

# **Generativity in Four Acts: Expanding and Extending Our Region of Care**

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Generativity is clearly a multi-dimensional concept with many different manifestations; nevertheless, we propose that each of the four roles tends to be center stage at a specific time in our life. Following is a preview of the prominent role of generativity being played most often at specific times in our life.

## **Early Adulthood**

There is a period early in adulthood when we attempt to balance a commitment to both love and work. It's a time of life when the generative role includes parenting our children or parenting a specific project or job in an organization. This generative role often continues to show-up in our life through continuing and changing relationships with our children and through the shifting nature of the projects or jobs we engage in organizations. The prevailing motivations are based in Generativity One: a focus on direct and sustained care for someone or something that is immediate (close to us in terms of both space and time).

## **Early Middle Adulthood**

This role tends to be played-out during the middle years of our life when we are moving into a position of experience, expertise, or influence in an organization. This generative role focuses on being a mentor to younger or less experienced members of the organization and also involves us as monitors, mobilizers, and motivators. This is the original notion of "generativity." In some sense, we become a grandparent in our organization and frequently become an actual grandparent in our personal life. Much of the gratification comes not from personal achievement and advancement; rather, it comes from fostering the growth and achievement of other people – and the next generation (including our own children) being successful. As in the case of the first generative role, this second role of generativity frequently remains salient later our life. With the prevailing motivations of Generativity Two, we expand our caring to people outside our family.

We mentor and lead. We move from individual success to broader significance, at least within our own sphere of influence and control.

### **Late Middle Adulthood**

We find that the third role often is assigned to the later years of mid-life, as well as our senior years. This generative role is what developmental researcher, George Vaillant, identified as "guardianship". It is the time when we are serving as maintainer of traditions. We are storytellers, chair of the board rather than CEO, and "old timers" who like the way things have been and should continue to be. We are in the business of preserving heritage and honoring those who have contributed much to our society. We are legacy-leaders. Generativity Three prevails. We expand our caring in time and expand our attention and action to caring about objects and traditions, not just people. We become holders and promoters of heritage. We are guardians of a world that is in jeopardy of passing away or being ignored.

### **Senior Years**

Like role three, the fourth role is usually engaged during later mid-life, as well as during our senior years. This generative role concerns not just the preservation of what now exists and should be valued in a specific community; it can be engaged now and in the near future to further enhance and enrich it. The generative leaders in this role want both to sustain and build. This takes the form of leadership that often operates in the spotlight during the senior years (60s-90s). It also operates and influences outside the spotlight during many of the earlier years in our lives (as exhibited by many younger, emerging leaders in communities). The futurist, Fred Polak (1973), writes about the need for any society to have a clear sense of its own future if it is to thrive. Those engaged in this fourth role of generativity are actively involved in creating and articulating this image of the future, as well as engaging in tangible acts that illustrate and help to animate this image.

In generativity four, we expand our caring in space and expand our attention and action to caring about the welfare of people living in our local community; or more broadly our society or even our world. It is in this fourth role that we find the most distinctive contribution to the literature on generativity. This is an area in which we will dig much deeper in the fifth section of this

book, for the role that generativity plays in community leadership (what we call civic engagement) often builds and relies on the three other roles. It is a richly-textured form of generativity that is sorely needed in our contemporary world. It requires all of the skills, experiences, and motivational incentives to be found in the other three generative roles.

So what does all of this mean about the relationship between generativity and deep caring? What does it say about creation of conditions that lead to generativity and deep caring? Stated simply, generativity is about expanding and extending our *region of care*. We expand this region by moving from a concern about our own family and special projects to a concern about people outside our family -- in our organization, in our community and even in our world. This is expanding our region of care by an expansion of space. We also expand our region of care through a wider temporal concern. We look back and forward in time to preserve and propagate our core values and visions.

### **Playing Many Roles on the Life Stage**

In essence, we are all actors living on the stage of life--a common metaphor used by many writers, including William Shakespeare. Yet it continues to be a useful metaphor, given what many of us experience on a daily basis as mature adults. We live on a stage populated by many actors -- all of whom represent aspects of ourselves, playing many different roles assigned to us by society, genes, and our own proclivities.

This state of affairs was noted with particular insight by Erik Erikson as he moved to psychology from a career in theater. According to Erikson, we are primarily playing-out one of eight roles (dramas, scripts) at a particular point in our life. However, the other seven role-players are also on stage. They influence and often are in dialogue with the featured player, and on occasion share a spotlight with the featured player. The eight roles are identified by Erikson as *trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, intimacy, generativity and ego-integrity*. Many of these roles have received extensive attention by Erikson and his followers, but the seventh role (generativity) has received relatively little notice. We believe it is important to explore and write about generativity because it potentially is in the spotlight for many women and men in contemporary Western societies, and perhaps societies elsewhere in the world.

As already noted, we wish to offer an expanded perspective on generativity that goes beyond Erikson's initial description. We see that generativity is actually being played out in *four* roles--not one. Each of these roles requires the actor to step into the spotlight at one or more specific times during the life play. As we enter the final stage of our life, these four roles of generativity often interweave in exceptionally complex and marvelous ways.