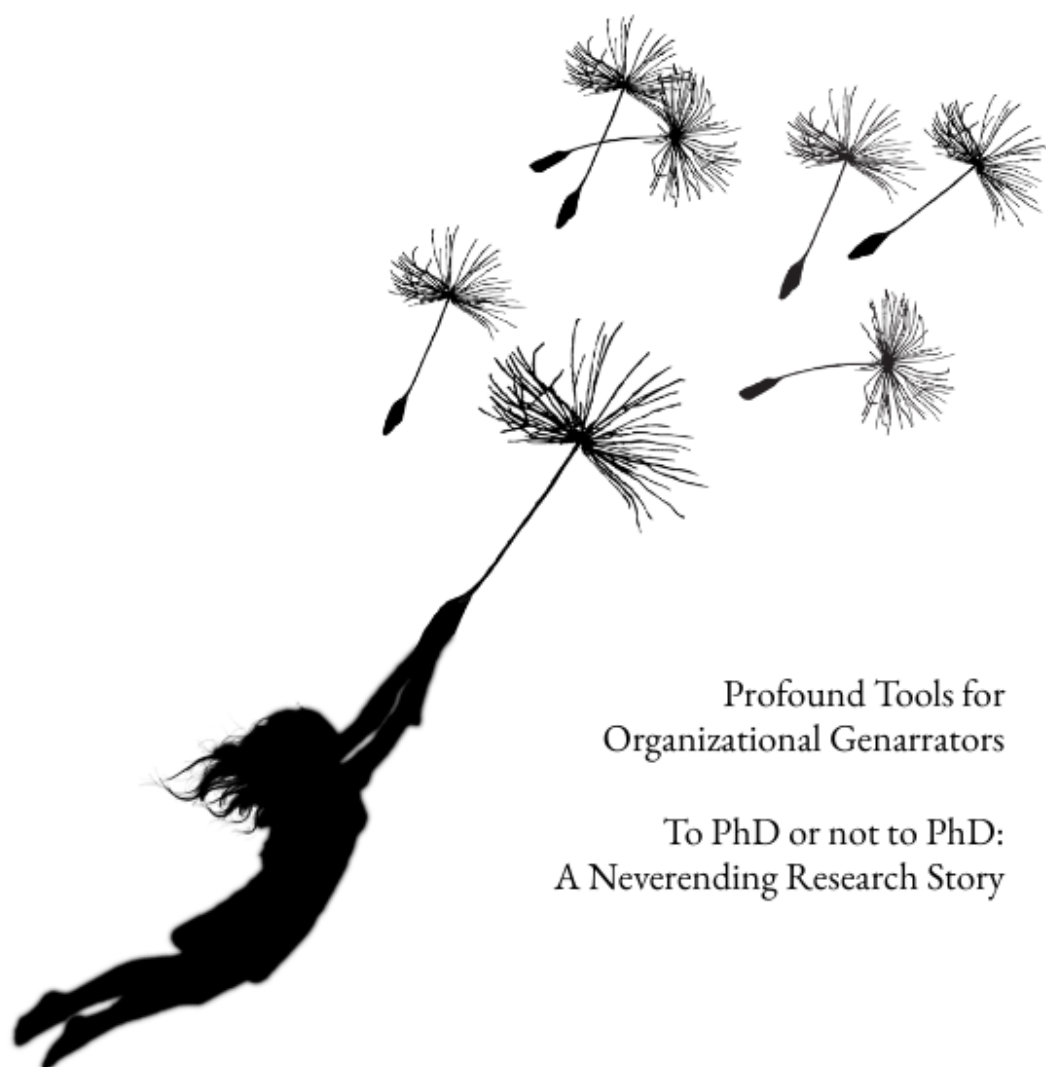# GENARRATIVITY

*future forming practices for
building better legacies*

Profound Tools for
Organizational Genarrators

To PhD or not to PhD:
A Neverending Research Story

Cees Hoogendijk

Being 35 years in organizational change and development, I have witnessed that a fulfilling job coincides with high performance. Easier said than done, always rewarding. Humanization is my mission, generativity my expertise, subtle disruption one of my qualities. Every organization houses like-minded professionals who want all the stakeholders to flourish. Does this resonate?

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(Photo by Carmen Marsal)

www.genarrativity.org

GENARRATIVE

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INTENTION

Intention is the driving force behind all meaningful action.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

This book is intended to propel three life-giving practices that emerged from a mixture of experience, curiosity, future-forming research, and love for life.

Practice 1   To use the word 'generative', and language in general, in such a way that it contributes to social and organizational flourishing.

Practice 2   To recognize, facilitate and accelerate generative relational processes.

Practice 3   To understand, appreciate, see and enhance the generativity of organizations and other kinds of communities.

Do these practices seem a bit abstract to you? It will all become clear, but don't expect an easy ride. Human progress is all about communication: one of our most complicated activities. Bear in mind that not many words contain so much life as generative. For a specific reason, which will be explained in this book, I named the corresponding practices *genarrative*. With an a and two r's. After reading this book you may call yourself a Genarrator. For the sake of life itself.

The book is also an attempt to connect the organizational world of managers and professionals with the academic domain of researchers and professors. The former are rewarded for checking, talking and getting things delivered, the latter for researching, teaching and getting published. In between are the groups, teams and communities that deserve to be beneficiaries of both parties. Perhaps the specific group of people called PhD candidates may show a special interest in this book. I sincerely hope it will show up in class as well as on the CEO's desk.

Proclaimer: genarrativity may very well enhance your personal well-being; however, it is primarily a practice to serve the well-being of the people around and beyond you.

NAVIGATION

Are you going to get lost with me?
I know the way

Loesje.org

My good friend and knowledgeable co-creator Joep C. de Jong wrote to me:

"I was at times lovingly-wondering whether I was reading (a) an autobiography (which in this case I truly enjoyed – it was very nice to be offered the opportunity to learn more about your story, (b) a chapter for the new edition of the Handboek Buitenpromoveren (Basten, E.M.R.C., & Tiggelen, K.B. van, 2013), a guide for the ones who combine a PhD next to their job, or (c) an inspiring search for (new) elements that will help us to 1. Find new, positive ways of using generativity to create new ways of understanding and new images of possibilities and 2. To become a Genarrator, an ambassador of organizational generativity. It probably is in the best of the AI traditions not an 'either/or' but real 'both/and'. However, it might be helpful to the reader to make these distinctions a bit clearer. In some parts of the book, I saw attempts to distinguish between the different elements, but often it was left up to me to decide whether I was reading a, b or c. It might help to manage the expectations if you offer up front what it is they are reading. I'm just imagining a book where it says if you want to read only a) just follow the blue text, if you are primarily interested in b) read the black text and in your interest is with c) read the green text. Just a co-creative thought!"

Esteemed reader, although you won't find colored text, I think that Joep's words may have sharpened your focus already. Yes, being a manager or OD professional, you might be interested in how to enrich your practice. The scholar in organization studies could prefer the research elements and findings. As a PhD candidate you may feel strengthened by the idea that you are not alone. You may also enjoy parts of this book because of being a language lover, an appreciative inquiry practitioner, or a social constructionist. More likely, you may have a bit of all of these perspectives, and who am I to direct you beforehand?. Nevertheless, you will soon find out that the structure of this book allows you to easily skip (and return to) paragraphs as you like. Through this, you will probably create the best way to navigate, even co-create your own unique reading journey.

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from the ancestors of our ancestors
from the teachers of our teachers
from the sources of our sources

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to the clients of our clients
to the students of our students
to the children of our children

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to the successors of our successors

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PREFACE & PRE-PHASE

The Greek root gen bears two meanings: to beget and to arise.

A book paragraph caused my eyes to get wet: an unprecedented experience. Not that I would consider myself an icy reader. Ken Follet's cathedral trilogy makes me submerge in medieval romance and suffering, and I feel Tom the Builder carving his stones. By speaking her songlines, Margareth Wheatley invites me to reflect on my path and on who I choose to be. Plenty of books turned my silent reading into inner silence. ('Hola, I was talking to you!', says my wife.) My friends and clients (my professional friends) consider me a sensitive being. It took me half a life to find out that being sensitive is not the same as showing emotions. Some people judged me for my lack of visible emotion and touched me deeply by calling me unsensitive. But they didn't get my tears. Only a few intimate friends notice subtleties in my expression, when I feel sad or uncertain, and when they are at their best. Crying is not my core competence. And yet, reading those particular pages made me want to weep.

The last movie that made me swallow, printed the eyes of Bambi in my brains. In Fiddler on the Roof, where Tevye sings: 'If I were a rich man, ya ba dibba dibba dibba dibba dibba dibba dum', his humor and optimism compensates for the terrible fate of his people in such a way that possible eye wetness may as well be caused by laughter. I really sense *Anatevka*, *The Sound of Music*, *Billy Elliot*, not to mention *Watership Down* in my very guts, besides showing poker face. Newspaper stories full of sadness and injustice make me gnash, but not snivel.

My face may be mostly dry, still nothing wrong with my sensitivity. And through my unexpectedly moist eyes I experienced *The Good Ancestor* by Roman Krznadic as touching. Because, at 16 percent of the e-book, a mind blowing and heart glowing exercise triggered my senses. You might experience the same in about a minute or two. But let me first give you some context. According to Krznadic, we humans seem to prefer the short term, whilst we're the only species wired for envisioning the future. Our marshmallow brain wants rapid satisfaction and creates questionable short sighted decisions. Our acorn brain can make us plant a seed of a tree that may protect our grand-grandchildren from the sun, or heat their stove, depending on climate development. Roman Krznadic urges us to develop deep-time awareness and cathedral-thinking. He wants us to be time

rebels who offer next generations a future instead of borrowing it from them - without payback. This was far too brief for describing such a promising book. You better go and read it. And, like me, on page 66 you may suddenly find yourself immersed in the following impressive time-machine[1]:

> You begin by standing in an open space. The first instruction is to take a step backwards, with your eyes closed, and imagine someone you know and care about from an older generation, such as a parent or grandparent. You then step further back again and imagine them as a young adult, picturing their life, their thoughts and feelings, their hopes and struggles. After a minute, you take a third step backwards and imagine their fifth birthday – everyone who is there, the looks on their faces, the emotions in the air. When I did this, I was picturing my five-year-old father in his tiny village in Poland, just a year before the outbreak of the Second World War turned his life upside down. There was laughter, warm embraces from his grandmother, the first strawberries of spring from the forest.
>
> For the next stage, you return to your original starting position and imagine a young person in your life who you care about and feel connected to, like a niece or godchild or one of your own children. Again with your eyes closed, you take a step forward and conjure up their face, their voice, the things they love doing. Then take another step forward and you've traveled 30 years into the future – what's happening in their life, what are their joys and troubles, what is the state of the world around them?
>
> Then take a final step and it's their ninetieth birthday party. You picture them surrounded by their own children and grandchildren, their closest friends, neighbors and work colleagues. They stand up, slightly doddery, with a stiff drink in their hand, about to make a birthday speech. Suddenly, over on the mantelpiece, they see a photograph of you, and decide instead to tell the gathered group about the legacy you left them: what they learned from you about how to live and the ways you inspired them. At this point, the final instruction is to sit down and write out the speech they would give, a memorial to you, their departed ancestor.

[1] From Roman Krznadic, 02020, The Good Ancestor, recalling his participation in a workshop called Human Layers, created by cultural activists Ella Saltmarshe and Hannah Smith, and inspired by the deep ecologist Joanna Macy.

How was that? Did you walk the time-line? In the open air, or mindful in your chair? Was it as good for you as it was for me, as it was for Roman? Did you stop reading, to reflect on your thoughts or perhaps to share your feelings with others? Did you ever *before* think about any *future* speech remembering the *late you* framed in a photo? Are you wondering how a "future *in-memoriam*" would describe you? Did you actually write that speech, as suggested in the time-machine practice? A first attempt perhaps? Where are your thoughts at the moment? Are you planning proper action? Did your mind change a bit? I wouldn't be surprised.

Perhaps you already forwarded the practice to a family member or a friend? Just imagine: Roman did the exercise and described it in his book; then I read it, experienced something similar and copied the instruction in my book; then you read it, perhaps practiced it and brought it further. How many people would have done the time-simulation by now already? And Roman wasn't the first. The exercise is alive and being reproduced for at least two years now, probably much longer. I sense generativity here. What? Generativity, the phenomenon about creating some kind of life that creates offspring: new life. Do I consider Roman Krznadic a generative person? No. (I will explain later.) Can we call that exercise script a generative story? Not yet; time will be the judge of that. Let me tell you this: In the past five years I have been studying almost every book that uses the word generativity, for the purpose of finding out how we can make the world, in particular the organizational world, a better place. There was - and still is - a lot to discover around that magical adjective *generative*. Regarding Krznadic's time-travel exercise, I can reveal that the interaction between its description and you - the exercising - is likely to be qualified as generative.

So What?

According to one of my former PhD-supervisors, one always should ask this question after putting the results of your inquiries on paper: "So what?" Why do I consider generativity so important that I should write a book about it, with a seeming typo in the title? Well, 35 years of working in and with organizations made me clear that (i) my level of organizational sensitivity is high, (ii) there's too much suffering among the workers, and (iii) sound working conditions create the best possible performance. I wish organizations and communities to be safe, healthy, inspiring to live and to work in. I want them to grow the capability to thrive, to flourish, to leave a promising future behind for their successors. This

PREMISES & PROMISES

"What about research, not as a mirroring,
but as a making of the world?"

Ken Gergen

Five premises are to be made. Unlike theses or theories, that can be tested as true or false, premises are like assumptions. Whether they are valid can only be tested over time. They also contain a certain logic in itself that makes them plausible, trustworthy. That's why we are willing to take them as given. Beware. Don't take the following premises for granted. Please try them for yourself.

Premise 1: reading this book is for you an act of co-creation. By reading my mind, you make up your mind. The moment you start applying the content of this book, like telling others about it, or doing the suggested genarrative (with ʹaʹ) practices, you initiate another co-creation with new people. This will ignite new ideas that will make a change in the way things are going. In that sense, both the reading and the applying of this book can be regarded as generative (with ʹeʹ) processes. Let me promise that slowly but gently you will get more comfortable with the difference (differance?) between that ʹaʹ and that ʹeʹ. For sure this will be accomplished when you reach the Andnote of this book!

Premise 2: this book is important. This perhaps sounds a bit blunt, but the more I inquired into generativity, the more promising it became. I dare to say that studying Generativity is as important as studying Love; and how many books, movies, poems, songs (and therapies) have been created upon that four-letter concept? Furthermore, this book has been built upon genuine academic research. Quoting Richard Sennet, author of The Craftsman, I would regard my five years of inquiry as "*doing things well just for the sake of it*". The word generative demands clarity, where most of its use so far is technically incorrect or its meaning taken for granted. Collecting the evidence for this bold statement took proper study: literature review, engaging experts, interviewing leaders, and so on. Clarifying is one; translating into practice is two. Having published a few academic articles on organizational generativity might be considered impressive;

articulating the concept to become actionable for practitioners, represents the real importance of this book.

Premise 3: learning to do is different from learning to know. This book is intended to give you something to do. Not only the why and the what but also the how, so to say. And in doing such, you probably will learn, which can be understood as: doing something better than before, or doing something you didn't do yet. Telepathy is not enough. This book heads for telekinesis; to make you move; to make your organization or your community move. When performed in a conscious way, the doing is the learning.

Premise 4: diligent use of language is crucial. I've seen so many strategic plans that didn't prevent organizations from stagnating. Too many job profiles are being matched with even more C.V.'s and do we really know that the chosen co-worker will flourish? How do we go from reading to doing? When asked what he would do if he would rule the country, Confucius answered: "I would use the language well." I don't think that he desired language to be so perfectly clear that everybody would exactly understand, because such may not exist. I do think that unclear language can bring uncertainty and stuckness among people. If you ask me, language should be just clear enough to bring people into action, from which understanding will follow. Inspiring words are nice; mobilizing words are better. Some of my client-friends say: "If we take care of the coffee, Cees will take care of the confusion." Confusion happens where multiple perspectives meet. You could call this the opposite of tunnel-view. To confuse this conversation for the full, I think that language doesn't necessarily need to be clear; it better be performative: inviting to act. Confusion may very well be beneficiary to action. That is: if we use the language well.

Premise 5: this book can work for you. If you have reached here, and it is your intention to keep on reading, this book can work for you - with you - through you - for others.

Confused? Ask Confucius

"Cees, you should know that academic readers are not interested in you or your research journey, so just stick to your question, method, data, analysis and conclusions. Furthermore, it's not a detective story, so please start with a resume of your findings, don't let your reader wait for it until the end."

After this feedback on my first serious writings, from one of my early Leiden University mentors, I separated my diary from my data and tried to focus on the content, keeping the notes of my research journey aside and for myself. Years later, when I finally managed to pass the peer reviews and publish a genuine academic article, with the help of esteemed scholars, muddling through almost a hundred manuscript versions, the majority of my revisions had only to do with document structure and text formatting. Nobody seemed to be interested in organizational generativity itself.

I understand that scientific papers should be structured for the purpose of traceability. But what about the intentions of the researcher? What to think of reporting the research as a seemingly logical series of steps, whilst the reality is much more chaotic and full of emergence? Not to forget the doubts, the difficult decisions, what to in- and what to exclude? Or the necessary transfer from theoretical findings to practical guidelines? To cut this short, I came to a point where all this scholarly work seemed little rewarding, besides the fact that none of my clients ever would find or read such an article. From that moment on, I knew that all my stuff had to be blended into a book. You are about to finish reading *Part Zero* of it. Four parts will follow.

In **Part One, In Search of Generativity**, we will travel toward and across my extensive review of almost every piece of literature that uses the word generativity. It was actually quite exciting to see that this word is taken for granted so much, but not very well explained. I dare to say now that the adjective 'generative' is often used incorrectly, and clearly in the need of re-framing or even un-framing. This part of the book is foundational. It may be the first time that the word generativity finally has been given a genuine user manual. It may be your first time to be taken on a journey in which one word is being studied. Be prepared for a generative journey that will make you reflect on your own use of language.

Part Two, Processual Generativity, invites you to take a closer look at processes going on in organizations and communities. Some of the relational

interactions are more generative than others. Generative processes can be recognized in seven possible manifestations. This part of the book may very well be a transformational experience for you, since you might not have looked at processes this way at all, let alone bother about their generativity. Through examples, reflections and challenging guidelines, you will be enabled to observe, with completely new eyes, relational processes that make organizations and communities thrive and flourish. Whether you are a family member, a community leader, a manager in an organization, or a coach or consultant of any kind, you will benefit from a new capability to not only recognize generative movements, but also promote and facilitate them.

Part 3, Organizational Generativity, stretches your newly gained observational capabilities to the level of organization or community as a whole. Its organizational generativity is determined by five elusive factors. You need to embrace emergence in your own reasoning to become comfortable with them. (Compare it to getting comfortable with the fact that water molecules are not wet, but together they are. The relation between the molecules and the water is emergent.) Again you will be guided by examples, reflections and practices to make this new view valuable for you. You actually are invited and facilitated to do the research yourself. At this point you can claim your membership of the circle of knowledgeable co-creators of organizational and social generativity.

In **Part 4, Genarrative as a Practice**, finally you will get some clues about that "a" and that "e". Moreover, this part is intended to provide pathways for practical personal development, after which, at some self determined point in time, you will find yourself qualified as genarrative: capable in future forming practices for building better legacies. Of course, the corresponding learning is preferably a generative process, and how could we better organize this than accompanied by profound genarrators and their immense wisdom?