

Generativity Two: Expanding Perspective and Actions about Deep Care

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So far in our exploration, we have been presenting a new narrative about the nature and dynamics of generativity. In this essay, we rely on a script that has already been written by the original playwright, Erik Erikson—and by subsequent authors and researchers in the field of adult development. Later, we will expand on that text by investigating the various ways in which Generativity Two is played out in several different relationships, turning to our own research findings about Generativity Two, relying primarily on the 100 interviews conducted with Emerging and Senior Sage leaders in Nevada County, California.

At the heart of Generativity Two is an expanding perspective about deep care and the engagement of actions that are aligned with it. We consider this expanding perspective and set of actions to be a result of our formulation of Generativity One; we are generative when we raise our children, and when we initiate a project that is important to us. Both of these clearly are primary examples of deep care. It is when we move into Generativity Two (and later into Generativity Three and Four), that we reach out through deep caring even further in both time and space.

What's in a Name: "Generativity"

The term “generativity” was first used by Erik Erikson to identify an ongoing concern for people besides one’s self and one’s family. This concern typically develops during mid-life and, according to Erikson, involves a need to nurture and guide younger people in a supervisory, sponsoring, or mentoring role. Erikson’s generativity is about contributing to the next generation, as well as leaving a legacy in the organizations with which we work as successful mid-life leaders.

Erikson’s basic idea about generativity has been expanded and probed in great depth by other adult development theorists and researcher—most notably Dan McAdams. We will review his work shortly, but must first note that the term “generativity” is used in many other ways—at least

three of which are indirectly relevant to Erikson's use of the term. All three of these alternatives seem to enhance our understanding of Erik's generativity by providing a focus on innovation and creativity, sources of energy, and foundational processes in a specific system.

Generativity as Innovation/Creativity

On an everyday basis we make use of the term "generate" when speaking of the creation of new ideas, slogans, logos and many other types of thought and image being created. We conduct "thought experiments" and do "brainstorming" in order to generate many new and "off-the-wall" suggestions for an advertising campaign, new use for a wrench, or ways to get that young kid living on the street into a safe environment. Sometimes, we even label someone a "generative" thinker.

There is an essay from the *Sloan Management Review* that makes use of this first definition of generativity. Jeanne Liedrka and her colleague (Liedrka, et al., 1997) are interested in the "generative cycle" used by knowledge-based organizations, which are often professional firms. The authors identify this cycle as consisting of collaborative learning among employees in an agency and the clients that they serve. They see business development and individual professional development as being intimately linked. For this collaborative work to be successful, an agency must hire and retain people who have *analytic talent* to do technical work, *relationship skills* to build and sustain the collaboration through a combination of interpersonal skills and personal qualities of integrity and respect, and *entrepreneurial instincts* to drive the business development and organization-building work.

We believe the ingredients which are required to create a generativity cycle are also prerequisites for a person to be successful in the role of Generativity Two. In building the competencies and confidence of those with whom a leader is working, it is essential that many things be known in-depth about the system in which the leader and his or her colleagues operate. That requires experience in this system and a deep understanding of how it actually operates. Leaders also must be able to build a strong collaborative relationship with their co-workers. This requires the relational skills identified by Liedrka—a combination of interpersonal skills (emotional IQ), personal integrity, and respect (appreciation) for these colleagues. Finally, the leader needs to be

driven to achieve success for the organization, and not just for themselves. The entrepreneurial instinct identified by Lierka seems to be right on target.

All of this suggests that the ingredients which are to be found in the creation and maintenance of an organization's generative cycle parallel and overlap with the ingredients needed for success in Generativity Two. That is, creativity and innovation exist side-by-side with Eriksonian generativity. Or as Everett Rogers once observed, the process of innovation diffusion starts with creativity and innovation and then disperses to various constituencies in an organization. This diffusion requires analytic skills, relationship skills, and an entrepreneurial instinct—as we will see later in this chapter.

Generativity as Source of Energy

The second use of the term "generativity" is an off-shoot of the more commonly used word, "generator" – a device that produces energy by converting it from one form (such as natural gas, propane or water) to another form (often electricity). Used in this way, "generative" refers to the capacity of any device to perform this function and is directly aligned with Eriksonian generativity. Just as a generative leader can produce, enhance or at least encourage creativity and innovation, so the generative leader can transform organizational energy from conception to action and from dream to reality. This transformation is more likely to occur because the generative leader is interested in the welfare and advancement of other people and the long-term welfare of the organization. There is an additional point to be made about energy and generativity. The legacy that a generative leader wishes to leave behind is based on the capacity of the organization to sustain its energy long after the leader has left the organization. This is the essence of Generativity Two: leaving a legacy of energy-conversion based in commitment, encouragement, and vision (and not just the legacy of a specific product or procedure).

Generativity as a Foundational Process

The third use of the term "generativity" ties in many ways to both the first and second uses, though it comes from a different region of contemporary thought. This use is esoteric and a bit hard to exemplify. It has to do with the formation of a specific foundation for some powerful ongoing process. We see this third use of the term in the phrase, "generative grammar." This refers to the deeply embedded rules that govern our use of language—the foundation for our

capacity to speak, write, hear and read a set of words that immediately make sense to our self and other people.

We also find the use of "generativity" in descriptions of complex global communication networks that undergird our Internet services, come with code, and have the capacity for rapid change and flexibility that is truly remarkable. Quoting work by Jonathan Zittrain regarding the Generative Internet, David Post (nd, p. 2) suggests that generativity:

. . . denotes a technology's overall capacity to produce unprompted change driven by large, varied, and uncoordinated audiences. The grid of PCs connected by the Internet has developed in such a way that it is consummately generative. From the beginning, the PC has been designed to run almost any program created by the manufacturer, the user, or a remote third party and to make the creation of such programs a relatively easy task. When these highly adaptable machines are connected to a network with little centralized control, the result is a grid that is nearly completely open to the creation and rapid distribution of the innovations of technology-savvy users to a mass audience that can enjoy those innovations without having to know how they work. (Quoted by Post, 20xx).

It is not our intention to move fully into Post's rather technical analysis of generative networks; we simply wish to note how his analysis parallels and perhaps points to the inherent value found in Eriksonian generativity. Post is describing a dynamic process that is often labeled a "self-organizing system." This type of system is the focal point for many studies about complexity and chaos, areas of scientific investigation that are now popular and widespread. On a global level, this type of system has also become familiar through the work of Thomas Friedman and his portrait of the "flat earth."

With regard to Generativity Two, we can point to the loss of personal ego and control among men and women in networked organizations who are truly generative. They encourage the generation of new innovative ideas (first use of the generativity term) and the generation of sustained energy (second use of the generativity term) by identifying (analytic skills), supporting (relationship skills) and promoting (entrepreneurial instinct) the natural, self-organizing processes of their organization. It is these generative processes and cycles that enable an organization and its members to "come alive" and flourish. Organizations die when their leaders seek to tightly control its operations. Generative leaders influence but do not control; they seek to

understand, not predict, and they encourage self-monitoring by their colleagues rather than their own ongoing inspection. This is what Generativity Two is all about, and we are thankful for the insights provided by those who make alternative uses of the word "generativity."

We turn in the next essay to the analyses of Generativity that have been provided by theorists and researchers who begin with Erikson's description of mid-life Generativity—and what we are calling Generativity Two.