the time of a natural planning cycle. These time and space constraints limit our field of appreciation.
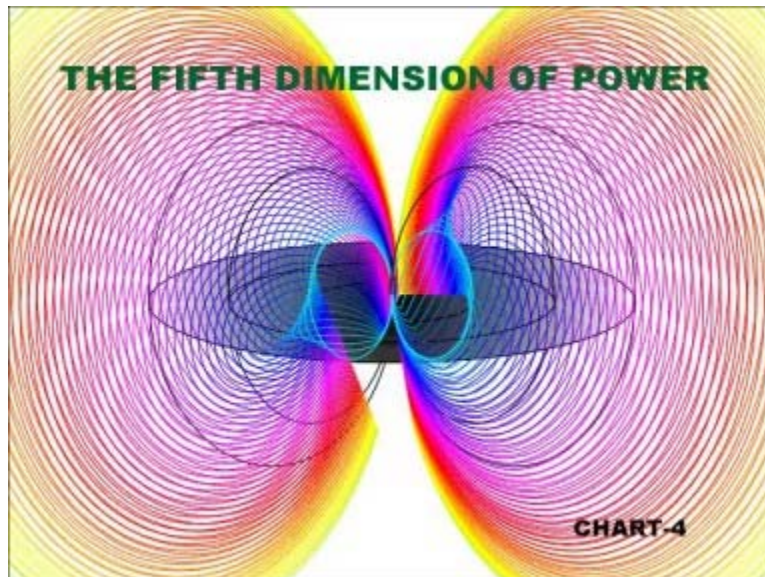
It is hard enough to show three and four-dimensional images on two-dimensional paper, so Chart 4 needs quite a bit of interpreting and imagination to visualize. You have to imagine the original sphere made fluid with convection type flows that rotate the darker colors on the inside toward the outside. We must also imagine the white colors of our extended sphere of the whole rotating through convection type flows inwards to reproduce the color bands of the original sphere. We end with a dynamic living sphere that is holographic in nature. Every point on the surface and inside the sphere contains information about the whole. There is no center of power. Every point is the center of

power and has equal opportunity to occupy any point in the sphere. Appreciative-centered organization, then, is an even higher order of organization than influence centered-organization. By adding the fifth dimension, it helps us to relate to the whole and every part, to transcend differences and to find the place of oneness. I believe that it is the interaction of waves from the appreciative levels of every level of the system during this fifth dimensional in-folding and out-folding that produces a resonance and coherence around purpose. It is this coherence and resonance of power relationships that enable people to produce extraordinary levels of performance and accomplishment. Such accomplishment seen, for example, through the eyes of control-centered actors would seem impossible.

I first became conscious that something like this was happening the very first time we used the AIC process. Turid Sato, then the Senior Loan officer for the Colombia Division of the World Bank, had been asked to help with the threatened financial collapse of the country's electricity sector. She understood that the problem was so systemic it could not be solved by traditional means. So, with great courage, she charted a new course. She involved all the stakeholders at three system levels in the controlled, influences and appreciated environments in a workshop to diagnose and come up with solutions. The opposition within the Bank and in some quarters of the country was legend but she eventually succeeded in staging a workshop - the first of its kind in Bank operations. At the end of the workshop, the Minister of Mines and Energy went around with a microphone to ask people to identify the next steps. Crusty old electronic engineers and government bureaucrats, with voices cracking, were so emotional they could hardly get their words out. They were almost pleading: "For God's sake, for the first time we know what the problems are, we know that we are the cause. We now know what must do. Please, please, let's not drop the ball." It was as though they could sense that they were in a special place of understanding but one so delicate they knew it might easily slip away. Yet, they felt and respected its power.

It was at that time, for the first time, that I knew I had felt like those engineers and bureaucrats before. That was the feeling I had in Rome. I knew we were in the state I had come to know as appreciative power. The participants acknowledged that same sense when they referred to the "Spirit of Santa Marta" - the location of the workshop. They would try to solve problems "in the spirit of Santa Marta." From then on, I knew it was possible to reproduce this state. It was a state of wholeness that people reach when they transcend their self-interest; they transcend their group or political interests, and come together as one.

7. The Principles

What, then, do I understand now that I did not understand in Rome?

> 1. The most fundamental insight is that purpose is the source of power. I had thought that knowledge, authority or control of resources was the sources of power. Appreciative power which depends more on being in tune with the whole - the whole person, group or community - is not very dependent on

control of resources. It was primarily through the use of appreciative power that the performance gains in Rome were achieved.

2. The relative perspective helps me accept a different definition of who we are. Whereas, as a young man in Rome, I still held the very Western view that we were the skin-bounded individuals. I can now see that we are a set of relationships. We are our relationships to our selves, to others and to our appreciated world. The most formidable change or development we can produce in others or ourselves is to help enlarge our appreciated world. Such change opens up greater possibilities for influence and for more control.

3. The third set of insights relates to the process itself. In practical terms they consist of:

a. Choosing the highest level of purpose possible in the situation - it ensures the higher level of power potential.
b. Participation of people who truly represent the whole affected by the purpose.
c. A process that honors the uniqueness of every individual participant.
d. Priorities sorted on the basis of the participants' own values.
e. Opposing perspectives and relationships surfaced and expressed.
f. Individuals allowed to make commitments based on their free will.
g. Wisdom should be built into the process itself to minimize the need for theory, explanations and experts. For example, the basic process is driven by a set of seven simple questions that, if asked, will ensure that all three levels of appreciation influence and control are dealt with and that the productive dialectic at each level is achieved. In practice none of this needs to be discussed - the questions just have to be asked.
h. Implementation of the philosophy and model should not be tied to methodology. The danger is that the process becomes too rigid, and loses the creative talents of its practitioners. Any methodology can be chosen which meets the norms for the phase. For example, the norms of the appreciative phase are to be open to the whole, to be non-judgmental, to allow any part of the whole to be connected with any other part. Any methodology that achieves these ends can be used. The goal of the influence phase is to maximize the flow of ideas and their interchange, to ensure that all possible relationships are explored. The purpose of the control phase is to give final form to the process in terms of plans, commitments, decisions, etc. Any methodology that achieves these ends may be used.

Having finally found explanations for the high performance at Rome, and having drawn out some key principles that could be applied by others on a larger scale, the questions for me over the last year or so has been "what use should we now make of this knowledge? Where could we have the most impact in applying and improving the principles?" I believe that we can have the most impact by working with the largest natural systems that we feel could incorporate the three dimensions of power. Our guess is that this would be countries or regions of countries with populations in the low millions.

Our starting hypothesis, somewhat oversimplified for brevity's sake, is that societies will evolve in a way that incorporates the three dimensions of power at corresponding system levels. For example, the lower level typified by private sector organizations, the productive sector, will be run on control-centered principles. Their development or evolution will be to move to include higher levels of purpose, as in Chart 3. They will gradually learn to take into account all their stakeholders and not just their customers. They will learn how to be an integral part of their various communities, local, national and global. At the second level the host of mediating organizations, political parties, associations of interests groups, foundations, etc. will learn to operate from an influence-centered base. They will help overcome the distortions wrought by the control focus of the private sector and mediate the differences between the interests of the various wholes. They will evolve by learning to manage greater differences. The highest level of society will be the government and those institutions concerned with the whole community, universities, religious institutions, etc. Their function will be to create the conditions of oneness; transparency, interchange and regulation necessary for the influence centered middle level.

So far, we believe that the developed world is in the throes of the transition between control-centered organization and influence-centered organization. The collapse of the Soviet Union taught us once and for all that we cannot govern the whole through control - even by the best and the brightest. While democracies, by definition, have an influence-centered political philosophy, their governments have been constrained by control-centered organization models. The organization field is now struggling to formulate such influence-centered models and practice. Systems theory, Chaos theory and the New Sciences, the bulk of currently popular management theory is helping us to develop models to cope with the dynamic relationship between the parts of our whole systems - the influence-centered, market-driven revolution. The future of Organization Theory will be to take the lead in developing new appreciative-centered models.

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Notes

1. This framework owes a good deal to Parsons, who as far back as 1960 had identified the three vertical levels of organizational functioning and referred to them as Institutional (appreciative), Managerial (influence) and Technical (control). The horizontal extension of the framework builds on Trist and Emery's 1975 concept of three levels of environment, internal (control), transactional (influence) and contextual (appreciative). .

2. I borrowed the term "appreciation" from Vickers, "The Art of Judgment" Basic Books 1966

3. Emerson R. (1962) explains power as a relationship in which the power of one actor is equal to the dependency of the other. Pab = Dab: the power of actor A over actor B is always equal to the dependence of actor B on A. "Power Dependence Relations" American Sociological Review 1962.