Flourishing Organizations

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I seek to answer the following question: *What makes organizations flourish?* My ontological standpoint is that organizations are living, open systems created and developed by people who are unceasingly and dynamically evolving, learning and developing. Appreciative inquiry (hereafter AI), as a form of action research, changes the focus from problem solving to developing organizations based on their strengths. The life-giving forces of 29 organizations in Finland were ascertained during a four-year period of research. Groups of Master's students collected and analysed qualitative data from 319 interviews, where they asked "unconditional positive questions". This paper presents a synthesis of the findings of these students' inquiries. The findings assert that discovering what provides joy and happiness for people in work serves as a strong basis for them to dream, design and maximize their own and their organization's destiny in the future.

Keywords: Organization Development, Appreciative Inquiry, Life-Giving Forces, Unconditional Positive Question, Action Research.

1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is to answer the question: *What makes organizations flourish?* Here I present a synthesis of what the Master's students found out from their conducting of 319 face-to-face interviews, which was part of their AI in 29 organizations in Finland. My role in this has been tutoring and guiding their qualitative research projects.

Organizational flourishing, and organizational development is type a change. Traditionally, organizational change is defined as a dynamic, ongoing process of moving from the current state of the organization to a potential future state. However, in the current, uncertain and unstable business environment "change is no longer viewed as that something that happens every now and then and can sometimes be disruptive; it is viewed as an integral part of our working life" [1: 45]. All development involves some kind of change, but not all change leads to development or flourishing. In the literature, there is a proliferation of theories and approaches to organizational change. Dawson and Andriopoulos [1: 131-134] provide a comprehensive overview of 25 different change theories. Despite the growing body of empirical research and theoretical literature about change [2], more understanding is needed regarding these new drivers, forms and processes of organizational change and development.

For ascertaining the drivers of organizations' flourishing, AI has been selected as a constructive form of action research (hereafter AR). This research approach has been chosen because AR is conducted with the involvement of people, it is research *with* rather than *on* people [3]. AI is appropriate because the paper seeks to shift attention from problem solving to determining the strengths of organizations, and building on them. In AI, people actively participate in developing their organizations.

The paper is organized into nine parts. After the introduction, in a brief literature review, I discuss how organizations are understood in the

literature and what my standpoint is regarding organizations. Then, I focus on how organizations develop. Next, I explain the suitability of AI as a research approach and describe the research process used. In the section on the life-giving forces of organizations I present the findings of the Master's students' inquiries. Finally, I answer the research question in the discussion part of the paper, argue about the implications and possible value contribution of this paper, indicate its limitations and suggest future research areas in the field of organizational development. At the end of the paper, the reader will find my words about the background of this paper, acknowledgements to the Master's students, and the reference list.

2. UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONS

My underlying ontological assumption is that organizations are emerging, living, and open systems created by people. In order to demonstrate what led to this assumption, I briefly present the different paradigms, assumptions, debates, and views about organizations in the literature.

Currently, there is a proliferation of different paradigms regarding organizations. Scott [4: 107], in his layered model paradigm, provides a concise synthesis of the historical evolution of organizational theories. His model identifies four *chronological phases* and three levels of organizational analysis. Since the beginning of the 20th century organizations have in general terms been viewed chronologically as follows: closed-rational systems (1900-1930), closed-natural systems (1930-1960), open-rational systems (1960-1970) and open-natural systems (1970-present). Organizations have been analysed on three levels, specifically social-psychological (e.g. professional identities, values, sense making, meaning negotiation, learning), structural, and ecological (e.g. interactions, practices, relationships, networks, communities).

There is a debate in organizational studies about the ontological status of organizations. Organizations can be viewed in three different ways:

1) *either* objectively [5] *or*
2) subjectively [6], [7], [8], [9], [10] or
3) *both* objectively *and* subjectively [11], [12], [13], [14].

Next, I briefly present these three ontological views. Boal, Hunt, and Jaros [5: 84-98] defend a realistic view of organizations. They refer to a story about a young man who was asked, when he returned from England, if he had seen Oxford University. He said that he had seen trees, rocks, people, and buildings but he did not "see" Oxford University. Boal, Hunt, and Jaros ask: "Is Oxford University not real?" They argue that "organizations, like trees, rocks, and gravity, are real" [5: 84].

Today in organizational studies we can sense a substantial move toward a subjective ontology. The ontological assumption of this paper about organizations concurs with this view. Based on a *subjective ontology*, an organization emerges through the social interactions of people and is a jointly constructed reality. An organization is a complex system, not a static, solid thing, and not an objective or pre-given reality. It cannot be designed beforehand, as assumed by positivism. According to Stacey, an organization is constructed by people, and therefore it could be viewed as *"patterns of relating"* [6: 265] of humans interacting with each other in constructing the organization. Castells, [7: 151-152] as a sociologist, understands organizations as "specific systems of means oriented to the performance of specific goals". He argues that the new organizational forms in the information economy are based on networks: **"Networks are the fundamental stuff of which new organizations are and will be made**" [7: 168, emphasis original]. Similar to Castells, an interaction view of organizations is represented by Fonseca [8: 75-80] when he writes:

> "The perspective I take, then, is one in which we call 'the organization' is temporarily 'successful' patterns of interactions that participants accept as 'good enough' to be continually repeated, so becoming organizational habits. This repetition constitutes the stability of collective identity, or organizational culture, which is habitual patterns of themes organizing the experience of being together" [8: 77].

For Chia [9: 98-112] organization means *"world-making".* He characterizes organizations as "the aggregative, unintended outcome of local efforts … as "islands" of a relatively stabilized order in a sea of chaos and flux … as temporary stabilized event clusters loosely held together by relational networks of meaning … as products of sense making". Heckscher and Adler [10: 11-105] argue that communities as social organizations take three forms: *Gemeinschaft,* i.e. community in the shadow of hierarchy, *Gesellschaft*, i.e., community in the shadow of the market, and *Collaborative,* where community itself is the dominant principle. Furthermore, they define three distinct characteristics of the new form of community (i.e., the collaborative community) as

1) values based on contribution, concern, honesty, and collegiality;
2) the organization as an organic division of labour coordinated by collaboration; and finally,
3) identities that are interdependent, interactive, and have social character [10: 16-17].

Finally, organizations could be understood as *both* an objective *and* subjective reality [11]. For Berger and Luckmann social reality and social order is an ongoing human production. "It is produced by man (*sic*) in the course of his ongoing externalization. … A human being must ongoingly externalize itself in activity" [11: 69-70]. Searle [12] argues that there are "institutional facts" and "brute facts". The former exist only because we believe them to exist and they require human involvement (i.e., they are only facts by human agreements), whereas the latter do not require human institutions for their existence. Based on his view, organizations are institutional facts. Morgan [13] presents eight different views of organizations: machines, organisms, brains, cultures, political systems, psychic prisons, flux and transformation, and instruments of domination. Wenger [14: 241-262] distinguishes two views of an organization: the designed organization (i.e., institution, formal organization) and the constellation of practice (i.e., the living organization or informal organization). He argues that "the organization itself could be defined as the *interaction* of these two aspects" [14: 241, italics added]. However, institutionalization (i.e., formal organization) cannot make anything happen as "[C]communities of practice are the locus of 'real work'" [14: 243]. Communities of practice can be understood as "*shared histories of learning*" [14: 86, italics in original], or "*the social fabric of learning*" [14: 251, italics in original]. Communities of practice play a decisive role in the negotiation of meaning, learning, preservation and creation of knowledge, and spreading of information, and they are the home for identities.

In brief, my purpose in this section of the paper was to demonstrate the multiple views and assumptions about organizations in the literature, and thus to establish the ontological assumption followed in this paper, i.e., the *subjective, becoming ontology*. In the following section, I focus on organizational development.

3. HOW DO ORGANIZATIONS DEVELOP?

All development is change, but not all changes lead to development. In today's dynamic and unpredictable business environment, the sources of competitive advantage of businesses changed from land, labour, and capital to knowledge and learning. In the knowledge

economy, only organizations that are able to learn quickly and innovate fast can create and sustain their competitiveness. I argue here that *people* who are able to learn and develop the learning environment in their organizations will enable their organizations to learn and develop. Thus, if organizational learning depends on the learning ability of their people, it makes the human factor critical in organizational development.

There is a debate in the literature about organizational learning and learning organizations. The question is: "C*an organizations learn?"* Viewing organizations merely as pre-given contexts (i.e., buildings, rooms, computers, and so on) most probably will lead to the conclusion that organizations are not able to learn. As clarified in the previous section, I concur with the view of organizations as a collection of individuals. Therefore, I believe that organizations are able to learn only through actions, interactions and experience of their people [15], [16], [17]. In accordance with this subjective becoming ontological standpoint, I view organizations not as pre-given objective contexts but rather as living, organic, open, and complex systems that are the results of human interactions, results of sense making and learning processes that are in constant change. Therefore, I concur with Örtenblad [18], [19] whose answer to the above question is *"Of course organizations can learn!"*

The literature of learning and organizational learning is more mature than the emerging literature of learning organizations. The four main paradigms of learning theories are behavioural, cognitive, constructivist, and social learning. Nowadays there is a move from individual learning toward social learning, where the goal of learning is not only to change the behaviour, thinking, and feelings of individuals, or developing the individuals, but to have an impact on the environment including the organization. Social learning is learning by participating, acting, doing, communicating, collaborating, networking, and creating practices together (e.g., apprenticeship). Briefly, this view of learning is both individual and social, and both theoretical and practical, where the role of communities and networks is important. The main authors representing this view are Bandura, Lave and Wenger, Vygotsky, Engeström, Hakkarainen, Mezirow, Davis and Luthans, among others.

In social learning processes different forms of knowledge develop (i.e., extended epistemology). Knowledge is seen not only as an asset, not only as prior existing knowledge, not only as an individual knowledge, but it is viewed as *both* explicit and implicit knowledge, as *both* existing and new knowledge, as *both* individual and social knowledge that emerges through interactions with social and non-social environments.

Concurring with the subjective becoming ontological assumption about organizations, I argue that organizational development depends on the ability of the people in the organization to learn. People create and continuously co-create organizations. Therefore, I am confident that organizations are in a state of constant becoming. Since I assume that organizations are not pre-given objective contexts but rather that are as living, organic, open, and complex systems that are the outcomes of human interactions, results of sense making and learning processes, which are in constant flux, it is consequently logical that my epistemological assumption in this paper is the *extended* and *becoming epistemology*. Becoming epistemology [20: 392]:

1) is an evolutionary, transformative, iterative, interactive, dynamic, dialectic, and social process;
2) unites pragmatic and theoretical, empirical and rational, direct and indirect knowing in synthesis (i.e., phronesis);
3) is where new knowledge and knowing become to be through interlinked ontological and epistemic chains of situational justification of goals, beliefs, values, and

skills (i.e. learning happens in multiple ways through extended epistemology); and

4) unites subject and object of knowledge, which are both changing as a result of interactions. Individual and social identities and knowledge are emerging at the same time.

Summing up, in this paper I assume that *extended, becoming epistemology* is the way organizations develop through social learning. The learning ability of organizations means that the organization has the capacity to act, make plans and choices, build models to operate in a new way, make sense of changes in its environment, and have an impact on its social and non-social environment. The learning ability of organizations is important, as it is assumed that a higher ability to learn has a positive impact on performance because it enables the organization to act better and faster due to substantial and relevant knowledge and shared understanding. The learning ability of organizations depends on several factors, such as the external and internal operational environment (i.e., networks, partners, and competitors); cultural, legal, political, economic, ecological, and geographic environment; history; values and culture; learning climate; vision, strategy and policies; internal resources; formal and informal structures; power of management; leadership; and people working for the organization. However, I conclude that the learning and development ability of an organization most importantly depends on the human factor. Next, I present the research approach and the research process.

4. APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

The research approach is AI. This is a constructive mode of AR that "moves beyond the limitations of the critical effort to discover, understand and foster social and organizational innovations through language" [21: 191]. Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrett (ibid.) argue that AI is "more than a technique, appreciative inquiry is a way of organizational life – an intentional posture of continuous discovery, search and inquiry into conceptions of life, joy, beauty, excellence, innovation and freedom" (ibid.). AI is a positive form of AR; it formulates and asks unconditional positive questions and it has a positive impact on constructing the social reality of organizations. Furthermore, according to Ludema et al. [21: 197-198] AI:

- redirects attention and discourses in organizations from problems to energizing possibilities through empowering stories, metaphors, dreams, and wishes [22];
- discovers what is positive, healthy and successful in organizational life;
- is a collaborative-effort type of action research;
- strengthens the community by collaborating during an inquiry;
- enriches understanding, deepens respect and establishes strong relationships through collaborative sense making;
- asks unconditional positive questions;
- leads to multiple ways of knowing (i.e., extended epistemology);
- supports open and productive dialogues;
- creates and reinforces learning communities;
- promotes democracy and egalitarian relationships;
- enhances collaborative competence; and finally, AI
- helps people in organizations to co-create the worlds and realities they are working in.

AI has discovery, dream, design, and destiny phases (i.e., the 4-D cycle). It starts with an affirmative topic definition that makes it the 5-D cycle. In this paper, the positive topic is "*What makes organizations flourish?*" The 5-D cycle can be applied and adapted to almost any situation, to address issues of interest within a firm. Its foundations are based on the AI assumption that organizations are highly generative and constantly evolving, growing and building their own future in order to move

towards renewal and positive organizational change.

This research approach corresponds well to the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this paper, as I clarified earlier. The AI approach is appropriate for this research because the aim of this paper is to understand the driving forces of organizational development. This approach concurs with Cooperrider and Godwin [23: 8-10], who explain that organizational development arises from the values of spirit of inquiry, collaborative design of the future, and a positive view of human beings. This view is in line with the new wave of organizational development that is called Innovation-inspired Positive Organization Development (IPOD). It considers AI as a strength-based management and as a positive psychology [23: 12-13].

AI has its roots in positive psychology. I agree with Lopez saying that *"Over the last two decades, we have realized that to understand humans we have to make sense of things like joy, hope, and love. There is so much for researchers and practitioners to do to demystify the positive side of life. That will keep us busy for centuries."* [24: 457, emphasis added]. Positive experiences of people in organizations are called life-giving forces (LGFs) of organizations that enable value creation. I am convinced that moving toward positive thinking in organization development is required as the problem-oriented view in organizational practices and in organizational research has several negative impacts on communities and on the production of generative knowledge and innovations. Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrett [21] argue that there is a need for a new way of thinking and asking "unconditional positive questions", because "scientific vocabularies of deficit establish the very conditions they seek to eliminate" [21: 191]. Similarly, Gergen [25] and [26] sees several negative consequences of the critical social and organizational science approach. He argues that it: limits the argumentations and conversations because of the strong dichotomy in thinking; limits innovations and "out-of-box-thinking"; silences other, marginal voices; destroys relationships; polarizes, splits, erodes communities; supports patterns of organizational hierarchy; limits individual potential; diminishes organizational capacity, moral, and job satisfaction; and contributes to cultural and organizational enfeeblement.

In order to overcome these negative consequences, positive organizational studies and positive leadership [27], [28], [29], [30] focus on life-giving forces (LGFs), values, best practices, and good experiences of people in organizations. AI looks at the strengths of the organization and builds on them [31], [32], [33], [34]. Concurring with Ludema, Cooperrider and Barrett [21] McNamee argues "… if we ask questions about problems, we create a reality of problems. … if we ask questions about what works or gives life to a community, group, or person, we participate in the construction of reality of potential" [33: viii].

Thatchenkery and Chowdhry [34] highlight the differences between problem solving and appreciative sharing of knowledge (hereafter ASK). A problem-solving involves: knowledge sharing as a problem to be solved; identification of the problem; highlighting what is broken; Identifying knowledge sharing problems: *What makes people hoard knowledge?*; analyzing causes; generating possible solutions; action planning and treatment; fixing as intervention; and looking at what is missing. They argue, however, that ASK is an approach in AI because here it involves: knowledge sharing as an opportunity to be embraced; valuing and appreciating *"what is"*; affirming what is working; identifying knowledge enablers: *What makes people share knowledge?*; envisioning what is possible; generating future-present scenarios; innovating/realizing what will be; affirmation as intervention; and looking at what is present [34: 2]. Similarly, Cooperrider and Whitney [35], [36] argue that AI differs from the problem-solving approach and that they

consider AI as an organizational developmental approach.

AI is a form of social action, based on constructivism and positive philosophy. These are the arguments that support my selection of AI as a research approach for this study. Next, I describe the process of the research.

Research process

According to Thatchenkery and Chowdhry [34], the AI process follows the 4-D cycle: discovery, dream, design, and destiny. The **discovery** phase explores *"what is"* and includes the steps of negotiating top management commitment and support, presenting the ASK paradigm, and the identification of knowledge enablers (LGFs). The **dream** phase is about imagining *"what might be"* by expansion of knowledge enablers using appreciative interviews designed and conducted by the ASK team, thematic analysis of the data to undertake a knowledge infrastructure analysis, and constructing future-present scenarios. In the **design** phase focus is on *"what could be"*, therefore it includes the consensual validation of future-present scenarios. The **destiny** phase is about action and implementation of *"what will be"'* by creating and mandating and implementation team [34: 51].

As I mentioned earlier, my role in the AI projects of the Master's students has been providing them a theoretical background, as well as guiding and tutoring them in data collection and analysis. The students followed the practical guide of Thatchenkery [37: 1-20] on how to conduct appreciative organizational analysis. According to Thatchenkery, the process of AI has the following six steps:

1) identification of life-giving forces (LGFs) or core values;
2) expansion of LGFs or core values using appreciative interviews designed and conducted by the AI team;
3) thematic analysis of the data to undertake organizational analysis;
4) constructing possibility propositions;
5) consensual validation of propositions;
6) creating and mandating an implementation team.

Master's students conducted the first four steps of AI as their course projects, and because not all were members of the organizations studied, it would have been difficult for them to lead the implementations of their own development ideas. However, several project groups presented their possibility propositions developed for the project organization to the management and participants of the AI interviews.

Students collected data for their AI research projects as part of their studies from 2007 to 2010. There were altogether 29 organizations in Finland involved in AI projects. The companies were very diverse: small, medium, large, international, and local. They operated in various business fields such as telecommunications, human resources management, consulting services, banking, and service providers. Examples of the companies involved are: Oy Nordisk Film, Xtract Oy, NCSO Finland, Fortum, a department of TietoEnator, several departments of Nokia, Nokia Siemens Networks, Context Learning Finland Oy, Securitas Systems, a department of Accenture Finland, Headstart Oy, Finnair Technical Services, HyXo Oy, Swissotel Tallinn, several bank departments, Danone Finland Oy Ltd, Deloitte secretariat, IT firms, The Walt Disney Company Finland, etc. Through analysing and synthesizing the findings of 319 appreciative interviews conducted by students, the life-giving forces of organizations have been identified.

Because the question I seek to answer in this paper is "*What makes organizations flourish?"* I therefore focus only on the findings of the discovery phase of the AI process, on the life-giving forces of organizations. Next, I present the synthesis of the LGFs of 29 project organizations identified by Master's students.

5. LIFE-GIVING FORCES OF ORGANIZATIONS

What makes organizations flourish are the positive experiences of their people during their work practices. In the process of discovering the strengths of organizations "unconditional positive questions", as suggested by Ludema et al. [21], were asked during the interviews. They suggest asking questions during the discovery phase as follows [21: 55, emphasis in the original]:

1. *Think about a time when you shared something that you knew, which enabled you and your company to achieve success. Describe one such event when you felt the most alive, excited, valued, or appreciated.*
2. *Name an event where one of your colleagues did something exemplary recently (outstanding/highly successful) with respect to knowledge sharing. What did s/he do?*
3. *What are your images for the future of this organization with respect to knowledge sharing? What would you like to contribute to make that happen?*

During the discovering phase interviews students asked similar questions from employees of organizations. Below I present the findings of LGFs identified in student projects.

In 2007, 74 appreciative interviews were conducted in twelve organizations. What makes these organizations flourish was teamwork, customers, others, individuals, people, skills, know-how, attitude, atmosphere, collegiality, professionalism, communication, cooperation, and service. In 2008, 37 appreciative interviews were conducted in four organizations, and their LGFs were motivation, growth, collegiality and collaboration. In 2009, 109 appreciative interviews were conducted in seven organizations involved in the studies. What gives life to these organizations was professionalism, teamwork, working environment, communication and customers. In 2010, 99 appreciative interviews were conducted in six organizations and the main LGFs were identified as the work itself, team spirit, ways of working, and knowledge. Comparing the findings of all AI projects from 2007 to 2010 reveals that the work itself, teamwork, team-spirit, and working environment were present in all lists of identified LGFs. Professionalism, growth, and collegiality are appreciated and they give meaning to work. An interesting finding is that in 2010 knowledge came out as the LGF of organizations.

It is valuable to see the synthesis of all LGFs of the 29 organizations researched throughout the 2007-2010 period presented in Figure 1 as a word cloud. When all the LGFs identified in 319 appreciative interviews for 29 organizations were analyzed and synthesized, the most significant LGFs were teamwork, work and working environment, team spirit, communication, cooperation, collegiality, collaboration, people, customers, knowhow, professionalism, products, motivation, sharing, feedback, and atmosphere.

The student teams reported back their findings to the organizations and in some cases they presented their reports to the people involved in the appreciative interviews. The feedback they received was very encouraging. The people who participated in the appreciative interviews were interested in receiving feedback, and they assessed the findings as valuable for them. Some interviewees were surprised that there were no questions asked related to problems and how to solve them, and rather "unconditional positive questions" [21] were asked. In several cases there were concrete actions formulated and taken based on the findings.

Figure 1. *What make organizations flourish?*

Summing up, there is a need for redirecting the attention in organizational analysis and design from a critical, problem-solving approach to a social constructivist, positive approach [34], [35], [36] that motivates and energizes people in developing their organizations. Based on the findings of AI projects conducted by students I demonstrated that this approach is appropriate. I argue that it would need more attention in organizational development research, especially in the knowledge, collaborative, creative economy where knowledge, knowledge sharing and innovation are the sources of an organization's success. The next section answers the research question, and briefly discusses the possible value contribution and implications of this paper.

6. DISCUSSION

Before answering the question I seek to answer in this paper, i.e., *What makes organizations flourish?* The reader is reminded that the answer is based on the becoming ontology and extended, becoming epistemology standpoints. Organizations are created by interactions of people and they develop through social learning processes. I argued that in organization developmental processes that it is essential to focus on people and on the life-giving forces, which energize people and foster knowledge generation, knowledge sharing and innovation. I empirically demonstrated the LGFs of 29 organizations explored in AI projects.

The findings showed (Figure 1) that teamwork, working environment, team spirit, communication, cooperation, collegiality, collaboration, people, customers, knowhow, professionalism, products, motivation, sharing, feedback, and work atmosphere are the forces that make organizations flourish. In the knowledge economy, tangible assets are necessary, but they are not sufficient for gaining sustainable competitive advantage, and consequently the role of the human factor in organization development would need more attention. Human skills, knowledge and competencies are the main source of competitive advantage and economic value creation. People in organizations are unceasingly and dynamically evolving, learning and developing. Therefore, it is critical to focus on the inspiring, motivating and energizing forces of people, as they are the main drivers of organizational development.

With this paper, I sought to redirect the attention from changing organizations, where people were mostly seen as passive objects or targets of change, toward giving people a more active role in continuously developing their organizations. Therefore, my view in this paper concurs with the argument of Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel [38: 116] that probably the best way to manage change is just to let it happen or to create an environment where people can actively participate, be creative and innovative. I argue that, in change processes, it is necessary to shift the role of people from a passive to an active one (i.e., from being an object to becoming a subject), and to redirect their thinking from problem solving to the strengths of the organizations [34], [35], [36]. Furthermore, I argue that if we give more authority to people and knowledge workers, because if we succeed in this then people will be more involved, energized, motivated, and empowered to develop their organizations and

to more successfully face the issues involved in ongoing change in the business environment.

Authors promoting AI ([21], [22], [23] and [27] - [37]) agree that AI focuses on social relationships and human interactions. It can generate *new knowledge and understanding* while transforming entire communities, organizations, and individuals. AI can transform and add to traditional research expectations. It is a form of action – a way of engaging with others, creating applicable forms of practice (new ways of knowing). AI is a form of practice developed for consultation, which can address the criteria expected of scientific research. It has become a popular consulting tool for organization development (OD). I would argue that AI as a constructive, participative form of action research provides and generates not only practical knowledge but can also provide scientific, theoretical knowledge [20] (i.e., extended, becoming epistemology of knowing) to the social sciences. Therefore it needs more attention in contemporary organizational research.

Implications and value contribution

The paper has a number of implications. Theoretical implications could be a shift in thinking about organizations and organizational development, from problem solving to developing and learning organizations. The managerial implications are that managers should focus on LGFs and should become knowledge facilitators, by creating an environment where people and organizations can flourish.

Most of the implications of this paper are in organizational research. I argue that this paper contributed to the clarification of philosophical standpoints as to how we think about organizations (i.e., becoming ontology), and about their development (i.e., becoming epistemology). The paper contributed to the application and experimentation of less common research approaches (i.e., AI and AR). Furthermore, it contributed to a better understanding of the importance of the human factor in organizational development studies.

Limitations and future research

The paper has several limitations. The AI process was not fully covered, as only four out of the six steps, as recommended by Thatchenkery [37: 1-20], were conducted. Further research is needed on consensual validation of propositions and on creating and mandating an implementation team. Going through the whole recommended 4-D cycle would provide a deeper understanding of the organizational development process.

This study has been undertaken with qualitative research, which is a strength and weakness at the same time. While it provided a good understanding of LGFs as drivers of development, the author nonetheless believes that quantitative research or a mixed-method research could provide a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. Future research could be, for example, a case-study research where the findings of this research could be validated in one or more organizations.

Another limitation is that all organizations were located in Finland, in one geographical area. Additional research in different countries could enrich the findings and show differences in LGFs. Additionally, it would be useful to conduct follow-up research on the organizations involved in this study to see the impact of the development propositions, and to find out what has happened after the findings were presented to the managers and participants of AI.

7. NOTE

I followed ethical research practices, as none of the organizations can be identified individually. Furthermore, I openly disclosed my role in the AI projects of the students. Earlier, the findings of these appreciative inquiries were presented at conferences (EURAM in Estonia, EIASM in Cyprus, and WMSCI in Florida, USA). However, in this current format the paper has

not been published, either in conference proceedings or in journals.

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