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Quantum Communities:

How a new approach to 'community' might help us build spirituality in our organisations

A paper by Andrew Woodgate

Abstract

The argument central to this paper is that (in my definition) one of the features of a 'spiritual organisation' is a culture in which we are able to be full and free persons in relationship with other full and free persons. My model for how such a culture can be described and fostered is 'community' – but community defined in a particular way, drawing on chaos and quantum theory. Building on the work of such writers as Étienne Wenger and Margaret Wheatley, the paper shows how the self-organising principles revealed by chaos theory can be used to provide a new model – 'quantum communities' – for fostering organisational spirituality. The paper contrasts positive experiences of healthy community with negative ones of unhealthy community, and analyses how and why communities sometimes fail to act healthily. It sets out twelve 'health indicators' for communities and concludes with some pointers for managers on how they can build community in their organisations.

The roots of this paper: a personal inquiry into community

I have been engaging in a personal inquiry about the nature of 'community'.

This has been against a background of a number of related critiques of our society, our organisations and our workplaces. My general inquiry has been to wonder whether fostering a greater sense of 'community' could in some way provide an answer to the problems described.

This is important to me because I work as a consultant with organisations and have been intrigued by the way in which individuals are treated within them – often very badly and wastefully. I have been following the public debate about the nature of our selfish, globalising, society and its effects on our planetary environment. I have also had personal experiences (good and bad) of being in community with others. The results, so far, of my inquiry are presented in this paper.

The first strand of thought influencing my inquiry is the debate around growing individualism in society. At the turn of the millennium, the debate was brought into focus on both sides of the Atlantic through the well-known work by Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*¹. Putnam charts the decline of 'social capital' in recent decades in the

¹ Putnam, RD. (2000) *Bowling Alone: the collapse and revival of American community*, New York, Simon and Shuster

US. Social capital 'refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them... civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations.'² The greater the level of social capital – of networks – the better the situation for schools, neighbourhoods, the economy, anti-social behaviour, democracy and personal health and well-being. In his exhaustive study, Putnam identifies some prime likely causes for the fall in social capital as growing pressure on time and money, increasing suburbanisation leading to longer commuting, the rise of electronic entertainment (particularly TV) and generational change³. On the positive side, Putnam is careful to point out that the story is not all gloom. 'Declensionist' narratives of how society is going to the dogs have been around in America for at least two centuries, he says. His belief is that social capital can rise as well as fall, and points to the 1950s and 60s as decades in close living memory in which it was on the increase.

The second strand of thought influencing my inquiry on community is the critique increasingly offered of our workplaces and of our working lives. An example of the debate is *Willing Slaves*⁴, published in 2004 by *Guardian* journalist Madeleine Bunting. In it Bunting describes how she was regularly overwhelmed by people's emails and letters bemoaning their working culture of long hours, constant availability and insecurity, whenever her column touched on these issues. She found that 46% of employees in companies rated as *good employers* felt exhausted at the end of a day's work – and felt they had less time for relationships and activities outside work as a result. Bunting feels that women have been particularly hit hard as their aspirations for career often run against the demands of raising children. While many people still feel they like their jobs, Bunting notes that job satisfaction across the board fell markedly in the 1990s.

The corporate culture may gradually be supplanting other models of culture and being. Respondents (particularly in the public sector) reported how the demands of work 'efficiency' often ran counter to their intuitive understanding of how human relationships work best. However, despite the continuing importance of voluntary and other informal activity in our society (for example through sports clubs, charities, church groups), paid employment is often the only model people now have of collaborating with others to achieve a common goal.

Bunting asked why people colluded with this system – why they became 'willing slaves' – and why choices about how to deal with it were increasingly individual; why we seem to have eschewed collective action or even debate. Her answer is that work is now seen more as a vocation than a job. Despite examples of forward-thinking, the organisational culture of team spirit, success, working hard, means it may be difficult for people to exercise individual choice over how, and how hard, they work. Even attempts at introducing good management practice can result in increasing demands for employees to sign up to corporate values, visions, behaviour, and so on. Just doing a good day's work is now no longer seen as good enough. (And there is a warning here about piling on new management initiatives for those of us interested in promoting yet another change in organisational culture.)

A third strand of thought influencing my inquiry has been the growing public discourse over the last couple of years around happiness. Richard Layard's recent

² *ibid*, p 19

³ *ibid*, p 283

⁴ Bunting, M. (2004) *Willing Slaves: how the overwork culture is ruling our lives*, London, Harper Collins

book, *Happiness: lessons from a new science*⁵ shows how, as economies have grown richer, populations have not grown happier in proportion. Our wealth is roughly double what it was 50 years ago in the UK and US, but people do not report being any happier – yet public policy is only now catching up with this fact. In a purely pragmatic way, Layard turns to Benthamite philosophy (that the best society is one in which its citizens are happiest – both as the result of individual moral actions and public policy) as a model for a happier society. Layard blames post-war rampant individualism which has stepped in to fill the hole left by the decline of religion and socialism. Like Putnam, he points to key foundations of happiness as including a sense of security, trust and the quality of relationships with others.

In parallel, the New Economics Foundation too is questioning the basis of social progress measured in purely economic terms and looking to wider definitions. They argue we need to examine how economic, social and environmental well-being affect individual well-being. They are developing indicators to gauge social happiness. In such a world:

*'the economy would provide high quality work for all that wanted it, and we would be time rich as well as consumption rich. Schools would focus on emotional literacy and life skills as much as academic subjects. The health service would focus more on prevention, and care, as well as surgery and medication. And in order to secure the quality of life of future generations, we would aim for quality economic growth rather than quantity growth, which would not deplete our social and environmental capital.'*⁶

Although I've so far only mentioned written sources, what I notice about these three different (but related) critiques of these aspects of our society, and of our organisations, is that they are primarily *felt* critiques rather than intellectual ones. Many of us just *feel* that our needs are not being met adequately. To that extent, we do not need to be *told*. I also notice that they are largely couched in a materialist, rather than a spiritual, discourse.

In the past, as society changed over time and organisations and institutions struggled to adapt, doubtless they often *felt* unsatisfactory to those involved. We also know that, at times in the past, people looked to spirituality and religion to help them deal with rapid social change. One only has to think of the rise of various grassroots non-conformist movements (such as Quakerism, Methodism or Spiritualism) in this country in the 17th to the early 20th centuries, of the upsurge of 'new religions' in Japan at the start of the 20th century, or of the rapid rise of Christian evangelicalism in present-day Latin America. This may even be part of a cyclical movement in society. At the least it can be seen as a response to an environment perceived as hostile to oneself or, as in the case of the upsurge of inner-city church building in the 19th century, an anxiety about 'the way things are going' in other sections of society.

However, the nature of the present critiques does seem different. For a start, this is possibly the first time ever in our society that we are looking for answers to our spiritual searching beyond the narrow confines of church and parts of the education system; we are looking for a range of organisations to treat us as whole persons in all aspects of our lives. Secondly, the growing emphasis on the needs of the whole person is certainly a change from much of the social thinking through the 20th century which, influenced by Marxist and other materialist thinking and struggling to cope with the onslaught of wars, and poor economic circumstances, focussed on the individual

5 Layard, R. (2005) *Happiness: lessons from a new science*, London, Allen Lane

6 www.neweconomics.org, 20 Apr. 06

more as an economic unit than as a whole person. 'Welfare' was the goal; as our material circumstances have been transformed, we are looking rather for a wider sense of 'well-being'.

That the malaise affecting our workplaces is indeed a spiritual one is named explicitly in a research report by the Roffey Park Institute, written by Linda Holbeche and Nigel Springett⁷:

'Why do highly talented people choose to come to work and give of their best? If the reasons are more than just financial, it is through work and their experience of the workplace that many employees attempt to meet their 'psychological', emotional, social, creative and personal achievement needs. Some would go further, arguing that work fulfils a greater role, connecting people through affiliation and purpose to sources of meaning which might be described as 'spiritual'.'

Holbeche and Springett's research revealed that 70% of managers were searching for something more meaningful at work; that 80% said it was personally meaningful to them that their company was environmentally and socially responsible – although 52% were sceptical about their company's value statements; and that 39% said they experienced tension relating the spiritual aspects of their personal values to their daily work. When asked to expand on 'what makes work meaningful?', respondents identified a number of indicators, such as: doing good work, being connected with others, having autonomy and respect, balance, making a difference to others, trust, alignment with personal values and work as part of one's life mission. In essence, what many people at work are missing, Holbeche and Springett conclude, are a sense of engagement and of being part of a wider community.

I long for both too. And the fourth strand influencing my inquiry is my own personal experience that community can and does exist – and that it can be a space in which we can feel engaged and connected with others, that it can be loving, life-transforming, personally developmental and open to the workings of (what I would call) Spirit.

I know this from the brief snatches of magic I see when facilitating group work, when the whole suddenly becomes greater than the sum of the parts, when participants suddenly move from being individuals, to being 'in the flow' with others. At these moments, it seems that participants open, that individual egos are given up, that hierarchies are dismantled and barriers between people fall. What emerges is a deep fellow-feeling and recognition of others as persons.

I particularly know this melting and reforming from my own life-changing experience of being part of an intentional community for gay men, the Edward Carpenter Community, or ECC. Set up in 1980, originally with the idea of founding a gay men's residential community, the ECC now exists as a network *'to provide opportunities to express our identity as gay men'*⁸. What holds the network together, and runs through its week-long workshop-style residential events, is its collective vision of what it wants to achieve. Its principles describe the ECC's commitment not only to fostering personal growth, trust and intimacy, but also to overcoming the effects of oppression, living in a non-exploitative way and working cooperatively. The vision which the ECC has, then, forms an intention to develop a particular type of

7 Holbeche, L, and Springett, N. (2004) *In Search of Meaning at Work*, Horsham UK, Roffey Park Institute, p. 5

8 From ECC Principles, www.edwardcarpentercommunity.org.uk

community. The living out of the vision releases the pent-up feeling and potential for self-transformation latent in the members of the community.

There's something about simply being in the moment within such a community which leads inevitably to personal growth. Such an intense experience involves more than just thinking or ego – it calls to one at an emotional, a mythical, a spiritual level. These dynamics are part of what Jung sees as the process of individuation, 'a process by which individual beings are formed and differentiated... having as its goal the development of the individual personality'⁹. And individuation leads to transformation on many levels:

*'Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our understanding of relations with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awarenesses; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.'*¹⁰

My experience of the Edward Carpenter Community is of something compelling, life-changing. The events I've been part of clearly contain some sort of magic.

So my specific question in this inquiry around community is this: can the transformative, spiritual spell of 'community' be cast over our failing organisations to help them address the spiritual crisis they face?

What do we mean by 'community'?

First we need to get clear on what we're talking about when we use the word 'community'.

The idea of 'community' is certainly attractive. But its very attraction means that the word is often used sloppily as a blanket term. One hears it used to describe people who happen to be living in a particular area – even if they may feel that their town or estate is far from being a unified community. It's used to designate a particular group of people by those who are themselves outside that group. One hears of 'the black community' or 'the Asian community', when people supposed to be in that community may be far from experiencing themselves as part of a unified whole. It may be adopted by people living intentionally in a specific grouping or place (for example, a religious or spiritual community), when the reality of that 'community' may feel oppressive or fractured to some of its members.

Humans evolved living in communities; we are meant to be that way. In the past, these communities would have been contained in relatively narrow geographical bounds – the village, the valley, the tribal hunting grounds, the mill town. The

⁹ Carl Jung 1921, quoted in Jacoby, M. (1990) *Individuation and Narcissism: The Psychology of the Self in Jung and Kohut*, Routledge, London

¹⁰ Statement from The Transformative Learning Centre at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, quoted in Paul Tosey (2004), Guildford, University of Surrey

'containers' for these communities may have been relatively static, slow to change and possibly chafing some of those within them.

The contemporary world means that rigidly-defined communities, with closed boundaries and stifling cultures, are no longer sustainable. The modern world on the one hand faces us with the challenge of creating communities in ways which people have never had to before, which is difficult and unsettling. On the other hand, through technology and increased mobility, it offers us whole new possibilities for building community. We have to learn to create communities for the modern world, which means paying attention to what we mean and want by 'community'.

If we are consciously to build community, we need a clearer definition of what it is we are after. For me, 'community' means a web of relationships which enables us to be fully and freely ourselves in relation with others who are fully and freely themselves. In order to support this network of relationships, healthy communities will have a certain number of characteristics in common. I suggest twelve characteristics of a healthy community below, but first I want to acknowledge two important influences on my thoughts about how meaning flows round groups of people.

Chaos in organisations: other thinking on organisations, community and meaning

The first influence is Étienne Wenger and his colleagues' work on communities of practice ¹¹. Importantly, Wenger *et al* take a very relaxed view of participation in communities. They suggest that there may be three broad levels of participation. The first is a small core who take on much of the organising and participate extensively. Around that core may be 15% to 20% of community members who are active and participate often. The majority of the community, however, may be 'peripheral' and watch what happens from the sidelines. In a traditional team or group, this level of participation would be seen as half-hearted. However, these people may be having private conversations and thoughts about the activity in the wider community, which in itself can be of value. It is important for communities to create sub-spaces (what the authors call 'building benches') to allow these spontaneous interactions to take place.

The second influence is Margaret Wheatley, particularly her book *Leadership and the New Science* ¹². Wheatley draws on quantum and chaos theory to re-think organisations. She uses insights from quantum theory, about how the basic stuff of the Universe is energy, to look beyond mechanical models for organisations and instead to focus on fields, energy flow, space, synchronicity. From chaos theory she describes the self-organising principles of systems to encourage us to focus on the whole organisational system, not on mere teams or departments. Key elements here are the identity of the organisation, networks, the flow of information (meaning) around systems, relationships, the interaction between system dynamics and individuals:

'The whole must go in pursuit of itself; there is no other way to learn who they are. But as people engage together to learn more about their collective identity, it affects them as individuals in a surprising way. They are able to see how their personal

11 Wenger E, McDermott R and Snyder WM. (2002), *Cultivating Communities of Practice: a guide to managing knowledge*, Boston US, Harvard Business School Press.

12 Wheatley, MJ. (1999) *Leadership and the New Science: discovering order in a chaotic world*, San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler

*patterns and behaviours contribute to the whole. The surprise is that they then take responsibility for changing themselves.'*¹³

Above all, perhaps, the generation and sharing of meaning, the energy which powers the system, is vital to its health and development. The processes which foster meaning-generation are far more important than organisational structures. The size of a network is not important; affecting one part of it will affect the whole.

While acknowledging the great debt this paper owes to Wheatley's work, I want to take her thinking and build on it. Wheatley is clearly fascinated by systems and how they work. She is influenced by science and sees organisations, or systems, as part of the fabric of the Universe itself. It may be that this in itself is a deeply spiritual approach to organisations, but she does not name it as such. While she does of course bring people into the frame, and talks of the importance of sharing meaning and personal values in systems, it almost seems at times as if the people are subordinate to the system.

In this paper, I want to turn the systems approach inside out. While acknowledging its value and wisdom, I want to put *people* at the centre of our focus. Building on the learnings from quantum physics and chaos theory, I want to describe how community may be a place in which the present critique of, and debate around, our organisations can be addressed; how community founded on systems principles may be a place where our potential as full and free human beings (including our spiritual selves) can be recognised and fostered.

To make it clear that I am using the word 'community' in a specific way, I have named this sort of community a 'quantum community'.

Twelve characteristics of a quantum community

What makes a quantum community different? Here are twelve key characteristics which I suggest will define any successful quantum community.

1 Self-reference, or self-awareness – the community understands itself as a community, and its members are aware that they – and others – are part of it. So if you don't think you're part of a community, then you're not – you can't be labelled as part of a community by someone else. Thus, membership of a community demands a voluntary commitment and can't be imposed. The community will maintain its self-awareness through feedback loops, which allow issues to be heard and communicated to the wider community.

2 Autonomy and diversity – all members of the community are free and of equal value, although they may perform different roles and have different levels of participation. The community cannot be controlled, designed or led by an individual or a group (although members might agree to delegate leadership, or other functions, to an individual or a group). The community recognises and respects the differences between individuals.

3 Participation – all members of the community are enabled to participate, but are free to choose their level and manner of participation. A community needs to

¹³ *ibid*, p 144

value and accommodate these different levels of involvement by creating opportunities to allow spontaneous reflective sub-groupings.

4 Relationships – the community pays attention to developing relationships, valuing both the individual and the collective. Members of the community do not need to be in direct relationship with every other member. (This is in distinction to a group or team, where all members would normally be in direct relationship with all other members.) Relationships within communities can be thought of as ‘integrative fields’ in which individuals come together and create something greater than the sum of the parts, while retaining their distinctiveness.

5 Intention – the community has a clear and shared intention. In traditional work teams or groups, the mission or task is often about doing something, about effecting change external to the group. The task is generally envisaged in rational, practical terms. In healthy communities, the intention may have a ‘doing’ element (encompassing the cognitive and practical) but this will be balanced with a ‘being’ intention, which pays attention to the emotional and imaginal realms of human beings. Healthy communities will pay attention to how they are, as well as to what they are doing.

6 Energy – the community has enough internal energy, or enthusiasm, to sustain itself. Energy is likely to come from the generation and flow of information which is given a shared value by community members (that is, meaning, not mere data). Meaning is generated from intellectual knowledge, strong emotions, values and beliefs present in the community.

7 Culture – the community has the basic minimum necessary ground rules or culture (even if implicit) to form a gentle container for the relationships between community members. However, in order to maximise energy-flow throughout the community, the culture must be one which allows as much diversity, creativity and spontaneity as possible.

8 Processes – the community pays attention to the processes needed to create and transmit meaning, including the community’s culture, to its members. Community members will share a ‘community hygiene’ role, making sure the community is functioning to the optimum, by looking out for, and dealing with, individuals who are struggling or processes which are not working.

9 Wave and Particle – the community exists, like matter, in wave packets and may manifest itself at different times in ‘wave-form’ (eg: virtual communities, loose networks, very disparate or low-energy communities, everyday neighbourhood activity) or in ‘particle-form’ (eg: close groups, teams, during specific events, in response to particular occurrences in the external environment, street parties, and so on). Low-energy (‘wave’) communities (and community members) have the potential to shift to a high-energy state (‘particle’) and vice-versa.

10 Context – the community, and what happens within it, emerge from, and are inseparable from, its context. The community can’t be designed, controlled or predicted from outside itself. What works in one context can’t be precisely translated or copied into another context.

11 Boundaries – the community pays careful attention to managing its boundaries. The community is aware of both inside and outside perspectives. Members of the community ‘scan the horizon’ to see what is happening in the outside

world, and bring relevant information back into the community. The community pays attention to welcoming and inducting suitable newcomers, and to celebrating the departure of individuals leaving. The boundaries of the community are thus permeable and fluid. They are seen as the place at which it interacts with, and learns from, its environment.

12 Emergence and evolution – the community evolves and changes in response to its own energy levels and to other internal and external stimuli. It will need to have feedback loops and review mechanisms to help this happen. The community will need to pay particular attention to what is happening outside itself, in its wider environment. Flexibility will be built in to how the community functions, to allow the unplanned to emerge.

The shadow side of community

Of course it would be foolish to be too starry-eyed about community. We can all think of communities which have been oppressive, restrictive and moribund.

The very concept of 'learning communities' in an academic context, for example, has been challenged by a number of writers¹⁴. Communities can be seen as idealistic, harking back to a non-existent pastoral golden age, enforcing conformity while punishing difference, valuing the collective over the individual, and so on.

Nor is it always easy to participate in a community. It can be hard for some people to join together with others – to step into the 'integrative field' of a relationship¹⁵. Some people may be left on the sidelines feeling isolated. And while we may strive to respect others, it can be hard to know how our personal behaviour is affecting them until it is too late. The creativity of a community comes from the energy generated by the various relationships and interactions within it. But these interactions can trigger negative, as well as positive, reactions within us. Parker Palmer highlights the irritating side of community, saying '*we might define true community as the place where the person you least want to live with always lives!*'¹⁶.

However I would argue that the reason for communities feeling uncomfortable, or even damaging, is because some of the characteristics of a healthy community listed above are absent. For example, in a small village community where conformity is enforced, one could say that participation is not voluntary – one has no choice about where one is born. Similarly, in a community which is not evolving, the boundaries may not be permeable enough to allow in new members or ideas, or the community processes may be too cumbersome or irrelevant to allow growth. Where individual members are feeling bruised in a community, it may be that the 'community hygiene' role is not being carried out effectively, or that not enough attention is being paid to generating healthy relationships which value the individual. A healthy community will have processes to bring awareness of these facts to its attention and to allow it to evolve in response to them.

14 Summarised by Michael Reynolds of Lancaster University in 'Bright Lights and Pastoral Idyll: Ideas of community underlying management education methodologies' in *Management Learning*, vol. 31(1), pp67-81, (2000) London, Sage Publications

15 For more on the individuating and participative modes of the psyche, see John Heron. (1992) *Feeling and Personhood: Psychology in another key* London, Sage Publications

16 Palmer, P. (1999) *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 10.19, 2nd edition, London, Religious Society of Friends

Can quantum community help foster spirituality in our organisations?

The 2004 research by Holbeche and Springett points to a spiritual crisis in our workplaces, to a dislocation between people, their work, their sense of purpose and their personal values. What can be done to bring a greater sense of meaning to people's work lives and to allow them to better connect their work and non-work selves? Could fostering quantum communities in our organisations provide an answer?

Without being unrealistic about what 'community' can achieve, and understanding that the uniqueness of each context means that nothing can transfer exactly from one setting to another, I believe that thinking about quantum communities gives us a different model for thinking about organisations.

In the past, organisational development models have focussed on constituent structures and task roles. Organisational change was seen as if it were actuated by pulling levers – what Wheatley calls a Newtonian model. A quantum community helps us see *both* the whole system *and* the people in it. A quantum community provides the metaphor of a substrate over which shared meaning can flow as it needs to. A quantum community helps us focus on developing new ways of connecting. 'Building community' provides a unified and coherent narrative which holds together apparently disparate elements such as HR initiatives, stakeholder involvement, use of ICT, investment in relationship building, corporate social responsibility, and so on. It thus helps leaders focus on their key task: building community. It helps us focus *both* on the effectiveness *and* on the health of an organisation.

And from the individual's point of view, 'quantum community' can provide a space in which the individual is encouraged to be more autonomous and self-responsible while in relationship to others. This in turn can allow people to develop a greater sense of togetherness, common purpose and shared meaning, clear intentions and a defined but flexible culture. By paying proper attention to the full context in which the community finds itself – which may entail listening to the voices which are not being heard, understanding the meaning of conflicts, gossip and rumours – individuals can feel freer to bring more of themselves to work, because they feel that who they are will be valued.

Is this spiritual? I certainly believe many of our organisations and workplaces have lost that sense, which can be found in a healthy community, of what it means to be properly human – an individual fully and freely in relationship with others who are fully and freely themselves. All too often, our organisations focus exclusively on task, output, the bottom line, while failing to pay enough attention to the interpersonal relationships which deliver them. I suggest that the model of quantum communities helps us pay attention to developing and supporting a wide variety of relationships and sharing meaning across the organisation – both of which are key elements, according to Holbeche and Springett, of organisational spirituality.

What can we do? Working with the reality in many organisations

But, sad to say, 'community' will feel very far from where most of our present organisations are. Trying to create a fully-functioning quantum community from scratch will be an unrealistic task for many. Creating a community demands

investment and commitment. While a community can encompass far more people than a group or a team, the larger the community, the more energy will be needed to manifest it in a high-energy 'particle' state.

Change may be hard to imagine. Within our organisations, people are so entrenched in their structures, tasks and roles that it may be hard for them to imagine how they could move outside the perceived safety of their present way of doing things. Realistically, people in our workplaces may simply be reluctant to see themselves as part of a community – they might not want the challenge, they may not even like their colleagues enough. It might just sound like one more management initiative hitting them over the head.

But our organisations need to capture some of that shared meaning-generation and energy of which communities are capable. Fortunately, I believe there are some practical steps, some of which most organisations could take immediately. In taking them, the role of leaders and managers will be crucial by helping giving a commitment, by ensuring that resources are directed where necessary and in helping generate enough energy to bring the quantum community into its 'particle', high-energy state.

1. Be more creative about stimulating the free flow of **information**, and thus energy. Set up events in which the widest range of people come together freely to exchange and generate ideas. Activities such as Open Space, Market Place, Learning Exchange or The Street allow individuals to mix in small and large groupings and to share information and ideas which are important to them in a spontaneous way.
2. Concentrate on developing information into **shared meaning**. Don't just collect more data: use the data to develop a collective understanding of what's happening between as many colleagues as possible. Notice how information – and meaning – flow (or don't flow) around your organisation, perhaps even in the form of gossip or rumour, which always contain huge amounts of energy.
3. Invest in **exploring the non-rational** side of the organisation. Generate debate around your organisation's rituals and myths. Introduce the topic of spirituality, well-being, being a full and free person. Be brave enough to spend time collectively dreaming your organisation's plans as well as thinking about them. Tell each other stories about the history of your organisation, plus about what you're doing now. Make sure that the stories aren't controlled by a small elite but that dissident voices and alternative stories are heard too.
4. Pay attention to how the organisation **is**, as well as to what it **does** – to its health as well as to its effectiveness. Reward time spent developing interpersonal relationships, and the processes which support them, as well as time spent achieving 'bottom line' tasks. Schedule time during working hours to allow people to talk and interact with each other away from their desks, perhaps even in a more social setting.
5. Reward individuals who act as '**community hygiene monitors**' by identifying where your organisation is not functioning well – and who do something to clear up the mess, even if only by bringing it to wider notice.
6. Identify how the **boundaries** of your organisation could become more permeable. Encourage people within your organisation to 'scan the horizon' regularly for new developments outside your organisation which may affect it, and to share that information. Make it easy for new members to join your organisation, in whatever

capacity, for whatever length of time (for example, through proper 'hand-holding' induction procedures, guest speakers, consultants, secondments, job placements and shadowing). Make it easy for members of your organisation to leave it, in whatever capacity, for whatever length of time (for example, through exit interviews, study trips, sabbaticals, job-sharing).

7. Really value **diversity**, **criticism** and **dissident** voices, rather than paying lip-service to difference or trying to enforce sameness.

Conclusion

In short, I suggest that fostering a greater sense of community can provide a way of bringing new, much-needed energy to our organisations. By paying attention to developing healthy relationships with others, we can maximise the energy within our organisations and help it flow to where it is most needed. In turn, our organisations will reward us by evolving more effectively than in response to mere 'rational' planning.

The idea of quantum community provides a 'golden thread', an over-riding narrative to pulling together a whole slew of management and organisational tasks, from CSR, through stakeholder involvement or work / life balance to developing shared vision and commitment. Leaders can see their overall mission as being 'building community'.

Above all, fostering quantum communities will reconnect us with what it means to be fully and freely human, in relationship with others who are also fully and freely human. Being part of a healthy community will allow us to create organisations in which all aspects of ourselves can be honoured; not only our ability to do and achieve, but our emotions, our values – even our spirituality.

Biographical note

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Andrew has an interest in fostering spirituality in organisations, particularly through helping people build community and shared meaning within their workplaces.

Andrew is an alumnus of the Spiritual Development and Facilitation course of Surrey University (July 2004). He is a member of the Edward Carpenter Community, a 'virtual' community for gay men dedicated to exploring personal growth and spirituality.

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