Generativity Two: The Existing Concepts

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The concept of generativity is about birthing -- the birthing of children, of projects, of leaders, of heritage, of community. In keeping with this emphasis on birthing, we now turn briefly to a history of the birth of the generativity concept itself. It began with the work of Erik Erikson and his initial identification of eight life stages -- the seventh stage (mid-adulthood) being positioned as the point in life when we choose between generativity and stagnation. At the heart of the concept of generativity resides the process of caring, and the transformation that occurs in this caring process during one's lifetime:

> In youth you find out what you *care to do* and who you *care to be*--even in changing roles. In young adulthood you learn whom you *care to be with*--at work and in private life, not only exchanging intimacies, but sharing intimacy. In adulthood, however, you learn to know what and whom you can *take care of*. (Erikson, 1974, p.124)

While Erikson began writing about generativity during the 1960s, he primarily focused on the other seven stages--as did most developmental theorists and researchers who were building on Erikson's work. It was only during the 1980s and 1990s that generativity began to receive much attention, but this seems to have dropped off during the first two decades of the 21st Century.

The two key developmental theorists to devote considerable attention during the late 20th Century to generativity were John Kotre and Dan McAdams. It was Kotre (1984) who first expanded on Erikson's concept of generativity and the motivational base for this developmental stage. Specifically, Kotre suggested that generativity is "a desire to invest one's substance on forms of life and work that will outlive the self." (Kotre, 1984, p. 10) It is quite understandable and appropriate that Kotre identifies this wish for some form of immortality as a key motivator for generative action. It is also quite understandable that some developmental theorists have identified other sources of motivation and have referred to the inherently narcissistic orientation to be found in Kotre's challenging proposition. We will return frequently in this book to the issue of desired immortality and the role it plays in motivating generative actions.

Don McAdams has played an even larger role than Kotre in bringing the concept of generativity to the fore. McAdams seems to have been a very active and successful convener of psychologists and other behavioral science researchers from around the world. They have written about generativity from cross-cultural, philosophical, historical and social-political perspectives. McAdams and his associates (McAdams, Hart and Maruna,1998, p. 9) summarize their own expansive definition of generativity in a seven-element model:

> [G]enerativity consists of a constellation of inner desire, cultural demand, conscious concern, belief, commitment, action, and narration revolving around and ultimately justified in terms of the overall psychosocial goal of providing for the survival, well-being, and development of human life in succeeding generations.

We rely on two of McAdams edited books (*Generativity and Adult Development* and *The Generative Society*) in linking our own research and theorizing with that of previous researchers and theorists. Sponsored by the American Psychological Association, these books offer many different ideas about generativity and certainly expand on Erikson's original definition and description.

With this brief overview of the field, we turn to several of the core concepts that are offered by Kotre, McAdams and their colleagues as related to what we are identifying as generativity two -- the caring for other people and institutions through the process of mentoring and other related roles. We will exemplify these core concepts by turning once again to our *Featured Players* -- and more specifically to two of these generative actors: Sally and Dan.

The Next Generation

First, it should be noted that most theories of generativity focus on the interactions between a senior person (usually in their 40s and 50s) and someone who is younger (member of the next generation): "It requires only a passing familiarity with the popular writings of Erik Erikson to have an inkling of what the concept of generativity is all about. It is about the next generation." (McAdams, Hart and Maruna, 1998, p. 7). Furthermore, while the next generation certainly includes our own children, most theorists and researchers distinguish between the care we devote to our children (what we call Generativity One) and the care we devote to someone who is not a family member, but is related to us as a fellow member of the organization in which we work.

One of our *Featured Players*, Sally, offers a poignant example of what it means to care for the next generation, even though the person being cared for does not come from her own family. Sally frames this generative act as being similar to the role she has played as both a caring mother and daughter:

> Perhaps my most authentic and meaningful grand parenting has been in a mentoring role with someone outside our family. Shortly after we moved here, I became a board member of a local nonprofit organization that works with at-risk, under-served girls. Each girl has a mentor, called "an Angel." I met my mentee, Janet, when she was twelve years old; her mother was killed in an automobile accident. I have had a major parenting relationship with Janet from that time right through her recent 20th birthday. My husband and I have become so close with her that she calls us "Grandma and Grandpa."

Sally takes great pride in recounting the achievements of Janet and their own intervention with Janet's partner:

> She will finish college in 2016 and is living with a wonderful young man who is going on to law school; they plan to extend this relationship long term, and they both turn a lot to us for advice and emotional support. For example, the young man hadn't told his parents that he was living with Janet, and we counseled that he tell them. To his surprise, they surmised that he and Janet had been living together. This experience and grand parenting relationship have been very satisfying to my husband and me. We have helped Janet along the way to be honest with herself, to be true to herself, and to have compassion in dealing with the sad part of herself. Indeed, we have developed an emotional attachment with her that we were unable to have with our own grandchildren due to the distance while our granddaughters were growing up. We regard Janet as our "adopted granddaughter."

Repeated and Diversified Experiences

Many of the generativity researchers have noted that mentoring is often not a onetime experience, that sometimes it involves increased diversity of mentoring experience. Frequently, a generative adult will describe multiple experiences as a mentor and often identify mentoring

experiences that extend over many years (suggesting that Generativity Two is not limited to our mid-life years). This persistence is often identified as long-term commitment: "Experiencing the world as a place where people need to care for others, the protagonist commits the self to living in accord with a set of clear and enduring values and personal beliefs that continue to guide behavior, throughout the life span (moral steadfastness." (McAdams, Hart and Maruna, 1998, p. 34)

We turn again to Sally's narrative, beginning with her experience as a mentor while in her 30s:

> I also had a wonderful mentoring experience in my 30s during the Creative Initiative Foundation years. My husband and I served as "house parents" to a group of young high school women whose parents (also members of the Creative Initiative project) decided it would be a valuable experience for their daughters to live together under a single roof and develop life skills that would help them to move through their formative years and then on to college. Each girl got a stipend from their parents for a whole year, and they did all of the cooking and planning. Part of their stipend was spending money, and they did a variety of projects (e.g., working at the Levi factory putting fabric on carts, picking garlic in Fresno with migrant workers, various internships, etc.). My husband and I were volunteers, and our role was to develop a mature adult relationship with the girls by helping to support their decision making. My husband and I were adults who they could come and talk to, but we avoided telling them "what to do"; rather, we guided them on the "how to do" when they identified personal problems and issues. The girls are now in their 50s, have careers, and most are married with children of their own.

Years later, Sally served as a mentor to a young woman who came from a different cultural background. We see Sally not only repeatedly offering mentoring to young people, but crossing a cultural boundary:

> After my husband and I had moved to Nevada City, I mentored a young Hispanic girl from the time she was 11 until she was 17. I still keep in touch with her. She comes and sees us once in a while, and she is now in college. She spoke very little English when I first met her. So, I helped her transition from being Mexican with parents who worked in strawberry fields to becoming a young professional American woman.

We can consider the diverse challenges that Sally chooses to address in her mentoring as a manifestation of what generativity theorists identify as the rich interplay between caring and creativity. While creativity (as we mentioned earlier in this chapter) often is identified with creating a new idea or product, it can also (in alignment with caring and generativity) be identified with the passing on of an existing idea or product. We create by expanding the space in which the idea is shared or the product is used: "creativity [in its isolated form] ends once the [idea or] product is made, but generativity implies caring for the [idea or] product as it grows and develops." (Kotre, 1984, p. 11)

Mentoring Inside and Outside an Organization

As the reader might note, these first three narratives offered by Sally do not take place within a specific organization; rather, they concern work with younger people who reside in the same community but not the same organization. While many of the generativity researchers focus on mentoring inside organizations, we find examples of work being done outside a specific organization as well. As a generative woman in mid-life, Sally was eager to take on many new challenges both inside and outside organizations: "Having formed a sense of identity and developed relationships, the middle-aged adult at the generative stage is thought to be ready to become involved in the larger sphere of society and to work to continue it and perhaps improve it for the next generation." (Snyder and Clary, 2004, p. 223)

In many ways, the mentoring done by Sally is this expansion into the larger sphere of society--a blending of Generativity Two and Generativity Four (civic engagement). It also may represent a blending of Generativity One (parenting) and Generativity Two. As McAdams and his associates (McAdams, Hart and Maruna, 1998, p.13) have noted: "Forms of generativity that go beyond one's kin may represent expansions or generalizations of the instinctive patterns associated with reproduction and care of offspring, and they may also tap more generally into other, related evolutionary tasks and mandates."

In expanding her sphere of influence (and caring) in her community, Sally also provides mentoring inside organizations.

> I became involved about a decade ago when my husband and I moved here with an
> organization serving at-risk girls. I played a role in mentoring the young executive

director (who is still the ED) to become skilled in meeting the various challenges of the organization. Given my professional background, she first tapped me to head the organization's marketing committee. Then, after I became board president, we obtained critical help from a six-month leadership seminar that the umbrella nonprofit organization sponsored for non-profit ED's and Board Presidents; this was the beginning of my really helping our ED to develop the leadership skills that she needed, and she helped me understand how to work with ED's in the nonprofit world.

We see generativity also exemplified in the willingness (even eagerness) of Sally to expand her mentoring experience -- in this instance by working with a different kind of non-profit organization:

> The non-profit arts organization [I serve] has been an entirely different experience. This organization had been in operation for a number of years, but it wasn't until we hired a new ED that it really took off in terms of the quality of performances and audience growth. I have been board president for three years now and have had the continuing challenge of encouraging and helping this extraordinarily creative and productive executive director understand that she needs to learn how to listen to her board members and benefit from their counsel. This trying experience has been like taking a brilliant diamond in the rough and trying to polish it.

Involved but Not Embedded

There is one other important insight to be gained from the narrative offered by Sally, which is reinforced in many of the articles about generativity. The mentor is not expected to take over the work of the person she is mentoring. Nor is she to be the formal supervisor of this person. Mentoring works best when there is no formal power relationship between the mentor and mentee and when the work and responsibility remain in the mentee's hands (the "monkey" of responsibility does not leap onto the mentor's shoulder from the mentee's):

> The main thing that I conclude about my mentoring is that I am done with wanting to lead nonprofit organizations. To be part of important projects, yes. But I no longer care to be in a . . . leadership role. What I most care about are my personal relationships and the value that they add to my life. These relationships are my life-line.

This level of involvement that skirts direct leadership and supervision is not always easy to attain. It also represents the important distinction to be drawn in the generativity literature between generative caring and narcissism. While the narcissist does care deeply about his continuing presence in an organization or community, even after he has left the organization, the generative mentor has moved beyond the inevitable need for control of the mentee's current and future behavior or the environment in which the mentee is working.

One of our colleagues, Don Jochens, has effectively framed the difference between narcissism and generativity. At one level, we want our innovations and accomplishments to be sustained after we have left an organization. We want to leave a mark and know that our influence will linger and our style of leadership will be replicated by the next generation. This is an understandable (but often counter-productive) mode of narcissism. At another level, we hope to come back to the organization and observe that our mentees and the organization have continued to innovate and be successful. For this latter state to exist, our mentee and our organization will no longer be sustaining our specific innovation; instead, they will be able to take pride in their own unique accomplishments. To have emulated and sustained our spirit of caring and creativity, the mentee will be exhibiting their own style of leadership and probably will themselves now be mentoring someone else. To be truly innovative, the organization will have moved on past our own ideas. It is the latter state that exemplifies generativity.

Another of our *Featured Players*, Dan, expresses this sense of thoughtful, generative engagement by suggesting that the role he plays might not even be best described as mentoring. It is more like a friendship that is initiated by the other person:

> In the context of its meaning for me, mentoring is too strong a word. I think of a mentor as someone who fully engages with a person and really helps them. It's like walking beside them during a part of a journey over time. I have not mentored in that fashion. I'm more of a resource, advisor, or a counselor. Maybe I am more of a nurturer than a mentor. I am sought out by friends and other people that I know—mostly in the nonprofit world where I have these contacts. And generally with younger people (e.g., executive directors of nonprofit organizations). A number of these friends are women and are raising families, and they just call me. I'm actually quite surprised when they call. These friendships have often led to conversations over coffee, and they are most often initiated

by them and not me. It's quite like my role as parent. I can give advice and insight when asked, without them having to follow it. It's much like giving time to my children and grandchildren. So, I am not initiating mentoring, which requires a much more proactive role, and I don't have any skin in the game—other than helping others as a friend. What I do comes entirely from my heart.

Dan offers a specific example of the way he works in this "non-mentoring" fashion:

I have a dear friend who is with Habit for Humanity. He is an incredible man who gives of his time and energy. His name is Ed. He will just call me, and I almost always think he's getting on me to come out and pound some nails. But he isn't calling about that. He just wants to have a shoulder to vent on, and it's obviously helpful to him for me to listen in complete confidence. He often expresses his frustration at having to herd cats for Habitat and run all over the place. We have had a number of times when we talked through some very difficult organizational issues, where friendships were fractured and actually became irreparable. So again, this is more of an advisor role rather than mentoring.

We close with yet more pondering by Dan about his role in working with other people. These last two excerpts from his narrative serve also as examples of how mentoring can move far beyond the confines of a specific organization. As in the case of Sally's work, it seems that Dan is generative in a manner that defies the traditional definition of mentoring and also moves generativity beyond its usual boundaries:

I had a beautiful experience when I was 53 and a similar one just recently here at age 75; each had to do with a dear friend who was dying of cancer. My first experience was with a friend named Harry. I went into this just wanting to be present and give his wife a much needed break. It was a fascinating, beautiful, and sad time. Harry had pancreatic cancer and was not expected to live beyond three months. My wife asked what I was going to do, and I said that I had no idea other than just listening. Actually Harry lived almost two additional years, and early on he didn't have the strength to do much. But we did go to lunch periodically and sometimes went to a park. And sometimes we ate as his home. I found out that as a young man he loved to fly fish. He was of Japanese heritage and said that he hadn't touched a fly rod in 40 years. I said, "Well, I used to fly fish, too." So we

started tying flies together, and he actually got really good at it. This was an interesting experience for me because Don gave us a model for how to live through a terrible, irreconcilable tragedy. Being with him was actually uplifting for me, and this outcome was unexpected. I don't know if this experience is an example of mentoring, but it certainly was a profound learning experience for me. I found that I could help give Harry back memories.

Is this mentoring? Is it even a form of generativity? Perhaps we will be able to answer both of these questions after exploring various forms of Generativity Two in the following chapter, and after exploring the other two forms of generativity as well. At the very least, we can certainly identify Dan's relationship with Harry as deeply caring. Can we ask for anything more from the life-affirming relationships with which we are blessed?