

# **Living Systems Theory and the Practice of Stewarding Change**

**By Michelle Holliday and Michael Jones**  
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## About the Authors

**Michelle Holliday** is a facilitator, organizational consultant, researcher and writer. Her work centers around “thrivability” — a set of perspectives, intentions and practices based on a view of organizations as living systems. To this end, she brings people together and helps them discover ways they can feel more alive, connect more meaningfully with each other, and serve life more powerfully through their work. This generally takes the form of designing and hosting transformative events, as well as delivering talks and workshops. Michelle also writes regularly, including a forthcoming book, *The Age of Thrivability*. Her research is summarized in a slideshow called [Humanity 4.0](#), as well as in a [TEDx presentation](#). Her websites can be found at [www.stewardinglife.org](http://www.stewardinglife.org) and [www.cambiumconsulting.com](http://www.cambiumconsulting.com). She can be reached at [michelle@cambiumconsulting.com](mailto:michelle@cambiumconsulting.com).



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## About This Paper

This paper was initially written for the [Spanda Foundation's](#) semi-annual journal, for an issue dedicated to the theme of Systemic Change. Here, with more room to play, we have expanded on the original article, elaborating a few key points and interspersing brief case studies throughout the text.

The topic of Systemic Change has broad reach, relating to efforts to re-shape organizational culture; to enable greater participation among citizens; to invent new social systems and structures; to support new ways of being in relationship with each other and with nature; and more. At the same time, change is the fundamental nature of any living system, including organizations and communities. Anytime we create a strategic plan or envision improved ways of working, we're engaging in systemic change. Therefore, our hope is that this paper may serve as a useful guide even in the absence of a discrete and ambitious change initiative.

We are grateful to the Spanda Foundation (and in particular to guest editor [Helene Finidori](#)) for the original invitation to articulate our views and observations. And we are grateful to you for your interest in what we believe is a critically important topic.

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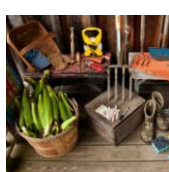
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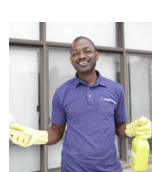
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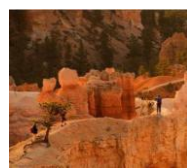
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## OVERVIEW

**How do we create meaningful change within our organizations and communities?** What perspectives and practices are necessary to make an intentional, substantive and lasting difference in these systems, particularly when their complexity puts them beyond the power of command and control?

This may be the paramount question of our times, as awareness of the complex, systemic nature of society's problems increases along with the growing urgency to solve them.

In fact, the inquiry has broad relevance, extending from the multinational corporation to the mom-and-pop shop, from the sprawling metropolis to the rural hamlet. In each of these, there is the urge - and the ongoing imperative - to improve, to grow, to evolve, to adapt, to innovate. A practical theory of change is useful at each of these levels.



Photo credit: Bogdan Grigore

Beyond the strategies and tactics of changing what already exists, however, there are also signs of a broadly felt yearning for greater richness and depth of experience, raising questions about *what kind of change* is desired. Wherever people are gathered, and at whatever scale, there is an emergent longing for change that is **generative** - bringing something new into being, creating a preferred future - and even for change that is **regenerative**, healing what has been wounded in our communities and ourselves by the structures we have inherited.

To contribute to this inquiry into the multiple levels and possibilities of systemic change, this article will present a weaving of our two perspectives, the intersection where the sage and the scientist meet.<sup>1</sup> Our belief is that this is where the future lies, bringing these two deep life inquiries into balance again. Specifically, the article will expand on the following observations that have emerged from our research and our work of the past several decades:

**A. Organizations and Communities as Living Systems:** Organizations and communities exhibit core patterns common to all living systems. Those patterns provide the foundation of a useful and rational theory of change, helping us understand how living systems function and how we can influence them. Importantly, they help us see that the more relevant question is not “how can we change this system?” but “how can we support the system’s intrinsic ability to thrive?”

**B. The Mythic Dimension of Life:** As we acknowledge aliveness in our organizations and communities, this opens the door to the narrative-based, subjective, wonder-filled dimension of life, adding powerful generativity and regenerativity to the theory of change. This is the richness and depth of experience so many of us are craving.

**C. The Role of Place:** It is through a sense of place - of being rooted in and nourished by place, of weaving our own story together with the stories of the places we belong to - that we reconnect with the experience of the generative, mythic dimension of life most directly. With this insight, the living systems patterns take on new meaning in our lives and our work.

**D. The Call to Stewardship:** To embrace the living systems perspective in both its rational and mythic aspects, the leader’s role must shift from conductor of change to cultivator or steward, creating the fertile conditions for life to thrive and for change to emerge.

**E. The Need for Practice Grounds:** Such stewardship is less a position or a title and more an ongoing practice - one that can be undertaken by anyone in any context, and one that calls for dedicated practice grounds that are (a) guided by informed intention, (b) woven with story, art and inspiration, and (c) rooted in place. Two examples of such practice grounds will be described below.



**Together, these observations have the potential to shift not only *how we seek to effect change but why and to what end.*** We are moving from the industrial age and the age of information and technology to what might be called the ecological age, in which we are asking: how do we craft spaces for life to thrive and align our thinking with how nature thinks? In these times, the true work of any change effort is to create generative places where people can learn, ideas can grow and life can flourish at every level. The goal is less to manage change as a distinct before-and-after scenario and more to recognize change as the nature of life and to embrace our role in hosting it as an ongoing, inspired practice.

Not only is this the pathway to intentional, substantive and lasting systemic change and to the greater richness and depth of experience many of us seek - our conviction is that these perspectives and practices are vitally needed if humanity is to find its way forward.



## A. ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES AS LIVING SYSTEMS

For over a century, the dominant assumption within management theory has been that organizations operate like machines. That line of thinking extended to economies and communities and to all aspects of our lives - even ourselves. It also extended to theories of change, leading to approaches like “re-engineering,” “driving” change, and change “management,” all based on the assumption that human systems can best be altered by adjusting so many gears.

Of course, there is truth within the mechanistic paradigm and some degree of effectiveness to the change theories it spawned. But there is also reason to believe that this worldview is linked to many of society’s most pernicious problems, like poverty, environmental degradation, social unrest and epidemic suicide rates. There is the growing sense that it leads us inevitably to those outcomes and blinds us to alternative routes.

Yet the past three decades have witnessed a mounting body of literature and experience demonstrating that organizations and communities exhibit core characteristics and tendencies common to all living systems - and that this recognition offers a more accurate understanding of what we are working with and how we can influence it.<sup>2</sup>



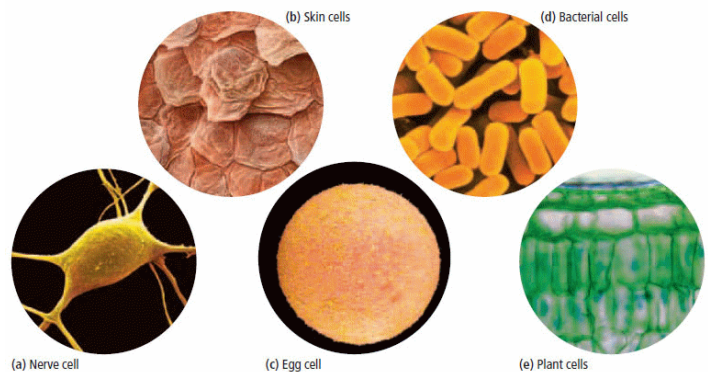


Although theories abound and there is little consensus about the definitive list of characteristics, we outline here the set of four properties we have found to be widely cited across the literature in both biology and management theory and also universally present across the organizations and communities with which we have worked. Whether it is your body, a rainforest, an organization, or a community, these are the factors at play:

**1. Divergent Parts:** In every living system, there are individual parts.

This is the cells in our bodies and the people in an organization or community. It is “who I am” within the system - how each part serves the system and how they are served by it.

Generally, the more diverse and self-expressive the parts are able to be, the more resilient, adaptive and creative the living system is likely to be.



**Diverse types of cells in the human body**

Photo credit: [http://wonderwhizkids.com/conceptmaps/Cell\\_shapes.html](http://wonderwhizkids.com/conceptmaps/Cell_shapes.html)

**2. A Pattern of Relationship:** The divergent parts are connected and supported in a pattern of responsive relationship with each other and with context.



In our bodies, this is the circulatory, digestive and immune systems, and the supportive skeletal structure. In organizations, this is the patterns and infrastructure of information-sharing, decision-making and getting things done: the org chart, processes, meetings, shared vocabulary, office design. In a community, it is roads and traffic rules, retail infrastructure, governance systems, the culture of the commons. This is “how we are together” within and around the system.

Generally, the more open and free-flowing the interactions, the more resilient, adaptive and creative the living system is likely to be.

**3. A Convergent Whole:** The divergent parts come together in relationship to form a convergent whole with new characteristics and capabilities.

This is the level not of your cells, but of you and your body. It is the level not of the individuals but of the organization or community that they create together. It is here that we find the phenomenon of emergence, in which new capabilities are created. This is the great promise of living systems - that new things become possible and new forms take shape. You can think, feel and move - capabilities not found at the level of your cells. Similarly, an organization or community is able to complete complex tasks and maintain order, even when those functions lie beyond the abilities of the people who comprise it.

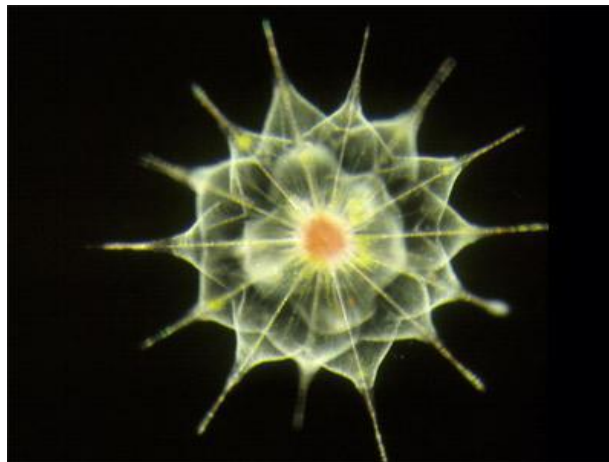


Just as the living system needs the seeming chaos of divergence, it also needs convergent order at the level of the whole. *You* remain recognizably *you* even as your cells are continuously replaced. An organization remains focused on shared purpose even as people come and go. A community retains its character across generations. This is “who we are together” and “*why* we are together” as a system.

Generally, the more convergence there is at the level of the whole, the more resilient, adaptive and creative the living system is likely to be.

**4. Self-Integration:** The entire process is self-organizing, set into motion by life itself.

In a dynamic, moment-by-moment interplay of the first three properties, the living system is able to self-organize in order to innovate, adapt and ultimately create higher, more complex forms of life (none of which can be done by a machine, by the way). Importantly, the process must be *self-integrative* - integrating parts into relationship and wholeness without an external engineer. Even the single-celled amoeba involves too much complexity for us to orchestrate manually. And in effortlessly self-organizing, that amoeba demonstrates astonishing intelligence, creativity and even beauty. With the right fertile conditions in place - the right levels of divergence and convergence, and the right supportive structure and flow of interactions - our organizations and communities are poised similarly to astonish us with their self-organized wisdom, creativity and ease.



**Undersea amoeba**

Photo credit: <http://bit.ly/1RcLZJR>



Photo credit: Bogdan Grigore

These are the design principles we have to work with in seeking to change any living organization or community. They suggest questions like:

- What will it look like when each of us is able to express our full divergence in service of our common goals? When we can bring the best of ourselves – our talents, our ability to identify opportunities and contribute solutions, our drive for meaning, our authenticity, quirks and passion, our sense of agency and choice? And what will that take?
- What will it look like when our interactions are open, flowing and efficient? When our infrastructure and processes support not only information sharing, decision-making, effective action and trust but playfulness, learning and joy? What will that take?
- What is the emergent shared identity - the unifying story and collective service to customer, community or cause - that will hold us together powerfully, as citizens, employees, customers, community members? And how will we live that story?





In many ways, these design principles are already well known. We've long understood the importance of employee engagement, effective process, and shared purpose, for example. But recognizing life and the systemic nature of organizations and communities brings new depth, detail, coherence and possibility to these strategic categories. For example, when you see an organization as a living system:

- The most appropriate relationship with customers and community becomes one of conversation and co-creation.
- It makes sense to design every action and interaction to generate creativity, learning and joy.
- New business models come into view – models inspired by nature.

Beyond new tactical and strategic guidance, however, recognizing our organizations and communities as living systems invites us to acknowledge that, presumably, the intention of our change efforts is to enable more thriving for more of the system. Naming this as our explicit intention has tremendous power. On this basis, our question shifts from “how can we change this system?” (somehow a violent proposition) to “how can we support and enhance the system’s inherent and ongoing ability to thrive, at every level?”



## CASE STUDY #1: ESPACE POUR LA VIE

Written by Michelle Holliday

**The background:** Originally called the Montreal Nature Museums, the organization consists of four institutions: the Botanical Gardens, the Insectarium, the Planetarium and the Biodome (several ecosystems recreated under one roof). Each is owned by the city, which several years ago merged them administratively and then hired one director to oversee them all. The director's mandate was to create cohesion among the four and to create one powerful brand that would add significantly to Montreal's global reputation.

**The challenge:** Across all four institutions, passion and commitment were high among employees. However, the infrastructure was heavy and bureaucratic, and employees were weary from lack of resources. The Museums were well loved by citizens and visitors, but generally not enough to inspire regular visits. Worse than this, their message was not powerful enough to incite more environmentally responsible behavior – the ultimate goal of their efforts. Also, despite cost savings, the four were not pleased with being merged; they perceived themselves as fundamentally distinct, with different scientific disciplines, histories and sizes. They were hopeful about the change that the visionary, charismatic new director represented. But as scientists and educators, they were also nervous; he came from the world of the arts and spoke quite a different language. Finally, they were skeptical about branding in general; they feared that they would be portrayed inauthentically and that science and education would lose prominence.

**Stewarding systems change:** Museum directors started by putting out a call for “Ambassadors” within the institutions – people who were interested in supporting the project logistically, getting a behind-the-scenes understanding of it, and sharing what they knew with others in the organization. Seventy-five people came to the first meeting of the Ambassadors. Though many were more skeptical than supportive, the interest was encouraging. In addition, comment boxes were placed prominently, with a clear invitation to staff to share their visions, hopes and fears. A flood of detailed comments flowed in.

Next, the directors invited all 450 people from all four institutions for a day-long exploration, asking essentially: what is the one conversation we all want to have with the world? The agenda was shaped by the patterns of living systems, enabling those gathered to envision all the fertile conditions that would be needed for them to thrive, together.

The outcome of this gathering was a draft manifesto that was then refined with the help of Ambassadors. In these discussions, one point in particular stands out. The draft version made reference to “life,” and in conversations with museum directors, there was some discomfort with this. The preference was to use the word “nature,” which seemed more scientific, objective and tangible, whereas “life” had the risk of being amorphous, subjective and possibly spiritual. The manifesto was completed with reference only to “nature.”

A second all-employee, all-day gathering was held to affirm the manifesto and to identify next steps and “vital signs” indicating progress. Key figures from the city and the scientific community were invited to express their support. In one memorable moment, a blue-collar, union employee stood up to declare that, “These are our words. They didn’t come from [one official]. They came from us. This is our manifesto. And that means we have to do it!”

As the search for a new name then got underway, discussion continued over use of the term “life.” In particular, the director questioned whether it was possible to inspire meaningful change in visitor behavior through references only to nature as something “out there,” surrounding us, and not to life, which is also within each of us. There was also concern over losing the divergent identity of each institution. In the end, each institution maintained its original identity, and together, they became Espace pour la vie – [Space for Life](#). Broadly and enthusiastically embraced, the new name was not a brand to them – it was a movement. It was a conversation with the world.



Organizational structure was then reshaped into three pillars: (divergent) People & Culture, (convergent) Visitor Engagement, and (supportive, connective) Infrastructure. This was a significant change from the previous structure, in which Human Resources was buried within Finance & Administration. There was also a broadly participatory exploration of new governance structures, in which the strong preference of employees was chosen (for valid reasons) over the suggestion offered in a lengthy consulting report.

Internal communication blossomed. With a compelling shared identity, there was now a willingness to open budgets to each other and to decide collaboratively how resources would be allocated (an astonishing shift!). For the first time, cross-organizational projects were initiated. Resident artists were introduced without specific mandate beyond offering inspiration. Whereas meetings had previously been stiff, slow and with little impact, they now became vibrant and alive. Ideas flowed from inspiration to implementation almost faster than people could keep up with.

Externally, engagement also grew. Citizens were invited into a regular (still ongoing) series of workshops to help shape the visitor experience. Museum exhibits began a steady overhaul, becoming more interactive and immersive and connecting with the power of narrative and imagination. New projects extended into the community and, indeed, across the planet.

Though for nine years, the museums had struggled – and failed - to raise enough money to renovate the outdated Planetarium, within one year they were able to raise enough to build a completely new, LEED Platinum building, with spectacular new exhibits. In fact, the power of their vision enabled them to attract \$190 million in external funding, allowing them to create several other exciting projects, too.

In all, this process of alignment with life's patterns has moved them beyond a tourist attraction to a powerful movement, inside and out.

#### A Place, a Commitment, a Movement



#### About Space for Life

Together, the Biodôme, Insectarium, Botanical Garden and Planetarium form a place where nature and science are honoured, a Space for Life. It's a participatory movement and it's also a commitment to better understand and protect our planet's biodiversity.



## B. THE MYTHIC DIMENSION OF LIFE

The living systems lens gives us an expanded view of organizations and communities and how we can influence them. But if we see the properties it reveals as merely a tactical checklist, then we will not have moved beyond the mechanistic paradigm, with all its shortcomings, and we will not find our way to truly generative change - or to healing the wounds of society. Something more is needed.

As we look deeply through the living systems lens, we begin to be able to draw on a broader form of knowing that some call a “mythic worldview.” Author Karen Armstrong writes that in most pre-industrial cultures, “there were two recognized ways of thinking, speaking, and coming to know our world. The Greeks called them *mythos* and *logos*. Both were essential and neither was considered superior to the other. They were not in conflict but complementary.”<sup>3</sup> *Logos* was the voice of reason, and timeless *mythos* the language of the imagination and our felt life together. This is not about myth as naive and unrealistic parable. It refers to the aspects of our lives that exist alongside and apart from reason – things like **love, beauty, inspiration, meaning and purpose** - recognizing them as different but equally valid expressions of what is true.

What is most wounded in our world is our connection to this dimension of life. With the rise of the industrial economy, we created a world out of balance. Scientific *logos* quickly rose to dominance and our subjective experience fell into disrepute. In organizations, for example, our strategic plans became dry and lifeless, unaccompanied by the stirring story of who we are, what we stand for and what is our shared quest.

With the loss of this mythic dimension, we no longer had access to the experience of *ekstasis* — that is, the ability to step out from the norm and allow life to live through us so we may feel **wonder, reverence, gratitude and awe at the mystery of life within and around us**.

For too long, we have relied upon the harsh glare of the flashlight to illuminate our world and failed to realize how much it blinded us from seeing the subtle and opaque forms of the mythic world that the flickering light of the candle brings into view. To truly understand and influence a living organization or community, and to heal our collective wounds, we must bring these two ways of knowing - and seeing - back into balance.





In embracing the living systems lens, then, the work is not only to enable intellectual awareness. It is also to invite an expanded set of beliefs: belief that there is vibrant aliveness and creativity within and around us (this alone is cause for celebration!); that place, art and nature have a vital role to play in every sphere of our lives; that each organization and community can (and must) shape and live into an unfolding epic narrative; that thriving is possible and we are worthy of it.

With these beliefs, we open up to new conversations, new priorities, new possibilities, new relationships, new agreements, new actions, new business models, new architecture, new governance – all more fully aligned with life. We step together into wise, compassionate and meaning-filled engagement with life, wherever we find it – and we find it everywhere.

## CASE STUDY #2: CLC Montreal

Written by a long-time staff-member and English teacher at CLC. You can learn more about the Montreal-based language school at [www.clcmontreal.com](http://www.clcmontreal.com).

The three letters of our school's name stand for *Culture & Language Connections*. And yet, as evocative as they are, there is more to us than those three words reveal.

Since its founding in 2009, CLC has grown into a dynamic, successful language school and a vibrant community - quite a remarkable accomplishment considering the intense competition we face.

The school's founder, AJ Javier, previously spent time living and teaching in Japan, and this has greatly influenced much of what CLC is today. The idea to open a school came to him only after returning to Canada and connecting the dots – a space that blended the best educational practices of the West with the systems approach of the Japanese. The school would lie at the intersection of culture, language and connections.

Beyond these surface concepts, however, the seeds for the school's emergence lay even deeper - in the yearning people feel to find meaning. AJ's intention was not to exploit an opportunity *per se*, but to fill an empty space in people's hearts... to bring people together... to help them thrive. Indeed, the primary mission has always been to help people feel more fully alive. The school simply provides a familiar framework that people recognize and feel comfortable to enter.







Fueled by this vision and the energy that comes with starting a new business, the first year flew by in a blur. But as this honeymoon period gave way to the reality of ongoing operations, we struggled and searched for a way forward. Without any formal business education or experience, AJ had been guided by instinct and the underlying mission he had set out for the school. But his instinct seemed to go against much of the conventional wisdom about how a business is supposed to be run, and doubts began to arise. Then he discovered the concept of thriving, which aligned remarkably well with his thinking. At last we had an established model to compare ourselves to, to use as a sounding board and to reflect upon.

In fact, he had always recognized CLC as a very organic organization. For example, AJ rarely refers to it as a “school” or “organization” or “business.” He talks about it as “the space,” meaning: the sum of all the life, experiences, contributions and growth of everyone who enters it. With this perspective, our first inclination was to take a cue from nature... to let the space grow “wild” and find its own path. But we eventually realized a better metaphor would be that of a garden protected and nurtured by loving hands. In this way, thriving has become an invaluable lens to invite everyone who enters the community to become a steward, contributing to its growth and growing personally in the process. To us, engaging with CLC should be a transformative experience. This is the synergy that drives the success of the space.



With inspiration from living systems principles, we have discerned four pillars that foster success within the space. The first pillar is the discovery and support of talent and the celebration of the authentic self. People are studying languages here, but it is usually just a skill necessary to move forward on a greater front... to fulfill dreams. The pursuit of interests and ultimately self-actualization is the engine that propels people. This focus creates an almost electric environment that offers people the freedom to change.



The second pillar is cultivation of community. At a basic level, language needs to be shared. It does not reside in a textbook or as something learned and then stored away; it is something that is practiced and used. Language lives in the space between people – in other words, in community. Within our space, community serves as the witness that celebrates and encourages the growth of the individual learner. This builds the trust that is necessary for people to be open and willing to accept feedback. People accept themselves and accept the diversity of the community. As barriers fall, the ability to learn grows and bonds deepen. By the time people leave the school, they have found a second home, and often cry in parting. These are tears of celebration and recognition that, on the path of their lives, they have come across a special place – and a special community - that will live within them always.

The third pillar is continuous improvement of our offering and our operations. This has enabled us to craft an uncommonly effective teaching methodology, and it generates an attitude and atmosphere of dynamism and possibility.

The final pillar is faith. We simply believe that good comes to people who do good.

In all of these ways, CLC doesn't just teach languages; it helps people compose the song of their lives and sing it.

## C. THE ROLE OF PLACE

The mechanistic worldview often overlooks the role of place - after all, place makes little difference to a machine. Yet all living systems are rooted in and nourished by the places from which they grow, and we and our organizations and communities are no exception. Indeed, it is primarily through a sense of place that we reconnect with the rich soil of narrative and meaning, grounding us in the mythic dimensions of our lives. Most of us want to belong not only to a job or even a career; we want to belong to a story, and particularly to a story that is both place-based and mythic in its possibilities.

In guiding this deepening connection with place in a variety of contexts, we have discovered that the four core patterns of living systems take on new meaning and offer new pathways to generativity.



## 1. Homecoming

Where the rational mind seeks ways to nurture Divergent Parts, the place-based mythic imagination invites us to explore the parallel pattern of Homecoming, in which we ask: where is home and how do I find my way there? To come home to ourselves is to find our own personal myth and to rediscover how our enchantment with nature, art and community connects us with the whole of life. Most of our leadership metaphors are focused on growing up and upward mobility and the ladder of success. What if we balanced this upward organic motion with also growing down? To grow down is to have an embodied experience of place and to become rooted in and native to the ground we find ourselves on.

In exploring and cultivating the pattern of Homecoming, we may ask: what is this place asking of me? What is my gift and what am I uniquely called to do? How can I set a context for others to understand my perspective and what can I learn from noticing the felt life that is unfolding within my own interior landscapes of place?



Photo credit: Tables and Chairs

## 2. Belonging

As the rational mind explores patterns of Relationship, the mythic imagination discovers the companion pattern of Belonging.



Photo credit: Tables and Chairs

The urge to belong to a place is basic to the tissue that connects all of life – a pattern of aliveness that brings us into alignment with the ecology of nature. With Belonging, we reach for an empathic resonance with our world.

Here, we may ask: what do we hold sacred in our relationships with each other - and with the human and more than human world? How do I belong to this place in ways I don't belong anywhere else?





Photo credit: City Repair Project

### 3. Regenerativity

While the rational mind explores ways to create Convergent Wholeness from Divergent Parts - enabling new capabilities to emerge and creating something new together - the place-based mythic imagination embraces the parallel pattern of Regenerativity. Regeneration happens when we create beauty through seeing all that we do as a form of craft and through embracing craftsmanship as the expression of place through the hands and the heart as well as the head. It happens when our career becomes a calling and vocation and we see ourselves as the instrument for the change we want to see in the world. With Regenerativity, we find trust in the conscious evolution of life, including the sense that we can approach life's challenges with grace and ease and an appreciation for life's natural unfolding.

Therefore, to be regenerative is to ask: what are we called to create together? What is the tone of the place that we are creating from, and how can we carry this tone within our work? Where are the places we go to find beauty and how can we craft our work in a beautiful way?



#### 4. Transformative Celebration

Where the rational mind recognizes the Self-Integrating, animating spark of life, connecting with place and the mythic imagination reveals the corresponding pattern of Transformative Celebration. Whenever we gather together and enliven the senses through art, music, storytelling, poetry and movement, we are engaging the life-generating forces of Transformative Celebration, which includes ritual and the spirit of carnival. Like the bright green blades of grass rising up through concrete, this is the upturning of the established order and making a place in the world for the raw, unformed impulse of life to burst through. The sense of gathering together on the public square or in the commons, of bringing together diverse energies, and of expressing the democratic spirit are a catharsis of this energy. The experience of it reinstates our sense of home for ourselves in the larger world and in the universe.





Photo credit: Tables and Chairs

Nurturing these patterns of life begins with coming together and telling our stories - with connecting people through their common care for a certain place, drawing on their stories of relationship with place, and inviting them to craft new stories of what is possible. Recounting these larger-than-life narratives of place is itself an act of joyous celebration, lighting a path to generativity and transformation. And in this way, we may also steward the discovery and articulation of an overarching, shared narrative of place.

By realizing that place is not an object or a backdrop, but a power and a presence, we can partner with it in a way that helps us craft our organizations and communities as spaces for life, opening our hearts to the experience of beauty, aliveness and possibility.



## CASE STUDY #3: EXPERIENCING MARIPOSA

### Re-imagining a Mythic Story of Community

Written by Michael Jones, long-time resident of the town of Orillia, Ontario.

For the past several years, I have served as the co-chair of two community roundtables in Orillia, Ontario, a rural farming and – at one time - successful industrial centre 90 minutes north of the city of Toronto. Nestled on the shores of Lake Couchiching, it has long served as a gateway to the great white pine forests and near-wilderness of Central Ontario. Our task on the roundtables has been to address Orillia’s downtown revitalization, economic development, cultural and event planning, infrastructure design and more. Through public conversations, individual initiatives and the support of city staff, our focus has been on what makes our community unique and how to redefine our role as citizens.

In this work, we have been accompanied – in spirit, at least – by Canadian humorist, Stephen Leacock, who a century earlier gathered together his observations and composites of the townspeople of Orillia and transported them into the much loved imaginary community of Mariposa within his book, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. Just as John Muir was an iconic figure whose work contributed to preserving and animating the wilderness ecologies and mythic origins in North America, Leacock was pivotal in the midst of the great upheavals of war and industrial progress in animating the longing for places that preserved our common humanity, including communities that could function on a human scale. His humorous and beguiling stories captured the imagination of readers around the world, many of whom traveled to Orillia in search of an opportunity to relive this myth for themselves.





What they found here, however, was a community still proud of its industrial past but now in sharp economic decline. Like many other midsize communities, it was long in search of a new narrative for the future that could build upon the industrial legacy from its past. For decades, this involved living in anticipation of an industry that would adopt Orillia as its new home. But as time passed, it became apparent that the community needed not to craft a new chapter in an old story but instead to change the nature of the story itself.

It was this insight that inspired the roundtables to imagine together how the story of place as told in Leacock's *Mariposa* can serve as a touchstone to which many community initiatives could be measured and understood. In re-imagining our own stories in this way, we took up the call to be anthropologists, uncovering the untold tales, forgotten artifacts, mysterious images and hidden meanings in order to polish and burnish them so that they may shine again and serve as the foundations of the community story.

Our desire to change the nature of our community's story also led us to explore the region's other, more ancient narrative – the indigenous story of Mnjikaning. Long before Orillia was an industrial economy, it was a gathering place - a destination for conversation amongst indigenous tribes and travelers from throughout northeastern Canada and the US. Mnjikaning means “gathering together,” and for millennia many gathered here from all directions to draw nourishment and strength from the fish that were found in the clear waters.



But it was not only the fish that made this a meaningful destination for so many. It was the creative energy of the land and the hospitality of the people who made their home in that place. They were the “keepers of the fish fence,” or the weirs, which are still located in The Narrows, a small channel that links two large lakes: Lake Simcoe, a deep, windswept lake to the south, and Lake Couchiching, a narrow, long, shallow winding finger lake to the north.



This land also marked the meeting place of the limestone plain and the warm, shallow pickerel lakes to the south and the deep granite and cold trout lakes of the pre-Cambrian shield to the north. To the south were mosquitoes and strawberries; to the north, blueberries and black flies. The people of Mnjikaning were unique in that they lived simultaneously in this natural creative incubator between two worlds — a “land in the middle” — where they were required to be masters of two distinct biospheres, each with its own complex ecology of fish, fauna and vegetation.

As we flash forward in time, Leacock’s mythical Mariposa and the indigenous story of Mnjikaning offered our community a ray of hope, an evocative narrative not only from the past but for the future – a recognition that in the fading of its industrial past there is a new story of place emerging in which the community may realize its potential as a place of meeting, a destination for global conversations, and an opportunity for visitors to develop their creative potential through active participation in culture, the arts, indigenous wisdom and the natural environment – experiences that are unique to the place itself. Underlying all of this, our vision has been to create an ethic and culture of local hospitality.

This vision led us to imagine our new public library not only as a book repository (the extent of the library board’s original vision) but as a public meeting space and the physical heart of the community - a ‘commons’ where many with diverse interests can meet and talk.

It also led us to imagine how to fill our public spaces in a beautiful way. This has included designating a part of our downtown as an ‘arts district.’ It has also included seeing the downtown as a space for street closings in order to celebrate our local culture through music and arts festivals that literally bring our streets alive.



Our belief is that the future will belong to those communities that are attuned to story, empathy, artistry, dialogue, originality and shared meaning, dimensions that express their unique character and strengths. They will hold a distinct advantage over those communities who, through analysis and logic alone, tend to frame their priorities primarily in economic, technical or business terms.

## D. THE CALL TO STEWARDSHIP

As we recognize the life in our organizations and communities, our own role becomes clear: we are to be faithful gardeners or stewards, cultivating change more than conducting it. Our task is to combine living systems perspectives and design principles with the power of story, meaning, beauty and place. In this way, we find the means to respond to three calls:

- to an inner call to come home to ourselves, to our gifts, and to the places and stories that shape us;
- to our yearning for belonging, flow and trust, which includes seeing the sacredness in our relationships;
- and to a calling or purpose that propels us into transformative action together.

In these ways, stewardship is less a role and more a commitment to tend to these fertile conditions, offered from a stance of reverence for the life in each of us and for the life between us, as well as for the transcendent potential that we may express together. It is a continuously unfolding inquiry, asking: “What conditions are needed in this moment, within these circumstances, to support life’s ability to thrive as fully as possible at every level?” And it is a purposeful set of responsive actions.





There is a challenging paradox woven into stewardship: it is a call at times to trust life's process of emergence, passively "holding space," while at other times it involves actively intervening and even on occasion making way for death. In the context of life's eternal cycles of germination, growth and decay, stewardship calls for both patient detachment and fierce determination at every stage of life.

Throughout, stewardship is fundamentally collaborative. It embraces uncertainty and invites learning, innovation and play. It recognizes emergent collective wisdom, developing individual and collective disciplines to listen for the voice of the whole even as it honors the needs of the parts. It demands intentional crafting of structures and systems. It necessarily takes a holistic view - which in organizations means linking purpose with passion, brand with culture, and worker with customer and community. Most of all, the steward *invites* change, rather than mandating it, taking steps to sense and support the change that is waiting to be expressed.

What, then, of management and leadership?

To understand what differentiates managers, leaders and the emerging work of stewardship, we might take as our point of reference the image of an oak tree. Leaves and branches symbolize the first level of learning and change. They represent the useful, surface-level busyness of the day-to-day, with its focus on managing the parts rather than the system as a whole through tactics, action plans, performance goals, and expert-driven solutions in a push to achieve certain outcomes.

There are also aspects of change that call for leadership. There, we direct our attention down a little, to the trunk and lower limbs. And our focus shifts from efficiency to effectiveness as we begin to look at structures, strategies and processes.

While intervening around strategies and structures can bring about significant and long lasting results, if we seek transformative, systemic change, then we need to look to the soil and root systems underneath the tree. Here, we shift from managing the parts and leading for effectiveness to stewarding the health of the whole, in all its potential. The fertility of the soil is critical in enabling the acorn to realize its destiny as a sturdy oak - to make the dramatic changes that are expressions of its true nature. The regenerative character of roots then gives the tree resilience and strength to grow. Communities and organizations are also composed of this interconnected and fragile latticework of root structures: neighborhoods, associations, networks and relationships. Too often, we believe that these systems are inexhaustible, much as the farmers on the Western Plains believed the soil was indestructible as they turned the sod toward the hot sun and witnessed the land die just as they hoped to prosper from it.



With this metaphor, we see that management and leadership are necessary, but only stewardship guides us towards those questions that are at the 'root' of transformative change - questions of beauty, gifts, courage, values and purpose - questions that contribute to building fertile ground and manifesting new possibilities for the future.

Photo credit: <http://www.treesquirrel.us/Fertilizing.html>





Photo credit: Tables and Chairs

This is true not only for the dramatically heralded change initiative. The nature of any living system is continuous change. More than that, the living systems lens reveals that our purpose in coming together in organization and community is to create ever more thriving, transforming and being transformed through interaction, contribution and learning. ***We come together to be transformed.*** From this perspective, stewardship is always an appropriate and potent stance.

## CASE STUDY #4: ZENITH CLEANERS

Written by Tolu Ilesanmi, Cleaner and CEO of Zenith Cleaning, a successful Montreal-based business offering commercial and residential cleaning services. You can learn more about Zenith at [www.zenithcleaners.com](http://www.zenithcleaners.com).

There is perhaps no service or job that seems more mundane and more lacking in promise than cleaning. The work of a cleaner tends to be transactional, impersonal, perpetuating a sense of shame and stigma. I came into it from business school because I loved its simplicity in comparison with complicated b-school theories and models of change. But I had to face the fact that cleaning is considered by most to be a dead end job or at best a temporary stepping stone.

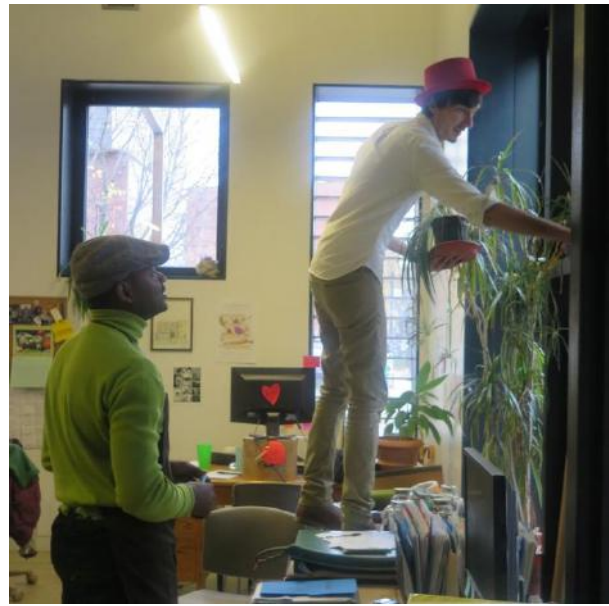
And yet I was drawn to the side of cleaning that we as a society were not engaging with - the idea of cleaning as a practice and a metaphor. My sense was that the business of cleaning was preventing cleaning from fulfilling its potential as a transformative practice that affects both object and subject, both cleaner and the thing being cleaned, both the agent of change and the object of change.



In fact, as I and the people I am very privileged to attract into cleaning for the love of it persisted in bearing witness to this other side of cleaning, we could not escape the simplicity and the profundity of what we were working and playing with. This led us to articulate what we saw as the essence of cleaning:

**"Cleaning is the process of removing dirt  
from any space, surface, object or subject  
thereby revealing beauty, potential, truth and sacredness."**

At the root of this understanding is stewardship, bringing care, attention and presence to a space, removing obstructions to the flow of life energy, creating conditions for both objects and subjects to thrive. When we go into a space to clean, we do not own the space or anything there. Our task is simply to remove dirt and render the space beautiful, to restore wholeness and return it to its essence. In a sense, we go in to care and to heal and then we leave when our task is done. And then, after we clean, people can do whatever it is they want and are capable of doing in the space - we have freed space and potential, for a time.



Through cleaning, we came to understand that while stewardship has elements of control – shifting things around, moving dirt from where it blocks potential and obstructs beauty to where it nourishes - it is essentially creating or allowing the conditions for life to thrive, for something bigger, something epic to emerge, like a gardener does by weeding a garden. At Zenith, cleaning became no longer just a service we offer but our practice.

This understanding seemed to unshackle cleaning, freeing it to do what it has always wanted to do - to transform not only the tangible but the intangible. Indeed, it is hard not to see how this principle applies not only to physical spaces or to the act of cleaning but also to leadership and everything on the planet we engage with. Perhaps we are here, wherever here is - this home, this project, this organization, this community, this country, this planet, this life - to reveal beauty, restore wholeness, return tangible or intangible things to essence, to truth and to sacredness and then to leave when our task is done.

Recognizing this emboldened me to embrace the identity of the Cleaner regardless of the stigma attached to it. The absurdity of being ashamed of something whose purpose is unveiling beauty became crystal clear, the way one must appreciate the dirtiness of a space in order to clean it. Being a Cleaner in a world in dire need of transformation becomes a thing to celebrate and not a thing to be ashamed of.

For clients, our approach to cleaning not only guarantees them great service, it exposes them to a new perspective that transforms their relationship to cleaners, cleaning and their work. What is more, it earns us their fierce loyalty.



A Zenith Cleaning Storm crew with Megosa, a Sudanese refugee

For employees, we've created a space where they feel nourished and fully alive for however long they are with us. During that time, they are often inspired to come up with and implement new ideas. In Cleaning Storms, for example, we partner with local community organizations to help people who would love a clean space but have no time to clean or money to hire cleaners. In two hours, a group of cleaners totally transforms their home for free and for fun.

For our business, an expansive view of cleaning has broadened our offerings, opened new doors and created new opportunities outside the scope of a traditional cleaning service. For instance, in addition to commercial and residential cleaning services, we now offer Cleaning as Practice experiences to organizations and individuals. After all, why should cleaning, with all its potency, simplicity and accessibility apply only to school hallways and not apply to how and what we learn and teach? Through these experiences, we invite people to be cleaners for a time and then to reflect on that experience. Among the many benefits and insights that are revealed, the act of cleaning together increases one's sense of belonging and evokes a sense of ownership that has more to do with the privilege of service and stewardship than possessiveness or control. The result is that beauty, truth and sacredness are revealed for people, organizations and even industries. Now when we consider cleaning a bank, we are of course thinking of cleaning the banking hall and washrooms but also participating in returning banking to its essence, free of corruption or dirtiness, where transactions are subordinate to human relationships.

Importantly, we continuously apply this same cleaning lens to Zenith itself – to our culture, our operations, our internal and external relationships and our finances. The beauty of cleaning is that it must happen again and again. This fact makes our work very dynamic, always getting richer, because we are not just cleaning; we are being cleaned.



## E. THE NEED FOR PRACTICE GROUNDS

Such stewardship is not a discrete set of competencies that can be trained and certified. It is not a “to do” list. Instead, it is an ongoing personal practice, like a martial arts or spiritual practice, ever unfolding as the context changes, as the living system you are cultivating unfolds, and as *you* grow and evolve through the process. It is the practice of growing into wisdom, compassion and the ability to sense and support what is needed.

It may also be thought of as a form of craft, in which we build a reservoir of practical knowledge based on direct experience. This kind of knowing is transmitted primarily through intuition and imitation and involves the integration of the intellect with the heart and the hand.



Photo credit: Tables and Chairs



Both ways of viewing stewardship call for practice grounds - spaces and times of shared learning, experimentation and reflection, where we can try on new perspectives and behaviors for size and where they can be reinforced over time. In such spaces, for example, we may practice the skills and techniques needed for generative conversations, for participatory organizing structures, and for sensing the voice of the whole. Like a greenhouse, these must be spaces for renewal and relationship with both people and place, where we may be nourished by nature and the arts and where we may continually refine our attunement to the underlying patterns of life. Over time, every organization and community may come to be seen and structured as practice grounds. But until then – and possibly even after – there is a clear need for dedicated time and space apart from the day to day.

To varying degrees, we find examples of such practice grounds in many places: in [Art of Hosting](#) events, in the [social lab](#) movement, in the learning journeys of [Mycelium](#), in [collective impact gatherings](#), in the [Open Space Agility](#) process, and more.



Photo credit: Benoit Meunier

To add to these examples, we will describe two forms of practice grounds that are in the early stages of development as the culmination of our work to date. In both, change is invited and nurtured at multiple levels of the system: for individuals, organizations and community. Both are (a) guided by the explicit intention to align with life's patterns and propensities, (b) woven with story, art and inspiration, and (c) rooted in place. And both are intended to be piloted and then propagated in multiple locations.

The first form of practice grounds is a **learning festival** exploring what it means to craft a city as a “space for life.”

The spirit of festival, or carnival, is the embodiment of the pattern of Transformative Celebration. Whenever we create places for people to become more whole, we are invoking the spirit of carnival. Carnival is an event, but it is also a state of being — celebrating the whole of life, including its darker tones. Carnival is the expression of the poetic spirit that clears away the old order to open space for the regenerative force of life to flow through. As such, carnival raises our spirits, awakens our senses and helps us see and act in new ways, often through playfulness, ceremony and celebration.

These are some of the core questions shaping the learning festival:

- If we believe narratives of life, stewardship and thriving are needed, what experiences will help people imagine and integrate these guiding stories?
- If we believe that the city (or town, or even village) is a powerful scale for working with life-centered narratives, what experiences will help us fathom — and therefore more naturally steward - the city, in all its complexity?
- If we believe festival is the form of learning most suited to this exploration, how can this type of gathering go beyond play alone to support powerful learning and transformation?
- If we believe that deepening our connection with place is an important part of moving into life-centered narratives, then how can we invite people into a deeply local and personal experience of place within a planetary perspective?

In all, this is the project’s core inquiry:

Within the dynamic, artful and participatory learning structures that festival offers, with its power to ignite a transformation of consciousness, what is the usefulness of a living systems lens to reveal key guiding principles and to support targeted prototyping and action?





The second project is an **action-learning cohort** made up of 20 to 25 organizational and community leaders. Over the course of 7 to 9 months, they will move through a regular rhythm of multi-day, reflective learning events, along with on-the-ground prototyping and application in between. Specifically, an overview of the four living systems patterns will be shared at an opening event. Then the subsequent four gatherings will dive more deeply into each of the patterns in turn, with a final gathering focusing on integration and celebration. Each of these gatherings will be infused with the expressive power of art, music, story and time in nature.

Although living systems principles will provide a clear path and directionality to the process, the specific learning outcomes and impact cannot truly be plotted in advance. They will emerge as a function of each participant's context, of their interactions with others in the cohort, of their experience of nature, art and place, and of the prototyping that takes place between gatherings.

In this way, we see the action-learning cohort as a collective inquiry into the active conditions needed for generative change. It will enable participants to discover new ways of understanding their influence in complex community systems and of seeing and acting on opportunities to shift their organizations toward greater resilience and cross-system impact.



Our aim with these two projects is to support the pioneering of a new community stewardship model in which communities invest in the uniqueness of their place and the capacity of their own citizens and institutions.

## CASE STUDY #5: CRUDESSENCE

Written by [Julian Giacomelli](#), CEO of Crudessence at the time of writing. The company is a successful Montreal-based food services company, with multiple restaurants, a catering business, an academy, and in-store and online sales of prepared foods and related products.

At [Crudessence](#), we feel very strongly about sustainability, and strive to go even beyond, to transcend the commonly held vision of sustainability. Coming from deep in our collective values is the belief that there is a new way to be in business, in community and in life. And we are out to live that vision.

The company has grown significantly in many ways over the past five years, and in good part due to our expanding diversity. Diversity in the customer base, the employee pool and even in our offering. We have grown over ten times in that period. As the reach and size of our ecosystem has grown, what was once a clear vision among a handful of employees started to become less so. We started hearing disagreements among staff and confusion from our customers as to what Crudessence was all about. There was a growing and apparent need to clarify and perhaps expand on the original vision of the founders, who had strong intentions but had not imagined the size of this endeavour. So we decided to undertake a vision quest for Crudessence, and set out to create a manifesto.



In expressing a manifesto, we hoped that there would be numerous rich benefits along the way. And that a manifesto would surely contribute in ways we did not know and could not name. We realized that an organism cannot mature into vibrant health if it does not fully know who or what it is. The calling for a collaborative self-expression of Crudessence was clear. So the journey began, firmly believing that this endeavour would kick-start a new phase in our development.

With the guidance and leadership of visionary Michelle Holliday ([Thrivability](#) Montreal and [Cambium](#)) and über-consultant/coach Jean-Philippe Bouchard ([Spiralis](#)), we embarked on what would turn out to be a nearly one-year Manifesto crafting journey. Through dialogue with multiple stakeholders, we tackled topics found in a typical visioning or mission-definition exercise, and also touched on more subtle layers, calling for an inner organizational voice to emerge. We wanted to touch basic existential questions like who we are, what we want to be, and to listen for what else seemed alive in us.

In the process design, we simultaneously founded the Crudessence Community of Stewards (CoS), a leadership group comprised of the founders, managers, connectors and coordinators. The intention behind the CoS was to create a community of learning and sharing among the leaders, or “stewards”, of Crudessence. We have met roughly every three to four months since December 2011.



At the initial offsite meeting, we prepared “data” for the stewards to look at, asking Crudessence to express itself through the various lenses of the clients, the organization, the money, the staff and the community. We spent 36 hours ruminating on what we were grateful for, what brought us together, what held us back and shared much more. From this meeting, the seeds for the manifesto were sown.

Following this, we invited all our staff to open space meetings. This taken from the poster to staff:

*Help us clarify the mission of the company to manifest our dreams: an invitation to co-create our workplace... The co-creation of the manifesto of Crudessence. Crudessence is a visionary company with a revolutionary social mission! But how is this mission manifesting exactly?*



At these half-day meetings, we shared stories, played games and expressed what we loved and liked less about Crudessence. We talked about what we aspired to be and what we wanted to avoid. We shared food and laughed, inviting other stakeholders to the meetings including key suppliers and trusted customers. The harvest was sifted through, combined with information from the past, and a small group started writing. Through a number of iterations of feedback from the founders, CoS, and staff at large, the manifesto slowly emerged, at a natural pace. The final draft was agreed in September.

The Manifesto now graces the walls of our Academy, the Crudessence website, our restaurant menus, and has been shared through social media into our ecosystem. Over the next few months, we will post it in all the physical Crudessence spaces and continue to improve it.

It serves as a rallying point, as marching orders, a flag to carry, and a clear expression of what we aim to do – and how we strive to be. It can help us recruit staff and partners better, and speak to our customers in precise language.

When something comes from deep within you, it is as if it was always there. I already cannot remember what Crudessence was like before the Manifesto.

The full Crudessence manifesto can be viewed [here](#), and also in [French](#).



## MOVING FORWARD

So, where do you begin? What is a good first step in inviting change using these perspectives and practices?

The sage would say that perhaps it is first to 'walk in beauty' and in so doing to fill every space we are in in a beautiful way. The power of beauty is that it stands at the threshold of the visible and the invisible, where science and the mythic world meet. Seeing the world as beautiful helps us see the patterns, connections, relationships and movements of life that are often invisible to the untrained eye. The word beauty itself is closely related to both calling and compassion. As such, beauty lies at the root of what it means to be truly compassionate and truly alive. It is our call to life. To be regenerative is to return the world to beauty.



Building on the possibilities beauty unveils, the scientist would propose engaging in generative conversations, such as:

- What will it look like when each of us is able to bring the best of ourselves? When we each feel deeply at home?
- What will it look like when our interactions support not only information sharing, decision-making, effective action and trust but playfulness, learning and joy? When our patterns of belonging are infused with a sense of sacredness?
- What is the calling or purpose - the emergent, unifying story - that propels us into transformative action together, as citizens, employees, customers, community members? And how will we live that story?

Our greatest challenge is not lack of answers to these questions. The world has exploded with new, life-aligned strategies and tactics - things like Agile project management, new forms of shared ownership, and participatory governance - and even more discovery awaits us in our conversations and imaginings. Instead, the real challenge is to find the collective will and courage to embark on these new paths, to create space and time to learn from our experimentation, and to focus not only on changing the system but on changing ourselves along the way. The real question is: **how do we need to see** and **who do we need to be** in order to choose the most appropriate tactics and to steward their implementation well?



## CONCLUSION

It is in the ecotone between scientific observation and mythic inspiration that we find a pathway to meaningful change. Here, we discover a view of the world that is transformative, organic and whole. We see that our organizations and communities have the potential to be places where we are nourished by our relationships and by the opportunity to contribute and develop our gifts. Where we can be held lovingly by people and place. Where we can grow into wisdom alongside each other, with trust that this is the most direct path to effective action. Where we can experience beauty, wholeness and healing. And where these are the express purposes of coming together.

Viewed in this way, stewarding change - *stewarding life* - becomes even more than an inquiry and a practice. It is a quest. A hero's journey. A choose-your-own-adventure story. The challenges we face in our organizations, in our communities and in the world call for nothing less. And our own hearts crave nothing more.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Our distinct perspectives are elaborated in Michael Jones' latest book [\*The Soul of Place\*](#) and in his two previous books on reimagining leadership, in Michelle Holliday's slideshow, [\*Humanity 4.0\*](#), in her TEDx, "[\*The Pattern of Living Systems\*](#)," and in her forthcoming book, [\*The Age of Thrivability\*](#).
- <sup>2</sup> For example: Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life: A New Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996); Arie de Geus, *The Living Company: Habits for Survival in a Turbulent Business Environment*; Joanna Macy, *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Ourselves, Our World* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1998); Humberto M. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992); Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2006).
- <sup>3</sup> Karen Armstrong, *The Case for God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), p. xi.
- <sup>4</sup> Michael Jones, *The Soul of Place: Re-Imagining Leadership Through Nature, Art and Community* (Toronto: Friesen Press, 2014), p. 91-98.
- <sup>5</sup> Michelle Holliday, "What You See Is What You Get: The Full Promise of Seeing Your Organization as a Living System," Huffington Post, February 25, 2015, [www.huffingtonpost.com/great-work-cultures/what-you-see-is-what-you\\_b\\_6755238.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/great-work-cultures/what-you-see-is-what-you_b_6755238.html).