

Appreciative Nurturing (AN)

HumanDHS

This text is in the process of being written collectively. It was begun in December 2006 and will never be finished.

If you wish to contribute, please let us know!

This text draws on the experience of members of the HumanDHS group. We wish to highlight the central role that the nurturing of relationships plays in creating our group as a cohesive and dynamic organization.

We in HumanDHS observe that we need more awareness of the fact that a voluntary network is different from an institution where people receive a salary. In a voluntary network, encouraging meaningful collaboration means offering people an experience as rewarding as – indeed, even more rewarding than – a salary. The work of HumanDHS network grows because mutually-empowering, mutually-energizing, authentic connections take the place of a salary. These relationships must be intentionally developed if they are to thrive and flourish. One of the essential ways we cultivate mutually-enriching relationships in our network is through email and related cyberspace technology. Most notably, we encourage members of our group to view relationship-building and -maintaining as the primary task of these communications. Information exchange is secondary to building relationships if we want to be true to our vision.

This text attempts to raise awareness and describe the specifics of our unique, relationship-centered approach to communication, which we call appreciative nurturing. Emphasis in this text is placed on virtual ways of connecting, for example emailing, however, clearly it applies also to face-to-face meetings, for example during the annual meetings of our network.

Please see our contributions further down in chronological order.

Evelin Lindner's Contribution, December 7, 2006
(Please see her biographical background at
<http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin.php>)

Perhaps I should precede my contribution with a personal remark. My contribution, the text you see further down, has been criticized by many for being “too preachy” and thus violating my own aims. I agree. However, I thought I do not change it, but precede it with this explanation. I invest all my life into building our HumanDHS network, and I try to express the appreciation that I feel for our members at my best ability. For me, it is like nurturing the growing of trees in a forest, it is a slow and quiet process. Sometimes, I feel personally hurt, when our network is treated as an impersonal organization. I feel a kind of reflex in me to wish to protect the dignity and personhood of our members (and

myself, of course). I wish to shout, “Please, here we try to grow a forest, and you come with a chain saw and noisily cut down some trees! And you proudly think that this is the right way of going about!? No!” I would like to ask the reader of my contribution for their forgiveness, for that my wish for protection sometimes translates into a language of “must” and “ought”! When I write “must” or “ought,” I wish to express that if we desire to protect our dignity, consequently, we “ought” to fill this aim with substance.

Let me begin with describing three types of relationships that are typically played out in today’s societies, so as to make clear which elements I think need highlighting (see also Table 1 further down).

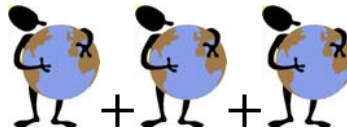
1. Business relationships (exchange of services for money)



2. Private relationships (exchange of private favors)



3. “Co-shouldering the world”



When we go to a shop to pay for products or services, there is no need for a personal relationship between seller and buyer (case 1, see Table 1). However, when we ask for a favor from a friend, indeed, this requires a private relationship – if we go into a shop and ask for a private favor, it might even be regarded as an insult (case 2). In voluntary networks like our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies network, where the aim is to work together for a shared goal, we need to go beyond exchanging services in a businesslike manner or as personal favors (case 3).

The coinage in the first case is money, and in the second case exchange of private closeness, brought about by sharing private concerns and/or activities. Both are insufficient in a group like ours. Let us look at an example: N., a lawyer, and a dear supporter of our network, is currently generously carrying out all the paperwork necessary to attain non-for-profit tax exempt status for our network, and she does this pro bono. If we had approached her without knowing her beforehand and had asked her, “Can you work for us pro bono?” – she would have been astonished and wondered how we expect her to pay for her rent without having an income. If one of our members had approached her as a friend and asked her for her help as a personal favor, she would have expected a similar favor from this friend in return.

Why does N. help without expecting money or personal favors in return? Because we not only do not generate money in our network, we also do not merely build personal friendships. We go beyond. We build relationships as an expression of, and as a tool toward realizing our shared vision of a world of equal dignity for everybody. In the first two cases, two people, or two parties, interact, for money or private exchanges. In the

third case, our entire network interacts on behalf of all humankind. Therefore I label the third case “co-shouldering the world.”

It seems as if each level of relationship can be hampered or damaged if approached in ways that belong to a lower, less complex level. For example, in a business relationship it is accepted that the aim is to gain money. However, it is easily felt as an abuse when people instrumentalize friends only to gain money.

Since “co-shouldering the world” represents a level of even higher complexity, it can be abused, hampered, and undermined in many more ways. I identify five or six ways of potential damage or abuse. Applying the template of business relationships in our network can, for example, easily border on abuse. As mentioned earlier, asking for pro bono help from people with whom one has no bonds may easily be perceived as an insult. Or, if members of our network instrumentalized it only to gain money, this would equally represent an abuse.

Likewise, applying the template of private relationships in our network can easily amount to abuse as well. For example, asking personal favors for our network from friends “because you are my friend,” is not necessarily in the spirit of our work. Conversely, using our network only to gain personal friends could also easily turn into abuse. A particularly destructive sub-case of building personal friendships would be the use of critique of the network as “glue” to build sub-groups of personal friends within our network. Usually, in private relationships, one finds solace for the hardships of one’s professional life. Such strategies, however, are divisive for any voluntary network and stoke potential infighting. They easily undermine the very gist of the work of our group, not least because private and professional lives are no longer divided as soon as one invests one’s life into one’s very personal core ideals.

In other words, what we want to avoid is the emergence of subgroups of frustrated individuals in our network, who find satisfaction in bonding among themselves by pointing their fingers at the rest of the network in indignation, accusing the network of not carrying out the great ideas that the subgroups has. This would lead to division and even to infighting. It would drain the energy and enthusiasm out of the entire network, and the result would be that the entire network does not fulfill the potential it has, because its energy is eaten up by the exchange of frustration. Frustration is an important marker that there is space for improvement and it therefore needs to be communicated to the network in constructive ways, not as glue for sub-groups of “buddies” who undermine the rest.

And, finally, if not money, then some people enjoy domination. But using power-over strategies to enjoy domination would also represent an abuse of our network, and contradict its very ideals of equal dignity for all.

Most of us are usually still socialized into a top-down world, into a world of domination/submission, all of which results in a widespread inability to “wage good conflict” (leaders merely give orders and “pull rank,” while underlings are afraid to speak

up out of fear for serious repercussions). And most of us are furthermore socialized into dividing our time into a professional and private life – many “hold their breath” during working hours, and hope that “real life” will take place in their private lives. Our network undercuts all these definitions and categories.

One of the most valuable resources for our network is trust. Everybody must be able to trust everybody else that nobody will engage in double-talk behind one’s back. We expect everybody to be aware that it is deeply damaging to the entire network to engage in building sub-groups of “buddies” within our network, sub-groups that thrive on criticizing the rest, using the rest as “common enemy” to gain cohesion within the sub-group. In traditional work places, this strategy may help employees survive the hardships of their professional lives vis-à-vis abusive leaders, however, in the case of our network, it would simply be eaten up by infighting.

In our network, no longer do we wish to have unresponsive dictatorial leaders dominating their colleagues, whose only escape is despair, building covert coalitions with co-victims at the workplace, or lamenting to friends in their private lives. We wish for un-dominating selfless leadership in our network, we wish for collaboration with un-submissive colleagues in mutual trust, and we wish for appreciative communication that does not avoid conflict but uses the innovative ideas that conflict often entails as nurturing stimulation for the next steps that our network wants to take. Problems can easily be defined as challenges, and the “glass” can be framed as “half full” and not as “half empty” – already such simple reframing can improve our work.

Linda Hartling writes: “Waging good conflict is not about criticism but about constructively co-creating change, growth, movement, and clarity in relationship. Waging good conflict depends on a level of safety and trust, so that all members of the group feel they have the possibility to share their truth” (in a personal message, November 29, 2006).

To conclude, I believe, we, as humankind, need to co-shoulder the world by building global I-Thou relationships (Martin Buber differentiates between I-It and I-Thou relationships, see Buber, 1944, from Buber, 1923). I am convinced that we need to discontinue believing that there is a fence on which we can sit as unaffected observers. If the world “goes down,” also the fence will go down. We have to discontinue wasting time and energy by skeptically keeping our hands in our pockets, or by waving our hands in the air in indignation about the world’s ills, or by righteously pointing fingers at evil perpetrators. Instead, we need to put our hands on the job, namely on co-shouldering the world.

We would therefore like to invite everybody to become inclusive members of humankind, or in the case of our network, inclusive members of our network. This means that everybody is invited to take “vacation” from usual roles, at least to a certain extent, for example, from the role of being only a private friend, or from being only an evaluator or advisor. All these roles have the potential to put a member outside the cooperative framework of the network rather than inside it.

And even though a hands-on-practical-projects orientation is important, a too direct and inflexible approach often leads to nothing but frustration. If Mandela had been an impatient man, he would not have been able to instigate constructive social change. There are many reasons for why patience is needed. The first reason is that we need new solutions to build a new world – therefore old solutions are not always what we want – and finding and experimenting with new solutions takes time. Another point is that a voluntary network cannot be “ordered” to carry out certain ideas, activities, or projects, even if they are ever so great. We have to patiently persuade our members to become active.

What we need to nurture, at the very outset, is the awareness that any hands-on approach needs to start with relationship-building. Imagine, your spouse is a smoker. Imagine you yell at her everyday, you explain that she is stupid in not recognizing that it would be in her own very interest to stop smoking. But, alas, she does not quit smoking. Is a marriage of daily yelling worth having? No. Does it help your spouse quit smoking? No. You better either leave your spouse, or stop yelling, and try to be as helpful as you can, but ultimately being accepting of her limits. A voluntary network is like a spouse who does not stop smoking, at least to a certain extent, because there are bound to be limits in any group of people that make it impossible for the group to attain a maximum level of activities. Any indignation at that fact decreases the network’s potential even further. The only way is to try to encourage the group members to go beyond their limits, but ultimately always lovingly accept those limits.

Table 1: Three different types of relationships

	Definitorial elements	Abuse
1. Business relationships	For an exchange of services for money no personal relationships are necessary.	Money can be used to destroy people.
2. Private relationships	For the exchange of personal favors a personal friendship is typically a prerequisite.	It is felt as an abuse when people use friends only to gain money.
3. “Co-shouldering the world”	For “co-shouldering the world” mutually nurturing connections are a prerequisite - connections built on authentic interest in the vision of our	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applying the template of business relationships in our network can easily border on abuse, for example asking for pro bono help from people with whom one has no bonds may easily be perceived as an insult. 2. Using our network only to gain money would represent an abuse. 3. Applying the template of private relationships

	<p>network and on mutual trust.</p>	<p>in our network can easily turn into abuse, for example, asking personal favors for our network from friends “because you are my friend,” may easily be perceived like an insult.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Instrumentalizing our network only to gain personal friends could easily amount to abuse. 5. Particularly destructive and divisive would be the strategy to use critique of the network as “glue” to build sub-groups of personal buddies within our network – discouragement and infighting would thus be stoked within the entire network, and mutual trust undermined. 6. If not money, then some people enjoy domination – however, using power-over strategies to enjoy domination would represent an abuse of the ideals of our network. 7. Framing challenges and the need to design next steps as “problems,” and the “glass” as “half-empty,” easily discourages our network and saps out all energy and enthusiasm.
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Table 2: Three different types of relationships

In “How Research Can Humiliate” (Lindner, 2001, see full text at www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin02.php#howresearchcanhumiliate), I wrote about the fact that validity in research is easily foreclosed when “interview objects” are not treated as full human beings. I believe that a similar dynamic is playing out when we build a network like HumanDHS.

Please let me now continue by trying to express my thoughts as to Appreciative Emailing itself. To start Appreciative Emailing (or any communication that is not a face-to-face contact), perhaps it is a good idea to think of the recipient of a message as being a stranger whom one meets for the first time. It might be unwise to prematurely assume a level of familiarity that might not be there. It might furthermore be wise not to assume that the other “knows” that we have “good intentions and high ideals.” It may, on the contrary, be necessary to make our good intentions and high ideals visible by expressing them clearly, among others by treating the recipient of our messages with respect, appreciation, and politeness. Appreciation has to be expressed – the recipient should not be left to guess whether we appreciate him or her, or not.

Donald Klein (<http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/don.php>) speaks about the human ability to feel “awe and wonderment” in the face of this world and its living creatures. I believe that if this awe and wonderment shines through in every email, a level of appreciation is reached that is beneficial for both the authors and recipients of a message interchange. I would therefore like to recommend writing messages in a spirit of awe and wonderment, by taking a step back, looking at the world from a distance, and recognizing every recipient of our messages as a person first, with whom we wish to

build a relationship, not as a messenger, not as a carrier of information. We could perhaps view the recipients of our messages as strangers, at least as a baseline, as strangers, whom we wish to invite into our lives, and whom we therefore have to “court.” Even people we know for years are not completely “familiar” to us, we do not “own” anybody (not even ourselves), and thinking of a recipient of our message as a valued, but always to a certain degree unfathomable and unknowable addressee, might be a “safe” starting point.

Expressing Appreciation Is Difficult

Expressing appreciation, however, is difficult for many people. Please see Table 2. It shows some cases and “antidotes.”

Table 2: Expressing appreciation is difficult

Expressing appreciation may be particularly difficult for:	“Antidote”
Expressing appreciation may be particularly difficult for many men because they are not socialized to do so, but have traditionally delegated this task to women, while they themselves have tried to fit into hierarchical domination/submission structures. Many women, however, when trying to appear “competent,” copy the impersonal “male” style of appearing as a role carrier and not a full human being.	Please become aware of this fact and find a way to express appreciation in your own authentic manner!
Expressing appreciation may be particularly difficult for many shy people.	Please become aware that the shy and considerate wish of “not wanting to bother other people,” is easily misunderstood as negligence! Please learn to step out into the “light,” become more visible as a person – this is like growing up to a new level!
Expressing appreciation may be particularly difficult for some people, who seek confirmation for a negative self-image (“See how nobody replies to my emails!”).	Please get psychotherapy!
Expressing appreciation may be particularly difficult for people who are socialized into institutions where people come to work for a salary.	Please become aware of the fact that people who depend on a salary may come to work even though they loath it, but that a voluntary network will be non-existent in such a case. Mutual nurturing relationships are the best “salary” for voluntary networks (not least to “crowd out” other, less benign potential “gains” that often tear voluntary networks apart, such as power dynamics).

	Please find a way to express appreciation in your own authentic manner!
Expressing appreciation may be particularly difficult for academics, who wish to display scientific objectivity by effacing themselves.	Please become aware that building a network of people cannot be done by effacing oneself, and that it might furthermore be a myth that scientific objectivity is safeguarded by the researcher pretending not to be there!
<p>Added by Linda Hartling: Expressing appreciation may be particularly difficult for those who live in rich societies, and for those who have always had or who have accumulated economic advantages, especially within social/cultural traditions that perpetuate idealized myths of self-sufficiency. For example, when an individual’s economic achievement is described as having “pulled oneself up by the bootstraps” it makes invisible the necessary contributions of others that make an individual’s achievements possible (e.g., parents, teachers, health care providers, mentors, advisers, employees, etc.). Political Scientist Robert Lane observes, “When the economy grows, people attribute their rising incomes to their own efforts and derive great satisfaction from these alleged achievements” (Lane, 2000, p. 64).</p>	Please become aware of the fact that achievements depend on the efforts of many. Furthermore, recognize that you may be seeing the “tip of the iceberg” when you see the visible work of an organization. Take time to honor, dignify, and make visible the invisible work of others, the work that makes collective work possible.

Table 3: Expressing appreciation is difficult

Expressing Appreciation Meets Adverse Cultural Myths

Expressing appreciation meets adverse cultural myths. Please see Table 3.

Table 3: Expressing appreciation meets adverse myths

Expressing appreciation meets adverse cultural myths	Facts
Some people might say: “I do not want to flatter people, the need of people to be flattered is disgusting.”	The fact is that mutual connection and appreciation is at the core of human psychological health and social cohesion. Therefore, the need for appreciation needs to be celebrated, not denigrated.
Some people might say: “Showing appreciation is unprofessional. A professional person effaces his/her personality to best fill his/her role.”	Roles do not form mutual connections and relationships, only people do!
Some people might say: “If you express appreciation as a leader, you appear weak and non-tough.”	The truth is that domination-submission as leadership style is outdated. Seeking power-over relationships is not conducive to voluntary networks that are based on the idea of equal dignity.
Some people might say: “Expressing appreciation smacks of embarrassing New Age let-us-all-love-each-other naivety. I do not want to be part of that!”	The solution is finding your authentic style of reaching out to the other person. New Age let-us-all-love-each-other rhetoric avoids precisely this and is therefore as unsuitable as old-fashioned power-over styles. Appreciation needs to be expressed authentically, by each person differently, and differently in each situation.

Table 4: Expressing appreciation meets adverse myths

Authenticity as the Core Antidote

For a voluntary network, it is essential to show yourself authentically, as the human being you are, and to build relationships to other people. What is a salary in an organization is the human relationship in voluntary networks. By “being professional” we take out the very glue of a voluntary network.

Most of us are socialized into treating emails as ways to exchange information. If this approach is used in voluntary networks that are based on the idea of equal dignity, those network will not flourish. The first task of every single email in such a network must be for the author to step out as a human being and build and nurture mutual connections and relationships. Every piece of information-contents must be treated as secondary.

There is no need to communicate in embarrassingly New Age ways, humor is the best way to avoid that. However, humor in emails is easily misunderstood; therefore straight

forward expressions of appreciation are perhaps best.

Particularly the beginning and the end of each emails are important! These are the places where the recipient of a message needs to be greeted as a person and the relationship must be nurtured. If this is omitted the network will fade away.

What Appreciative Emailing Does NOT Mean

Appreciative Emailing does not mean that conflicts have to be avoided. On the contrary. However, conflicts have to be discussed in an appreciative manner. Rude confrontational styles are to be avoided – they are unproductive whether communication occurs face-to-face or not.

Appreciative Emailing does neither mean that messages have to become long sermons. However, appreciative emails will have to be a bit longer than emails that only exchange information. Clearly, the length of the appreciative relationship-building parts of an email depends on the degree to which one is familiar with the recipient of the message, and how many emails one had already exchanged.

Please see further down some links, first to Jean Baker Miller’s “five good things,” and then to social emotional learning (SEL).

A Hands-on Guideline of Appreciative Emailing

I usually begin with addressing the recipient of an email with “Dear [full name]!” I avoid using Mr., Mrs., or Dr., Ambassador, or Professor, etc. (except, in rare cases, but then I use titles only in the very first email to that person). The reason for this choice is that the HumanDHS vision is to build a world of equal dignity for everybody, and to dismantle unnecessary power differences. We wish to invite everybody to help co-shoulder the world as individuals, as responsible citizens of the world, not as bearers of roles. We wish to persuade the citizens of this world to seek satisfaction in relationships of mutuality, embedded in equal dignity, and not in power-over relationships. Clearly, in traditional societies, many people derive satisfaction precisely from moving up a status ladder and gaining power-over leverage, and some may therefore feel insulted when their achievement (Dr. , Professor, etc.) is not taken note of in my email.

I try to counteract the danger that my personal approach might insult some people by expressing strong appreciation in the next sentence, which I space as a new paragraph. I formulate the second sentence in my emails as authentically appreciative as I can. I express specifically, though briefly, why I admire the work of the recipient of my email, or the way this person thinks or acts. I write, for example, “I read your article in X Journal and I was very impressed by the depth of your thoughts.” I paste this second sentence, if appropriate also into the Subject line of the email.

In my third sentence, which I again space as a new paragraph, I present myself, in case I write to the recipient of the email for the first time, and then I proceed as concisely as possible to the information part of my email. I formulate a wish as directly and briefly as possible – albeit always with warmth – for example, I would write: “We would be happy if you could have a look at our website and our work and let us know what you think!” I always attempt to cut down as much as possible on redundancies (being respectful means not flooding people with unnecessary content) and format my message as clearly as possible (with spaces, new paragraphs, bullet points, or making important words bold, for example), however, I never cut down on positive respectful and personal words that build a personal relationship of warmth and respect between me and the recipient of my email. For example, I avoid formalistic bureaucratic language, and indirect language. I refrain from saying, for example, “You have been chosen because of...” and would write instead, “We became aware of your great work, and therefore we would like to get in touch with you...” I also frequently repeat the name of the recipient of the message (“may I add, dear [name]...”). In other words, the information part of the message needs to be as short as possible, I believe, but not short in warmth. It is not the information that will carry the relationship with the recipient and make him or her wish to support our work, but my ability to meet the recipient as a human being and a person.

The last sentence in an email is extremely important, I believe. It is a prime place for building a personal relationship with the recipient. Using uniform formalistic expressions destroys this opportunity, and, to my view, needs to be avoided. Everything that sounds business-like or ideological is better avoided, I think. I would never write “please feel free to contact me again.” I would write, instead, “I would be very happy to hear from you.” I would also never write, “Peace for the world,” or other such pre-formulated phrases, because I believe that impersonal ideological expressions, as well intentioned as they might be, also fail to build an authentic relationship between me as a person and the recipient as a person. I would rather attempt to write a sentence that expresses as authentically as possible what I feel towards the recipient. I might have appreciated a little word, a movement, or a gesture that the person made during our last meeting, or in his or her last email, for example, and I would express my appreciation for this detail. In short, I would try to express my appreciation for the other person in an as personal and as authentic way as possible.

I would end my email with expressing my appreciation once more, but shorter, like “most appreciatively,” or “most warmly,” or, if I feel it to be appropriate “most fondly,” or any other similar way of expressing warmth and appreciation. I would avoid such phrases as “peace and light,” because, again, they are not personal enough.

I try to sign my email with nothing but “Evelin” whenever possible, precisely to emphasize that I wish to meet the recipient of my message as an individual and not as a role bearer, followed with my full coordinates if it is my first contact with the recipient. The following example shows a typical email that I would write to a person when approaching him or her for the first time:

Dear John Walker!

Michael Miller kindly encouraged me to contact you. He spoke about you and your work most praisingly to me.

May I present myself. My name is Evelin Lindner, and I am the Founding Manager of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (HumanDHS, <http://www.humiliationstudies.org>), a global network of academics and practitioners who wish to build a world of more dignity and less humiliation (to say it very short!).

Please see Michael on our Global Advisory Board!

We would be very happy if you could take a moment to look at our website and work and let us know what you think!

We send you our warm appreciation and look forward to hearing from you soon!

Most warmly,

Evelin

Evelin G. Lindner, M.D., Ph.D. (Dr. med.), Ph.D. (Dr. psychol.) Social Scientist

A Hands-on Guideline for Organizing Workshops and Conferences (added in December 2010)

Our HumanDHS workshops and conferences are being organized using appreciative emailing. The point is to invite people from our heart and soul, as human beings among human beings who share the same lifetime on our planet.

From 2003 to 2010, I was the main person to invite people into our workshops and conferences. My aim was to establish a new reality of how to organize meetings.

My conclusion, in 2010, is that our main focus must be to communicate to the participants of our conferences that I, as the person who invites, and we, as associates of the HumanDHS network, are not neutral to our invitees' participation, but that we personally place the highest value on their presence.

We need to model our emphasis on relationships and our appreciation of the participants' presence. We need to refrain from inviting people into being "presenters" and "audiences," but invite people, during our workshop and afterwards, to weave a web of mutual I-Thou connections (Martin Buber), grounded in respect for equal dignity. *Being* is more important than *Having* (Fromm, 1976) or *Performing* roles.

It is not enough for us to theoretically see the human species as a global family, we need to get practical in our conferences and workshops. We need to model that we, rather than regarding people as separated and isolated individuals, wish to invite them to move closer to each other and practice with a wider group of people the kind of family-like solidarity that usually is reserved for family and friends.

Since Western culture emphasizes the concept of the isolated individual, it requires a lot of pro-active convincing from our side to make this message be heard, particularly in Westernized cultural realms. It is therefore not enough, from our side, to wait that others will understand our point. We need to make the first step and communicate how much value we place in the relationship with the other. We cannot have our theoretical ideals and values be the only "attractors" for our work, including our conferences, we must also invest ourselves, as human beings, with our heart and soul, and make clear how much we value the relationship with the other.

From my point of view, this latter "requirement" for our work is the hardest. People are not used to invest themselves as human beings, we are all socialized into filling roles, acting from roles, hiding behind "safe" facades that separate us, and putting on stage performances rather than ourselves. Our HumanDHS approach means saying: "I personally will be happy to see you at our workshop" rather than "you are welcome to participate (and for me it is not important whether you come or not)."

This is also why I try to congratulate our network associates to their birthdays if possible, because it underlines that I personally value her or him as a person. Businesses have long recognized that this is the best strategy to keep customers, and consultants teach this approach in their seminars, namely that people need to be seen, feel valued and wanted.

In our case, we must make clear that we are not a business or a cult that wishes to manipulate people's need to belong and be recognized for profit maximization, but that we authentically appreciate our workshop participants and network associates.

The organizers of our conferences must be authentic appreciation agents. To say it in the context of my work, it means replacing the old language of honor with a new language of appreciation, framed by respect for equality in dignity. No longer status and competition, but a new language that stays clear of the linguistics of the past and works for connectivity, mutuality, and equality in dignity.

As in all our activities, we follow a growth paradigm. Like with the Open Space approach ("the people who come, are always the right people"), we invite people from our heart and soul to become associates of our network, participate in our conferences, or join the faculty of our upcoming World Dignity University. The classical approach is to start with themes and projects and then find the people to fill the slots. We turn this approach upside down. We begin with the people and invite them to contribute with what they feel for and what they authentically stand for. This serves our core principle of Unity in Diversity by nurturing the best of diversity within our overall unifying ideal of mutuality and equality in dignity. Authentically standing for something is always more dignified

and has more impact than filling a slot defined by others. It is extremely important to note that this approach entails drawbacks that more or less are unavoidable if one does not wish to dilute this approach to much: there will always be topics that will not be covered and needs not served by this approach. The solution will be to invite those who feel a lack, to step forward and contribute next time. Thus, we allow organic growth to emerge.

We will develop our World Dignity University similarly. We will invite people to offer a lecture, a seminar, or whatever they feel they can contribute with. In that way, also our curriculum will grow like a tree.

Both Linda and I, and all our network associates, we plan our cooperation for our work/network to last throughout our lifetimes, and therefore we think very long-term. We wish to gather people in our network who walk the talk. Many people in the world are very intelligent and diligent, and hard-working and prolific. However, few have the sensitivity for humility, for walking the talk, for the significance or dignity (with humiliation as its violation), and all issues that are related. This sensitivity is like a foreign language that some people speak and others not. We look for people who embody the being-in-this-world that gives rise to this language, and this is what is most important for us, more important than any "tangible product" be it time-wise or otherwise. Therefore it is not important if a persons feel she may not have enough time just now. What is so valuable for us is her sensitivity, her speaking this foreign language. It is a language that people do not learn usually, only some people seem to know it intuitively, perhaps through particularly educative or even harsh life experiences.

Through our work, we wish to spell out in more depth what this new language of dignity is all about, of which, so far, so few people have an inkling. And we ourselves, me included, of course, we are also only learners. The point is to work for something new, rather than against something old. We are aware that focusing energy on being confrontational and busily shaming people into admitting their failings to see their own participation in, or at least their blindness for the practices of rankism (racism, sexism, etc., see Fuller, 2003), creates backlashes of humiliation and saps energy, which, as a result, rather than speeding it up, slows down the necessary transformation toward something new. On the other side, we make utterly clear that we are not complicit with macro aggressions nor micro aggressions (that, in replacing macro aggressions turn into ever more covert and hideous tools of humiliation). Basically, the economic system, in which we all partake, to our view, is a huge systemic macro and micro aggression that victimizes all of us, the poor first, but even affecting the rich and wealthy in the long run, around the entire world, including our ecosphere. When I travel around the world, the suffering I see that flows from the supposed "realities" of our global economic system, is currently perhaps the most potent and covert manifestation of humiliation. And, it is far from being an unavoidable "reality." It is a human-made system of destruction-by-design that can and ought to be replaced with a more constructive and sustainable systemic frame as soon as possible. See our article in progress (Lindner, 2009).

We attempt to use our own sense of victimhood to invite everybody to join hands for creating a new future, where we can, together, appraise in much more clarity and depth

both the perpetration and the victimization we partake in. Or, to say it differently, we wish to avoid what Jimmy Jones calls "the post victim ethical exemption syndrome" (Jones, 2006). Not everybody is mature enough to embark on this path of "active nonremembering" (Volf, 1996) and of avoiding humiliating-potential-humiliators-entrepreneurship. Taking the time to remember the past (i.e. its grievances, humiliation), and choosing to forgive and purposively embracing "the other" in an act of mutual transformation, is difficult.

If you feel you can embark on this difficult path of ours together with us, WELCOME!

Jean Baker Miller's Five Good Things

Jean Baker Miller describes as "five good things" what characterizes growth-fostering relationships (Miller, 1986):

1. increased zest (vitality),
2. increased ability to take action (empowerment),
3. increased clarity (a clearer picture of one's self, the other, and the relationship),
4. increased sense of worth, and
5. a desire for relationships beyond that particular relationship.

Cleary, Jean Baker Miller "five good things" are the optimal cohesive "glue" for a voluntary network.

In our HumanDHS Mission text we try to describe what we have to aim at and what to avoid (www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/mission.php):

Our team aims at embodying a model of the organization of the future, where mature and grown-up people create flat hierarchies and develop new forms of communication. Often, organizations who engage in protesting against social ills tear themselves apart with the same aggression that they develop against their "enemies." We attempt to live what we preach and entertain respect for equal human dignity among us and towards those we deal with. We do not wish to peddle images of "us" versus "enemies," but work for new communication styles of inclusive decency, among ourselves and with others.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Competences

CASEL (<http://www.casel.org/>) is an organization that promotes Social Emotional Learning Competence (SEL). It seems that all SEL skills are involved in Appreciative Emailing at all levels. A greater self-awareness is necessary at the outset, an awareness of the fact that we often do not really communicate when we write emails, but that we send out monologues. Social awareness is required to realize that broadcasting such monologues will not lead to any fruitful mutual connection. In order to write messages that indeed succeed in building bridges to the other, enhanced self-management and

relationship skills are required. And, finally, it is necessary to assume more personal responsibility for the kind of relationships one wishes to build with one’s messages. This means that also the point of “responsible decision making” needs more attention.

Below, please see the SEL skill clusters and composite skills that CASEL views as essential (adapted from http://www.casel.org/about_sel/SELskills.php)

Table 4: Adapted from http://www.casel.org/about_sel/SELskills.php

Self-Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying emotions: Identifying and labeling one’s feelings Recognizing strengths: Identifying and cultivating one’s strengths and positive qualities
Social Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perspective-taking: Identifying and understanding the thoughts and feelings of others Appreciating diversity: Understanding that individual and group differences complement each other and make the world more interesting
Self-Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing emotions: Monitoring and regulating feelings so they aid rather than impede the handling of situations Goal setting: Establishing and working toward the achievement of short- and long-term pro-social goals
Responsible Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyzing situations: Accurately perceiving situations in which a decision is to be made and assessing factors that might influence one’s response Assuming Personal responsibility: Recognizing and understanding one’s obligation to engage in ethical, safe, and legal behaviors Respecting others: Believing that others deserve to be treated with kindness and compassion and feeling motivated to contribute to the common good Problem solving: Generating, implementing, and evaluating positive and informed solutions to problems
Relationship Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication: Using verbal and nonverbal skills to express oneself and promote positive and effective exchanges with others Building relationships: Establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding connections with individuals and groups Negotiation: Achieving mutually satisfactory resolutions to conflict by addressing the needs of all concerned Refusal: Effectively conveying and following through with one’s decision not to engage in unwanted, unsafe, unethical, or unlawful conduct

Table 5: Adapted from http://www.casel.org/about_sel/SELskills.php

CASEL describes the kind of facilitating environment at a school with the following characteristics:

- Safe
- Caring
- Well-managed
- Participatory.

A safe, caring, well-managed and participatory environment is precisely the kind of context that we have to create in our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies network.

Arran Stibbe's Contribution, November 16, 2006
(Please see his biographical background at
<http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/coreteamlong.php#stibbe>)

Hi Evelin,

What a fascinating document. Can I suggest that it becomes an ongoing document held within the group and that it slowly evolves through the experience of the group and comments from all about its content? It reminds me that language is so central to dignity and communication and people working together, especially when email makes communication purely linguistic.

Hopefully, as the document evolves it will become more positive in some places and develop more equal and respectful relationships with the reader in others. For example, 'no salary motives people to turn up' sounds negative, but the fact that what brings people together is a common sense of purpose could equally be expressed as something extremely positive.

In terms of relationships, modals like 'should', 'has to', 'must' etc as in "Each email must have relationship-building and maintaining as its primary task" could potentially set up an unequal relationship with the reader. Instead, it might establish more friendly relationships to mention benefits, as in "If each email has relationship building as its primary task then the result is a cohesive group working towards a common goal, and that is more important than any specific information exchange going on in the emails." Or something like that.

In a similar way, "This text attempts to raise the awareness and highlight the skills that need to be developed" implies that the reader doesn't already have skills, but could be expressed in ways which encourage more respect of where the reader is already. "This text draws on the experience of members of the group to highlight the central role that appreciative emailing plays in creating a cohesive and dynamic organization."

I'm sure there are lots of opportunities for the document to move from the more expert-led feel that it has now towards a more inclusive feel, drawing from the wider experience of the group in ways which include the reader as an equal. I'd suggest that's a task for the long term future though – in terms of content, the document is full of helpful insights into the communication process. In fact, I'd like my students to look at it and make comments and suggestions, because helping people to express their authentic appreciation of others in non-patronising ways is central to issues of restoring dignity.

all the best,

Arran

Ashraf Salama's Contribution, November 17, 2006
(Please see his biographical background at
<http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/board03.php#salama>)

My dear friends;

Please note that this email can be categorized under appreciative emailing that is also colorful....smiles

I am fascinated by the arguments introduced and impressed by the idea itself. I liked the tables Evelin has gathered and introduced in the paper, and I like Linda intervention when she said we need to cultivate this skill without expecting uniformity.

I've been thinking over the past two days, I recall some of the disturbing emails as well as the supportive, motivating, and encouraging ones that I have received since I started to use emails in 1996...it is been 10 years.

Rather than writing in research terms, I thought I would introduce my words here based on some reflections.

Appreciative Emailing: Toward More Humane Electronic Communication

Who Is Writing What to Whom, When, on What Subject are critical questions toward a clearer understanding of appreciative emailing. This suggests that **cultural differences are paramount when talking about appreciative emailing.**

Hofstede, 1980, eloquently stated that the survival of mankind will depend to a large extent on the ability of people who think differently to act collectively (Hofstede 1980, *Culture's Consequences*, London, Sage Publishers.) I would argue that since interaction between people from different cultures is incredibly increasing in recent years, there has to be some understanding of how people from different cultures think and communicate differently than people from our own culture, whatever "our own" culture maybe.

Below are some personal reflections written as they occurred in my mind. So the sequence of ideas might not be flowing

Appreciative Emailing: Between Optimism and Pessimism

Can we look at appreciative emailing as an effective way of communication across the boundaries of cultures and regions??

In cross cultural communication such as our network HDHS, meanings, conceptions and interpretations of communication can be found collectively and individually. Why collectively? Because meanings are negotiated between persons from different cultural backgrounds and from different disciplines, who communicate with each other, sharing a number of values, beliefs, and ideologies. Why individually? Because the interaction process is mediated by individual perceptions that are subject to one's identity, expectations, and experiences. On that basis, one can categorize two views; one optimistic and the other pessimistic.

The optimistic view is voiced by many who argue that emailing allows people communicate independent from the physical constraints of time and space, and also from the social constraints of race, gender and class. The pessimistic view is also voiced by a few who claim that emailing can be seen as the final stage of de-humanization of society arguing that anonymity encourages the presence of insulting communication behavior to a greater degree than face to face communication.

I believe that appreciative emailing when properly defined and comprehensively framed and understood would invigorate that optimistic view while at the same time respond to the negative responses raised by those few!

Will Appreciative Emailing Encourage Dialogue??

While electronic communication can be inclusive and foster dialogue, the question of when and how to involve others or to get involved with others is challenging. Still, we do not know much about, cultural norms in electronic communication neither about acceptable behavior and etiquette.

My belief is that appreciative emailing would foster dialogue; however, the term dialogue is often used in a fuzzy manner. In **Appreciative Electronic Communication**, the power of people should be neutralized so dialogue is invigorated, equality is perceived as a priority, and dignity and respect are not seen as Utopian ideas or luxury, but true feelings that pose themselves confidently in the communication process. In this context, I recall a statement made by Gregory Baum that I kept using for several years back in the mid nineties: **“True Dialogue takes place only among equals, for the master will listen only as long as his/her power remains intact, and the servant will limit his communication to which he/she cannot be punished”** In fact to recommend a dialogue

in a situation of inequality is a deceptive ideology of the powerful who wishes to persuade the powerless that harmony and understanding, appreciation and warmth can exist without any change in the status of power. Therefore, if appreciative emailing is to be promoted people need to see one another/each other as equal in status, position, and authority, while their power is neutralized.

Is There a Need for Expressing/Evoking Emotions through Words in Appreciative Emailing

The story of my friends

While some argue that expressing emotions is somehow easy in some cultures than in others. I imagine that some of my friends in Egypt, Turkey, and probably Morocco would say “. *we express our emotions in emails because of our culture. We express our emotions in polar extreme ends we either like somebody or dislike him/her there are no grey areas in our real life, and this happens in emailing our friends and family too .*” I tend to see my friends in Europe and North America disagree with this. Needless to say, there are individual differences. One of my friends would say “*No, email is a written document and I do not like to use it as a tool of expressing my emotions ,*” another would say “*Yes, I express my emotions only when needed and very superficially.*” A third would say, “*No, I exaggerate my emotions when writing emails for example instead of saying “thanks” I would say “thanks a million” and instead of saying regards and I would say “warmest regards, or kindest regards”*”

It would appear that expressing emotions for some people is a “cultural pattern” that is transferred from face to face communication to email communication. In other cultures, expression of emotions is influenced by the medium in which those emotions are conveyed.

Also, one needs to realize the influence of the American style in writing emails on the people whose native language is not English. I am sure that one of my friends who speaks Arabic or Chinese. would say regarding her communication with American friends. “*I sort of exaggerate my emotions based on my impression that American friends usually do so.*” *When I see something nice or a nice piece of news I say WOW, or GREAT in capital letters, but I do not feel that I need to do so with the people of my nationality .”*

Now, the questions that represent a challenge within the preceding context **How can we promote dialogue via appreciative emailing, how can we recognize cultural differences in writing, Why and how should we express emotions in appreciative emailing.. should they be true or superficial (no one would really know. anyway), are they to instill a sense of belonging in the recipient’s mind or are they to evoke the emotions of the recipient. Is the use of Emoticons or any other symbols appropriate in appreciative emailing, Are they powerful tools of expressing or evoking emotions, are they necessary, do they convey intended meanings**

I suggest that we take step back and start to generate questions that pertain to the nature and qualities of appreciative emailing..

With all warm regards to all

Ashraf

Judith Thompson's Contribution, 2006
(Please see her biographical background at

<http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/board04.php#thompson>.

This text was written by Judith in February 2006 not as contribution to this paper, but to facilitate our Round Table discussions in our workshops. We include her text here, because it addresses the same topics)

Appreciative Facilitation Hints for Round Table Moderators

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One important component of HDHS gatherings has been the round table process. Round tables provide a hub for presentation, inquiry and discussion around core topics that are evolving within the HDHS community and the wider network of scholars and practitioners exploring similar topics. They consist of a series of presentations followed by an open forum for questions and comments to presenters. Typically, they are about two hours long. Round tables are crucial learning laboratories in the process of theory development, and as such, they comprise the bulk of our structured interaction during our gatherings.

The role of round table moderators is both logistical and relational. On the logistical end, it is helpful if moderators make sure that all round-table participants understand the timeframe for the roundtable, and that they be prepared to share their thoughts within the allotted time. It is also advised that moderators email presenters before the conference inviting questions about the process and providing relevant details regarding time, venue and the overall roundtable process. When the round table begins, make sure that each presenter is well introduced to the group. Generally bios are available on the website prior to the annual meetings, but asking presenters to remind us of their names and their affiliation is helpful to the group and confers respect for each presenter.

On the relational side, the moderator's role is to help create a humiliation free environment supportive of all presenters and audience members. The HDHS network incorporates people from all over the world, often from different sides of ongoing conflicts. Often they may hold differing viewpoints on how to approach complex issues. On occasion, disagreements or even conflict, can arise, particularly during the period of open inquiry and discussion that follows presentations.

In keeping with the appreciative framework embraced by our growing HDHS network, the following thoughts are offered to moderators to assist them in creating an environment of safety, non-judgment, respect and lively inquiry that fosters deep learning and human dignity at the same time. These thoughts represent one set of insights about the process. Other thoughts are welcome!

- **Modeling respect and caring.** The beauty of the work we are doing is that we have the opportunity to walk our talk. Contradicting humiliation and honoring dignity are dynamic relational activities. Our challenge is to become more and more mindful of our own actions and how they impact others.

Any time we are entrusted with the responsibility of facilitating a group process, it is important to remember that we can “set the tone” for the group. True to the premises of appreciative inquiry, this means that, generally speaking, our appreciation, our respect, and our care for the feelings of group members, elicits the same qualities from the group. This is not a manipulation; rather it is a conscious choice to align oneself to life-affirming, dignity-affirming behaviors. Experience and our own intuitive knowing, tells us that when we treat others with respect, they respond in kind. Respect and caring show up in many ways. How we introduce people, our facial expression and tone of voice, eye contact (when culturally appropriate), ensuring equal time, and thanking people are all means for expressing respect and care.

- **Paying attention.** Listen deeply to each speaker with interest and focus. One thing that is sure to humiliate (and we all know this from our life experience) is to offer our voice to a group and believe that others are not listening or paying attention. Keep your mind, your heart and your physical attentiveness (via body language and eye contact) on each presenter as they are sharing. Paying attention creates a feedback loop of creative mutuality. As a relational practice, paying attention is one half of a learning exchange wherein the listeners is open to receiving and integrating new information, and the speaker, feeling connected to the listener, offers her or his knowledge with enhanced confidence, often accessing a deeper flow of wisdom or understanding in the process.
- **Staying present in the midst of the unexpected.** Due to the differing social and historic contexts represented at our meetings, and the complexities that often accompany these contexts, difficult emotions can arise between people, particularly if they come from areas of intractable and unresolved conflict. These are the unanticipated “curve balls” that can seem to create instability in the container that you’ve helped to foster through respect, caring and attention. Yet, conflict also means opportunity for all participants to be heard more deeply, and for the community as a whole to demonstrate its commitment to human dignity.

At times like this, the moderator can, once again, set a tone of respect and calm, assisting the group to explore the tensions in a spirit of curiosity and support rather than fear. Simple techniques like focusing on your breath can keep you in the present moment – where you need to be – rather than in reactivity or fear. This slows down your heart rate

and moderators your physiological reactions, keeping you calm and more flexible to respond respectfully to the situation.

- **Respectfully handling conflict.** When people are in conflict, try to stay connected with both or all parties, treating them with equal respect and maintaining ease and a sense of lightness. Often your own confidence that respectful struggle can be fruitful helps put people at ease. It may be useful to encourage people to use “questions of genuine curiosity” that aim at truly understanding another’s perspective, not judging it.

If you sense that the group is gaining valuable depth from the discussion, and dignity is being honored, you may choose to suggest that the focus remain on the particular discussion at hand, asking other’s to hold their questions and comments unless they build on the topic being explored.

Sometimes as a moderator, you have to make a judgment call if you feel that conflict dynamics are replicating patterns of historic humiliation. This can be a delicate situation where you are looking to maintain a deep appreciation for all concerned and at the same time be mindful of how unconscious humiliation patterns may be unfolding in the interchange

Maintaining a compassionate alliance to all concerned may mean interrupting the flow of the exchange and expressing appreciation for the deep feelings on all sides of the conflict, while acknowledging that the time constraints and structure of our meeting can’t do justice to addressing all of the complexities of the historic conflicts. You can then speak privately with both parties after the round table to see how they are doing and/or have a deeper conversation about the dynamics that you observed.

At other times, you may wish to call upon someone else in the room who you feel can offer a reorienting perspective, which can help the group to go deeper without restimulating hurts. You may want to ask them outright by saying, “Jorge, I wonder if you have a perspective on this that could shed new light?” Or, you may wish to interject your own “moderating” insight, which can help people regain a sense of their common bonds, even if the common bond is the fact that both sides are suffering.

- **Humility, lightness and fun.** Remember that you are among friends! Particularly if difficult emotions do arise, it is not your job to figure it all out. Remain transparent. You will not have all the right answers or all the right moves all the time. You are trying your best to be of service to the group. When you feel stuck, say so. “Hmm, right now I’m not really sure how to be serve the process. Does anyone have a suggestion?” We are all in this together and even though you are a moderator, sometimes being in the hot seat can feel a bit too hot! Ask others to join in. You may particularly invite someone who you feel could better handle the situation in that particular moment to offer some insight. Humility asks us to forego expectations of perfection! Sharing your own imperfections allows others to let down their own protective armor. The truth is

that there are no magic formulas for complex conflict situations. The best resource we have is the fullness of our own humanity and our intention to honor each other's dignity. Holding yourself lightly is an invitation to others to do the same. Keep a sense of humor and have fun! We are all here to learn!

Linda Hartling's Contribution, 2007

Linda Hartling kindly puts forward the idea to formulate a "HumanDHS Relational Ambassadors" program (May 19, 2007):

Here's one idea... I'm wondering if we could formulate a "HumanDHS Relational Ambassadors" program in which we train and support interested individuals to assume specific aspects of the work, in particular electronic communication. Perhaps we should develop something more formal, perhaps a "connected curriculum of appreciative training" that is facilitated through mentoring relationships?

In addition to managing the interfaces of communication, dear Evelin, I see us multi-tasking in these ways:

- 1. Finding the most effect ways to encourage and facilitate the participation of those who wish help with our efforts to walk toward a talk of equal dignity.
- 2. Continuing to develop and define what it means to practice a HumanDHS walking-toward-our-talk approach (e.g., appreciative emailing, appreciative practice, etc.).
- 3. Identifying and describing specific roles and responsibilities that can be assumed by others in way that facilitates their growth and the growth of the organization.
- 4. Most of all, I think we will always need to help each other up each time we fall as we move this work forward.

I am looking for models of how other organizations that have been able to do this effectively.

I am so thankful to participate in a community that is developing the fluid expertise and relational resilience to grow while allowing people to be authentic "humans among human-beings." It is a wonderous experience.

I'm sending my warmest wishes to all of you,
Linda

Linda adds an idea for developing a HumanDHS Resume:

I agree with you, dear Michael, when you suggest that it might be helpful to reflect on our strengths and weaknesses. Building on your idea, I'm wondering if it would be helpful to collect a "one-page" profile of information from all of the members of the Global Coordinating Team? Without duplicating information that is already posted on our

website, this one-page summary might be a little like a HumanDHS resume that includes the following:

- 1. Name & Email
- 2. Brief Biography (two sentences)
- 3. Strengths/Weaknesses (I appreciated your example, Michael!)
- 4. Describing Our Desired Level of Participation: Limits and Aspirations (For example, I am currently working a demanding, “more than full-time position.” At the same time, I am deeply devoted to the work of the HumanDHS network. Because of my work responsibilities, my HumanDHS efforts are generally restricted to evenings, weekends, vacations, and holidays. Furthermore, there are times when my work responsibilities completely consume the energy I would use to contribute to HumanDHS in my off hours. In the future, I am hoping to reinvent my work schedule in a way that would allow me to contribute more time to HumanDHS. However, until then, I depend on people’s generous understanding when I need more time to respond to electronic messages.)
- 5. Optimizing Time (Also, I wonder if it helps for people to describe the time they would like to give this work? For example, I am have made an open-ended commitment to supporting Evelin’s efforts. Some people might be able describe how many hours a week or months they would like to devote to supporting the work in a specific way.)
- 6. Personal Goals, Role, & Agreements (For example, my goals for my contribution to HumanDHS this year have been:
 1. Setup a bank account for humiliationstudies.org
 2. Setup a Paypal account for humiliationstudies.org
 3. Get these accounts linked together so transactions are streamlined.
 4. Get a functioning button on our website that will take donors to our secure website.)

Again, dear Michael, thank you for your thoughtful, thought-provoking email.
I am sending both of you lots of love,
Linda

Linda kindly formulates our overall vision as follows (July 17, 2007):

For me our approach means daring to “move toward mutuality” in all of our efforts. I conceptualize “movement toward mutuality” as an powerful act of resistance to organizational practices that implicitly or explicitly propagate exploitation. In “Relational-Cultural-Organizational Theory” (my variation on RCT), exploitation might be called “relational-organizational malpractice” (a variation of Joyce Fletcher’s term). Far too many for-profit and nonprofit organizations depend on countless forms of relational-organizational malpractice, including shameless exploitation. Whether this occurs in an organization that is working for good or not, it is still malpractice.

Five Guiding Ideas/Ideals for HumanDHS by Linda Hartling (November 28, 2007):

1. Relationships come first
2. None of us is as smart as all of us
3. It is not just the work we do together, but how we do the work together
4. We are humans among human beings (ubuntu)

5. We will all do better when we all do better

Michael Britton's Contribution, 2007: The Tree - Job Descriptions

I am thinking of concentric circles. In the innermost circle are the small number at the heart of the Network, whose job seems to be threefold: (1) the bringing in of new people, which you, Evelin, do so amazingly; (2) meditating/reflecting on the core concepts of the Network: humiliation, dignity, appreciation, transformation, nurturing – and how these are lived in day to day interactions/relationships with each other, within the Network, with anyone; the role of Tenders of the Mission, explorers of the “tactics” of appreciation, apology, forgiveness, etc; (3) providing service to the members in the next circle: encouragement, modeling of good relating, connecting them with one another as resources to each other, encouraging them in their own sense of mission, their own projects, etc. – the Tree encouraging its branches to dare to grow their own fruit.

In the next circle are the members of the Network who are essentially doing their own thing, drawn to the Network by a shared focus on humiliation, dignity, nurturing, appreciation, transformation – who participate in the sharing and cross-fertilization and mutual encouragement that takes place at the Conferences, and hopefully via the internet forums. The forums allow for an easier “networking” around shared interests – education, research, etc. – to compare, contrast, keep each other updated so that synergies can pop out and be taken advantage of, etc.

A coordinator or director of one of those forums is someone who takes the step out of the second circle into the first: S/he may continue to do their own thing, but that is not what the position is about. When acting in this role, the person focuses on the members in the second ring and what they are about, what they are trying to do, and provides encouragement, connections, brainstorming and the like for them in the pursuit of their own projects. A coordinator is a nurturer of other people in their own work, and sometimes in their own lives when they feel overall discouraged. A “coordinator” is not thought of as a “director” but more as a servant, a provider, one who seeks to be of help.

A coordinator also tends the larger picture in that domain, be it education or research or whatever: Where do all the individual efforts seem to be going, what do they have in common, where can they cross-fertilize, what does the bigger picture of global transformation seem to be most in need of that can be put out as a thinking-point that individual researchers might or might not want to take up as part of their work.

The other side of a coordinator role, as someone who has been brought into the first circle, is to enter into the shared process of reflection that goes on at the heart of the Network, reflection on humiliation/dignity/nurture/ transformation/appreciation/etc, as broad ways of understanding global life, its needs and possibilities, and on the “micro” level of our lived interactions. This is the realm of “walking the talk” and anyone who comes into the first circle as a coordinator takes on the responsibility for this kind of personal reflection so that, in the course of attending to the members of the Network

he/she deals with, the interactions embody the effort to live what we think about. In this the goal is that whoever we have dealt with comes away with their own dignity “grown” or affirmed in the process.

Linda Hartling’s Contribution, 2008: Dynamics of Discontent

At one point in my doctoral research I wanted to study “empowerment.” In fact, I conducted a complete review of the psychological literature on the experience of empowerment! Ultimately, I relinquished this topic for several reasons. First, I became concerned about “who has the power to empower whom?” For example, it seems that the dominant group often determines who gets to be empowered.

Second, I realized that empowering others sometimes leads the newly empowered to overpower others. I am particularly aware of this because of my experience of working with Jean Baker Miller. Some might say Jean was all about empowering others. However, in the course of watching her work with others, I noticed that some of these individuals would use their power to primarily advance their power over others, advance their careers, advance their status, advance their dominance in the world. There is a distinction between “empowering” (an individual development, self-promoting orientation) and “growing by supporting the growth of others” (a relational development, mutually-supportive orientation).

To use a term coined by Mike Miller (Jean Baker Miller’s husband), I think we are “relational activists.” In our work with HumanDHS, we are daring to encourage a revolutionary way of engaging people. We aren’t empowering people to overpower others; we are developing people who can be entrusted with a new vision of human relationships and relating.

For example, we need to take great care with people who have psychological and/or neurological challenges that would surpass our abilities for integration. Problems in the prefrontal cortex (PFC; i.e., poor impulse control, poor social skills, poor judgment, etc.) fall into this category. It seems that people with PFC problems sometimes create turmoil to stimulate brain function. Creating turmoil helps them stay engaged. Indeed, they become conflict-seeking. They do not know they do it and they don’t plan to do it, but they do it. Creating turmoil increases the activity in the frontal lobes. Daniel Amen suggests that some people get addicted to turmoil to get their brains to fully function, to get focused.

Our efforts can be derailed and our energy can be drained when people unconsciously use HumanDHS as a way to resolve enormous psychological issues. These are issues that are more efficiently and effectively addressed by professional service providers. As collaborative leaders of HumanDHS, I think our job with difficult cases is to lovingly, respectfully, and firmly redirect people toward the resources and experiences they need to work on these issues.

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