

The Role of Aesthetics and Resonance in Future-oriented Organizations

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Introduction

Leading Question: How can organizations thrive in a volatile, complex, uncertain, and ambiguous (VUCA) world in a future-oriented and sustainable manner?

Which concepts do we need to find an adequate answer to this question?

- ~~Focus on Data? Focus on finances (only)? Focus on technology? Planning & predicting, maximizing profit?...~~
- **Focus on the Organization and its Purpose!**

Concepts:

- **Organization** as a dynamic (socio-material-epistemic) process of unfolding and shaping a thriving environment and being co-created by it
- **Organizational Aesthetics** as the appreciation for sensory perceptions in understanding organizations
- **Resonance** as a description of the ongoing process leading to the best possible fit of an organization to an ever-changing environment and enabling it to proactively shape this environment
- **Alignment** as a form of *resonance* between the organization, its purpose and its stakeholders

Purpose & spirituality

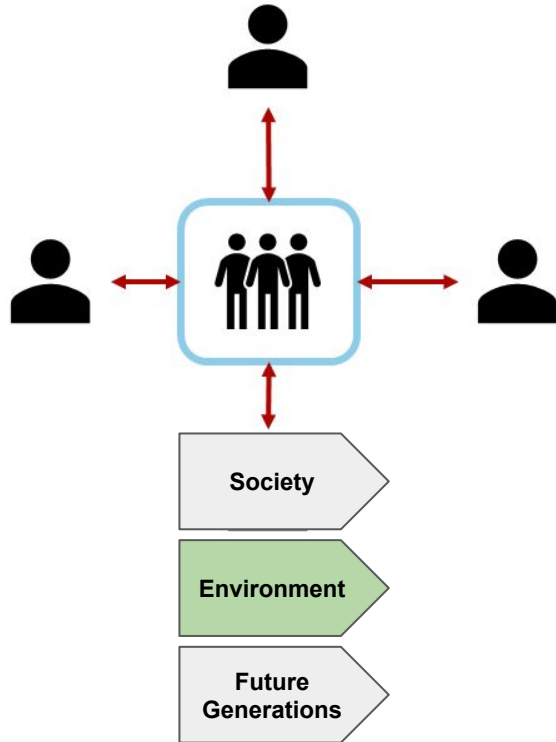
What is (organizational) purpose?

- Concerns existential aspects and deeply rooted mindsets and values of an organization
- It is the “reason why?” an organization exists (→ its final cause)

What is the relationship between (organizational) purpose and spirituality (in organizations)?

- Spirituality: concerns the human/organizational search for... (e.g., Tanyi, 2002)
 - for meaning and purpose in life
 - (organizational) growth
 - transformation towards an authentic and fulfilled “self”

Recent Definitions of Organizational Purpose



Purpose...

*“...[describes] the **essence of an organization's existence** by explaining what **value it seeks to create** for its stakeholders. In doing so, purpose provides a clear definition of the firm's **intent**, creates the ability for stakeholders to identify with, and be inspired by, the **firm's mission, vision, and values**, and establishes **actionable pathways** and an aspirational outcome for the firm's actions.”*

(George et al., 2021)

“...[is the] configuration of those value expectations of legitimate stakeholders that cause them to organize as and engage in an organization in order to fulfill them.”

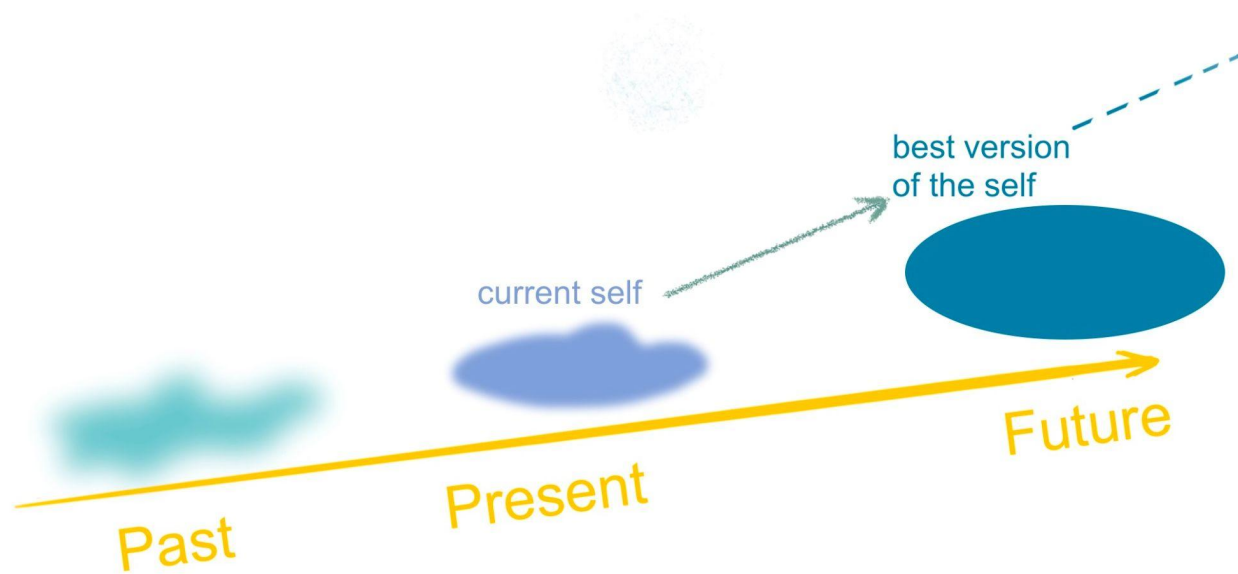
(Kragulj, 2022)

Transformation towards a purpose-driven organization

Profound transformation towards a sustainable and future-oriented organization always involves purpose and a spiritual aspect:

- Shifting a current state or situation toward a *future state* that is *more advanced*, intricate, *authentic*, and a state *better aligned* and “in resonance” with what is considered ideal or “ought to be”
 - e.g., shift to a “*wise organization*” (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2019), from a state of potentiality to living and thriving actuality
- fully embracing inherent calling and vocation
- these transformations are purposefully initiated, aiming for profound, substantial, and meaningful change that is intentionally triggered.

Enacting/actualizing (Organizational) Purpose



Resonance I

What is resonance?

“Resonance *emerges* when a human and the world “meet” and engage in a process of *(mutual) transformation*.” (H.Rosa [sociologist], 2019/2016)

- Resonance always involves a considerable level of *unpredictability*, *self-organization*, and *emergence* due to (respecting) the *autonomy* of the entities involved in resonance activities.
→ Resonance as a possible way of dealing and engaging with a VUCA environment.
- Resonance is primarily about a *relationship of (mutual) response*, rather than echo or (passive and predetermined/mechanistic) “re-action”.
- The concept of resonance has a *normative* character: it serves as a measure for how things “should” be and for a “good and purposeful life” (e.g., Aristotle’s concept of eudaimonia)
→ **Goal: being in resonance with oneself (e.g., an organization) and the world**
→ replaces the “best” in best version of the self.

Resonance II

Why is resonance important for transforming organizations towards sustainability and future-oriented innovation?

- The concept of resonance can be translated and applied to the relationship between an organization, its employees as well as its environment (e.g., users, other stakeholders, value & need systems, etc.)
- The **goal of a sustainable organization** is *no* longer to “*dominate*” the market, but to **engage** in a **relationship of resonance** with it
- Engaging in resonance as an alternative path towards finding and enacting an organization's purpose
 - Resonance goes beyond re-action or inter-action (e.g. between a company and its market/users)
 - resonance engages in co(r)-respondence (Ingold, 2013, 2022) potentially leading to co-enacting each other's future potentials and joint relationship
 - redefines the relationship between a company and its market/users/...
 - Resonance always points towards a future state
- New skills and mindsets/attitudes are necessary:
 - Resonance is about giving up/reducing control and **engaging in receptivity and (radical) openness/responsiveness**

Resonance III

Why is resonance important for sustainable organizations and future-oriented innovation?

- **Challenge:** establish an “existential resonance-axis” (Rosa, 2019) connecting the innermost of an organization (i.e., its [future] purpose) with the unfolding future potentials of the world at an existential level.
- How can this be achieved? → it is necessary to...
 - a. to be grounded in the accurate and unbiased perception and understanding of the now and the present state of the world as suggested by the engaged epistemology approach,
 - b. to identify and understand emerging future potentials (“what ‘wants’ to emerge?”), and
 - c. to make use of these potentials as a source for enacting and realizing an ecosystem that delivers value to all involved stakeholders and sub-systems.
- Resonance is an emergent phenomenon and becomes an interface for *mutual transformation*
- Resonance becomes a measure for successful and sustainable innovation

On how to Resonate...

„Art is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world. Less involved in knowledge and more involved in experience, in pushing forward the boundaries of what can be experienced. Finally, less involved in shielding us from death, but indeed precisely involved in actualising the possibilities of life“

(O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 130)

Organizational Aesthetics and Aesthetic “knowledge”

An **Aesthetic Understanding of Organizing** leads to “**knowledge**” that roots in **meaning** which is elicited by **sensory perceptions** of objects and experiences in and around organizations.

- Non-rational means to acquire *capacity-to-act* (Sveiby, 2001)
- Goes beyond the conscious act of creating meaning (as emphasized by the definition of knowledge as *justified* true belief)

Does it solve the problem of “justification” of future-oriented decisions?

- **Everything has an aesthetic flavor to it** (places, interactions, situations, **organizations...**) -
But are we truly interested in the taste?

“Knowledge is as much about feelings as it is about cognition!”

(Baumgarten, 1750)

Conclusions

- Co-creating a desirable future together stakeholders and the environment to cope with VUCA environments
- *Resonance* as ongoing, dynamic process of alignment – the organization must resonate with itself, its stakeholders and its surroundings
- Resonance requires a sense of the organization's purpose and the will to pursue it. This requires the desire to become a better version of one's self → Ultimately a spiritual endeavour
- The sense of (Organizational) Purpose relies in essence on the aesthetic perception of the organization and its surroundings. Resonating individuals feel when the organization steers towards to, or away from its purpose.
- To achieve the ideal of purpose driven organizations, we have to train and embrace our sense of Resonance!
- Organizations should hence allow spaces for the development of sensitivity and receptiveness for their employees. → Meaningful personal experiences both within and beyond the frontiers of the organization.

Join the Discussion!

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