

## Preliminaries

It would be wonderful if churches could just be inspired enough that all of the good things for which we long happen. But somewhere between inspiration and realization there is a lot of perspiration!

**The adaptive challenge for congregational revitalization is not programmatic, but rather cultivating the "capacity to understand and live in an environment that is no longer experienced as stable, predictable or even comprehensible."** (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2011, 2)

The four most common sources of leadership failure teach us that for an organization to thrive, leaders:

1. shift their focus from problems to realizing more of what we want (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2011)
2. meet adaptive challenges with adaptive solutions (Heifetz and Linsky 2002) Ronald Marty
3. understand and overcome their organization's immunity to change (Kegan and Lahey, How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work 2001)
4. **navigate transitions successfully** (Bridges 2009)

This resources provides a basic understanding for successfully navigating transitions.

These tools have been used successfully in both church and corporate settings to cultivate the **"capacity to understand and live in an environment that is no longer experienced as stable, predictable or even comprehensible."** (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2011, 2) An organization's **"capacity to understand and live in an environment that is no longer experienced as stable, predictable or even comprehensible"** (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2011, 2) is the single most important factor in predicting whether an organization will experience increased vitality and thrive, or die.

## Basic Dynamics of an Organization

Organizations have a visible and an invisible component. Both are very real and alive and impact the health and vitality of your organization. Take note of the green (center) line in Figure 1 below. Notice what is above it and what is below it.

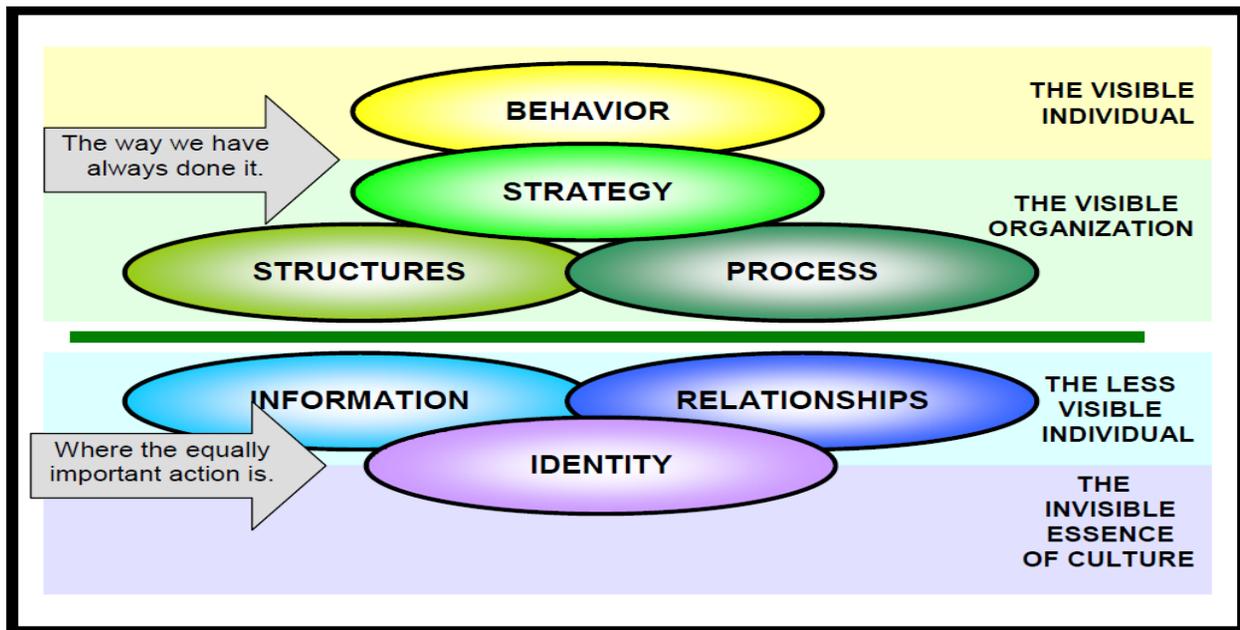


Figure 1. (Zuieback 2012)

A change is the event in time when something in your organization visibly becomes different. Where does that put change in the organization - above or below the green line? Yes, that's right. Most changes we make in our organization resides above the green line as either a new:

- Outcomes - behavior; i.e. more people attending church, integrating a new program
- Structure - the ways in which a system organizes itself to conduct business.
- Process (operations) - the standard business processes that are used to build consistency and efficiency.
- Patterns (strategy) - the systematic ways in which a system focuses its key strategies to accomplish its mission and goals.

But simply making the new thing visible does not mean that mean everyone embraces what's happened or that the new outcome, structure, operation, or strategy is actually achieved. The degree to which a change takes root in the culture of an organization is directly related to how well leaders manage the psychological dynamics related to that change. The processing of psychological dynamics related to a change is called a transition. (Bridges 2009)

## Change v. Transition

In his paradigm for managing transitions, William Bridges identifies three zones:

1. Endings
2. Neutral Zone or Wilderness
3. New Beginnings

A change and its accompanying transition do not necessarily correspond in time. Changes are fast! Transitions are slow! The more poorly managed a transition, the longer it takes. Transitions aren't complete just because you've started something new. Sometimes transitions continue after a change has been implemented. And some folks never embrace the new beginning. Managing transitions, or to employ Biblical imagery, skillfully shepherding people through a Wilderness, can significantly impact the 80% rule - that's the percentage of change programs that fail on average.

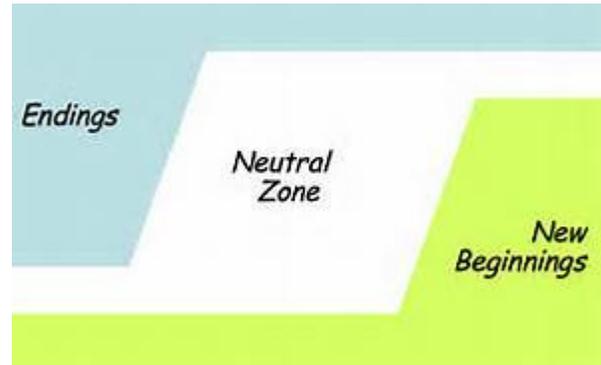


Figure 2.

Transitions, regardless of the changes to which they are attached, share common characteristics. People respond to changes - whatever those changes are - in predictable ways. Each zone in a transition requires leaders to perform different shepherding tasks/interventions while as people move through that zone. So how do leaders know where their organization is on the transition journey, and more importantly, when the organization is ready to begin work in the next zone? Figure two can help make that determination. to the next to shift their work from one zone to the next? we are in our progress through endings and the Wilderness?

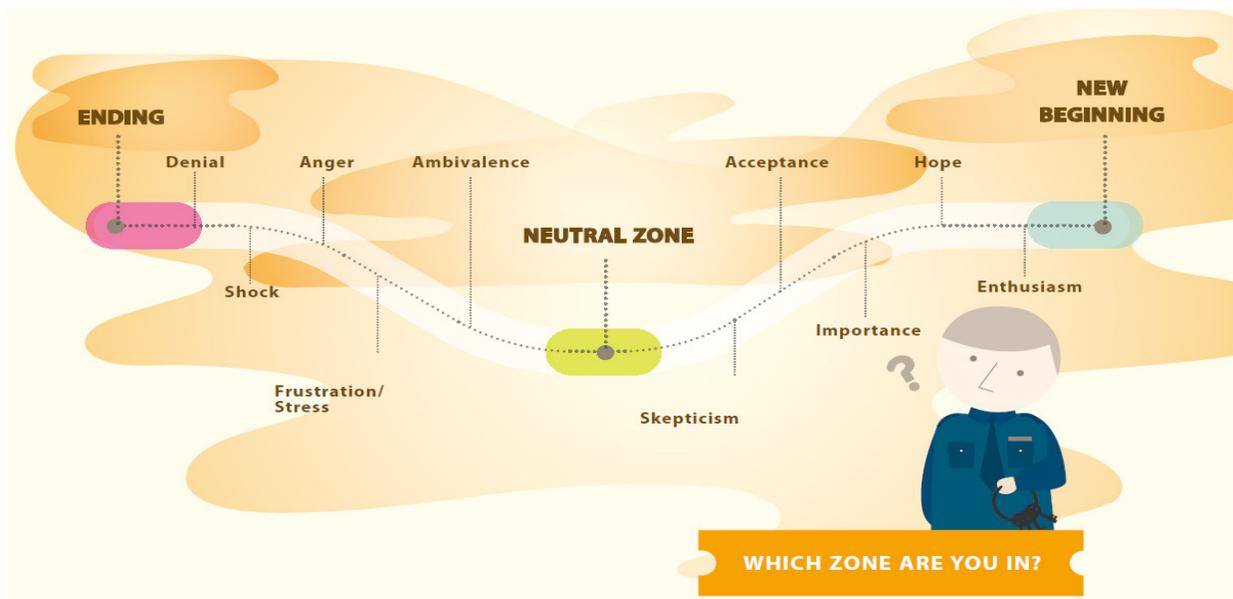


Figure 3.

The leaders' goal is not to move people out of one zone and into the next. Excellent shepherds focus on **growing the capacity of individuals and their congregation to understand and live in an environment that is no longer experienced as stable, predictable, or even comprehensible.** (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2011) This is the heart of ongoing revitalization in any organization. Simply put it's the ability to adapt or as Wheatley describes it, to continually self-organize amidst evolving conditions. **Our sense of stability comes not from static conditions and circumstances, but from confidence in our ability to adapt to our environment.** The organization as a whole tells us at what pace we can move forward. We take inventory of the emotional reality of the whole. When 10-20% of the people in the group demonstrate the psychological dynamics associated with the next zone, excellent transition shepherds individualize the work of the current zone and begin group work around the next zone.

This doesn't happen in a linear fashion. We make progress, we regress, and within the organization people are at different places and moving at different speeds. It all seems very confusing. Such is the Wilderness. But eventually we come to the Promised Land or new beginning!

### *Endings*

Every Transition starts with an ending. Organizational endings need to be processed by the whole group. "Wholeness brings out the best in people and organizations. Bringing all stakeholders together in large group forums stimulates creativity and builds collective capacity." (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2011) Psychologically in this transition zone people will find themselves

- letting go of the past,
- sorting out what's worked and what hasn't,
- deciding what to bring forward with them from the way it was, from their learnings,
- naming how it's different
- trying to decide if they are going to consider the proposed change (give it a hearing)
- dealing with loss of roles and meaning

This is a time for story-telling about the past, one's role in it, how one's identity was shaped by it, and all with an eye to what the next chapter might look like. We construct stories about our lives (personal and professional) and live into them. (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2011)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> After reviewing the principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), the reader will recognize how those principles have been incorporated into this resource's explanation of the zones of transformation. The principles of AI can be found on the last two pages of this resource and at: <http://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/more-on-ai/principles-of-appreciative-inquiry/>

Endings are a time for questions. Positive questions lead to positive change. Momentum for small or large-scale change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding. This momentum is best generated through positive questions that amplify the positive core.<sup>1</sup> (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2011) When folks ask, "What's wrong with the way we've been doing it?" Honesty is important. Nothing may have been wrong with the way we did it before; it just doesn't work today because culture, values, people etc. are different and think differently. Equally as important is answering their question in terms of what will be better about the future if the change is made. AI's Poetic Principle tells us that we can choose what we study. Teams and organizations, like open books, are endless sources of study and learning. What we choose to study makes a difference. It describes – even creates – the world as we know it.

Reframing is a constant challenge in all zones of transition. Right and wrong is better reframed as advantages/disadvantages, worked/isn't working. Words create worlds. Reality, as we know it, is a subjective rather than an objective state and it is socially created through language and conversations. (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2011)

As the ending is marked people will need room to grieve, and to express negative emotions while finding a way to frame life after this loss positively so that they have the wherewithal to move through the wilderness journey that awaits them.<sup>2</sup>

Appreciating the enduring aspects of life together is also critical in the ending zone. They may be expressed differently after the change takes place, but what you do well needs to come with you, as you say goodbye to what was. (Watkins, Mohr and Kelly 2011) Look for and celebrate the enduring strengths in your organization. Asset mapping<sup>3</sup> and Appreciative Inquiry processes can help with this part of the conversation.

### *The Wilderness - The Neutral Zone*

*"Confusion is a word we have invented for an order which is not yet understood."*

*Henry Miller*

As an organizational transition unfolds the number of people in the neutral zone grows as people come to terms with the ending. A few people start in the neutral zone, they love change and are open to it. They never were sold on the old way.

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<sup>2</sup> For a checklist of tasks the leader will need to give attention to this and in each zone of a transition William Bridges book, *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* is invaluable, particularly in helping leaders avoid blind spots.

<sup>3</sup> See Snow, Luther. *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts*. Herdon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004.

The Wilderness experience is an experience of both the best and the worst of times in organizational life. While endings can be hard, sometimes the neutral zone has both terrifying and ugly moments. Marilyn Ferguson compares this time in community life to the *Peanuts* cartoon character Linus with his blanket in the dryer. There is nothing to hold on to. To compound this, individuals all move through the neutral zone at their own speeds.

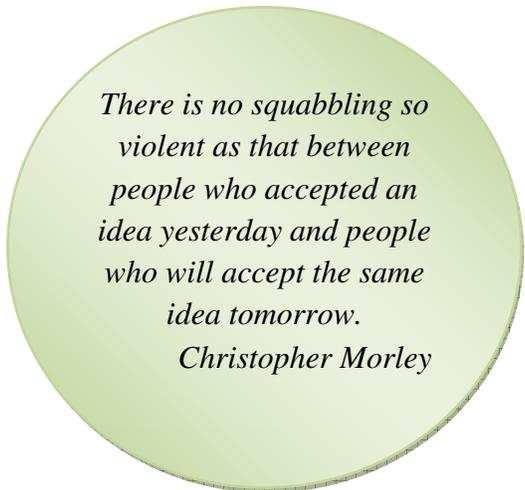
People ready to let go but they are uncertain about and are dealing with the issue of their own capacity, and so they find themselves:

- trying to juggle two worlds, the world of what has ended and the world of what is about to begin
- being asked to take on new skills, new attitudes, new values, new behaviors that feel overwhelming
- wanting to be committed to one thing, but spending all their and energy doing other things.

About the Wilderness, Bridges writes, "During this apparently uneventful journey...a significant shift takes place within people - or if it doesn't, the change isn't likely to produce the results it is intended to produce." How exactly does a leader encourage and nurture that new commitment to happen? Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey offer a practical method for helping individuals and groups to identify and overcome the competing commitments that threaten to derail change.<sup>4</sup> So critical is that task for thriving organizations to master, particularly when traversing a transition's Wilderness zone, that an entire resource in this series is devoted to it.

In the Wilderness organizations often experience:

- miscommunication, undone tasks, mixed signals, confused or competing priorities
- disequilibrium and chaos
- high anxiety and low motivation
- patch-fixes give way
- unresolved issues resurface
- conflict
- attacks from competition or sabotage
- increased absenteeism and/or decreased productivity



*There is no squabbling so violent as that between people who accepted an idea yesterday and people who will accept the same idea tomorrow.*

*Christopher Morley*

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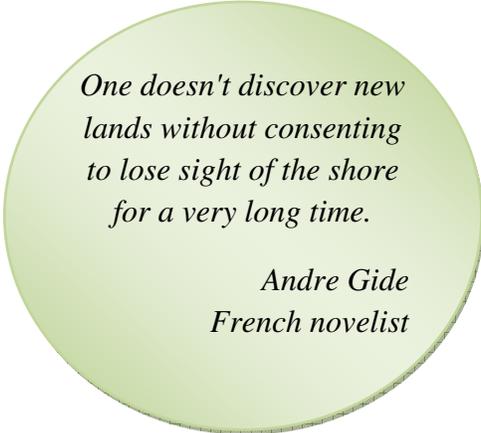
<sup>4</sup> See Kegan, Robert & Lahey, Lisa. *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001 and *Immunity to Change*. Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009.

Organizational cultures that strongly value change and with strong identity values empower people to endure in this zone. Celebrating openness to new ideas and new programs, people contributing to the shared vision, and creativity being valued and used in ways previously unimagined will bring out the best in the organization.

Time in the Wilderness is really about identity. Who are we going to be when we make this change? Who am I going to be and what role will I play in the new way of being? Clearly framing what this change means is critical.

In addition to AI's principle that words create worlds, remember that "images inspire action." (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005) Human systems move in the direction of their images of the future. The more positive and hopeful the image of the future, the more positive the present-day action. As individuals move through the Wilderness and share their positive images, lift them up as examples to others.

Experiment and create together. Not everything created will be kept, but there needs to be enough material to afford the group choices as they determine what *will* be part of the new way of being. People perform better and are more committed when they have the freedom to choose how and what they contribute and maintain. Free choice stimulates organizational excellence and positive change. "Free choice liberates power." (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003) Invite people to consider how they see themselves making a contribution to it, rather than simply asking for their blessing. Encourage people to rent ideas, behaviors, or tasks. If it doesn't fit, trade it in. Positive change occurs when the process used to create the change is a living model of the ideal future. "Acting 'as if' is self-fulfilling." (The Center for Appreciative Inquiry n.d.)



*One doesn't discover new  
lands without consenting  
to lose sight of the shore  
for a very long time.*

*Andre Gide  
French novelist*

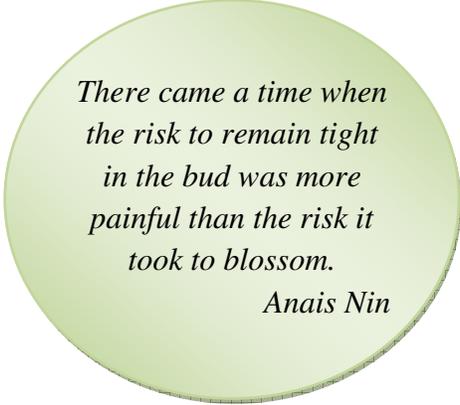
Bridges provides leaders a Wilderness tasks checklist that can be grouped in four categories:

1. Protect people
2. Encourage people
3. Structure people
4. Give people opportunities to shine

Margaret Wheatley's advise is well-taken although sometimes difficult to follow: people have the ability to sort the wilderness experience out for themselves if we give them the chance to do so. (Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers 1996)

### *New Beginnings*

The change is in place, and most people feel capable and are accepting and implementing the change. Organizational life is marked by a release of new energy in a new direction, and the expression of a new identity. People are looking at themselves and their roles in the organization in new ways, and they have made new commitment to new things. Congratulations on your new beginning!



*There came a time when  
the risk to remain tight  
in the bud was more  
painful than the risk it  
took to blossom.*

*Anais Nin*

Sometimes leaders confuse a new beginning with a start. Starts are designed; new beginnings are nurtured. Starts are scheduled; new beginnings follow the timing of mind and heart.

Beginnings have the potential to increase anxiety because they make the previous ending final/real; they are unproven and perceived to be risky. After all, what if it doesn't work? Beginnings can also be a let down from the adrenaline of living in the Wilderness.

Tasks of a leader as people make their new beginning include:

1. Explaining the basic purpose behind the outcome
2. Painting a picture of the outcome so people can try on the experience
3. Mapping the road to the intended outcome (plan)
4. Help people find ways to contribute to and participate in the beginning. (part to play)

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## Core Appreciative Inquiry Principles

The Core Principles of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which describe the basic tenets of the underlying AI philosophy, were developed in the early 1990's by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva (Cooperrider's advisor at Case Western Reserve University). The five original principles are: Constructionist, Simultaneity, Anticipatory, Poetic, and Positive.

### **The Constructionist Principle:**

#### *Words Create Worlds*

Reality, as we know it, is a subjective vs. objective state and is socially created through language and conversations.

### **The Simultaneity Principle:**

#### *Inquiry Creates Change*

Inquiry is an intervention. The moment we ask a question, we begin to create a change. "The questions we ask are fateful."

### **The Poetic Principle:**

#### *We Can Choose What We Study*

Teams and organizations, like open books, are endless sources of study and learning. What we choose to study makes a difference. It describes – even creates – the world as we know it.

### **The Anticipatory Principle:**

#### *Image Inspires Action*

Human systems move in the direction of their images of the future. The more positive and hopeful the image of the future, the more positive the present-day action.

### **The Positive Principle:**

#### *Positive Questions Lead to Positive Change*

Momentum for [small or] large-scale change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding. This momentum is best generated through positive questions that amplify the positive core. (Cooperrider and Whitney 2005)

## **Emergent Appreciative Inquiry Principles**

Additional principles that have surfaced throughout the years that are based on, or constructed from, the five original core AI principles. They are:

### **The Wholeness Principle:**

#### ***Wholeness Brings Out the Best***

Wholeness brings out the best in people and organizations. Bringing all stakeholders together in large group forums stimulates creativity and builds collective capacity.

### **The Enactment Principle:**

#### ***Acting ‘As If’ is Self-Fulfilling***

To really make a change, we must “be the change we want to see.” Positive change occurs when the process used to create the change is a living model of the ideal future.

### **The Free Choice Principle:**

#### ***Free Choice Liberates Power***

People perform better and are more committed when they have the freedom to choose how and what they contribute. Free choice stimulates organizational excellence and positive change. (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003)

### **The Narrative Principle:**

#### ***Stories are Transformative***

We construct stories about our lives (personal and professional) and live into them. (Barrett and Fry 2005)

### **The Awareness Principle:**

#### ***Be Conscious of Underlying Assumptions.***

Both awareness of and understanding our underlying assumptions are important to developing and cultivating good relationships. Practicing cycles of action and reflection can build one’s self-awareness. (Stavros and Torres 2005)

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From: <http://centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/more-on-ai/principles-of-appreciative-inquiry/>

See also: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>