

A developing perspective on primary energy in working communities

- Anjet van Linge -

A lot of what happens in organizations appears cyclical; periods of growth and bloom are inevitably followed by periods of retreat or pause, people group and ungroup, join and leave. Working with organizations over the years has made me reflect on this cyclical nature, and how it manifests itself in various ways. This chapter offers a perspective on the cyclical movement of energy in organizations. It looks at organizations not only as a configuration of people, processes and tasks, but also as working communities. Working communities are communities of people who gather for a particular task¹. They can include all the people in an organization, but an organization will at the same time often also have multiple overlapping working communities. Working communities do not necessarily need to be organizations. In the first workshop about the perspective shared in this chapter a friend joined who had been the driving force behind a very active network of international families making a home in Leiden. Hers was not an organization, but it was definitely a working community.

This chapter explores the movement of primary energy in working communities. It is a developing perspective – every time I work with it, talk about it or write about it, something is added, a new aspect offered. To capture it in a chapter seems not to do justice to its evolving nature, yet also offers an opportunity to share more widely what has started to be used as ‘the primary energy model’. It builds on the ideas set out in the previous (?) chapter about fields, and will invite us to notice what is moving in organizational life in different spheres of presence.

¹ I learned this word, *werkgemeenschap* in Dutch, when I worked in my first job in a Shell refinery. Jeroen van der Veer, who later became the organization’s CEO, used it to describe the community of people working at the refinery.

The intention of this chapter is not to claim *the* new truth about how organizations function, it is to offer another perspective, another language to the 'more' that is also going on in organizations as working communities.

Three spheres of presence

Primary task

Organizations have a *primary task*. This is the task an organization is required to do in order to survive (Rice, 1965). Put simply, it can be described as the what and where of an organization. It generally has some physical manifestation, like petrol produced by an oil company, the bank statements for your bank account, the food in a restaurant or signed laws approved by parliament.

As organizations exist in a particular context, the primary task too is performed in this context, and what is needed to survive can therefore change. The recent economic crisis has invited a re-thinking of the primary tasks of banks for example (from 'making money with clients' money' to 'earning a fee for keeping clients' money safe' some people would argue), and the rise of internet shops like Amazon require physical bookstores to rethink their primary task.

The primary task is executed by the organization – and, ideally at least, one can point at an organization chart and be clear which part of the organization is responsible for which aspect of its primary task.

For my former office I invited a collective of carpenters to make me a table fit for the space. The primary task of this particular collective was (and is) to sell and then make custom-made furniture.

Primary Spirit

The primary task of the organization is animated by its *primary spirit* (Bain, 2002; Armstrong, 2005). The primary spirit breathes life into the task; it is the collection of animating principles that make the task come to life. Where primary task deals with the what and where of an organization, primary spirit deals with the how, the values

that underpin the work. Primary spirit is not about the espoused values of an organization, though they can sometimes be an indication of what values are also alive in practice. Primary spirit manifests itself by the way an organization lives its values in its daily practice. Like the primary task is executed by the organization, the primary spirit is carried by the working community.

Two carpenters built the table. They worked together seamlessly, each finding their role and stimulating each other to make it the best table it could be. They took pride in making this unusual six meter-long table that stood on only four legs. They sharpened each other's skills and let the process of making something they had never done before strengthen their craftsmanship. They worried about me making holes in it for computer plugs because it would take away from the beauty and integrity of the table as an object (I did not). Working in this way was essential to their collective and critical in how they acted on their primary task in relation to me, their client.

In my mind I differentiate primary spirit from for example organizational culture in the sense that it is about the art and craft of the work. It describes the extent to which the working community takes the craftsmanship required for the primary task seriously, and whether or how it leaves space for the art of the work to manifest itself. As such, primary spirit may be what fuels the culture of an organization.

(Reference to Richard Sennet – look up!)

Another insight into how primary spirit manifests itself can be found by reflecting on recent interactions with any call centre. Who answers the phone? Where are they physically in relation to me? What questions am I being asked and how can I ask for what I need? Do I notice pride or joy in the person who takes my call? What do I notice? And what does that tell me about the art and craft of the work in that community? All these questions will insight into aspects of the primary spirit.

I want to be careful here to not suggest that primary spirit is always or only the happy beautiful spirit that is present when people do what they enjoy. Every organization has a primary spirit, and it is the nature of that spirit, and its position in

a cyclical movement that becomes the focus of inquiry, of noticing, as I will outline later.

Primary Knowing

Occasionally, when working in or with an organization, we touch on something that appears more essential still than primary spirit. As suggested in the chapter about field, sometimes we find ourselves in a 'more' that is akin to being in the zone. When we become aware of being in such a field, we may at times notice a connection to a source from where our work stems. This is *primary knowing*. Otto Scharmer describes it as the moment the painter draws from a deeper source, just before she puts the first stroke on the white canvas (Scharmer, 2007). In sculpting it is the same moment: even when you work with a model, there is something sacred about the instant before the first hammer on chisel on stone. (also reference to Sennett, where the chisel then becomes the eyes).

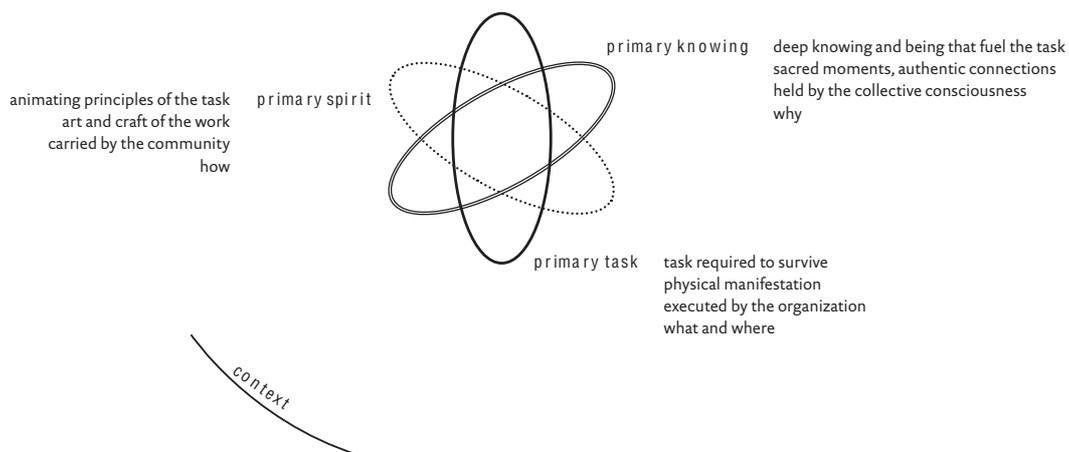
It can be manifest in a group when its members find ways to communicate without words, to understand each other seamlessly and operate as a collective entity. It appears present when they find moments to address the deeper questions that move them all and they allow themselves to see each other person to person, having let go of the fears and judgments that might block authentic connections. Thus, primary knowing is at once accessed individually and collectively. Where primary task is about the what and where, and primary spirit is about the how, primary knowing is about the deeper why of the organization, the community, the individuals and the collective: why-are-we-here-now? When the execution of the primary task lies with the organization, and working communities maintain the primary spirit, the primary knowing is the knowledge that is held by collective consciousness of the community (yet owned by no-one).

The two carpenters appeared exquisitely clear about why they were there. It was because they were carpenters. Their being a carpenter was a way of bringing into the world (or quite mundanely, my office) a table that was more than a mere object. Some people say it has a soul, others that it refers to the 'more' we often cannot name. It is a table that is testimony to the primary knowing of the collective

who made it, and it invites people who use it to bring to the table what they know of why they are here.

Three spheres of presence

In describing the spheres of primary spirit, knowing and task, it is easy to slip into verticalistic language and sometimes task, spirit and knowing feel like levels. I think it is helpful to look at them as three spheres of presence that exist simultaneously, and where one is not more important or deeper than the other, even though task may have a more immediately visible manifestation than the other two. When sharing this perspective in a workshop, Jos van den Broek, a Leiden University professor in Science Communication, immediately crafted a 3-D model of three pieces of paper, stuck on a pen. You could move the pieces of paper around the pen and look at how they related to each other. I still have it. On paper, and in 2-D, this is how I help myself understand it:



Primary task, spirit and knowing appear as three spheres of presence, each in motion individually and in relation to each other. All three spheres are present simultaneously, yet often in our work with organizations or working communities we focus on only one or two. In my work with clients I sometimes had the impression that the spheres were out of synch, that the spirit of a working community was seeking to animate a task that was no longer present, or the other way around, that the spirit was desperately wanting to find a new definition of task,

in relation to the context the organization found itself in and fuelled by a knowing that no-one could quite articulate but was felt nonetheless.

Primary energy

Observing how the three spheres move in the organizations I have worked with over the past years, I have come to think of the driving force of that movement as primary energy². What I noticed was that sometimes movement was driven by the energy of compassion, of space and trust, of being good enough, enabling and allowing connections to emerge, of libido serving as a force of creativity, of abundance – in one word, the energy of love. At other times movement appears to be driven by the energy of not being good enough, of shame, scarcity, greed, of not enough and needing more, of restriction – in one word, the energy of fear.

When using this developing perspective with people, we have often discussed the choice of the words love and fear. Isn't love too laden a word, and can you not replace it by trust, I was asked. Or is it not simply love, without opposing it to fear? For now, I stay with this choice of words. Thinking about love and fear as a continuum enables me to explore to what extent an organization's orientation towards primary task is driven by love³, or how fear manifests itself in the community's primary spirit.

One of my clients built a way of working around the craftsmanship of its engineers, another had created very strict procedures in which even the changing of a light bulb was subject to asking permission. How the art and craft of the work evolved in one organization versus the other differed enormously: in one community slowly a spirit

² The next section of this chapter has been moved at least fifty times in the writing process. Do I talk first about what moves the three spheres? Or do I first talk about the directions along which they move. Ideally I'd like to do both at the same time, or show the animation with a little video of the pieces of paper and the pen.

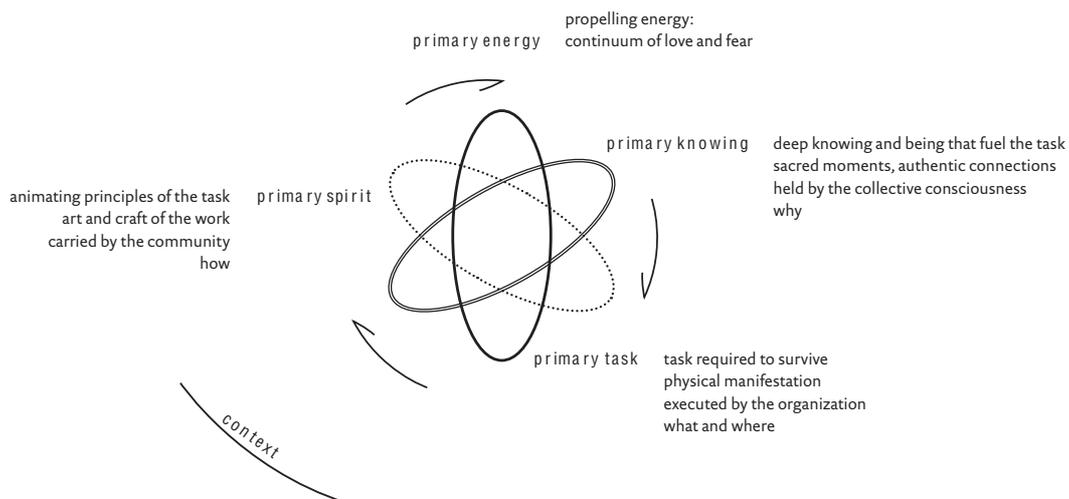
³ When needing to choose one of the Greek words for love, agape comes closest. However, I use love here in the sense of the fundamental energy that drives us, and in a way it is hard to give that a name that is not already tainted by the many associations to the word. For greek definitions, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_words_for_love

of craftsmanship, accountability and pride developed and people would call each other to task with kind force, collectively growing their skills both as craftspeople and leaders. In the other community procedures dominated how people worked, with little time and space for discovering smarter ways of working and a reluctant submission to what other people told them to do; the primary task appeared to be following the rules instead of manufacturing safely, sustainably and profitably.

Only recently I looked up what other meanings primary energy may have – and I found the Wikipedia definition (which is echoed by other websites):

Primary energy is energy found in nature that has not been subjected to any conversion or transformation process. It is energy contained in raw fuels as well as other forms of energy received as input to a system.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primary_energy)



Energy that has not been subjected to a transformation process seems a fitting definition for primary energy in our sense of the word too. It is this energy that moves the three spheres. On one end of the continuum, this is the energy of love. One could argue that the other end of the continuum is no longer no longer primary energy, but already a conversion of it, as the energy of fear is in essence the fear of the absence of love (space, trust, compassion, etc.).

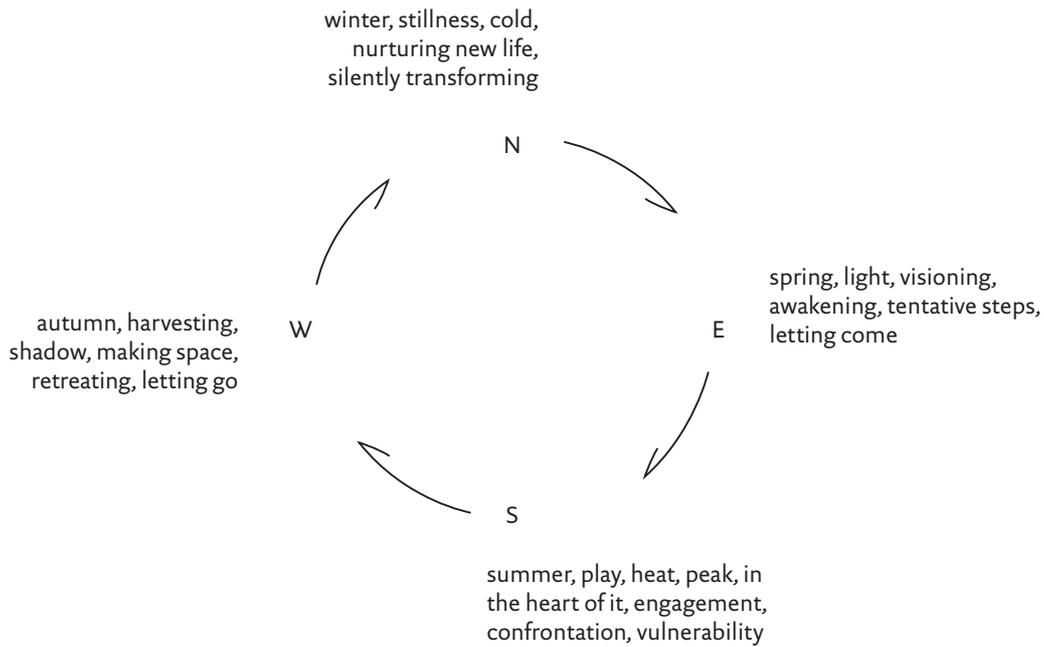
Cardinal directions & movement of the spheres

Primary energy moves the spheres, it drives how organizations develop their primary task, how communities nurture their primary spirit and it may even determine whether or not the collective field that holds our primary knowing is accessible. In my work with organizations I noticed how this movement appears cyclical – growth follows decline and pause, endings make space for new beginnings. Following Scharmer’s Theory U, it is like a continuous cycle of U’s, of letting go to let come, and letting come only to let go again.

A few years ago, people who had been trained in Native American traditions put me in touch with the four cardinal directions as beacons for the cyclical movement of natural life. This resonated and it seemed that these four directions also offered an insight into the nature of the movement of the spheres of primary task, spirit and knowing. The movement follows the rhythm of the seasons:

- ≈ the growth and light of spring where new ideas sprout, tentative first steps are taken, and what has been waiting can start to come to life;
- ≈ the heat and warmth of summer, where activities reach a peak, you feel you are in the heart of work that feels like play, and at the same time confrontations and the abundance of force and potency can create vulnerability;
- ≈ the paradox of autumn, a time for harvesting the fruits of summer and for letting go what is no longer needed, for shedding leaves and making space, and preparing for descent into retreat;
- ≈ and winter, a time of stillness and dark, where life appears gone but has merely retreated like the juices of a tree into its trunk, a period of silent transformation in preparation for the next spring, and so on⁴.

⁴ The model of course is springs from living and working in a northern hemisphere – where the sun travels through the South and North represents winter. In a southern hemisphere one could switch North and South, and in a region with a less clear differentiation between the seasons as described here, other models may apply better.



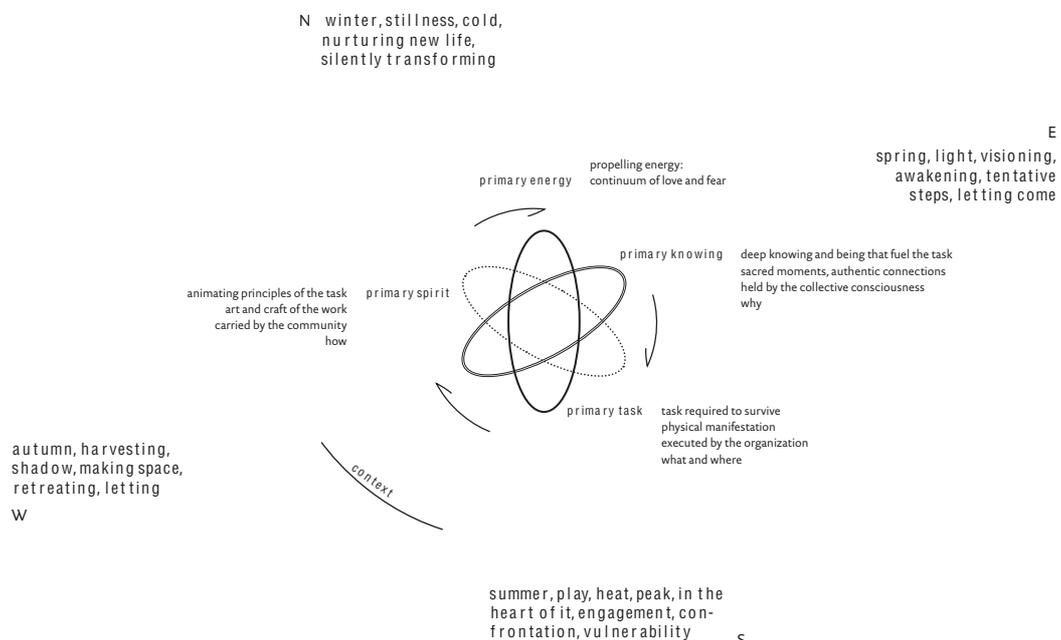
In working with the cardinal directions we (as I did much of this work with my colleague and co-author Zachary Green) discovered how much universal appeal these descriptions hold for people. The cycle thus described seems to offer a helpful language to think about (and often physically explore by laying it out in a room) where an organization finds itself, where one is in it and why that is so. In the work we have often used the four elements fire, water, earth and air and placed them at the four points in the cycle. Different traditions locate these elements at different points and we have found there is no one way. It is however a helpful way to invite people to associate with the four directions, and typically we use (starting from East) fire/water/earth/air, or turning the elements a quarter turn, air/fire/water/earth.

The cardinal directions offer a way to understand the movement of primary task, spirit and knowing. I can start to think about the nature of a primary task in an organization, and wonder where along the cycle it finds itself. If the task is clearly defined, and being executed in full exchange with the organization's context, then it may be a south orientation. If the spirit is characterized by tentatively finding new ways of working, and conversations are about what happened when someone tried something new, while newly found artful ways of working are beginning to be developed in response to changing client needs, then maybe spirit is moving into east. I could try to describe in a matrix what each sphere looks like in each direction

and I have decided not to that. For one, because I could not possibly give a definitive answer, and while there may be archetypes, I think we are still discovering these through the work with this perspective. Additionally, in working with this as a model, the strength of the work has been that it invites people to frame their own experience and explore how they see the task or spirit of their working community in relation to the directions, and what makes them think that. It is the dialogue that results that offers space for further movement.

Bringing together the three spheres, primary energy and the cardinal directions offers the picture below.

The three spheres do not always move in synch. The invitation then, is to explore how the three spheres are moving alone and together, how they relate, how this developing perspective can help us understand life in working communities, at a time when so many organizations have forgotten what it is to also be a community, and fear seems to be a more dominant driver than love.



Working with task and spirit

In the autumn of 2009, during the period of the banking crisis, a colleague told me how the bank she worked at wanted to carry on as usual. It had little appetite to review what it needed to be doing, what it was in fact doing or what it seemed to be doing in the eyes of others.⁵ . In two departments however there was a stirring, a desire to review what it meant to be a banker, how the craft of banking could be rediscovered and what that meant for the way in which the bank carried out its activities. Discussing the primary energy perspective with her, she commented that she had the impression that any movement on task was halted, or at best moved by a fear for losing job, status and income, both at an individual level and at an organizational level. In relation to the bank's role in society, she noticed how senior leaders preferred moving on with business as usual, instead of also looking at what may need to be understood about why things had turned out this way, and how the spirit of the working community inside the organization and in the sector might have contributed to the crisis. She had been surprised that it was the HR and Finance communities who looked for a movement in the sphere of primary spirit, and was wondering what it meant that these communities were seeking change. We talked about the need for these communities to be serving something honorable, and that perhaps precisely because they were not directly to be blamed for what had happened but were not innocent either, that they had retained the capacity to reflect on what had disappeared in a movement apparently driven by gain.

In seeking to understand the primary task, I wonder what the organization does, how it relates to its context, what it thinks it does, and what it should be doing (Lawrence, 1985). I seek to understand who does what, and where task-and authority boundaries have been drawn, I pay attention to the physical signs of the task in the organization, and seek to understand what metaphors the task may offer so I can explore both the hope and anxiety the task may generate in the working community that populates the organization.

In exploring the primary spirit of the working community in an organization, I notice how the community goes about its work. Apart from the structural organization of

⁵ Lawrence distinguishes three primary tasks: the task the people in an organization ought to pursue, the normative task, the existential task they believe they are doing, and the phenomenal task that is hypothesized they are engaged in but of which they may not be aware (Lawrence, 1985).

the work, who really does what, who takes what roles? What is being valued in the work, what given attention? Where are which people gathered for which work, what type of conversations take place between them? Where do I notice joy or fear, pride, craftsmanship? And how does the community deal with me, how does it make me feel, when I connect with it, as client, consultant or in another way?

When looking at the spheres of primary task and primary spirit together, I wonder how they connect. Where do they touch each other, and where is their movement out of synch? How does this manifest itself and does that matter? How does it impact the functioning of the organization as a working community? How does it contribute to the organization's ability to survive? How does a changing context impact the way these two spheres touch? Which communities inside the total organization are holding or nurturing which aspect of the organization's primary spirit? What happens when the context an organization functions is asking for a shifting of the primary task, a harvesting of what was useful up to that point and a letting go of other aspects? Can primary spirit follow that move or is, in fact the spirit leading the way?

Recently I have started to use the primary energy cycle as a way to make visible where communities and individual people believe the task and spirit of their organization and community are at. It helps us explore what characterizes both position and movement of these spheres, and which they feel is leading. When doing this as a large group process, it generates insights not only into the state of task and spirit, but it also provides information on where individual people find themselves along the cycle, and (given time) offers the opportunity to explore the relationship between parts of the community or the roles individual people may be taking.

It was only through working with the model physically in a large room that we became aware of the importance of the axes and halves. The northern half of the cycle could be called the cold half, the southern half the warm. The western half of the cycle could be the half of decline and letting go, the eastern half that of growth and letting come. When you stand in the east, the movement focuses on what is still

to come, standing in the west the light shines on what has already been⁶. When doing this work in a group, it pays to notice who is facing you along an axis, and what information this may be offering about how you relate and what space you can make available between you. We found that many people have a preference for one particular direction or quadrant, and a tendency to represent that perspective in a working community. We also learnt that most organizations have a preference for the northeast through to the southwest part of the cycle, the area traditionally labeled as growth and success, and often seek a movement back into the south once they realize they are beyond a peak in performance.

The work of Bill Plotkin, who has developed a wheel of human development based on a variety of indigenous and modern traditions (Plotkin, 2008), not only confirms the meaning of directions and quadrants, but he also talks about the importance of transitions from one stage to another. In the work we have done so far this has not yet become apparent, but it is worth thinking further about how an organization or community transitions from one stage to another in terms of task and spirit, and whether we can identify what signals or enables such a transition.

Sometimes organizations seek help in one sphere when the problem lies in another or in the way the spheres relate. This of course is nothing new. Working from this perspective can help a consultant or leader to identify what action, intervention or invitation is required in order to enable the community to move. In east, holding grows the fragile new life, the new beginnings, the fear of the first steps, the trying and prototyping. In south, moving with the burst of activity enables full engagement with what is becoming, and fertile development of new ideas into maturity, energetic activity that is focused and sharp. In west, the chaos that emerges from the south often asks for merely being, for tuning in and understanding what it is that needs to stay, what needs to go, what needs grounding and nurturing in the winter of the north. When a countercyclical movement is sought, I have found myself asking what is hard to engage with in its full presence (pushing back from south to east), what is hard to let go of (wanting movement from west to south), what is difficult to nurture, transform or simply be with (resistance to turn to north), or what anxieties

⁶ Thank you Sara Neuff, for making this clear to us during Group Relations International's winterwalk in December 2009.

the new possibilities evoke in us (reluctance to turn to east, once again). Cyclical movement is inevitable, skipping a phase not possible. Leadership from the perspective of the cyclical movement of these three spheres invites us to stay and move with that reality.

Exploring primary knowing

When Scharmer speaks about primary knowing, at an individual level, he describes the moment just before a painter puts his brush on the white canvas. He uses that to illustrate a connection to source, from where the painter paints. Elsewhere he contrasts analytic knowing built up out of isolated objects and events that are connected by the human mind, with primary knowing which arises from “interconnected wholes, rather than isolated contingent parts and by means of timeless, direct presentation” (Scharmer, xxxx [\(in Presence, look up reference\)](#)).

When Group Relations International, hosted its first collective consciousness conversation in 2009, this event was based on a firm yet fragile belief that such an interconnected whole might hold a knowing that was more than we could each access on our own. We believed that there was one consciousness to which we were all connected and through which collective action could be taken. And we wondered whether working from this belief might enable an exploration of leadership that was different than what we were used to. We gathered with about thirty people and experienced the depth of knowing that was available, if we simply let it be.

In a way, this experience opened me, us up to a way of working that trusted more than before what I knew intuitively even though there were no direct analytic data available, a knowing that is indeed akin to the moment just before the painter puts his brush on the canvas, a knowing that explains why sometimes you know who is on the phone or standing right behind you, a knowing that no longer labels as coincidence someone crossing your path with the resources you need to progress a plan you are deeply committed to.

Looking back at my work with organizations over the years, I came to realize that this knowing is also available in organizations (and of course, why would it not be, if we see organizations also as working communities and therefore as interconnected wholes of animated people). Theory U (Scharmer, 2007) offers some indication of how to work with that. When looking at primary knowing in the context of three moving spheres of presence, this sphere holds both the deeply known yet unspoken and the not knowing, the unknown.

Working with primary knowing in organizations, I pay attention to what excites and frightens people, to little clues that might indicate what this community's unique contribution may be, to conversations, symbols, routines that indicate something is deeply known but not yet spoken, and to the movement of the energy, both inside the community and inside myself. The first collective consciousness conversation taught me, as one of its guides, the importance of trusting that in groupwork there is a why-are-we-here-now, and that I do not need to know the answer to that question in order to be able to work with it. I 'merely' need to be prepared to encounter whatever that answer may be.

A working community has the capacity to explore this field of consciousness held by the interconnected whole and listen to what it knows. In an organization where the primary energy is more dominated by fear than by love, it can be incredibly difficult to engage in such a task of collective inquiry.

Hirschhorn talks about primary risk as 'the felt risk of choosing the wrong primary task, that is, a task that ultimately cannot be managed' (Hirschhorn, 1999). When faced with the need to review the primary task, harvest what was good and let go of what is no longer needed, the anxiety caused by experiencing this risk can be significant. It may be that experiencing a shift in primary spirit can feel more risky because to some it might appear more fundamental (although I can also imagine that newly exploring the primary spirit of a community can facilitate the process of redefining a primary task). The primary risk experienced in exploring one's primary knowing can be significant, and in an organization dominated by the energy of fear, it may even be impossible to face this risk. This does not mean the knowing is not available, it merely means it is not at that point accessible.

The paradox of primary knowing may be that in its cyclical nature, it holds the space both of knowing and not knowing: the first glimpses of knowing in East, fully knowing in South, unknowing and holding on to some knowing in West and fully being with not knowing in North. Pema Chödrön, in one of her books, talks about not knowing, not hoping to know and not acting like you know. I have found that helpful counsel to stay with the essence of not knowing. At the same time it is important to discern when you do know and when pretending not to know is merely a way to act out the anxiety of taking a next step.

When gathering as guides to host the first collective consciousness conversation, we cycled around this process many times. At times we were able to access what only collectively we could know, because each of the four of us held different aspects of the interconnected whole. At times, our experience of primary risk got in the way of our knowing, and we freaked out, or acted out some of the desires of our egos to create the next new thing or stay comfortably where we were (instead of humbly serving what we felt we knew). It was probably not until we saw the fruit of this work in the way some participants started to lead their communities more courageously, spaciouly and lovingly, that we felt enough trust to act on what we had come to know (and for example, to start writing the first draft of this chapter two years ago). How to apply this to working communities in organizations is the next phase of our journey.

Over the past years I have been fortunate to work with an electricity company somewhere in Europe that has clearly set out to influence the energy transition in the regions in which it works. It has touched a deep knowing that simply providing a network or selling electricity is not enough and that the context in which it operates asks for a proactive role in the transition to greener energy. Yet its history is one of mergers and acquisitions on the one hand and a focus on regulations on the other. Redefining its primary task from merely maintaining a network to being a key player in the energy transition requires a different way of working inside the organization. As people with solar panels or biomass installations deliver energy to the net, electricity is no longer a one-way flow from powerplant to user. Similarly, being a catalyst in societal change is a very different role from being an executer of

regulations. Slowly the primary spirit of the working community is shifting, but with a strongly regulated history in an industry where small faults can cause death, the primary energy that moves this shift is inevitably mixed. Nurturing the energy of space, trust and good enough is a continuous process. Heroifying a handful of leaders as a way to deal with the complexity of this transition appears a risk. As it continues to move forward, the invitation is to stay tuned to the interconnected whole in exchange with the society this whole operates in, and craft a new spirit that supports the task, knowing that there are no easy solutions.

Often our ego can get in the way of hearing primary knowing – we meet, time and again, our desire to be important, our fear not to be seen, our need to control everything around us, our feelings of inadequacy. The desire to link, to see the patterns, and to connect the spheres can then block the flow of what is already there. I think perhaps more often than creating a link, the task is to remove blockages, to let go of what is in the way, to make space for receiving something new – and that it is in the exchange between being able to receive and give, to let come and let go, that the primary knowing gets accessed.

In daily organizational life primary knowing may not always be accessible, and sometimes it is only in the authentic (sacred) moments that it becomes visible. Noticing helps us tune into this knowing, as well as explore the relationships between the moving cycles of task, spirit and knowing together. Noticing is making available to perception that which is already present. The next chapters outline what we have so far learned about this practice.

Recently I talked to an architect about how in his office they always work with paper models of the buildings they design. While autoCAD-programs offer many ways of doing this work on a computer (which of course they use), for them this is a way of putting their hands on what they are making, of “taking time to work on the building without thinking about it”, and accessing a different way of knowing. This way of working is essential to their practice. It seemed to me a beautiful example of how primary spirit can show up and how primary knowing is allowed to manifest itself. Interestingly, the tagline behind their company name is ‘we are architects’.

Leadership, self and non-self in the work

Since I have let this perspective inform my work with groups, I have started to pay more attention to how the cardinal directions are present in group-work. With my Group Relations International colleagues we have started to develop the practice of holding a space by anchoring cardinal directions – thus allowing for all aspects of the cycle to be able to manifest themselves, regardless of our own inevitable preferences. As with other people-work, using this perspective to help working communities in their work, invites me as guide or consultant to be very aware of my own preferences, and the stage I find myself in. It also points towards the temporary nature of everything, and it requires our ability to be not only with growth and bloom but/and also with decline and decay, without calling one bad and the other good.

In this context, leadership may be about attending to the primary energy in myself and others, and in relation between self and others. It is about noticing the movement between the spheres, and where I am, where others are in which sphere – where synchronous and asynchronous processes are taking place, and where that suits or does not suit the organization and its working communities. Leadership is about making myself empty and available yet focused and present, It is being clear about my own longing, my own intent as a leader, and dealing with the fragile fear that stems from my longing so I can nurture the primary energy of love that enables others to connect with their collective knowing. Leading is about finding the ability inside myself to stay with what is present, and listen so I can hear what may be next. This kind of leadership invites the ego to become a place that holds our focused intention, a force that has the courage to engage with the primary energy of love and to lovingly hold the fear that inevitably comes with opening that potential space, a force that trusts, seeks and enables co-creation, that moves with the spheres as they turn and has the courage to invite the collective consciousness in which the sacred can be present and accessible.

Often I have been asked what I think is in the middle of where the three spheres find each other. Is it unity, or God, consciousness or source? Recently someone

suggested it is soul. For now, it seems like a space that needs to remain open, a space for movement that holds what we do not know, where the processes of letting go and letting come can meet each other. Maybe it is a space that does not need to be filled so that, without becoming practiced as 'the truth', this chapter remains a developing perspective that continues to evolve and invite.

This is one of a series of working papers we are currently offering as work-in-progress through the Group Relations International website, www.grouprelations.org . Your thoughts or reflections are very welcome.

References

Armstrong, David, 2005, Organization in the Mind, Psychoanalysis, Group Relations and Organizational Consultancy, London, Karnac Books

Bain, A. and Bain, J., 2002, A Note on Primary Spirit Alastair Bain, in Socio-Analysis, Vol. 4, December, 2002, pp.98 – 111.

Chödrön, Pema, xxxx, The places that scare you, xxxxxxxx

Hirschhorn, Larry, 1999, The Primary Risk, in Human Relations, Vol. 52, p. 5-23, London, Sage Publications

Lawrence, W. Gordon, 1985, Management Development ... Some Ideals, Images and realities, in Group Relations Reader 2, Colman, Arthur D. and Geller, Marvin H. eds., Jupiter, AK Rice Institute

Levinson, Daniel, 19xx, Seasons of a Man's Life

Plotkin, Bill, 2008, Nature and the Human Soul, Novato, California, New World Library

Rice, A.K., 1965, Learning for Leadership, London, Karnac Books

Scharmer, Otto, 2007, Theory U, Leading from the future as it emerges, Cambridge
Massachusetts, Society for Organizational Learning

Senge, Peter et al, 2004, Presence, Cambridge Massachusetts, Society for
Organizational Learning

Sennet, Richard, 2008, The Craftsman, New Haven: Yale University Press