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- Appreciative Leaders: In the Eye of the Beholder.
 - Marjorie Schiller, Bea Mah Holland, Deanna Riley
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Chapter Six

The Method, The Model, and Making Meaning

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Method and Model Development

In the fall of 2000, the editors invited 110 professionals and practitioners experienced in Appreciative Inquiry to interview someone they considered an appreciative leader. We were interested in expanding our knowledge of the **competencies** and **attributes** of appreciative leaders, and we especially wanted to understand what differentiates appreciative leaders' thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Competencies have been defined in organizational literature as underlying characteristics of a person that distinguish outstanding performance in a particular job. Competencies can be exhibited in the form of skills, knowledge, social role, self-image, traits or motives. *Webster's Dictionary* defines "attribute" as "a quality or characteristic belonging to a person or thing; a distinctive feature."

We intentionally did not provide our authors/interviewers with standards or criteria for defining and selecting appreciative leaders. The intent was to identify characteristics of appreciative leaders by examining the findings from the interviews. For consistency, a protocol was provided to guide the interviews, and the interviewers were encouraged to add questions that would ensure thorough and unique conversations. Our protocol questions (see Appendix) were intended to elicit information about Appreciative Leadership based on the supposition that these leaders might be strongly relational and participative, rather than commanding and controlling in style and beliefs.

To describe our writers' appreciative leader selection criteria, we initially focused on their examples and stories. The interview responses were read to find traits and characteristics that were common to the 28 leaders who were ultimately interviewed. The traits and characteristics that surfaced became the basis for our identification of fourteen attributes and competencies in our Model

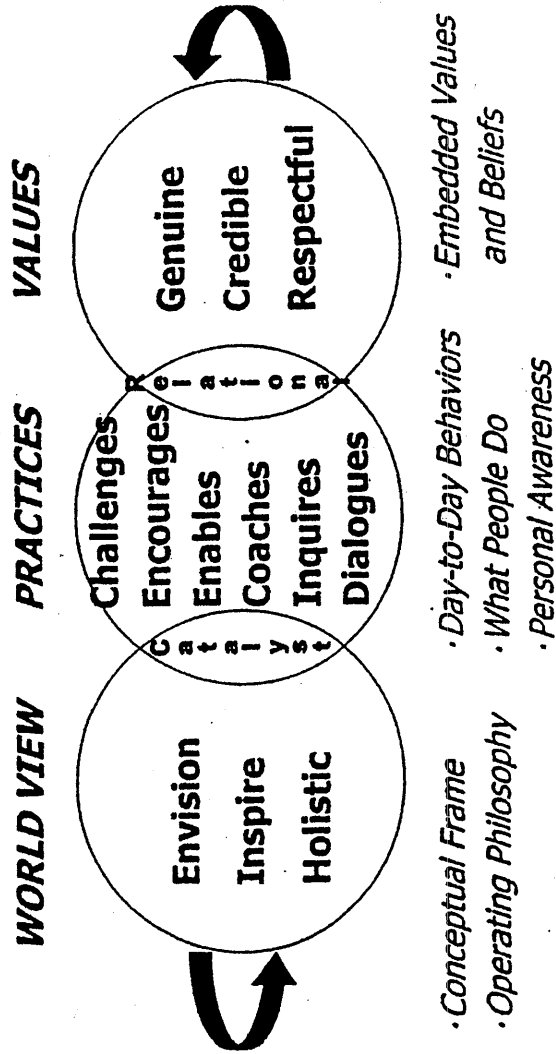
of Appreciative Leadership (see Figure A). Like anthropologists, our intent was to be open to patterns in the findings. We recognize that the study of Appreciative Leadership is still in its infancy and the knowledge of appreciative leaders is emergent.

We began to see patterns in the findings. The leadership characteristics seemed to fall naturally into three major clusters: **World View, Practices, and Values**. The competencies *envision*, *inspire*, and *holistic* emerged as what we called **World View**, the conceptual frame and operating philosophy of leaders. We called the next cluster of attributes **Practices** because they explicitly describe the day-to-day behaviors that show what leaders actually do: *challenge*, *encourage*, *enable*, *coach*, *inquire*, and *dialogue*. The third cluster was labeled **Values** because we recognized the depth of feelings embedded in the stories that the leaders told. The attributes were *genuine*, *credible*, and *respectful*, and describe the leaders' values and beliefs. Two additional attributes seemed to be bridges between the clusters. *Catalyst* seemed to straddle operating philosophy and day-to-day behaviors and therefore belongs in both the **World View** and **Practices** clusters. Similarly the *relational* attribute is appropriate to both **Practices** and **Values** because it is both belief-based and evident in what people do.

Having derived a tentative model of Appreciative Leadership from the eye of the beholder based on the interviews, we designed a questionnaire to gather demographic data and further information from the writers about what criteria they had actually considered in choosing the leaders they interviewed. We sent a survey (see Appendix) to 30 contributors. Twenty-eight responded.

We learned that the majority of the leaders (25) were from various regions in North America and that there was also an international flavor with leaders from Europe, Mexico, and New Zealand. Private industry had the greatest representation with 16 leaders, followed by eight in education, and four in government. Fifteen of those interviewed worked in not-for-profit organizations and 13 in the for-profit sector. There were 16 men and 12 women; 21 Caucasians, four African-Americans, two Asians, and one Hispanic. Their ages fell into a bell curve with forty- and fifty-year-olds in the center. There were thirty-year-olds on one end and

Model of Appreciative Leadership



(FIGURE A)

Source Deanna Riley

people of sixty and older on the other. There were no “twenty-somethings,” but leaders in their seventies are represented (see Chapter 5, “Reflections of a Lifetime”).

In the survey, writers were asked to rate the “importance as an attribute/competency for selection” of the fourteen elements we had identified. This was intended to gain further insight into which competencies were important to these writers in selecting their leaders and to further validate the Model of Appreciative Leadership. The writers were also invited to add comments. There were some differences in what the writers said guided their choice of a leader. For instance, some contributors who interviewed in large for-profit settings mentioned considerations that concentrated on organizational impact, such as the ability to drive long-term change, affect corporate climate, be a power broker, and initiate a significant culture shift. Some of the more seasoned and experienced contributors paid greater attention to strategic and whole-systems thinking. The experience of the interviewer seemed to influence the degree of expected complexity.

The attributes and competencies that our contributors ranked highest in importance in their considerations—from the field of fourteen—were the abilities to be *genuine, credible, and respectful*. There was a remarkable consistency. In fact, all the authors selected as their first, second, and third choices, the competencies that we had placed in the **Values** cluster, although they were not labeled as such in the survey. The competencies and attributes in the cluster we called **World View**, *envision, inspire, and holistic*, as well as the bridge attribute *catalyst*, were the next highest ranked group by our interviewers. The competencies in our **Practices** cluster, *challenges, encourages, enables, coaches, inquires, and dialogues*, and the bridge attribute *relational*, were ranked third. In the Model of Appreciative Leadership, appreciative leaders translate their **World View**, their basic views and intentions, into effective **Practices**. These behaviors show how appreciative leaders connect with others. **Values** are the lens we use to see and evaluate those day-to-day behaviors or **Practices**. These are the checks and balances that show leaders act on what they value, the hallmark of appreciative leaders.

Chris Argyris, a well-known management educator, has written extensively about the gap that often occurs between what he calls "espoused theory " and "theory in practice." According to our interviewers, these leaders have closed that gap. We believe the attributes of the Values cluster are the essence of authenticity and credibility. What the writers said, loud and clear, is that what differentiated these leaders as appreciative leaders is that they "live their values out loud." These men and women are intrinsically values based. It is the continuous core that drives their actions and decisions. They operate on a day-to-day basis from intensely held values. For all of the leaders you have read about in this book, everything begins and ends with values.

Based on qualitative analysis of survey ratings and comments, we gained insight into the thoughts, feelings, and actions of appreciative leaders. They uniformly exhibit a seemingly unconditional positive attitude; they have a positive nature and appear to be hopeful and optimistic. They express openness to growth, ideas, diversity, and situations and conditions that challenge traditional, established ways. They express moderation and fairness, and they seek to understand. These leaders are very open about their spirituality; they speak about the roots of their beliefs and link those beliefs to their philosophy of leading and everyday behavior. They seem to understand their own and others' need for meaning and significance in their work and daily lives.

Linking Theory and Practice

The competencies and attributes that the writers saw in these appreciative leaders resonates with those described in twentieth-century organizational behavior classics such as Robert Greenleaf's *Servant Leadership*, Peter Block's *Stewardship*, James Collins and Jerry Porras's *Built to Last*, Stephen Covey's *Principle Centered Leadership*, James Kouzes and Barry Posner's *Leadership*, Abraham Maslow's *Motivation and Personality*, Douglas McGregor's *The Human Side of Enterprise*, Peter Drucker's *Managing for the Future*, James McGregor Burns's *Leadership*, and Warren Bennis's prolific writings.

The following findings reflect the insights and learnings from 28 interviews, 15 of which are included in this book. To get the full picture and expand your knowledge of appreciative leaders, we suggest that you read additional interviews on the Taos Institute website at <www.taosinstitute.org>, and in the special November 2001 Appreciative Leadership issue of the *International Appreciative Inquiry Newsletter* at <www.aradford.co.uk>.

The themes that emerged from integrating interview and survey information capture the characteristics of appreciative leaders—and correlate to the attributes and competencies in the **World View, Practices, and Values** clusters in the Model.

- Appreciative leaders are belief-based, with an explicit spiritual orientation and practice.
- Leadership lives in the group and not in any one person.
- Multiple truths exist in ways of thinking, doing, and being.
- Appreciative leaders have an unwavering commitment to bringing out the best in themselves and others.
- Appreciative leaders find generative forces in their many circumstances and multiple systems.

Examples from the interviews that exemplify these themes follow.

Theme 1. Leaders Are Belief-based with an Explicit Spiritual Orientation and Practice

Consistent with the attributes of the Values cluster in the Model of Appreciative Leadership—genuine, credible, and respectful—the leaders demonstrate their optimistic and realistic views of the people with whom they work. Because of their trust in, and the openness of, their beliefs and values, they create a reinforcing cycle of affirmation.

Virtually all of the leaders interviewed spoke about their belief in their fellow human beings. Several noted that, as young workers, mentors had demonstrated faith in them beyond the faith that they had in themselves. These appreciative leaders are now replicating that behavior in working with their associates.

Ricky Lewis, an African American manager at Verizon, spoke about making mistakes in his career, and realized that a mentor who had unwavering faith in him not only guided him but also

took on an oppositional force to champion his success. Lewis is now "passing it on."

Lee Olivier of Millstone Nuclear Power Plant recalled his mentor as a man who "blew on the ember," and had an intuitive appreciation for what he [Lee] could do. He helped Lee realize, "You can get people to follow you." In a similar vein, Kenny Lang of BP reported about a mentor: "I've tried to make what Andrew gave me available to all of my reports in terms of creating time [for them], as often as they need."

We were surprised to hear that the majority of appreciative leaders spoke openly about their personal spirituality. Their spirituality base took many forms, including mysticism, Christianity, and personal meaning systems.

At Green Mountain Coffee, CEO Bob Stiller's "commitment to his company's social mission and to the people who work for him and with him is deeply rooted in his personal values and spiritual beliefs." As a seventeen-year employee of the company noted, "Bob truly believes we are working for a higher cause, and he imparts that to all of us."

For Kenny Lang, VP at British Petroleum, one of the most important events in his life was his religious conversion. His faith shows up in the way he frames his work. In speaking about a merger with his organization, he aspires to the time when "two are cooperating effectively, when each sees and elicits and works towards the best of what the other brings."

Theme 2. Leadership Lives in the Group and Not in Any One Person

Team leadership is a predominant and recurring theme. There is a belief that leadership capabilities reside in the group and not in the designated leader alone. There is an explicit acknowledgment that individuals alone do not have the answers. At the same time, people are viewed as having the capacity to do what needs to be done. In the Model of Appreciative Leadership, this relates to the competencies and attributes of envision, inspire, and holistic in the World View cluster and the bridging competency of catalyst between World View and Practices. For appreciative leaders a critical

imperative for organizational success today is "the collective discovery of the way forward," with the realization that this World View is not only about being inclusive, it is also good business.

The Civil Rights efforts and other social movements illustrate passion and motivation sustained by principles, and not just by individuals. "Doc" Lafayette is one of countless leaders who lived out principles within the Civil Rights movement in order to elevate society's norms of equality and justice.

Annette Griffin, a superintendent of schools, tells the story of a demoralized school district that she inherited: "I needed to help people realize that there were better days ahead and we are all in this together." She created conditions so that people experienced ownership and felt a part of the organization. By the end of her tenure as a superintendent, the staff had recaptured their esteem and developed ways to sustain the new strengthened culture. They had internalized the necessary change.

Another appreciative leader, Bob Stiller, CEO of Green Mountain Coffee, said, "The organization's intention—the culture—is what happens when no one is around. The culture must fully leverage people." To fulfill this intention, Stiller ensures "a clear, shared goal, sense of purpose, sense of trust in the whole, and a full engagement of people with the support they need to act."

Appreciative leaders manifested humility in the acknowledgment of their "not knowing." Said Thomas Inui, president of the Fetzer Institute, "In the crucible of the toughest stuff they do, there is nothing to trust except community and collaboration within it."

Theme 3. Multiple Truths Exist in Ways of Thinking, Doing, and Being

Traditionally, leaders have often been expected to be heroic and find the "one right way" to proceed. However, these appreciative leaders saw that there were many ways to deal with situations; often, there were multiple paths and many truths. Yet there was one consistency: these leaders played the role of architect, designing the structure in which a process could enable the development of an empowered community of people. From this

World View, they held the space that allowed the emergence of people's creative abilities. As David Cooperrider notes in his Foreword to this volume, "...humility is a stronger quality of leadership than bravado, infectious curiosity more important than supervision...."

Warren Bennis, who speaks from a lifetime as a leader and writer said, "It takes great maturity and esteem to say, 'I can't do that.'" This is illustrated by Tom Inui of the Fetzer Institute, who recalled that he learned how to deal with anxiety by admitting ignorance. He showed others that it was all right to lack knowledge. This led to learning with other people rather than lecturing and, more important, it modeled for others that it was acceptable to "not know."

Similarly, Police Chief Peter Carnes of Yarmouth, Massachusetts, obtained citizen input about building the police headquarters on town-owned land. Because of a conversation between a concerned citizen and the approachable police chief, the town saved substantial money. Carnes's reputation as a community builder demonstrates the power of one person to dramatically change the community ethos. Because he hears and values citizens, he has been integral in developing a strong community.

In another example of discovering alternatives, frequently mandated overtime at Hunter Douglas was a problem. Working with the business units, groups of people came up with customized solutions, including streamlining work, flexible schedules, and work-at-home options. Rick Pellett and Mike Burns, two appreciative leaders, said, "We encourage them to think and act differently—to question the status quo."

Theme 4. Appreciative Leaders Have an Unwavering Commitment to Bringing out the Best in Themselves and Others

These leaders led through appreciation, encouragement, validation, and support of people's best talents, and provided the structure for appreciative dialogue. Their behaviors reflect the attributes and competencies that were clustered under Practices in the Model— challenge, encourage, enable, coach, inquire, and dialogue.

Sarah Eagger, a physician from England, sets aside informal space and time for creating the conditions for building relationships. "Appreciative relationships in this team are also about being with each other—taking some time to know each other as people, knowing what is going on in each others' lives, and having some social time to get together." On the other hand, Lee Olivier of the Millstone Nuclear Power Plant held more formal "In Touch" sessions with employees, where he listened and responded to spontaneous questions, concerns, and suggestions.

Mike Green, the CEO of Concord Hospital, is credited with welcoming input from others. As he said, "I try to be just Mike. If you see my door is open, come in. At hospital town meetings, everyone is encouraged to come, provide feedback, and ask questions."

Kathi Mullin, a program director in the Boston Public Schools, is described by a colleague as having created "an ethos of caring and commitment." Kathi herself reported, "I am a person of strong conviction. I truly believe that if you can build environments where young people are really engaged, motivated to learn, and have caring adults in their lives, you can make a difference. That's what I'm about."

Other themes that emerged here were "allowing people to make mistakes" and challenging them beyond their own perceived capabilities.

At Hunter Douglas, Mike Burns spoke about supporting people to do what they love and do best: "Give people chances to experiment and make sure they succeed." Rick Pellett advises, "Don't try to fix yourself or other people. Just figure out a way to work around people's weaknesses and play to their strengths."

Retired educator Dolph Norton is repeatedly saluted by many of his protégés who speak about the investment of time he makes in people. They credit much of their professional success to his counsel. One young woman for whom Dolph was a mentor told the story of how he patiently listened to her describe one of her key challenges, and, to her amazement, he helped her "conceptualize the confusing issues in seconds."

Theme 5. Appreciative Leaders Find Generative Forces in Their Many Circumstances and Multiple Systems

The appreciative leaders used generative language and engaged in conversations that often led to new and creative approaches to problem solving or inspiring new ventures. They spoke of the criticality of questioning and listening. They were able to think "out of the box, in very diverse contexts." Operating in fluid work environments, these leaders listened to others—not only to their direct reports, but also to people in the whole organization and beyond—and developed methods and mindsets that seemed to accelerate learning and the diffusion of positive understanding and action. Several of the leaders were noted for their holistic conceptual frame that enabled them to see the interconnections among the individuals, the team, the organization, and the organization's place in the world. Leaders stood up for non-traditional positions, which catalyzed their culture to shift dramatically. These behaviors and operating philosophies resonate with the competencies and attributes of World View and Practices.

Margaret Crawford of Harley-Davidson is enriched through listening, particularly listening to those who hold points of view different from her own. She suggests: "Seek out people with different perspectives. It's the people with different perspectives that you learn the most from. Ask yourself, what can I learn from this person? Learn through their experience."

And when Mike Burns from Hunter Douglas was asked what he wishes he would have known earlier on, he responded, "Listen, listen, listen! At first I always had the answers and told people what they had to do. It took me years to understand that listening to people is your key to success—and your key to *their* success."

Dave Cooperrider has often said that inquiry is the most important word in the field of Appreciative Inquiry. All of the Leaders who were interviewed in the Appreciative Leaders Project said something about learning, listening, reading, teaching, or participating in training programs and their own personal growth. This is a curious collection of people who thrive on the renewal and refreshment of continual learning and personal growth through

many means, including feedback, meditation, reading, reflection, coaching, courses and prayer.

"In all of his interactions, Lee [Olivier] fostered a climate of inquiry...[Lee] doesn't wait for mentoring and encouragement to show up. His spirit of inquiry...is obvious as he searches far and wide for answers, learning from experts he will never meet in person."

School Superintendent Annette Griffin believes, "Telling doesn't work. I invite people to question—to dialogue—to discover ways we've never tried before, so that all children have a chance for success. We use inquiry in almost every interaction in management meetings."

In Conclusion

The appreciative leaders are strongly values-driven. This is not the application of technique or "fake it until you make it." This is an authentic congruence of belief and action. The interviewers, seasoned practitioners, perceived these leaders as credible people who walked their talk and were inclusive in their actions beyond the rhetoric. There was agreement among the writers that you can't simulate it; either you are "the genuine article" or you're not. The leaders were seen as, and served as, role models in their organizations. They were regarded as particularly open people who naturally created a safe community. These leaders recognize the power of the positive, seek answers from what has worked, live their spirituality, and develop the best in people. Their stories indicate the effectiveness of and provide a direction for an appreciative approach to leadership in today's organizations. The model developed from our survey is a beginning, indicating a path for the future. We hope it will provide a template for future appreciative leaders.