Values and Poetic Organizations: Beyond Value Fit Toward Values Through Conversation

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Abstract In the midst of greed, corruption, the economic crash and the general disillusionment of business, current conceptions of leadership, organizational values, and authenticity are being questioned. In this article, we fill a prior research gap by directly exploring the intersection of these three concepts. We begin by delving into the relationship between individual values and organizational values. This analysis reveals that the "value fit" approach to creating authenticity is limited, and also indicates that a deeper exploration of the nature of values and the role of leadership is necessary. More specifically, we propose that organizational values should be viewed as an opportunity for ongoing conversations about who we are and how we connect. Through this type of dialogue which we define as "value through conversation", we can create what we call poetic organizations. A typology of four interconnected values each of which forms a foundation for the critical questioning and inquiry that might be found in poetic organizations is developed. We suggest that this conceptualization offers a new and dynamic approach for thinking about the relationships between leadership, values, and authenticity and has important implications for both research and practice.

Keywords Authenticity · Values · Business ethics · Leadership · Responsibility

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Introduction

Values and leadership are prominent topics in the discourse of both academics and practitioners in an era of corporate scandals, greed, stunning business failures such as Enron and WorldCom and the recent sub-prime mortgage industry crash (Ardichvili et al. 2009; Newton 2006; Palmer 2009). Shadowing these discussions, particularly in recent years, is the notion that authenticity is an important underlying component to consider as part of any discussion of values and leadership. Although, most scholars would agree that values, leadership, and authenticity are critical to understand particularly now, little attention has focused directly on how these three concepts might be inter-related.[1]

Freeman and Auster (2011) drawing on Rorty's (1989) notion of the "strong poet" begin to tackle this topic with their work on the poetic self as a "project of seeking to live authentically." They propose that "the idea that simply 'acting on one's values' or 'being true to oneself' are at best starting points for thinking about authenticity." They suggest that being authentic is an ongoing conversation that begins with perceived values, but also involves one's history, connections with others, and individual as well as community aspirations. In short, it involves an enlarged and enriched notion of the self as an ongoing creative project, rather than the self as a vessel or "keeper of the values."

In this article, we extend Freeman and Auster's (2011) idea of the poetic self and delve more deeply into the embeddedness of the poetic self within an organization. We

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[1] Notable exceptions include Maak and Pless's (2006a, b) work on responsible leadership and Jackson's (2005) article on a Sartean perspective on business ethics and how it relates to authenticity.

begin by examining the relationship between individual values and organizational values. We suggest that the idea that "value fit" leads to authenticity is limited and that a deeper exploration of the relationship between individual values, organizational values, leadership, and authenticity is warranted. This analysis reveals that a more fruitful approach might be to view organizational values as creating an opportunity for an ongoing conversation about who we are and how we interconnect. We call organizations that embrace this type of approach "poetic organizations." We delineate a typology of four interconnected values each of which forms a foundation for critical questioning and dialogue that we suggest reframes our thinking about how values, authenticity and leadership might be intertwined.
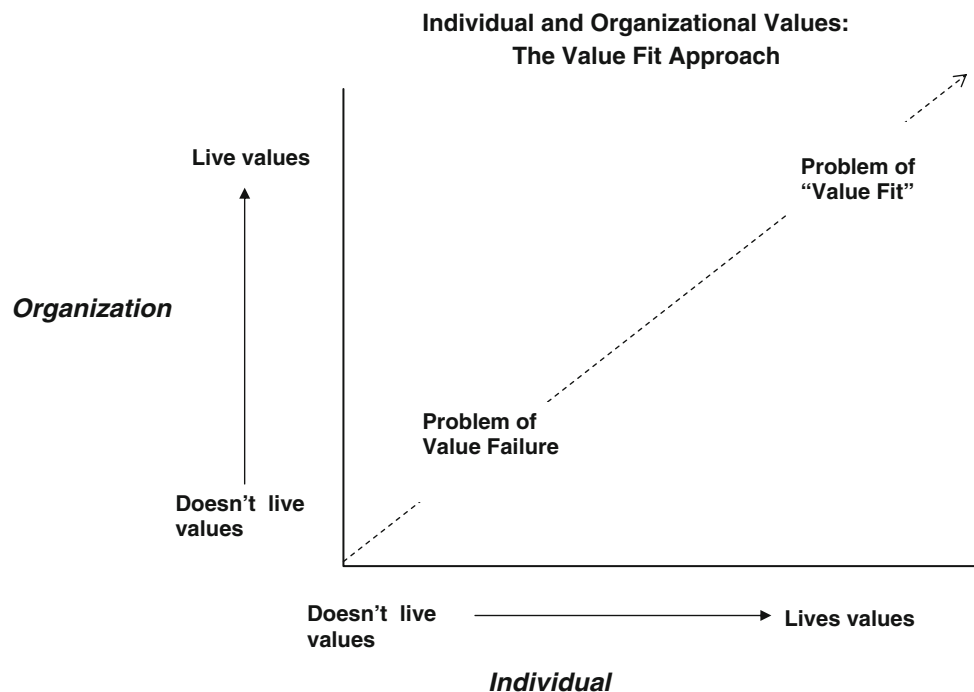
The "Value Fit" Approach

Although there is little scholarly work in management on the intersection of leadership, authenticity, and values as noted above, these ideas have been discussed in the popular press particularly recently. Most of these discussions begin with the idea that there are two inter-related reasons that explain why some organizations are able to create authenticity and others fail. One reason often articulated for why authenticity is missing in many organizations is that individuals and organizations are not living their values. While there is much to be said for this approach, we

argue that even if individuals and organizations are living their values, that fact alone is unlikely to create authenticity, at least at the organizational level. According to these views, a second condition must also be met. Authenticity will only emerge if the values between the individual and the organization are aligned—there is "value fit." Below we discuss the value fit approach in greater detail. We then delineate how the "value fit" approach can be viewed as a starting point for a deeper analysis of values and authenticity.

Living the Values or Not

A first condition for authenticity in what we are calling the "value fit" approach is that individuals and organizations must live their values—i.e., walk their talk. To illustrate this idea, we can create a continuum of an individual living their values or not and combine it with a continuum of an organization living its values or not. We can capture this view as shown in Fig. 1. As depicted in the lower left corner of the diagonal in Fig. 1, according to the "value fit" view, corporate scandals and greed in part stem from "value failure". Value failure is a result of individuals and organizations not living their stated values.

Take for example, the organization with the stated value that their employees are their most important asset. Yet inside the organization, people are never consulted on decisions that affect them and leaders focus predominately

**Individual and Organizational Values:
The Value Fit Approach**

Fig. 1 Individual and organizational values: the value fit approach

on maximizing productivity through efficiency based approaches rather than a more wholistic and inclusive approach. Stories of people being derailed or fired for trying to speak up about their ideas for how to improve the organization are told behind closed doors. What we find here is that the individual is in an organization that may post and preach its values, but everyday injustices leads to feelings of disenchantment, disillusionment, and stripped self esteem. For some, this erodes their passion and creativity and causes them to disengage as they feel empty and soulless. Others, perhaps, frustrated and angry that they lack any opportunities for input or change, not surprisingly, may undermine the company.

Clearly, this is an example of where both the individual and the organization are not living their values—authenticity is missing for both the individual and the company. Even though, there might be great deal of "values talk" and surface value fit, everyone knows that it is not real.

Value Fit or Not

Beyond whether the individual and the organization are living their values or not, is a second condition that must be met according to what we are calling the "value fit" approach. As shown in Fig. 1, the upper right end of the diagonal, in contrast, is where both the individual and organization are "living" their values. The question then becomes whether there is "value fit." Is there alignment between the individuals' and the organizations' values? If the individual's values do not fit the organization's values, then neither the self nor the organization can be authentic. If they do "fit," then according to the "value fit" view, the self and organization can be authentic.

We would suggest that when the individual and the organization are both living their values and there is congruence, that might get us headed toward something better than neither the organization nor the individual living their values. If everyone is clear that it is all about profits and the money, then there is a degree of authenticity. However, it does not go very far.

Where some might see fit as the problem and think that solving the problem of fit would reveal the "answer" to problems of leadership, values and authenticity, we see the problem of fit as just the beginning of the next layer of dialogue and analysis.

The Value Fit approach emphasizes "what" the content of the values are. This is where there is agreement of values (maybe) but values are often static words that attempt to guide what we do. Fit is achieved by the organization recruiting on those values and "enforcing" the values through mechanisms like end of year reviews, annual retreats, training, web-site, and intranet posting etc. Values are "given" or dictated. The emphasis is on whether

alignment is achieved between individual action and stated organizational values. While there may be stability because both are aligned, there is also an opening for deception and bad faith. We believe just living congruent values is unlikely to lead to authenticity.
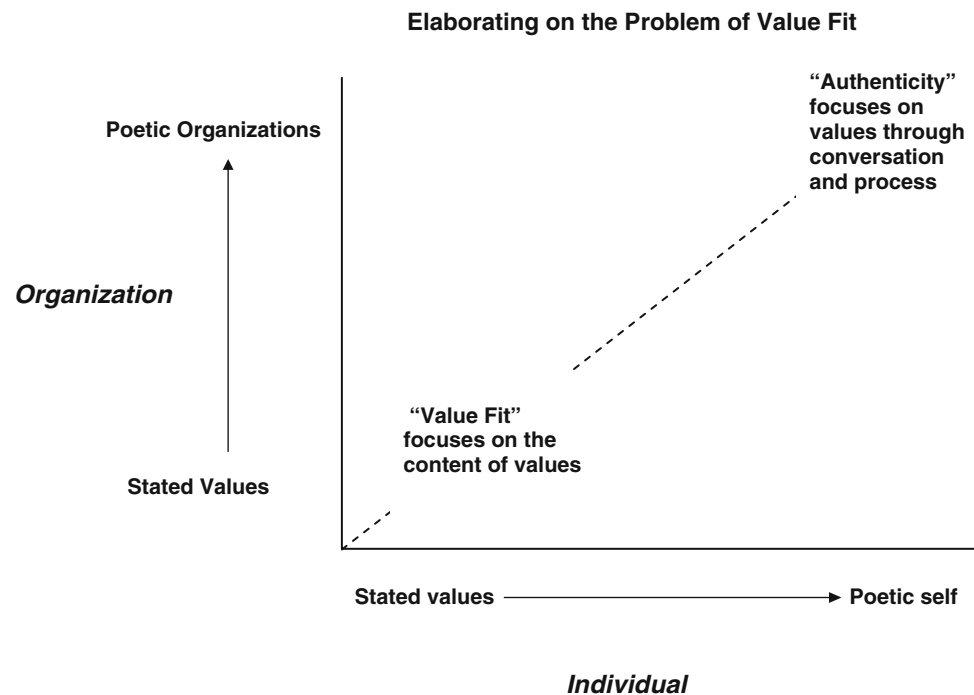
Poetic Organizations and Values Through Conversation

Freeman and Auster (2011) develop the idea of the "poetic self" drawing from Richard Rorty's extension of Harold Bloom's work on strong poets and their role in communities.[2] Rorty (1989) saw the world as continuously evolving driven in part by what he calls "strong poets." Strong poets are individuals who reframe how we see things "creating new perspectives on the experience of life and insights that often trigger change" (Hall 2011). Freeman and Auster (2011) build on Rorty's ideas by suggesting more specifically that poetic self is a project of seeking to live authentically. Being authentic entails continuous processes of self-understanding and introspection, connecting with others, and creating aspirations. Like Freeman and Auster's (2011) more nuanced view of the self, we suggest that there is an organizational analogy to the poetic self. To explore what this might look like, the analysis needs to be deepened beyond the problem of value fit to create a more robust view of values and the organization (Fig. 2).

An organization is people joined together to act around some common purpose (Etzioni 1964, p. 3; Scott 1981, p. 20). What inspires, engages, and energizes people in organizations is not only what the stated values are, or the physical structure, it is relationships, interactions, sharing discoveries, tackling joint challenges, and pursuing a joint purpose. Indeed, for the poetic self to thrive, it needs to have a context that is nurturing and supportive of its creative project. For the authentic individual, engaged in the process of self-realization with their past, connected others, and aspirations, organizations must be at a minimum place where this process does not get derailed. Ideally, organizations can facilitate the growth and development of authentic individuals. Authenticity then becomes the creative process of poetic selves joining together and engaging in joint understanding and introspection, connection and creating joint aspirations given their histories. This joint process of ongoing dialogue and conversation about who we are, what we stand for, where we came from, and how we want to "live" in the organization nurtures the conditions in which authenticity is likely to emerge.

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[2] For more on the original uses of "strong poet" see Bloom (1973, 1976, 1982). There is a secondary literature on the nature of "strong poets". For example see Garrison (1993) and Harmeling et al. (2009).

Fig. 2 Elaborating on the problem of value fit

Elaborating on the Problem of Value Fit

Poetic Organizations

Organization

"Authenticity" focuses on values through conversation and process

"Value Fit" focuses on the content of values

Stated Values

Stated values ⟶ Poetic self

Individual

We call this process, values through conversation (VTC). VTC brings talk about organizational values to life. Rather than emphasizing whether or not individuals actualized the organizational values, or whether the organization acted in bad faith or not, VTC is a process of enrichment and enlargement around organizational purpose and values.

VCT revolves around a typology of four interconnected kinds of values each of which forms a foundation for critical questioning and conversation. We want to suggest that these four kinds of values (which are parallel to the notion of "poetic self") allow us to answer more complex and nuanced questions about what it means to share organizational values and to act on them. The questions we offer are illustrative rather than exhaustive. The specific questions asked and how they are answered will be unique to each organization and will have important significance for how those within the community act and behave. While each value in the typology features different aspects of "the who, why, what, and how" of the organization, these values in practice may often be simultaneously expressed in the choices, decisions, and actions of those in the community (Table 1).

Introspective Values

Most businesses spend a lot of their time focused on current goals and fire fighting—activities that leave little time for reflection. The annual strategic planning retreat, or the quarterly—"have we met our targets?" meetings, may trigger a bit of reflection but typically these activities are intermittent and future oriented. By being so pre-occupied in the present with the occasional focus on the future, there is little time for introspection on how everyday and taken for granted actions facilitate or create barriers to authenticity. Even when these processes begin with a statement of the current purpose and values, there is often little questioning that the current statements are in fact valid, or even very well understood. Collins and Porras (1994) have suggested that truly great companies have a built in value of "dissent," that we see as a broader notion of a willingness to ask hard questions about why the organization is doing what it is doing. Such an introspective attitude is one of the precursors of building an authentic (or "poetic") organization.

There are many benefits and that can be gained from examining, contemplating, and reflecting on organizational purpose and values, just as there are personal benefits to reflecting on our own stated values and on the world around us. These benefits include breakthrough insights, learning, avoiding reinventing the wheel, sharing best practices, and time for restoration and renewal. We suggest that creating space for reflection and introspection helps facilitate authenticity in organizations much as it does in individuals.

Introspection might include a team asking itself how the work it is doing (specific activities, projects etc.) translates values into action or how the team is living the values on a personal level, or how it is not doing so. There are tough questions about which values apply and which ones do not, and more importantly, what is the shared understanding of those values, and how can that shared understanding evolve.

Deeper introspection might begin to reveal the organization's common assumptions as well as routines, norms, and processes that have become habit. No one understands why they were put there in the first place or why they continue. Raising awareness of habits and their effects is what introspective values can help shed light on. Time for introspection uncovers cognitive blinders and what they shadow, and forces contemplation about the everyday choices made both inside and outside the organization and their consequences. Introspection and appreciative inquiry can also help uncover the things that are working well in organizations that often go unnoticed because they are running smoothly. From that insight, companies can think about whether that positive deviance might be amplified or diffused (Auster et al. 2005; Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003).

Introspective values also might enable examination of our assumptions about our relationship to the world at large and the types of analyses we do. For example, many companies have bought into equilibrium models as a useful way of thinking. Equilibrium approaches stress that macro and competitive forces and dynamics and how they interact is mostly predictable, knowable, and generalizable. Sophisticated analyses enable management to isolate key factors, understand their impact, and respond. In equilibrium views, predictions and plans fail because the right analyses were not conducted or the right variables were not included.

The research of many scholars poses serious challenges to equilibrium views even though they are not always pitched as critiques of equilibrium theory. As Krugman (2009) astutely notes, the economic recession occurred in part because "economists, as a group, mistook beauty clad in impressive-looking mathematics for truth." Another vein of critique stems from what Abbott (2001) calls a "general linear reality." While sometimes things change and evolve in ways that appear "orderly" most of conventional economic analyses downplay things like acquisitions, strikes, new CEO's, the advent of the internet, political upheavals and wars, technological convergence, and the recent economic downturn which all create discontinuous change and make linear predictions dubious. In addition, slower moving changes like global warming often are ignored or set aside "for now" even though their impact will be profound, complex, and wide-reaching.

An alternative view of organizations and how they connect to the world at large is offered by disequilibrium and complexity views (Beinhocker 2007; Dooley 2002; Holland 1995; Meyer et al. 2005; Stacey 1996; Westley et al. 2006; Wheatley 1992). These scholars see the world as composed of nested complex adaptive systems all of which are made up of dynamic networks of many agents (which may represent individuals, firms, nations) acting in parallel, constantly acting and reacting to what the other

agents are doing. Control tends to be highly dispersed and decentralized. The overall behavior of the system is the result of people making decisions based on socially constructed information. The context is not this macro, objective force that stands above and outside individual action. Individual choices are driven by social, emotional, and cognitive needs or desires and that those choices are what constitute the context.

In short, equilibrium views see the external world as more reductionist, analyzable, static, objective, and neat where the agents change work macro to micro.

Complexity theorists and others flip that view on its head and instead view the world as holistic, interdependent, historical, and messy with change emerging micro to macro. The result is layers of adaptive systems that are ongoing, path dependent, idiosyncratic, and complex.

We highlight this tension between equilibrium versus complexity based views for two reasons. On the one hand, this type of entrenched paradigmatic thinking offers a provocative example of embedded and often unnoticed assumptions. However, it is also linked to authenticity. Indeed, while the simplification often suggested by equilibrium approaches is seductive, the world moves from micro to macro not the other way around. What seem to be more macro issues, whether they are external "forces," "big challenges" or "them" or positive change, are actually the aggregated result of people making choices. Solutions to these seemingly intractable problems thus rest in the individual decisions and actions of each of us and collectively how we work together. This implies very different approaches to leadership, inquiry, process, connectedness, and introspection.

Thus, through introspection (see Table 1), those in an organization can probe what is working well and why and explore how they might amplify those successes. These reflections might trigger insights about what is not working well and why and how they can learn and improve. They also might trigger reflection on actions, or habits that are "assumed" or taken for granted. Introspective values also urge us to reflect on what type of inquiries and research we conduct and how we view our connection to the challenges our organization faces and the world at large. Finally, introspection asks us to ask questions about the questions we ask.

Historical Values

Historical values focus on how we study the past and its impact on where we are today. Many companies operate mostly a historically focusing their efforts on now and the future with little recognition or regard for history. They may give lip service to history in the form of core

competencies that should be maintained or recommendations to "stick to the knitting" but they tend view history as an option that can either be built upon or ignored to begin tabula rasa. This type of approach assumes the organization and people within it can be removed from their context and their histories.

Consider Company A consisting of a number of divisions each of which had made historically significant impacts on their industries (creating them in most cases) and on the lives of many communities. While each division had some sense of its original purpose, the company as a whole seemed to have no purpose other than making a specific number for Wall Street. While the company consistently met performance goals, it suffered from a continuous morale issue, and it had ceded leadership in a number of its divisions. In short, it could not figure out how to recapture the pioneering spirit of its rather glorious and inventive past. Historical purpose had been replaced by profits.

This scene is repeated in many entrepreneurial firms who live past the founder and who move to the public domain. The purpose and values that made the company successful is often forgotten as it grows larger, becoming less than it could be. Purpose evolves over time, but without keeping history "alive," it is likely to evolve out of the control of the leaders to whom it is so crucial.

Organizations are idiosyncratic combinations of people and activities, intermeshed in ever-changing contexts that evolve in unique ways given where they have been and where they are going. As Lerner (1997) notes, history offers tremendous insight because it reveals the path dependency across the past, present, and future. We would suggest that history is an important aspect of poetic organizations and enables authenticity for it helps the people within the organization understand the connections between where they have been in the past and who they are now and why. Historical analysis and dialogue provides insight into the key changes and choices the organization has journeyed through and how they led to current circumstances. Historical understanding also solidifies organizational identity by encouraging different groups to grapple with different interpretations of the impact of past choices and their consequences for different stakeholders.

History "helps us see how the choices we make, once made, cannot be undone," and reveals "how these choices foreclose the possibility of making other choices and thus determine future events" (Lerner 1997, p. 205). History can create "imprinting" (Stinchcombe 1965) where founding conditions and related values shape the future because of inertia or vested interests (Stinchcombe 1965, p. 169; Suddaby et al. 2011).

For poetic organizations, taking history seriously involves creating collective conversations about the connection between where the organization has been and why recognizing that these conversations are subjective interpretations of the past (Suddaby et al. 2011). These conversations might also focus on where the organization is now and how these insights aid or hinder the ability to move forward. Historical inquiry moves beyond recording history to questioning and analyzing with history in mind how the organization might do things differently in the future. History also enables those in the organization to see paths for how to transform past history into future positive growth. Dialogue and questioning emerging as part of historical values in the poetic organization might include questions such as what is our purpose (see Table 1). It might also explore how interpretations of organizational history converge and differ, or how history shapes current values, routines, structure, and processes or blinds or opens up possibilities. It might trigger analysis around what can be learned from the choices, processes, and decisions that created the organization's historical path and asking what processes can help improve understanding of organizational history on an ongoing basis.

Connectedness Values

> A responsible leader then can be understood as a weaver of trusting relationships, as a facilitator of stakeholder engagement, and one who balances power by aligning different values to serve both business success and the common good. (Maak and Pless 2006a, p. 41)

Collectively working together requires connectedness. In many organizations, there is a bifurcation between rational "work" and "social time." We believe that relational "work" is the rational work of organizations[3] and that this relational work is what connectedness values are all about. Connectedness values in the poetic organization are oriented toward how people in the community connect with each other in how they lead and follow and their beliefs about effective processes and how they should work.

Although explicit command and control language is not as accepted as it used to be, many organizations still run on a fundamental premise of control through social hierarchy grounded in behavior modification methods. These approaches which dominate much of management practice start by asking the question "how do we get people to do what we want?" Although often clothed in illusions of participation, proponents of this view believe that clear communication from the top on what to do when combined

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[3] Our thanks to Henry Aldrich, Executive Coach/Human Resources at Procter and Gamble/Tremor for his discussions on this idea.

Table 1 Values in poetic organizations: definitions and key questions

Value	Definition	Key questions
Introspective values	How we examine, contemplate and reflect on our collective self and the world around us	Are we achieving what we hoped for?
		What are our values? How do we live those values within the organization? Are they working for us?
		What is working well and why? How can we amplify those successes?
		What is not working well and why? How can we learn and improve?
		What inquiries should we conduct? What research is useful in helping us create value and reach our goals?
		What questions should we ask ourselves?
		What actions and habits do we "assume", take for granted?
		What narratives underlie what we do? How does our language affect our ideas, actions, habits and values?
Historical values	How we study the past and its impact on where we are today	What's our purpose?
		How do our interpretations of our organizational history converge and differ?
		How does our history shape the values, routines, structure and processes we have today?
		How does our history blind us or open up possibilities?
		What can be learned from the choices, processes and decisions that created our historical path?
		What processes do we have to help us understand our history on an ongoing basis?
Connectedness values	How we connect with each other, how we lead and follow, and our beliefs about effective processes and how they should work	Who are our stakeholders and how will we connect, coordinate and build relationships with each of them?
		How will we cultivate collective leadership?
		How can we create dialogue and conversation that generates community within our organization?
		How do we insure multiple perspectives are nurtured?
		How will we learn, innovate and change?
		How will we cultivate innovation and new ideas?
		How will we insure we bring our whole selves to the organization?
		How will we communicate?
		How should power be distributed?
Aspirational values	Our hopes, dreams and how we see ourselves as making a contribution to our stakeholders and the greater good over time	Is our purpose still valid?
		Why do we exist?
		What are our shared hopes and dreams?
		What do we stand for?
		What makes us unique?
		How will we contribute to our organization, our community and the greater good?
		How will we enable our aspirations to evolve?
		How will measure what matters to us?

with proper incentives will result in obtaining the behaviors and outcomes that the company desires.

In our view, this type of approach reduces people to assets that should be motivated "correctly." It assumes compliance and respect for those in charge and that their "commands" will result in an orderly organization where people will do as expected and generate the required outcomes on the balanced scorecards and KPI indicators. Take

for example this quote from a Harvard Business Review article (Christensen et al. 2006, p. 73), entitled ironically "The Tools for Cooperation and Change." "Managers can use a variety of carrots and sticks to encourage people to work together and accomplish change. Their ability to get results depends on selecting tools that match the circumstances they face."

Perhaps a better question is to ask "why do people disengage?" and then we begin to see that this combination of compliance and behavior modification tools might force short run action or yield "go through the motions" behavior at best. But it will never provide a springboard for energy, passion, creativity—the essentials that build sustainable value creation and poetic organizations. It will more likely generate inertia, anger, and/or exit.

Thus, as we move toward poetic organizations and thinking about connectedness values and authenticity, we move away from a notion of leadership as paternalistic, created by a hero or architect at the top that knows best what to do, tells the people, and forcefeeds strategy with some incentives—a plan, lock, and load approach. Instead, we suggest that leadership processes are likely to be more effective and authentic when they are embedded in a community of mutual respect and are geared toward things that matter to the people. Leading is not about creating mechanisms for control. Direction instead comes from strong purpose grounded in collective aspirations. Leadership focuses on creating space for passion to flourish, with people reinventing their work as they see is needed. Leadership liberates those who work within the organization to figure out what to do, how and when in ways that they believe are best. Values offer a means to have an ongoing conversation that brings purpose and passion to life.

Interestingly, if we observe people in organizations, we discover that leadership and change naturally bubble up and emerge continuously from many places and many people unless it is thwarted and especially when it is cultivated. Sometimes change is sparked within the organization, sometimes by customers or other outside stakeholders sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally. Even if an organization attempts top management led "big" strategic leaps, it plays out as ongoing, self-organizing, and enacted. Leadership is distributed across the organization as different people and their units engage in decisions and actions at different speeds. Ideas of tipping points, social networks, diffusion, and social epidemics also all point to the natural emergence of leaders and followers (Gladwell 2000). These social epidemics are triggered by "connectors"—folks with wide social circles, "mavens"—those experts known for their knowledge, and charismatics who others idealize and want to imitate. These "go to people" can powerfully influence decisions and actions and are often important leaders, although

conventional approaches might not see them as such. From this analysis, we realize that leadership may be better conceived as a process that occurs throughout most organizations all the time and in many different forms. It might be best understood as how complex human beings interact and connect. It is innately collective and distributed so perhaps a better approach to leadership is to help these natural dynamics flourish.

Economic approaches that have long dominated much of management theory for the most part conceptualize people as rational and self-interested. It is not so much that these approaches are wrong, as that they are radically incomplete. We do not wish to repeat here, the well known critiques of the "rational person" argument. Indeed, in recent years, the fastest growing area of economic theory has been so called "behavioral economics" which essentially deals with the fact that human beings do not act in the purely self-interested way predicted and assumed by many economic models. As pragmatists we prefer to say it this way: for some purposes it is useful to talk as if human beings are narrowly self-interested, for instance when we are explaining theoretical models such as general equilibrium models or Prisoner's Dilemma situations. For many purposes and for most cases of when we are talking about people working together to create value for each other, it is more useful to assume that human beings are quite complex. There are many aspects to this complexity. People are simultaneously rational, emotional, political, and social beings. For our argument to work here, that we need to understand "connectedness" in more nuanced terms, we need only acknowledge this complexity, rather than picking a particular view of connectedness.

There is much research that documents the importance of connection in our earliest development in childhood. From Object Relations Theory in psychoanalysis to more recent studies of how children understand their connections with others, and hence enable themselves to learn language, develop and grow emotionally, and become functioning members of society. This does not seem very shocking if we talk about decisions about our loved ones, or surgery or our upcoming vacation—but somehow most approaches assume we check our emotions at the corporate door.

Creating poetic organizations also involves cultivating and developing conversations and communication channels to insure that a multiplicity of voices can be heard. Education, access to information and awareness are crucial for enabling people throughout the company to be able to contribute.

Beyond "hearing" multiple voices, we advocate joint engagement and shared leadership. This means creating a nurturing context for speaking one's voice and offering one's perspective. It involves respectful dialogue and

transparency. It enables the recognition of each person's capabilities and personality and creates space and cultivates their skills and growth so that they and the organization can thrive.

Thus, connectedness values focus on asking questions about how we lead, make decisions, organize and plan our work, generate ideas, and evolve collectively and individually. These values ask how we bring our whole selves and our values to life within our community. In our view, poetic organizations would lean toward connection that is mutual, collective, and ongoing with the goal of co-creating meaningful services and products that better the world in a community of respect with shared ownership and distributed responsibility. Questions that might be asked as part of this dialogue might include who are our stakeholders and how will we connect, coordinate, and build relationships with each of them. It might also ask what we mean by relationships and how we cultivate shared leadership to insure multiple perspectives are heard. As individuals and as a community, how will we support new ideas, innovation and change and how will we nurture our whole selves, our heads and our hearts, through our work (see Table 1).

Aspirational Values

Aspirations have been talked about in organizations for some time and often take the form of a vision statement that focuses primarily on market and competitive positioning. These types of vision statements emphasize how the company is the first choice brand, or the most profitable or how they guarantee excellent service to their customers. In recent years, many companies have expanded the scope of their vision statements beyond competitive positioning and customers to include statements about how they aspire to treat employees.

In organizations that in our view have more "poetic" aspirations such as Whole Foods and J&J, these aspirations also include how the company can make a difference to all of its stakeholders and why its efforts will make the world a better place. They incorporate broad value creation for multiple stakeholders on multiple levels including customers and employees, and shareholders and also expanding that stakeholder network to include the greater good—other living and non-living species, future generations and the viability of the planet (Wheeler and Sillanpää 1997).

While the specific words chosen for a vision statement or statement of aspirations are clearly important, we would suggest that what is more important is the process of how the values are developed, evolve, and are translated into action. Many are familiar with Whole Foods aspirations that are bound up in their Declaration of Interdependence. Their motto—Whole Foods, Whole People, Whole Planet—emphasizes that their vision reaches far beyond just

being a food retailer. "Our success in fulfilling our vision is measured by customer satisfaction, Team Member excellence and happiness, return on capital investment, improvement in the state of the environment, and local and larger community support."[4] But what makes Whole Foods a great place to work is not the words but how they live it. In the words of co-founder John Mackey:

> We started with a few simple ideas and core values for the company and then created very simple business structures to help fulfill those ideals. However, over time, as the company grew a process of self-organization took place and layers of organizational complexity evolved year after year to fulfill the original core values. As the original core values were expressed over time, deeper meanings of those core values were discovered and/or created by the interdependent stakeholders. Whole Foods Market's purpose has become deeper, richer, and more complex as it has evolved over the years. (Strong 2009, p. 78)

So, according to Mackey, connectedness of stakeholders has influenced the interpretation of purpose and values as Whole Foods has evolved. Aspirational values are sometimes clearer when companies are started, as many entrepreneurs have a purpose that is more than making profits. However, as growth happens, it is easy for purpose to get lost, and as companies move from private to public, it is easy for profits to replace purpose. Coming to see values as a living conversation that goes on in an organization can ameliorate this substitution, and keep aspiration alive and evolving.

Similarly, Johnson and Johnson has the Credo. While the credo is critical for articulating their view of how they contribute to the world, what distinguishes J&J is how it permeates the organization. "You'll find the Credo part of the vocabulary at Johnson & Johnson, from developing 'Credo-based' leaders to 'Credo-challenge meetings' to 'Credo surveys'. We want to develop Credo-based leaders–broad-gauged, multi-dimensional men and women with superior talents, values and the energy it takes to bring out the best in people and produce outstanding business results," Larsen told employees.[5]

J&J also uses a "Credo Survey" and "Credo-Challenge" meetings as methods for assessing gaps in action and practice—not walking the talk and as springboards for future aspirations. The Credo Survey filled out by all employees every 3 years is composed of more than 100 questions and is used to assess how well the company is living the Credo. The survey results are then woven into "Credo-Challenge Meetings" which began 25 years ago. In

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[4] http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/company/declaration.php.

[5] http://www.kahaner.com/johnson_johnson.shtml.

these "challenge" sessions, employees offer their insights on the survey results and how to better enact the Credo.[6]

Thus we see, that in each of these companies, aspirations do not just speak to what the organization is, they focus on dialoguing about what the organization wants to become. In organizations that in our view have more "poetic" aspirations, they focus on hopes and dreams, but the emphasis is not so much on finding the perfect words but on the processes of inquiry associated with conversations about aspirations. At a fundamental level, aspirational values in poetic communities ask how we make meaning from what we do—the "how do we make a difference?", "why do we matter?" questions (see Table 1). The stakeholder groups, scope, and time frame tell a lot about the collective beliefs of the organization and how they perceive themselves and why they exist as an organization. Thus, an essential characteristic of aspirational values in poetic communities is that these values are not only stated in the annual report, or the company web-site or talked about in an annual retreat. Instead, aspirational values in poetic organizations are under continuous scrutiny and discussion and live and permeate the fabric of the organization. Ongoing conversations about aspirational values include questions such as whether our purpose is still valid, what do we stand for, what makes us unique, what are our hopes and dreams, how will we contribute to our organization, our community, and the greater good and how will we enable our aspirations to evolve.

Values and Organizational Authenticity: A Brief Conclusion

Like individuals, organizations can be more or less authentic. However, we have suggested that organizational authenticity is more nuanced than simply announcing a set of corporate values, and trying to fit individuals to those values. We suggest that exploring the problem of value fit opens the door for a new conceptualization of values—one that emphasize process and inquiry as much if not more than the specific words chosen. We develop a typology of four interconnected sets of values that leads us to thinking about organizational values as conversation starters rather than conversation stoppers. We believe that organizations that commit to conversations about their values can develop the kind of organizational culture that nourishes authentic individuals, who themselves are struggling with their own project of self-creation. Organizational values in this inquiry must include at least: *introspective values*—reflecting on our collective self and who we are, *historical values*—what we stood for in the past; *connectedness*

values—how we lead and our beliefs about effective processes, and *aspirational values*—the why behind our efforts and hopes. We also develop illustrative questions that might trigger these types of dialogue in practice. Thinking about creating authenticity in organizations in this new light helps explain why espoused "core value statements" although well-intended might lead to disengagement and how an approach where values are dialogic and dynamic might lead to greater authenticity.

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[6] http://www.kahaner.com/johnson_johnson.shtml.

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