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Our Earthshot Moment

Net Positive OD for the Creation of a World of Full Spectrum Flourishing

By David Cooperrider
and Lindsey Godwin

Abstract

Abstract to come

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We are in a critical decade, maybe the most important one for humankind... climate change has accelerated and converged with multiple global crises: a once-in-a-century pandemic, widespread economic turmoil, a reckoning on race, democratic backsliding, mass migration, the crisis of social media, and rising inequality alongside diminishing trust in public institutions... the clock is ticking, future generations are counting on us, and “history has its eyes on us.”

How will you choose to lead? How will history remember you?

—Jesper Brodin, CEO IKEA & Halla Tomasdottir, CEO B Team¹

Here is a truth that could change the life of every person in the field of Organization Development:

¹ *Jesper Brodin, CEO IKEA & Halla Tomasdottir, CEO B Team in their Foreword to Cooperrider and Selian (2022) The Business of Building a Better World*

You are alive at just the right moment to help human systems at every level change everything. Ours is a once-in-a-civilization moment calling out for inspired transformation, especially in what Peter Drucker (1992) so aptly called “our society of organizations” where the scale, speed, and collaborative capacity of the human side of transformation is increasingly recognized as the difference that can make *all* the difference.

At this watershed moment in our collective human story, might it be that in relation to the great global-change agenda that Organization Development (OD) is the most important professional field in the world? It is becoming increasingly clear that we are entering a critical next decade to radically address the global challenges before us, what many have referred to as our “earthshot” moment. This term echoes the inspirational “moonshot” rally cry of the putting a person on the moon when it seemed all but impossible to do so at the time. As we enter into this earthshot decade, however, the work ahead of

us as a global community does not entail building rockets to enter new atmospheres, but rather in regenerating our own atmosphere at all levels: from the interpersonal, to the organizational, to the communal, to the national, and to all of nature and our life-giving biosphere. With its democratizing values around inclusive and cooperative change, its living systems and applied inter-human science knowledge-base, and its overarching ideal for a future of full spectrum flourishing, what field is better situated than OD to lead this earthshot work?

Some will argue it's taken us decades to get here. Perhaps. But what's vital is that we are here now. The late Rudi Dornbusch, one of the world's macroeconomists, spoke to this. It's called Dornbusch's Law:²

“Things take longer to happen than you think they will, and then they happen faster than you thought they could.”

In this article, we share first-hand our journey into net positive and full spectrum OD and how the world's earthshot mission we face today as a human family has vitally elevated how we view the primary task and future agenda of OD. If you are looking for yet one more stale conversation on the withering away, even the end of OD, you will be disappointed. We also are not writing behind a veneer of objectivity, rather we unapologetically share our feelings openly and validly (grounded in our lived experience), and emphatically declare that it's an *incredible time to be alive* in this field. There is a sense of tremendous privilege in this moment. More and more, we also feel a growing gratitude for the courage and fervent spirit of OD's early creators, where names such as Kurt Lewin, Mary Parker Follett, Herb Shepherd, Elise Boulding, Edie Seashore, Abe Maslow, Bob Chin, John Carter, Suresh and Indu Srivastva, Warren Bennis, and many others stand tall. In tracing the arc of our field from these inspirational seeds to the work unfolding before us now, we and others have the distinct feeling that today OD is bursting with

creativity, relevance, and fresh normative direction the likes of which we have not seen since its earliest days (Cooperrider and Godwin, 2022; 2011; Bartunek, 2022; Meyer, 2021.) Perhaps you can remember when you said “Yes!” for the first time to enter the domain of OD including the promise and excitement that moment held. For us, when we glance back, we feel it even more now, that indeed, we were born under a lucky star to have landed in this field.

We hope this article will help demonstrate why.

Follow Us on Our Learning Journey

We have organized this article to parallel the lived learning journey we have experienced as OD practitioners over our career, bringing us to this exciting inflection point moment in the field. First, we tell the story of the most shocking OD request we had ever received. I (David) will explain why I had to turn down the massive change request for it was, with clear honesty, far beyond my OD competence and training. Yet it was the spark that lit a torch and then a fire, for learning. For us, this story and request has become a metaphor for a call to all of OD. We hope the metaphor is meaningful for OD education and everyone on their journey into an OD that's a prime-time resource to leaders and organizations everywhere.

Then, we share the framework we now use for working with what we call “green micro-OD”. This refers to OD work where the focus is on helping enterprises powerfully innovate and transform their inner organizational dynamics and designs to achieve new levels of competitive excellence via the lens of sustainable enterprise and inclusive shared value strategy (Yeganeh & Glavas, 2008). We then disclose our most exciting OD leap for moving from green micro-OD to blue macro-OD. Here we offer up our largely externally focused definition of “positive institutions” and invite a thought experiment: What if organizations and institutions are not viewed as our clients, but are instead themselves viewed as the change agents? Moreover, if macro-OD is about institutions

becoming and being the change agents “out there” then what might, for example, be their top five interventions?

Finally, we conclude the article with the most important discovery in our careers: that macro-OD might be the most powerful way to raise the vibrancy and ultimate value of micro-OD. We propose that an integral unification of macro-and-micro in an “upward and outward” way is OD's new frontier. This infinite macro-micro-macro-micro positive loop opens vast vistas for OD innovation. We believe this will constitute OD's most generative pathway for helping organizations and the world succeed in the largest intentional change project in history.

A Request that Changed OD for Us Forever—and Now Dornbusch's Law?

At the outset it must be said that the letter's query was surprising, formidable, disconcerting—and totally compelling. Although it was almost exactly three decades ago, I (David) remember the request vividly. The request was written by members of the UN's organizing committee for the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, what would in 1992 become the largest meeting on environment and social development in history. In essence (see Cooperrider and Dutton, 1998) the call said:

“We are about to step into an unprecedented experiment in global cooperation. And frankly, there is cause for concern. The issues to be discussed and acted upon are tremendously complex, scientifically uncertain, interrelated, dynamic, and monumental. Consider just a sampling of the issues requiring deliberation:

- » World population, in the lifetime of those born after World War II, will soar from two billion to ten billion—though it took 10,000 lifetimes for the population to first reach two billion.
- » The world's forests are being destroyed at a rate of on football field-sized area every second and every day a species becomes extinct; and since mid-century it is

2. <https://fortune.com/2021/07/14/al-gore-progress-climate-change-esg/>



Figure 1: Our Sampling of Must-reads for Every Earthshot OD Practitioner

estimated that the world has lost nearly one-fifth of the topsoil from its cropland.

- » A continent-sized hole is opening up in the earth’s protective ozone shield as the world’s emissions of chlorofluorocarbons doubles every decade, having already increased 40 times over since World War II.
- » Fossil fuel use has in the same time period increased ten times over, flooding the atmosphere with unprecedented levels of carbon dioxide.
- » The economy which grew five times in size is pushing human demands on the ecosystem beyond what the planet (our soils, water supplies, fisheries, etc.) has the ability to re-generate; and with around a billion new mouths being born each decade the pressures on the entire ecosystem will multiply.
- » Every day, 37,000 children under age five die of starvation or preventable diseases; nearly a billion are suffering in desperate poverty (and the conflicts and wars associated with it) while a precarious global debt burden grows by \$7.5 billion every month.
- » And questions: Can the world survive one-fourth rich and three-fourths poor, half democratic and half authoritarian, with oasis of human development surrounded by deserts of human deprivation?”

Then the UN’s committee request went further (see Cooperrider and Dutton, 1998), in summary saying:

“We are, in so many ways, infants when it comes to our cooperative capacity for building a global society congenial to the life of the planet and responsive to the human spirit. So, as you know over 30,000 people with diverse disciplinary backgrounds from all over the world—from the earth sciences, from economics and business, from governmental and non-governmental organizations, from religious and cultural institutions, and from the grassroots to the ivory tower not to mention the myriad of cultures from 100’s of nations—will be assembling in Rio de Janeiro for what we call a summit, and what your field would call strategic planning. So, we have a puzzle for you.

Your answer is important. Indeed, what happens at this meeting in response to ecological and economic global change, will reverberate well into the future and across generations. Critics argue, and many of us actually agree, the world could be worse off as a result of this ambitious meeting (it could result in greater loss of hope, increases in cynicism in international institutions, identification of irreconcilable conflicts, waste of resources, much talk with no action, empty platitudes and promises, and others). So, we are asking for answers—from organization development and change management theory.

To help us organize and ensure a successful meeting, what knowledge can your field offer? Can you point us to the specific pieces of research, the theories, the principles, and practices that could truly make the difference?”

I was floored. It was like a lightning strike. Thirty-thousand people. Hundreds of nations and cultures. Science denial and paradigm wars. Cynicism in international gatherings. Temporary relationships. Exclusion of many voices, particularly the world’s poor. And a domain with whole new languages emerging such as “a Keeling Curve”... “scope one, scope two, and scope three emissions”...Milankovitch cycles”... “industrial negative aerosol forcing”... “Decarbonization and decoupling”... “planetary boundaries”... “INGO’s”... “carbon sinks”... “sustainable value” and more. My mind was reeling with the request—“what can your field share that could truly make the difference?”

How did I respond? It was time to write back with honest reflection: “Nothing in my OD education has prepared me to answer your question with solid evidence and real experience in this domain of sustainable systems design and deep appreciation of the complex interactions of environmental systems, including the atmosphere, biosphere, geosphere, and hydrosphere, as well as their interactions with human systems, including economic, political, and institutional arrangements that make choices, take action, and so forth.”

To this day, we interpret the request as metaphor and clarion call to all of OD.

We went on a learning extravaganza (see a sampling from our “Earthshot OD Library” in Figure 1). We also launched a worldwide Appreciative Inquiry story-corps platform, searching for the greatest business and society innovations in sustainability and regenerative economy on the planet, a platform which is today used by over 200 management schools and OD centers of excellence. The platform—www.Aim2Flourish.com—is now home to one of the largest databases of its kind in the world (read about its history in Sommer, Stavros, and Godwin, 2019). It hosts

over 6,000 interviews of successful change and “corporate shared value” (see Porter and Kramer, 2011) and two-thousand published stories of what and how of sustainable innovation and change-leadership in the areas of shared value strategy; regenerative organizations; business as a force for peace; OD and world changing megacommunities; net zero business designs and climate action; economic inclusion and eradication of extreme poverty; social innovations in tri-sectoral partnerships; and what we now subsume under the title “business as an agent of world benefit.”

That Rare Second Chance

Lightning, as we all know, rarely hits in the same place twice. Yet, we received a second surprising call and request—it was, so to speak, a “second chance.” This time we (both co-authors) did not decline. The call was directly from the Secretary-General of the United Nations and his team. This time we responded affirmatively. We were privileged to bring OD into the strategic heart what then-Secretary-General and Nobel Laureate Kofi Annan called “the largest world summit in history ever held at the United Nations between business, civil society organizations, and nation state leaders.”³ The task: to collaboratively raise the ambition to achieve the world’s millennium development goals. We were asked, using the Appreciative Inquiry approach, to help the wide-spectrum of stakeholders to discover, dream and design the world-wide growth strategy and trajectory for the nascent UN Global Compact. The year was 2004.

At that time, there were less than 1,000 corporations participating. We not only helped to design and co-facilitate that world summit, but we then went on to partner with the UN Global Compact to co-create the Global Forum for Business as an Agent of World Benefit, where again we leveraged what we are now calling the Appreciative Inquiry Net Positive Summit to design yet another megacommunity of

3. See more details at: <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/educational-material/united-nations-global-compact-leaders-summit/>

over 800 management schools. The megacommunity, a community not of individuals but institutions, is known as “PRME” or Principles for Responsible Management Education (Cooperrider, 2022.) Today the UN Global Compact, in addition to being home to PRME, has grown to become the world’s largest corporate sustainability network, with 15,268 companies, 163 countries, and 87,530 public research projects and “how to” playbooks for turning every social and global issue into bona-fide business opportunities to innovate, excel and “within each organization’s sphere of influence” to become a platform for building a better world.

“I commend you for your methodology of Appreciative Inquiry and thank you for introducing it to the United Nations. Without this it would have been very difficult, even impossible, to constructively engage so many leaders of business, civil society, and government.”

—UN SECRETARY-GENERAL
KOFI ANNAN, FROM HIS LETTER
GRATITUDE FOR THE OD PROCESS⁴

In some ways, since that first surprising letter that was searching for OD knowledge for the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, it feels like we as a field have been sleep-walking. However, in another way, it’s been a profound prep and powerful prelude to something even bigger. We are sensing that very real kernel of truth in Dornbusch’s law.

4. See: <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/testimonials/united-nations-secretary-general-kofi-annan/>

Something Remarkable is Underway

Yes, things did take longer to happen than we thought they would, and now they are happening faster than we ever thought they could. Consider the following:

- » ***In the domain of business and industry*** its being called “the business of building a better world” where virtually all of the world’s largest corporations and leading entrepreneurs now are increasingly embracing a multi-stakeholder view of value creation and serious “ESG” (environmental, social, and governance) goals and ambitions baked into their long-term strategy, operations, and organization (Cooperrider and Selian, 2022). One example of this is that today, through the recently organized Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ), over \$130 trillion of private capital is committed to transforming the economy for a net zero economic system by 2050. Published studies and careful forecasts show that these commitments, from over 450 firms across 45 countries, can deliver the estimated \$100 trillion of finance needed for the net zero earthshot goal over the next three decades. Trajectories like this are not just empty words on a piece of paper either. In OD, we call this a critical mass, and a 2022 Harvard Business Review article declares: “this is not fringe anymore”... “it’s now ubiquitous”... “The word ‘someday’, seems to have finally become ‘today’—and there is no going back” (Winston, 2022).
- » ***At the level of the grassroots***, Paul Hawken (2007) saw it coming—a “blessed unrest” he called it—with millions of organizations and concerned people, like our youth, spontaneously bringing about what may one day be recognized as the single most profound transformation of human society. Take for example the recent intergenerational climate cry of our world’s young people—our next generation’s voice, including 2019’s *Time Magazine’s Person of the Year* Greta Thunberg, and over 7-million youth strikers from six continents. For them, the age of “climate gradualism” and “science denial”

is over. These millennials and Gen Z voices are urging every one of us to listen to the finest science-based evidence, pointing to examples such as the recent climate emergency article in *Bio-science*, signed by 14,000 of scientists stating: “We’re asking for a transformative change for humanity” (Ripple, et al., 2021).

» **Innovation’s new frontier** is uniting exponential technologies with dramatic breakthroughs in collaborative capacities and in many cases are propelling companies to outperform, not incrementally but significantly. Companies such as Toyota (see Cooperrider and Selian, 2022) are building net-positive cities that give back more clean energy to the world than they use while leveraging artificial intelligence and biotechnologies to reinvent and individualize medicine, turn waste into wealth, propel zero-emissions mobility, and even purify the air that people breathe. Corporations such as Unilever, Danone, Westpac, Grameen Bank, Nedbank, and Greystone Bakeries have turned theory into reality with base-of- the pyramid innovation and social business strategies demonstrating how the enterprising spirit can eradicate human poverty and inequality through inclusive prosperity, profit, and dignified work. Companies such as Terra Cycle, Nothing New, Nike, and Interface are designing the future of circular economy modalities that leave behind zero waste—only “foods or nutrients” that create truer wealth through symbiotic economies of cycle while leveraging digital technologies that serve to dematerialize and decouple growth from harm. Likewise, revolutionary enterprises such as Solar Foods signal the potential of Schumpeter’s great “gale of creative destruction”. Their remarkable and, as yet, largely unknown, story of industry reinvention, has been sighted as one of the “biggest economic transformations of any kind” heralding the possibility of making food 20,000 times more land-efficient than it is today while propelling a future where everyone on earth can be

handsomely fed, using only a tiny fraction of its surface (Monbiot 2020).

» **At the nation-state and global level**, the economist, and Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunis traces the massive numbers of dialogues and big steppingstones to what he called “a milestone in human history” and “the most important set of decisions ever made on the basis of global consensus with quantifiable goals.” Today the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change have been embraced by 197 countries. In her own mission economy research series on the innovation dynamism of “mission moments” the economist Marianna Mazzucato (2021) sees something equivalent of a moonshot economy emerging. She was one of the first to call it an earthshot economy moment, and the implications for OD are vast. Reaching the science-based targets of net zero climate emissions by 2050, and doing so in ways that inclusively, equitably, and collaboratively creates a better world for all—e.g., gender equality; zero hunger; quality education; good health and well-being; dignified work and good growth; stronger economies; indeed all 17 SDG’s taken has a whole fabric—will require a “fundamental transformation of the global economy” according to a recent report by McKinsey⁵ and leading world scientists.

Moreover, Mazzucato’s research reminds us. We know from the past that public, private, and non-profit can come together to do extraordinary things—to innovate, invest and grow unimagined new industries, to collaborate night and day for a common cause. Earthshot OD is about the next decisive decades. It is time-bound and realizes that it’s today’s collaborative change

5. See McKinsey’s 2022 *Global Institute Report in collaboration with McKinsey Sustainability*. It provides an order-of-magnitude estimate of this earth-wide change. <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/sustainability/our-insights/the-net-zero-transition-what-it-would-cost-what-it-could-bring#>. Also see the IPCC science report <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/08/1097362>

barriers and broken social bonds, more that technology barriers or even economic ones, that present us with a beautiful, and crying, call. We will rise together if we have the courage and conviction to lift our gaze higher aiming for something far more ambitious than sending a person to the moon.

OD’s earthshot moment means ending the climate crises in a generation and creating a regenerative economy in the service of life—a future of full-spectrum flourishing. And because of the unthinkable high stakes of failure, this emerging world macro-project will call all of us in the field to dare in scholarship, to stand up, step up, and scale up in practice, and to reach far beyond our competence.

How Our OD Work Has Come Vibrantly Alive

Nearly every OD request we receive today involves the explicit application of OD to empower organization-wide transformations harnessing the lens of sustainability and to accelerate net-positive, flourishing enterprises that create new sources of shared value and world betterment. We call this work ‘net positive’ OD. Net positive occurs when an organization has more positive than negative impacts. In business terms net positive enterprise has recently been defined as “an organization that improves well-being for everyone it impacts and at all scales—every product, every operation, every region, and country, and for every stakeholder, including employees, suppliers, communities, customers, and even future generations and the planet itself (Polman and Winston, 2021.) What’s the core question for every organization? It’s this: is the world better off because your organization is in it? Net positive is a new horizon, a new standard, and includes stakeholder and shareholder value that includes the planet, fellow citizens, and future generations. Doing OD through a net-positive lens involves the opportunity to invest in radical innovations, it puts organizations into a leadership space, it requires a systemic view, and it is a north star not a short-term plan.

We have seen this net positive OD work steadily grow over the last several decades. From working with organizations such as Keurig Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, Apple, Fairmount Minerals, National Grid, Walmart, Clarke Industries, entire cities such as Cleveland and Tampa, whole industries such as the US Dairy Industry, and so many corporations that are participants and signatories to the UN Global Compact, such as Microsoft, Daiwa Asset Management Ltd, Siemens, Tata Industries, Novo Nordisk, China Mobile, the Gap, Starbucks, Novartis, IBM, Unile-

some 20,000 people digitally, from 100 countries.⁶

The most distinctive advance in this new AI summit method is how the design phase goes far beyond dialogue. It incorporates powerful tools used in leading edge *design studios* such as empathy and user-experience designs, model building, framing, and reframing, elevating the inspiration phase, and embracing constraints and creative opportunities. Then, instead of creating action plans (words on a piece of paper) we come out of the design studio phase with artifacts, with rapid

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ver, Natura, the Dalai Lama and the United Religions Initiative, and others, we are inspired by the direction we see OD work taking in these transformational cases.

In almost every one of these engagements, we leverage the strengths-based mindsets and multistakeholder systems methodologies of Appreciative Inquiry, especially our most recent advancements we are calling the AI Net-Positive Summit (NPS.) Like all AI Summits it involves the rigorous co-inquiry and the leveraging of AI's action-research "4-D cycle" of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (Cooperrider, 2021). It commonly involves anywhere between 300 to 2000 stakeholders, although in one initiative, combining AI and IDEO's open-innovation design and prototyping tools, we involved

prototypes, where we move from words and imagination to tangible artifacts that can be rapidly deployed, iterated in beta mode, and scaled.

For example, a sand mining company launched its sustainable value and "do all the good you can possibly do" design summits. The sand loader operators came out of the summit with a concept prototype of a low-cost sand water filter to be used to create clean drinking water for families where clean water could save lives, support child and family health, and create economic opportunity. The sand loader operators literally built it—a working mockup—in the design summit. They found a plastic cylinder. They went out into the quarries and sand production sites. They layered

6. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/business-as-an-agent-of-w_b_2091045

the various filtering components. When they presented it to the multi-stakeholder crowd, including community residents, they showed how it could fit into a FedEx box, how it had no moving parts, and could be made at low cost and be scaled up. Today, via a partnership with Aqua Clara, the device is contributing to healthier and better lives in 44 countries.⁷ This prototype was just one of the 12 exciting initiatives to come out of the summit. Moreover, two years later, Fairmount Minerals was named the number one corporate citizen in America by the US Chamber of Commerce. The company reached zero waste in landfills across the nation and internationally (Cooperrider, 2013.)

The CEO of this company, Chuck Fowler, and his family foundation observed how the business of building a better world brought his company to new life and collective pride; it elevated employee engagement scores significantly; and set off new waves of innovation and pride, all well documented empirically (Glavas and Piderit, 2009). Fowler's mantra became "Do Good, Do Well" and soon Fowler Family Foundation stepped forward to endow and name the *Fowler Center for Business as an Agent of World Benefit* at Case Western Reserve University with several transformative, multi-million-dollar gifts.⁸ Aligned with the Masters in OD and the MBA programs, the center has grown to become something of a creative design studio for graduate students, with its action-learning out in the field, bringing net-positive OD all over the world.

A Model with Design Elements for Net Positive OD

From our many Net Positive Summits, we have created a playbook, a generic composite which combines and elevates the best across these summits and draws empirically from the [www.aim2flourish](http://www.aim2flourish.com) data bank

7. <https://ungc-production.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/attachments/338/original/COP.pdf?1262614183>

8. <https://weatherhead.case.edu/centers/fowler/about/history>

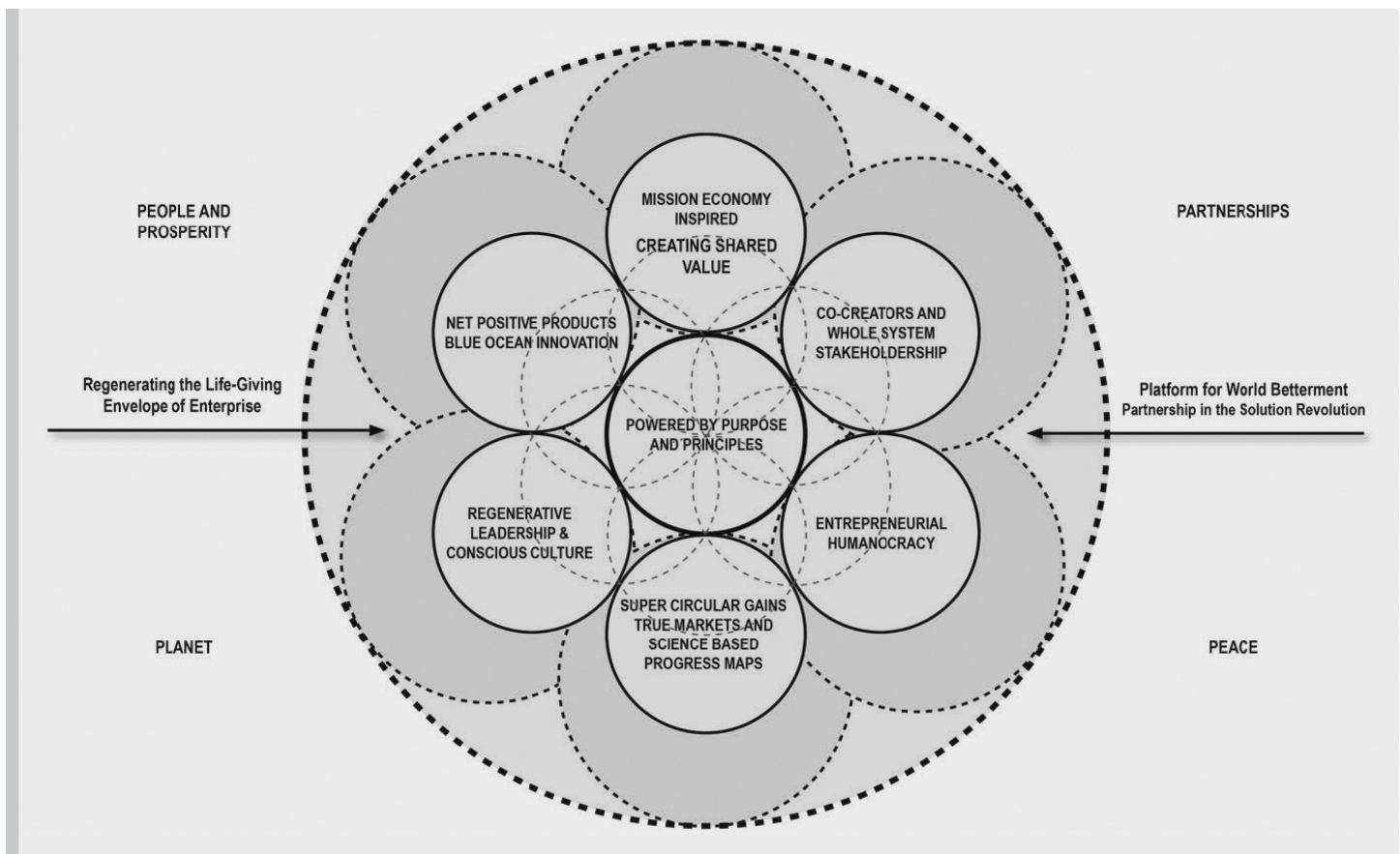


Figure 2. Twelve Opportunity Areas for Net Positive OD Inquiry, Intervention, and Innovation

of over 6,000 interviews. The playbook has been informed by hundreds of AI Summits that we or our many colleagues have run. For example, with Apple, the company learned how to leverage their world-class design-studio capacities—remember Steve Jobs obsession for “insanely great products”—and then transfer that same kind obsession into the operations arena of *supplier-responsibility*, focusing on human and ecological initiatives across vast supply chains, touching many millions of lives. With Interface, our colleagues have taught us how the AI Summit can help create a totally unified company in what CEO Ray Anderson called “Climbing Mount Sustainability.” Their work demonstrated how each of whole system-in-the-room convenings, when applied over the years, invited radical progressions, with each summit producing unstoppable waves, as witnessed in Interface’s “Next Ascent” net positive summit (Anderson and White 2011). With Whole Foods, we learned how the Appreciative Inquiry mindset can become part of everyday meetings, not just large group events, but embedded as an integral part of the strengths-based DNA of the working

culture. Roberta Lang, VP, and former Whole Foods chief legal counsel, shared how almost every meeting soon applied the method of Appreciative Inquiry for after-action reviews: “What was best?” “What’s the new possible?” “How might we make it so?” At Walmart we learned, perhaps not surprisingly, how the NPS can scale for larger systems innovation, for example, how Walmart strategically leveraged the AI Summit methods to convene the entire value chains of whole industries around sustainability—the dairy industry, magazine industry, seafood, electronics, apparel, and more—and now how these are now leading to even more ambitious projects, such as *Project Gigaton* with 2,300 suppliers in collaborative partnership. Project Gigaton is a remarkable illustration: its aim is to avoid one billion metric tons (a gigaton) of greenhouse gases from the global value chain by 2030 through pathways such as their 100% renewable energy investments, zero waste initiatives, net positive product designs, sustainable packaging breakthroughs, and more.

In Figure 2, we share our model of the most typical design-inspired *opportunity*

areas for incorporating a global people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership perspective into a NPS. You can imagine design teams using the lens of going net-positive for the world and searching for new sources of business and society value. The core design question at this design thinking stage is not whether to, but “HOW MIGHT WE...?” We have seen transformational questions such as these guide entire organizational systems’ work:

- » How might we turn social and global issues into new and industry leading **Shared Value Strategy**?
- » How might we imagine winning the hearts and minds of our customers through the design of new **Net Positive Products**?
- » How might we turn our organization into an **Entrepreneurial Humanocracy** with innovation and inclusive leadership from everywhere?
- » How might we enable a **Culture of Regenerative Leadership** as a way of life around here whereby *doing all the good in the world we can possibly and more profitably do* is an enterprise-wide mindset and is embedded, not bolted on,

Conceptual Note on the Importance of Flourishing

There are many conceptual and interdisciplinary reasons for opting to put “flourishing” at the center of our field’s focus, as the center from which all of its scientific pursuits and ultimate applied purposes radiate. Firstly, we see it as a homecoming to some of OD’s earliest ideals for community and self-*actualization*, that is, on the full flowering or flourishing of our highest human potentials. Secondly, in positive nature terms, the biology of enlivenment has opted for the biocentric or life-centric focus on flourishing and thriving eco-systems, not just on surviving, or sustaining (Weber, 2016.) Our third reason is one of rigorous measurement and advancing OD research. Over the past two decades the science of positive psychology has become prolific—our whole human science library has been transformed—and the burgeoning field of study has made human flourishing its dependent variable. Flourishing can be robustly and rigorously measured in persons lives’ and in organizations (see Butler and Kern 2016.) And in his classic volume *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*, Marty Seligman (2011) provides a grand synthesis of the concept with the acronym PERMA. PERMA as many in the human sciences now know, is the acronym summing up over 1000 studies on the concept of human flourishing—what it is, how to measure it, and how to advance it. It involves the study of high states of well-being, happiness, and lives of purpose, meaning, value, and vital relationships. Specifically, in empirical research terms, it involves the study of what good are *Positive emotions* such as hope, inspiration, and joy—and their contribution to lives of flourishing. It involves the study of *Engagement* of our signature or unique *character strengths* and how playing to our strengths brings us alive. It involves the role of high-quality connections and growth promoting *Relationships*, the kind that are *life-giving*, not toxic. It involves the study of the role of *Meaning* and living lives of purpose. It also involves the ability to *Achieve* or accomplish what matters to us most. Later in this article we will simply call it *PERMA flourishing* to encourage use of the concepts, the language of life, and the gold standard measurement tools as we have found the PERMA formulation so useful in own research with organizations (see McQuaid and Cooperrider 2018).

and in a manner that’s strategic to the core business?

These and other examples of design opportunities are pictured in *Figure 1* are available in our generic net positive OD playbook (Cooperrider and Godwin, 2022).⁹

The future, whether we are ready for it or not, is imminent. Our quest in net positive OD is ultimately to explore the profound new enterprise logic propelling the “business of building a better world”—ways that organizations and tri-sector collaborations are increasingly becoming an *agent of change* and a partnership power for building a better world—together with all of this serving as a catalyst for the betterment of the enterprise. Moreover, this includes all the pathways that can lead inside the enterprise to bold new waves of innovation, business outperformance, and flourishing inside and outside. Flourishing enterprise on the inside is, in our experience, something every leader wants. Flourishing enterprise is about people being inspired every day and bringing their whole and best selves into their work; it’s about innovation arising from everywhere; and most importantly, it is about realizing shared value with all stakeholders. These include customers, communities, shareholders, and societies, all coexisting ultimately within a thriving biosphere.

The Most Exciting Observation of our Career and a Major Research Opportunity

Today it’s time for OD to aim higher, to define its superordinate “why,” its reason for existence. We contend that our ultimate North Star as a field is not just *eliminating* unsustainability but *enabling* the actualization of a world we’ve termed full **spectrum flourishing**. This is a world where “organizations and economies can excel, *all* people can thrive, and nature can flourish, now and across the generations” (See

9. For those who would like their own copy of the Playbook—a high level composite and workbook of all the best Appreciative Inquiry Net Positive Summits we’ve conducted—please go here for the downloadable pdf: <https://www.champlain.edu/ai-home/what-is-appreciative-inquiry/resources>

The Betterment of Business + The Business of Betterment

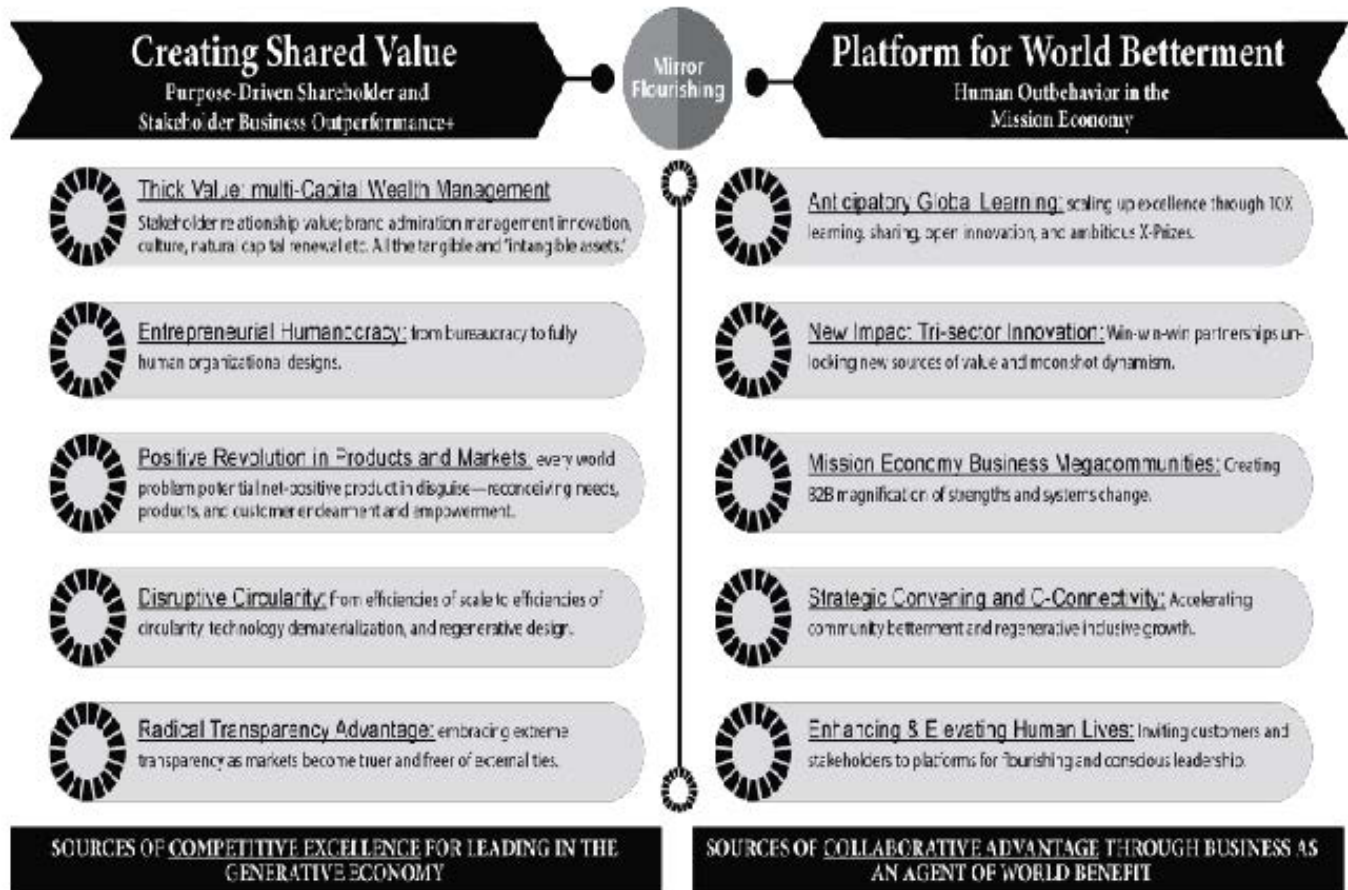


Figure 3: Mirror Flourishing and the Two-Pillar model for Net Positive Organization Development adapted from Cooperrider and Selian (2022) *The Business of Building a Better World*.

our “Sidebar Conceptual Note” for further context on this important point). The work before us as leaders and facilitators of change is to explore how we can serve the change challenges of our institutions, not just with their “internal” change management agendas, but also with their “external” opportunities to lead in response to the call of our times. Consider Alex Steffen’s words from his book, *Worldchanging* (2006) as he situates our global transition agenda of historic significance and high stakes:

“So here we are. We need, in the next twenty... years or so, to do something never before done. We need to consciously re-design the entire material basis of our civilization. The model we replace it with must be drastically more ecologically

sustainable, offer large increases in prosperity to everyone on the planet, and not only function in areas of chaos and corruption, but also help transform them. That alone is a task of historic magnitude, but there is an additional complication: we only get one shot...fail to act boldly enough and we may fail completely.” (p. 21).

In Figure 3, we share one more conceptual model—starting with the left-hand side of the model—where OD is doing its net-positive work largely within an enterprise-wide lens of development where the change target is the organization. This builds directly on the conceptualization we’ve spoken about and described earlier in Figure 1 and is about organization development in the

service of shared value, creating cultures of innovation for new net positive products, efficiencies of circularity (all waste is wealth), more entrepreneurial fully human organizations, embracing radical transparency in a world where hidden and often toxic externalities will increasingly expose organizations to great risk, while also and more positively expanding a view of value-creation that creates multi-capital for all relevant and affected stakeholders including shareholders, communities, and nature as a stakeholder. We call this (green) micro-OD because its goal is to help actualize the full potentials of the organization in market-driven terms—that is, shared value strategies, operations, products, services, and culture—leading to organizational effectiveness and competitive excellence.

Corporate Shared Value (CSV) as it is known in both the sustainability and strategy literature (Porter and Kramer 2011) is demonstrating that many of the greatest opportunity spaces for new sources of value creation are today found in providing market-driven solutions to the world's problems. Moreover, a mounting body of research backs this up and data suggests there is no reversing the fundamental recognition that providing market-driven solutions to the world's greatest social, ecological, and human challenges is a winning strategy (see Kramer; 2022; Hoek; 2021).

But now we want to bring more attention to the right side of Figure 2 where there is a largely underrecognized, under analyzed, and underdeveloped new continent of change leadership opportunity. This side represents a wide new axis of OD potential to be elaborated, appreciated, and extended. Here the focus is not so much on *outperformance* but *outbehavior*. Here, the focus is on platform models of organization. Platforms are not programs for change; they are bigger than that.

Platform business models—for example Wikipedia or better yet Patagonia's new activation platform that connects thousands of customers to one another and to hundreds of world-changing causes they can join—serve to harness and create large, scalable, networks of users, human strength combinations, and resources that become their own self-organizing ecosystems of co-creation.¹⁰ These platforms produce scaled-up action and turn action into an effective antidote to despair while augmenting human agency and driving human wellbeing. Platforms create communities and markets with network effects that allow users to interact,

10. Patagonia's "action works" serves to connect customers, employees, and many stakeholders with 100s of action initiatives empowering enabling people with many choices to lead lives of purpose, meaning, and value. As a positive institutional platform action works helps to elevate human strengths, combine, and multiply our highest human strengths, and then ultimately refract those magnified strengths out into our world. That's what positive institutions do. They augment human capacity. See—<https://www.patagonia.com/actionworks/about/>

learn, enliven—and collaborate. Instead of being the means of production, platforms are the means to connection.

More academically, in the *Oxford University Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship*, we talk about change making, with its usual focus on change management on the inside of the building, where the enterprise is the object of organization development and change (Cooperrider and Godwin, 2011). But now we want to pose a new question... a thought experiment. *What if* we conceived of institutions not as the clients of change but as *the* change agents for attracting resources, partners, persons, communities, customers, coalitions, investors, and mission-aligned change makers of every kind? Here the focus is not *competitive excellence*, but *collaborative advantage* and outside systemic change. It involves strengthening the shared and pervasive life-giving *envelope of enterprise*—the biosphere, our societies and human lives, the earth. The larger concept involves the discovery and design of "positive institutions":

Positive institutions are organizations and structured practices in culture or society that serve to elevate and develop our highest human strengths, combine, and magnify those strengths, and *refract our highest human strengths outward* in world-benefiting ways leading, ultimately, to a world of full-spectrum flourishing. (Cooperrider and Godwin 2011, pg. 737)

The world is the ultimate context for the OD of betterment. It's not enough to be good within an organization's own operations and capabilities. Positive institutions, as macro change platforms and interventionists, serve as strategic convenors of local and regional communities, unlock the barriers to improving people's lives by uniting the developmental resources from across the public, private and social sectors with an *all of society* mobilization, create big tents to leverage and multiply siloed strengths of whole industries, create and participate in megacommunities not of individuals but of organizations, enable

open innovation and world inquiry platforms, and augment human powers.

Positive institution interventions (see right hand side of Figure 2) help multiply and augment human capacities—enhancing and extending the capacities of individuals, networks, megacommunities and trans organizational systems, tri-sectoral collaborations, and world learning—especially for systemic change. This is macro-OD, for example, when—even while doing their own net positive innovation work inside the enterprise—Patagonia also creates a new outward-facing activation platform that connects thousands of customers to one another and to hundreds of environmental causes they can join, self-organize around, and live greater lives of meaning, purpose, and impact. This kind of new horizon intervention is macro-OD.

Consider another example whereby the institution-as-change agent emerges beyond micro-OD. National Grid US, a leader in the utilities industry, began its OD work internally training change champions in the theory, mindsets, and practices of AI for use in teambuilding, strategy work, mergers, employee engagement, and in searching for new sources of sustainable value by turning waste to wealth, developing new smart grid approaches, etc. Soon they did a companywide AI Summit, and they were inspired by the magnification of strengths, the bonding across silos, and the bold and unifying visions of the future. Then the Chief Innovation Officer, Cheri Warren, declared "with this new capacity let's do more than focus groups and customer surveys...let's become a convenor of the cities we serve and help them collaboratively imagine their green agendas, not only related to the renewable energy future, but all the visions they have for sustainable development, job growth, racial healing, empowering well-being across all neighborhoods, and more." Soon, National Grid was serving communities in ways they had never imagined. For example, by strategically convening the city of Worcester Massachusetts, their intervention, with every sector of the city involved—including an impassioned youth delegation—was called "Green Today, Growth Tomorrow: Transforming Worcester into the Innovative

Energy Leader of a Smarter Commonwealth.” Their macro or outward facing OD was so collaboratively successful that soon they expanded their macro work beyond cities, to the whole state of Massachusetts. With Governor Deval Patrick kicking it off, National Grid co-convened the entire energy sector, transposing OD methods from micro inside the enterprise to macro outside of the building work, while helping Massachusetts become the #1 energy efficient state in the nation (Warren and Cooperrider, 2022).

We could go on with numerous illustrations of organizations becoming platforms for macro systems change, for example, see the article in this special issue (“Changing Organizations to Change the World”) where one of the largest corporations in the world is propelling the convening of entire industries with OD’s net positive design methods. One of those summits was not only industry-wide but nation-wide. The Sustainable Dairy Summit, for example, catalyzed by Walmart and the Innovation Center for US Dairy, created a radical sustainable development charter and industry manifesto, and a growing and expanding OD-powered systems shift. The macro-OD project has been singled out by the Whitehouse. Hosted at an honors ceremony at the nation’s capital, the White House called the sustainable dairy initiative “a model for industry-wide change.”

Could Macro OD Be the most powerful form of Micro OD?

So why—beyond being a force for good—will such *institutions-as-platforms* for world-changing, matter in terms of internal organizational effectiveness and enterprise vitality?

The answer revolves around what unites the right- and left-hand sides of *Figure 2*. It involves the observable and mutually reinforcing and positive loop of how being a platform for world change “out there” is rapidly and paradoxically becoming one of the most inspiring and repeatable ways for bringing the “in here” of the enterprise powerfully alive. It’s called the “mirror flourishing effect” and it involves one of the greatest learnings of our career

(Cooperrider & Fry, 2013). What we’ve found most concretely is that after some 30 years of doing OD in the real world that there is nothing that brings out the best in human enterprise faster, more consistently, or powerfully than calling a whole organization to design net positive innovations to humanity’s greatest challenges—to be an agent of world benefit “out there.” The moment people come together to accomplish “doing good” out there—that is, concentrating and uniting their strengths in the service of building a better world, or a healing of nature, or activation of a flourish-

greater than ourselves, we in turn flourish. If you engage in doing good “out there” as a teen, for example, science shows you will be reaping health benefits 60 or 70 years later.

The accomplishment of being of benefit to others and to nature does not involve a sacrificing of our own flourishing—quite the contrary. It often is accompanied by a profound feeling of fullness and has been shown in the laboratory to activate the most brain areas linked to positive emotions such as hope, inspiration, love, curiosity, and joy (Fredrickson, 2013).

The accomplishment of being of benefit to others and to nature does not involve a sacrificing of our own flourishing—quite the contrary. It often is accompanied by a profound feeling of fullness and has been shown in the laboratory to activate the most brain areas linked to positive emotions such as hope, inspiration, love, curiosity, and joy. And remarkably, the just mere witnessing benevolent action, seeing someone else’s doing good, lights up the same areas of the brain as if you were the one being the agent of betterment while the emotions of flourishing have a contagion effect—they have been shown to flow through networks just as a virus does.

ishing regeneration of a whole community or nation, they too activate the PERMA-flourishing mechanisms for their own internal flourishing as persons, as teams, and as a whole organization. The more successful macro-OD becomes—for example helping a Tesla Motors and their employees *electrify the renewable energy age*—the more powerful their micro-OD work will become. Can companies, by engaging people in radically reducing energy watts, also in a reverse fashion actually produce more human energy?

Beyond the sustainability literature, Post and Neimark (2007) detail it in their meta-analysis of more than 500 studies of this reverse flourishing dynamic in their volume *Why Good Things Happen to Good People*. They demonstrate with large data sets that when we work for *betterment beyond* and give our energies to causes

And remarkably, the just mere witnessing benevolent action, seeing someone else’s doing good, lights up the same areas of the brain as if you were the one being the agent of betterment (Fredrickson, 2013) while the emotions of flourishing have a contagion effect—they have been shown to flow through networks just as a virus does (Fowler and Christakis 2008.)

Mathieu Ricard, a scholar of super cooperation argues it’s intrinsic. When we accomplish positive change that benefits others, for example when we help someone to heal, or realize their potentials, or when we step up courageously to save someone’s life—“don’t we feel,” asks Ricard, “as if we are in harmony with our deepest nature?” (Ricard, 2015 p.81). And isn’t that the nature of interdependence, that is, we are all connected? Mirror flourishing suggests an intimacy of relations between

Table 1: Summary Concepts related to Net Positive OD for the Creation of a World of Full Spectrum Flourishing

Concept	Definition
Earthshot OD	<i>Earthshot OD aims to end the climate crises in a generation and then help to enable a regenerative economy in the service of a world of full-spectrum flourishing.</i> This is a time-sensitive macro world-project in which the field of OD intentionally brings its collaborative change capacities and newest theories of change, in and through every organization and industry, to help leaders and citizens from everywhere to take on the immense global challenge of our age as measured through the realization of the 17 SDGs and the establishment of a net zero economy by 2050.
Full Spectrum Flourishing	The superordinate ideal for the field of OD to enable <i>a world where organizations and economies can excel, all people can thrive, and nature can flourish not just now but across the generations.</i>
Net Positive OD	A new horizon and standard for the field of OD where the aim of every touch point with an organizational system is <i>to create an organization that improves the well-being for every stakeholder it touches, including employees, suppliers, communities, customers, and even future generations and the planet itself.</i> With Net Positive OD, the guiding question for every change effort becomes: How is the world better off because your organization is in it?
Green Micro-OD	OD focused on the internal institution-wide embedding of sustainable value and <i>the “greening” of the enterprise which includes the search for corporate shared value—that which is good for the world and good for the business—and involves incorporation of environmental, human, and societal betterment into the enterprise’s core business with no tradeoffs in price or quality.</i>
Positive Institutions	Organizations and structured practices in culture or society that <i>serve to elevate and develop our highest human strengths, combine, and magnify those strengths, and refract our highest human strengths outward in world benefiting ways</i> leading, ultimately, to a world of full-spectrum flourishing.
Blue Macro-OD	OD focused on the external impact of organizations, whereby the aim is <i>to facilitate the creation of positive institutions in which the organization is seen not as a client, but rather as the change agent</i> for world betterment. Macro OD’s aim is the exponential mobilization of <i>systemic change capacities</i> , literally by many factors of magnitude.
Mirror Flourishing Effect	The <i>infinitely reinforcing loop of flourishing</i> that occurs when an organization’s stakeholders come together to advance full spectrum flourishing externally thus concentrating and uniting their strengths in the service of building a better world “out there” and as a result simultaneously activate the PERMA-flourishing mechanisms for their own internal flourishing as persons, as teams, and as a whole organization.
Net Positive Summits (NPS)	A specific form of the AI Summit whole-system methodology that combines <i>AI’s rigorous action-research “4-D cycle” with IDEO’s open-innovation design and prototyping tools</i> including user-experience designs, model building, framing, and reframing, and embracing constraints and creative opportunities to ensure that summit outputs are not simply action plans on paper, but rather tangible artifacts that can be rapidly deployed, iterated in beta mode, and scaled.

entities to the point where we can posit that there is no ultimate separation, only the creative unfolding of an entire interdependent field of relations or connections. As Martin Buber (1937) once wrote, “In the beginning is the relationship” and Alfred North Whitehead, in his process philosophy, called it a concrescence, a literal growing together of entities (Whitehead, 1929). Hence, we define *mirror flourishing as a co-elevating concrescence, a co-flourishing or growing together that happens naturally and reciprocally to us when we actively engage in or witness the acts that help nature flourish, others flourish, or the world as a whole to flourish* (Cooperrider & Fry, 2013).

Of course, this growing together can work for good or ill. When, for example, our companies are involved in destroying nature or degeneration of life and value in the world it can have massive effects on the inside of an enterprise. Consider of how the people of BP were feeling in relation to the horrifying images of the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, the industrial disaster that began on April 2010, flooding the ocean with 210 million gallons of oil, destroying all forms of wildlife in its path, including scenes spread all over the internet, with BP shown as helpless to seal up the well for not weeks but over a period five excruciating months. It was, for every employee at BP, the opposite of flourishing. Let’s call it mirror-languishing. There are colossal human costs, and in this case billions in economic costs, of being part of destroying value. Much of the heartsickness we see in our world today happens because we know, deep down, that environmental and social collapse is not separate from our lives.

**Concluding Call to the Field:
What if Every Organization Aspired
to Becoming and Being a Positive
Institution and Change Platform
for World Benefit?**

In this article we shared our journey into the “call of our times” and the next great episode in OD history. We invite you to evolve the lexicon of our field, but more importantly your own work, to include the many concepts we have highlighted here (see *Table 1* for a summary).

We said it before and we will say it again in conclusion: it's an incredible privilege to be alive at this time, in this field, when what the world needs most is the collaborative capacity to reinvent the entire material basis of our civilization. The world is the ultimate context for OD just as it is for every organization and leader today (see Schein and Schein 2022.) OD's future will be of larger scope and greater purpose than it has been in the past. To create a world of full-spectrum flourishing, in a *society of organizations*, opens up a kind of macro-OD whereby we can elevate and mobilize *systemic change capacities* exponentially, literally by many factors of magnitude. When institutions are not just the clients of OD and change, but themselves become *the change agents* we can imagine the change potentials, in this earthshot moment, when roos of millions of organizations become positive institutions, platforms for elevating, magnifying, and refracting our highest human strengths outward in the service of full spectrum flourishing.

OD will speak ever more fully to the destiny of humanity and nature, as macro-OD is embraced and as OD's innovation frontier involves a perfect union of net positive micro-OD and macro-OD. If you can see OD happening through and not just for institutions, then you can instantly sense the exciting vistas and courageous contours of an OD that is shaping the better future of the planet, its peoples, and our world systems. In all of this we have shared vital examples and two new conceptual models of this kind of full spectrum OD. Moreover, we have made the case both in terms of our experience in the field and with contemporary research, that building a better world is the most potent force on the planet—for generating, on the inside of the organization, the most engaged, empowered, and innovation-inspired enterprise every leader wants. The radical and even paradoxical message for OD practice is that macro-OD may be the most powerful form of micro-OD—and the reason why is captured in the concept of “mirror flourishing.” This is big news for every single leader who would love to have a workplace that is alive with PERMA-flourishing, passion, meaning,

high-engagement, trust, and a super-unified mission.

We invite every OD practitioner to join in this earthshot moment. As we stated at the outset of this article, it will call all of us to dare in scholarship, to stand up, step up, and scale up in practice, and to reach far beyond our competence. Together—only together—can we reach that ultimate North Star as a field: enabling a future world, a better world, of full spectrum flourishing.

Although things in this earthshot space did in fact take longer to happen than we thought they would, they are now happening faster than we ever thought they could. We are on the eve of OD's greatest potential and generative calling and, as the two world-respected CEOs declared in the opening epigraph... “*The clock is ticking, future generations are counting on us, and ‘history has its eyes on us.’*”

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David Cooperrider, PhD, is a Distinguished University Professor at Case Western Reserve University and holds two chaired professorships: Char and Chuck Fowler Professor for Business as an Agent of World Benefit, and the Covia—David L. Cooperrider Professorship in Appreciative Inquiry, at the Weatherhead School of Management. David is Founder and Faculty Director of the Fowler Center for Business as an Agent of World Benefit and also the Honorary Chairman of Champlain College's David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry at the Robert P. Stiller School of Business. David received the Organization Development Network's "Lifetime Achievement Award" for his pioneering theory on Appreciative Inquiry. David has published 26 books and authored over 120 articles and book chapters, including a five-volume research series *Advances in Appreciative Inquiry*, and his most recent 2022 book, *The Business of Building a Better World: The Leadership Revolution That is Changing Everything*. David serves as advisor to CEOs in business and societal leadership roles, including projects with five Presidents and/or Nobel Laureates such as William Jefferson Clinton, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Kofi Annan, and others. Marty Seligman, the father of positive psychology wrote: "David Cooperrider is a giant: a giant of discovery, a giant of dissemination, and a giant of generosity." Likewise, Jane Dutton, University of Michigan thought-leader and former President of the Academy of Management said: "David Cooperrider is changing the world with his ideas and who he is as a person. There are few who combine such insight, inspiration, and energy." He can be reached at dlc6@case.edu.

Lindsey Godwin, PhD, is a professor, practitioner, and possibilizer who has a passion for creating transformational learning spaces for individuals and organizations. She holds a Master of Science in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution, George Mason University, and a PhD in Organizational Behavior from the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University. She currently holds the Robert P. Stiller Endowed Chair of Management in the Stiller School of Business at Champlain College (Vermont, USA), where she also serves as the Academic Director of the David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry (AI), and the lead faculty for Champlain's MS in Leadership and MS in Organization Development & Human Relations programs. An active thought-leader in the field of OD and Change, her work has been published in a variety of outlets, including the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship*, *Practicing Organization Development* (4th Edition), *Research Handbook of Responsible Management*, the 4th volume of *Advances in Appreciative Inquiry*, *Journal of Human Performance*, and *Psychology Today*. She also serves on the editorial team for *AI Practitioner Journal*. An acclaimed scholar-practitioner, she earned the Edward Lyman Phelps Professorship, Champlain College's highest recognition for a faculty member. A sought-after international speaker, consultant, and facilitator, Lindsey has worked with individuals and organizations across the globe—including the United Nations, Imagine Nepal, Ben & Jerry's, IPEN, World Vision, Dealer Tire, the City of Tampa, and many others—having taught & facilitated over 10,000 people. She can be reached at godwin@champlain.edu