

Inviting Organization

evolution is now and open space

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The Inviting Organization Emerges

This is one story of evolution at work, my story of the inviting organization. It's the integration of a dozen or so years of study and practice in organization -- crunching numbers, building teams, redesigning process, and opening space. It's a practical mapping of the old, deep stories recounted by anthropologist Angeles Arriens and philosopher Ken Wilber and the modern business stories developed by organization development pioneers Fred and Merrelyn Emery, Open Space Technology originator Harrison Owen, and the new economy gurus at Fast Company magazine. Taken together these stories invite us to take a satisfying look back, a hopeful look forward and a practical view of our present, as the inviting organization is emerging in open space. Please join us...

In Search of the Next Great Strategic Question

In 1999, the cover of Fast Company magazine, a leading voice of the so-called 'new economy,' proclaimed "How Digital Is Your Company?" as the next great strategic question. According to their story, business strategy used to be as simple as "What business are you in?" As organizations evolved, "What's your business model?" became the definitive question. Today, it's all about getting digital.

These questions matter, they said, because every time we get an evolutionary click from one question to the next, everything throughout the organization needs to evolve together, to answer it. Specifically, they said that organizations need to rethink the "four basics of business" which they named as (1) attracting talent, (2) segmenting and selling customers, (3) using speed, and (4) financing operations.

Their newest and greatest strategic question, "How digital are you?" demands a rethinking of how we use information and technology to drive the flow of goods and services. In their story, however, they held up examples like McDonald's, Wal-Mart and Intel that were working this digital question 15 years ago. "How old is this story?" is the question that came to my mind -- followed closely by "If this is a 15-year-old strategic question, then what's the NEXT great strategic question? What are the next leading-edge organizations asking now?"

At the time this story came out, I was already deep into the work of mapping my own understanding of evolution in organization, with the overlapping stories of first-peoples anthropologist Angeles Arrien, Open Space Technology originator Harrison Owen, organization developers Fred Emery, Merrelyn Emery and Eric Trist, and philosopher Ken Wilber. If these wise people, and the map I was making from their stories, were to be of any use at all, they had better point me to the next great question.

My map was (and is) a four-quadrant, five-stage diagram of evolution in organization. Fast Company's four basics of business mapped quickly and easily into my four quadrants. Their three strategic questions fit perfectly with my first three stages of evolution. And when I looked into my own fourth stage, the next great strategic question, "How inviting is your organization?" was right there waiting for me, jumping up and down begging to be asked.

Since then, this evolutionary map has been invaluable in orienting myself to what is going on in all kinds of organizations. Along the way, I've shared it in conversation with clients and colleagues. It's been universally understood and appreciated, even by friends with no

training in business or practice in organization. While the map may appear either overly simple or overwhelmingly complex at first glance, the story itself has been easily understood by those who've heard it over the phone and other places where the actual map never was drawn.

What follows here is my story of evolution at work. It begins with the story of the map, which pulls together the old stories of spirit and new stories of business and organization. Along the way, the inviting organization will emerge and will be linked to a number of other developments in organization. So it will live in the context of other real stuff, not just in the context of my little map. Finally, we bring Open Space Technology into the picture, noticing its easy alignment and ready support for the emergence of inviting at work.

As I look back, this story gives me a deeper appreciation for where we've been in organization and real satisfaction that nothing's been wasted. Looking ahead, I find a hopeful clarity and confidence that all of this swirling does indeed work out in the end. All of which helps me now, in the present, to rest a little easier, stand a little readier, and invite a little more evolution at work. Please join me...

Evolution in Four Dimensions

This story starts with the work of philosopher Ken Wilber, who was already being hailed as the greatest American philosopher when he was just 23 years old. He earned this acclaim for his first book, Spectrum of Consciousness. It was the first successfully seamless integration of earthy native spirituality, rational western science and transcendent eastern wisdom. It was also the first of a long line of Wilber writings offering various spins on this same seamless theme. I read his Brief History of Everything first and it got me thinking. Two years later I heard him speak and was moved to read his Marriage of Sense and Soul. Halfway through that second book this picture of evolution in organization exploded into my consciousness. I put down the book and started writing.

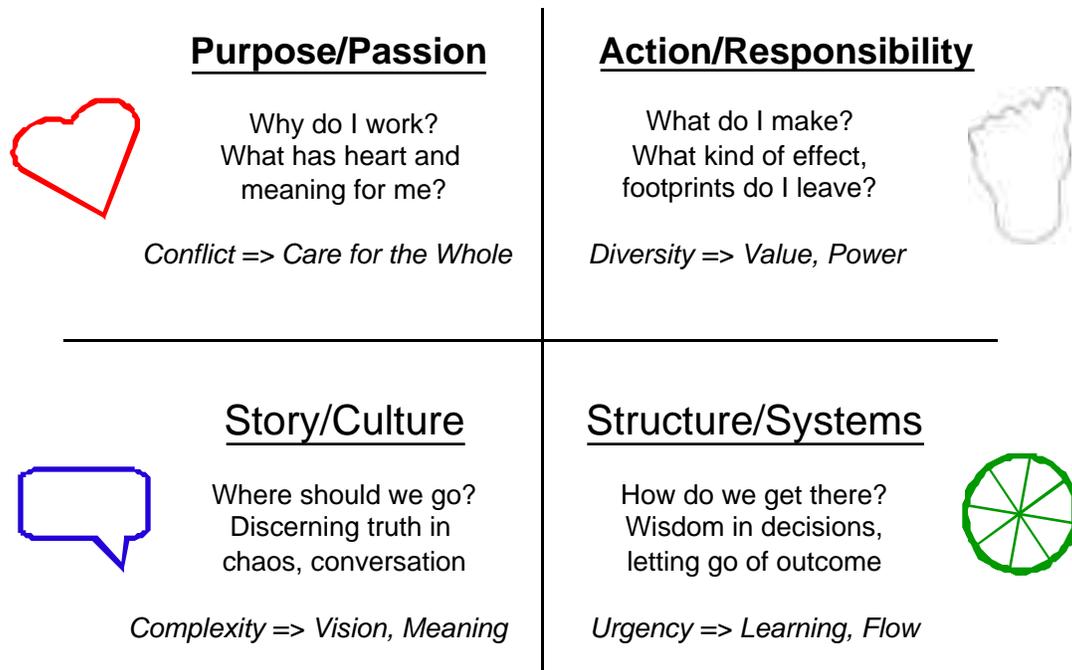
I started with Wilber's basic two-by-two matrix, a four quadrant map, that has at its core two basic tensions or spectrums of consciousness, shown as intersecting, perpendicular axes. The first axis stretches from inside to outside, subjective to objective. In organizational terms, every organization has a subjective, depends-on-who-you ask, open-to-interpretation and re-interpretation, unmeasurable-but-undeniable, story-based, deeper meaning INSIDE and an objective, observable, measurable, put-it-in-a-powerpoint-pie-chart, pass-it-around-the-room, obviously real OUTSIDE. We use soft, interpersonal skills to deal with the inside stuff of people and culture. We use hard data skills to deal with the outside stuff of decision-making and action.

The second axis is equally clear. It runs from the one to the many, the individual to the collective, the personal to the organizational. Every organization exists simultaneously as a single, whole entity AND has many, many individual parts or people. Leadership skills are about the personal, about passion and responsibility, about what do I want and what am I willing to do about it. Strategy is a bigger, organizational form of the same stuff, about culture and decision-making, about where do we want to go and how are we going to get there.

When Wilber lets the inside and outside play with the one and the many, he generates four quadrants, what he calls the four dimensions of evolution. Translated into organizational terms, we see that our work really is pulling us in four directions at once! Wilber's four dimensions are consciousness, culture, social structure and behavior. Consciousness is the internal, individual dimension, what we all know on the inside, for ourselves. Culture is

the collective form of that, the stories that we make to hold us together and tell us what is good and bad, right and wrong, sought and avoided. Social structure is the outside, collective, the outside of structure, it's what we literally construct based on our cultural beliefs. Finally, behavior is the individual, outside dimension, the individual actions taken within the social structures, what each of us actually does about the things that we are conscious of and care about.

Dimensions of Organization



Primary References: Owen, Wilber, Arrien

Translating this into more organizational terms, consciousness becomes personal passion or intention. Culture and structure need no translating, as long as we remember that culture is all about story and structure is about how we make decisions and move forward. Finally, behavior becomes action, the bottom lines at any standard cocktail party and any organization... what do you DO? and how do you get people to DO what is required at work? So we really are being pulled in four directions at work, continually reconciling and aligning what I love and care about as an individual with the plans and policies of who WE say we are as a culture, with the decisions, choices and options WE have now in the current organizational structure, with what I am willing to take personal responsibility for DOing about all of it. No wonder we come home tired all the time!

If we turn now the wisdom of first-people nations through the ages, as told by Angeles Arrien in her book *The Four-Fold Way*, the advice we get about this is simple and clear: show up, pay attention to what has heart and meaning, speak your truth, and let it go. In her book, *The Fourfold Way*, Arriens links these four simple practices with four hero

archetypes, four meditations, and four human resources. All of these map easily into the Wilber dimensions.

Showing up is the work of the warrior archetype, who practices standing meditation, developing the human resource of power. Map this to individual responsibility and action, where we exercise our individual power to take a stand and be accountable. Paying attention to what has heart and meaning is the work of the healer archetype, whose meditation is lying down and resource is love. Map this to individual purpose and intention, the things we love and in which we rest. Telling the truth is the work of the visionary, who does a sitting meditation and whose resource is vision. Map this to culture, story and planning and vision in organization. And finally, the letting go of the outcome is the work of the teacher, whose meditation is moving, walking and whose resource is wisdom. Map this to our capacity to make decisions and move within and beyond the structure of the organization.

Returning to the recent Fast Company story that prompted this journey, we can now appreciate just how basic their "four basics of business" really are. Attracting talent is about creating organizations that people can put their hearts into, where they can find a reason to work, something they love and can rest into. Segmenting and going after customers is about creating a vision, a story that customers can literally buy into. Using speed as a competitive advantage is about structuring for movement, letting go of control, and allowing more distributed, front-line decision-making. And finally, financing the operation is about generating power or value through responsibility and action.

Evolution in Open Space

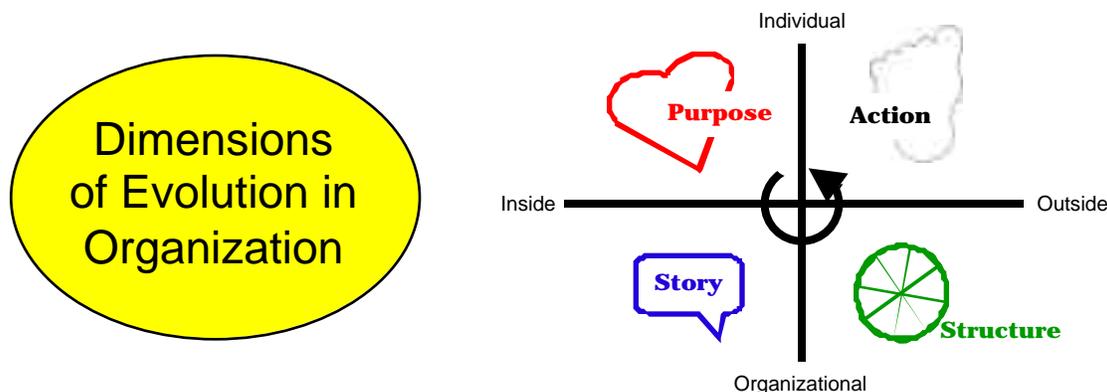
So far, we've seen that our oldest stories of spirit are aligned with some of our newest stories of business. Now we come to the practice of Open Space Technology, as discovered and disseminated by Harrison Owen. Given his experience in the Peace Corps with the tribes of West Africa, his study of Ken Wilber, his friendship with Angeles Arrien and his deeply practical approach to business of all kinds, it's not surprising that Harrison's contribution to evolution in organization would directly address each of the dimensions of evolution at work AND the challenge of moving in all of them at once.

When he looked back on the first handful of years of practicing Open Space Technology, Harrison concluded that Open Space works best when four key conditions are present: when the tasks to be done are highly complex, when the people who are needed to do them are personally, professionally, or simply geographically diverse, when there is real or potential conflict, and when the decision time was yesterday.

Keeping up with our picture then, map the conflict to our first quadrant, as it's just passion in disguise. It just means people care enough to disagree, but not yet enough to hold the larger whole in their hearts. Map high complexity to the absence of vision, as we don't yet see how we all work together, can't yet see the plan. Map the decision-making lag to questions about whether so-and-so is ready to let go of thus-and-such, the structure's not ready to move. And finally, map the diversity as deviance or differences of opinion as block creative new action and new value, remembering that environmentally and financially, diversification is power.

To look at why it works so well when the levels of conflict, complexity, urgency and deviation are high and rising, we have only to look at what it invites people to do. First it invites leaders to invite leadership, from all sides, to sit together as one circle, and to give their attention to this larger whole. Next the big, empty bulletin board wall invites all to

speaking their truth, write it down, and post it so that others who share the same passions can be found and engaged. Then the open marketplace invites everyone present to move and move and move again, constantly letting go of groups and ideas, in order to maximize learning (wisdom) and contribution (value). Finally, it is the responsibility of everyone who led a breakout session to document what happened so that the action can continue.



Business Basics (1)	Attract Talent	Sell Customers	Use Speed	Finance Ops
The Fourfold Way (2)	Pay Attention	Tell the Truth	Let it Go	Show Up
Leadership Roles (2)	Healer	Visionary	Teacher	Warrior
Human Resources (2)	Love	Vision	Wisdom	Power
Dimensions of Evolution (3)	Consciousness	Culture	Social Structure	Behavior
Dimensions of Organization (4)	Purpose/Passion	Story/Culture	Systems/Structure	Action/Acc'tability
Conditions for OST (5)	Conflict (Passion)	Complexity	Urgency	Diversity
Outcomes of OST (5)	Leadership	Vision	Community	Management
Mechanisms of OST (5)	Gathering Circle	Bulletin Board	Marketplace	Breathing
Preparation for OST (4)	Invitation List	Theme/Invitation	Space/Logistics	Documentation

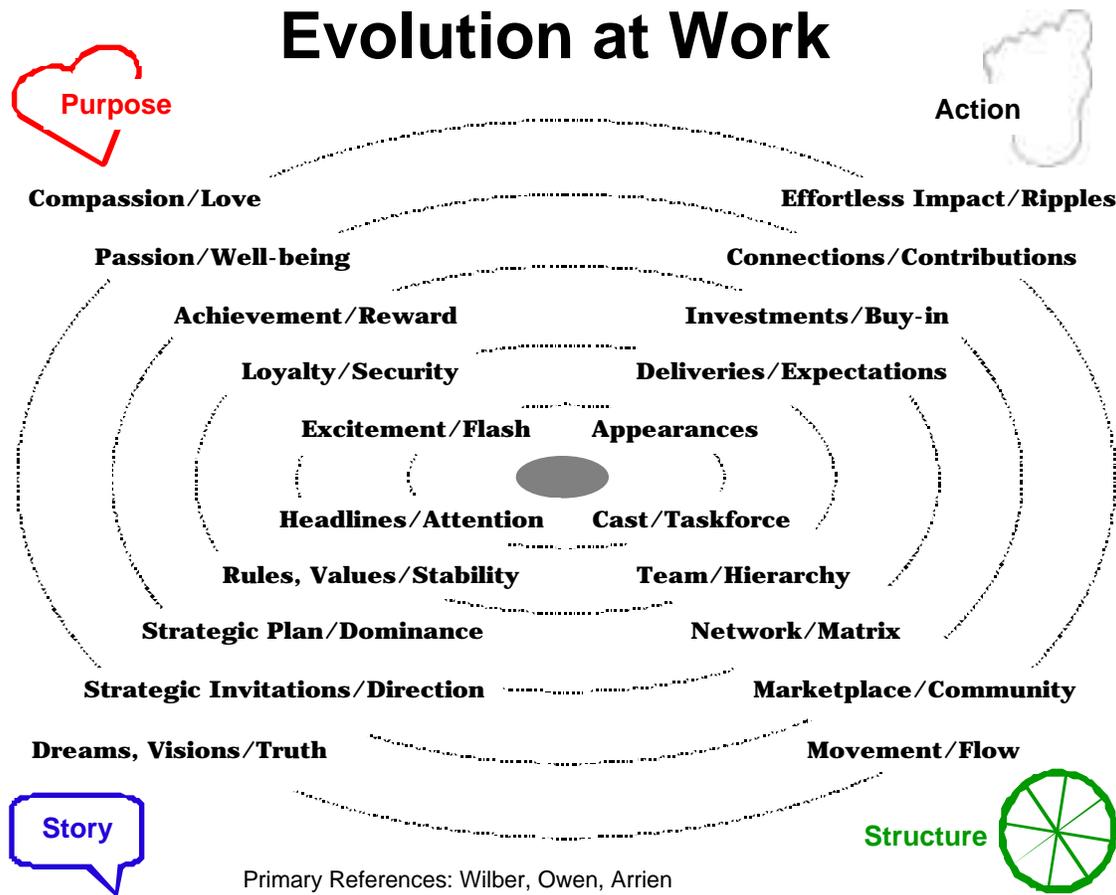
(1) Fast Company (2) Arrien (3) Wilber (4) Herman (5) Owen

What's more, the preparation for any open space event has four requirements: the invitation, the invitation list, the space/time logistics, and a plan for publishing the proceedings. The invitation list is about attracting the necessary talent. The invitation document is the vision that brings them together. The logistical opening of the space and time for meeting give people a chance to let go of regular routines and speeds the flow of work. Finally, the plan for publishing the proceedings takes responsibility for action afterward. In the end, it seems that the practice of opening space naturally addresses the four dimensional challenge of evolution AND the four basics of business.

To paraphrase Harrison's own story on this, leadership emerges as passion bounded by responsibility, the vision emerges on the wall, the community moves together in the marketplace and the management is a 'no-brainer,' because the whole thing is sprung from leadership and responsibility. He never designed it to do this, indeed Harrison is the first to say that he didn't design it or create it at all... but discovered it, in the process of trying to make the work of managing one particular conference event amazing AND easy.

Evolution in Organization

To summarize our progress here then, we've discovered that evolution, Open Space, and apparently everything else, is four dimensional, four directional, even four seasonal if you let them move in that way. But as we click through those seasons, where do we go and what do we become? I hear the echoes of kids in the backseat... when are we gonna get there? Where is the inviting organization? How much longer 'til we get there? Well, I'll show you the map...



...keeping in mind that no map is RIGHT, but that some maps are helpful, we'll tie up these quadrant stories and show how they evolve together, as we resolve bigger and bigger conflicts, see our way through increasing complexity, move faster and easier in organization, and act more and more responsibly in larger, more diverse circles. What follows is a nutshell review of each quadrant and a new story of evolution through five distinct levels which parallel Wilber's continuum from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit.

Purpose/Passion. It seems right enough to start with what we love, what we think we want, why we work, and what we intend to create for ourselves. This is the inside-individual face of organization. It's about consciousness, about paying attention to what has heart and meaning, about resolving the conflicts that arise between what we have and what we want, about why we get up and go to work everyday, and about what organizations must honor and appreciate in order to attract talent in competitive markets.

Looking into our map now, we see that the evolutionary journey in this quadrant is about learning to work for higher and higher purposes. In the beginning of our own work lives and the lives of organizations, we work for the excitement of it all. Over time, we might start a family, settle down, and excitement isn't as important as security and stability, to be able to maintain the success we've had at the first level. Once we come to believe that we will not lose the gains we've made, it's easy to shift into a proactive drive for still more reward, and work becomes about reaching the next rung of the ladder. At some point, however, we come to the place of asking ourselves what's really most important to us, what is our deepest passion, what do we really love and how can we do THAT in our work. We give our attention to insight, integrity, the things that pique our curiosity and help us feel healthy and whole. Until finally, we begin to ask how we can do the most service for the most other people, working beyond our own personal passions to a compassion for so many others.

I should note here, too, that our movements through these levels, as individuals, organizations and a whole national consciousness is never as strict and mechanical as moving from first grade to second to third. Rather they are a journey like any other learning or practice scale, like our 10K race times, monthly sales, and the stock market. They are some easy milestones against which to mark the movement of what we can think of as the critical mass of our attention to each of the four dimensions. And how big we care, how much we see, how easily we let go, and how responsibly we act -- just like our 10K race time -- moves from day to day, depending on all sorts of circumstances and conditions. We'll see differences, too, between people in the same departments and departments in the same organization. The critical mass of attention in the sales department is likely very different from that of the corporate philanthropy department or employee assistance program.

Furthermore, if we say that the latter fall higher on the scale, at a higher stage or level, we need also to note that their work is only made possible by the revenues generated by the sales department. None of the higher levels are sustainable without the infrastructure and foundation provided by the lower levels. This is what Wilber means when he says each level transcends, rises above the one before it, AND embraces, includes, and depends on the work done at the level below. The overall drive is to increase, expand, and transcend, bringing more and more of our individual, departmental and organizational attention and energy to higher and higher levels. This movement happens always and everywhere, trending upward without effort or trying. It's enough just to pay attention. Simply noticing these movements and levels can make our work easier, but making one level better than the next always seems to get in the way.

And so, keeping in mind then, that no map IS the territory, that no person, department or organization is all or always focused at one level, in any of the quadrants, and that no one level is better or worse than another, we continue with our story about story...

Story/Culture. Here the challenge is to explain what we see, to clarify where we should go, and develop the stories that help us stay focused and stay together. This is the inside-collective face of organization. It's about culture, about seeing and telling the truth about who we are, about defining simple patterns in times of complexity, and about the work every organization must do to segment and go after the customers it wants to serve. It's about creating a story that customers (and everyone else) can literally buy into and believe in.

The logic of our central organizational story moves from what I call auto-logic, the obvious, through monologue to dialogue and onto multi-logic and beyond to what I call translogic or translogic. As organization begins, it's central story is about headlines,

imaging and spins. It's logos, business cards, press releases and soundbites on the outside and the grapevine on the inside. It's the superficial, the automatic, the obvious and it's all about excitement. At the next level, the focus shifts to stories of stability and loyalty: mission, vision, values statements and monologues by the people in charge. The organizational body emerges, followed by organizational mind: the strategic plan. And with the emergence of the plan, dialogue takes over. The leader can't dictate through monologue, but has to control through ongoing dialogue with each part. The story, the plan, and our reason for working are all told and retold in the universal language of 'the numbers.'

As evolution continues and complexity rises, the parts start talking to each other and the multilogue breaks out. It's everybody talking to everybody, which doesn't happen very often in most organizations. In the chaos of it all, the strategic plan gives way to the strategic invitation, a story that is simple enough to travel fast and light, to appeal to people's passions, the reasons why they really want to work AND is complex enough to embrace and include the most important issues from the grapevine, the mission statement and the strategic plans. Strategic invitation is the story that leads organization into multilogue, where strategic conversation can move faster than the plan. Beyond this, at the highest level, where the reason we work is compassion for all, the story and vision become dream, a 'translogue in which we seem to be in conversation with the whole organization, as organization, at once... or maybe even something larger.

As the challenge with caring is to speak it, the challenge with our talking story is to walk it in our decisions, structures and systems.

Structure/Systems. This is where the vision, reflection and conversation of story and plan emerge as the objective, observable choices and decisions, the stuff that guides real action. This is where we get down to how we're going to get where we've said we want to go, where we develop the structures and systems that support timely and wise decision-making. This is the outside-collective face of organization. It's the sandbox where we build up organization structures and production systems AND where we let them go, tear them down, and open space for what's next. This is where we come up against the dizzying reality that it's ALL moving, where we learn over and over again to go with the bigger, faster flow.

The evolution of organization structure and systems (and restructuring and redesigning) begins simply as a circle of friends, colleagues and associates. It's a cast of characters, some of whom may be bigger stars than others, but none of whom really tells the others what to do. As cast, circle, task force, posse, and business start-up we may take our cues from outside directors, sheriffs or financiers, but inside the organization, it's an all for one and one for all kind of game that we play for the excitement and headlines. If we have some success together, however, we turn quickly to those bigger names to secure our future. We pledge our loyalty and submit to more and more monologues about policy and procedures, mission and vision. When we appoint a team leader, hierarchy emerges and in time becomes bureaucracy, where responsibility for outcomes rests not with the workers, but with the managers one or more organizational layers above. And this works for a time, until the pressure for front-line decision-making starts to erode lines of command and the bureaucracy starts to dissolve. We restructure into smaller, faster networked boxes, each one full of numbers and assigned to a person, who sits in a matrix of cubes and reports to a handful of different bosses.

Each year or so we reshuffle the boxes, until the whole organization ends up in constant motion, one big organizational to-do list, a veritable marketplace of projects, each its own little cast, circle, posse, task force. The circles are formed by invitation (though some invitations are more open than others), to meet specific business needs, given a budget

and/or other resource boundaries, and directed to perform in a way that adds value. This is what we're coming to know as the structure of organization and the way real work gets done. Now look again at the process of Open Space, where the circle is formed by an invitation, based on personal passion, professional interests and business needs, the resources and boundaries are clearly marked and the direction is do whatever you can to maximize your own learning and contribution. Open Space is real work, made faster and easier, in circle and invitation and marketplace.

And finally, if our experience in Open Space is any indication, when the marketplace of ideas and issues and projects REALLY starts to move, what emerges as the highest form of organization is movement, an undeniable sense of spirit and hardly any real structure at all. At this highest level, our compassion or concern is for all (all customers, all employees, all people, take your pick). Our story starts to sound like "I have a dream..." and structurally, in the words of folk singer Arlo Guthrie, "They'll call it a movement!" when the flow of work is nothing but flow. And the thing about flow is it comes and it goes, but it CAN be invited, we know.

Action/Responsibility. In the end, however, organizations don't really move, don't really do any work -- people do. We think and talk and build support for what we care about. And then, each of us DOES something. Takes responsibility and takes action. Makes a difference and makes our own unique contribution to the flow of evolution. This is the outside-individual face of organization. It's about unique, individual behavior, about creating value and using diverse abilities to make things different, about what we have to show for ourselves, and where we stand, when our work is done. This is the question of finance, value and contribution -- the footprints we leave on a bottom line and better world.

The evolution in this quadrant runs from making different stuff, the proverbial better mousetrap, to making a difference that makes a difference, rippling through everthing. While it's been associated here with diversity, that's really only half-way there, as it is really about uniqueness, the reality that each of us is absolutely unique and the possibility that every single action IS a unique, creative act.

This journey begins with making appearances, making points, adding value with bells and whistles, a new look to an old product. It's what makes work exciting, makes headlines. In the beginning, it's about showing up in the right places, but eventually it becomes about showing up at the right time, making deliveries, as promised, time and again, loyal and stable, like it says in the mission statement. Eventually, however, as the business grows, the loyal servants are rewarded. We make them partners, shareholders, give bonuses as rewards, and investments. Everything is done based on expected return, the places we work, the projects we choose, the phone calls we return are all 'calculated' for potential payoff.

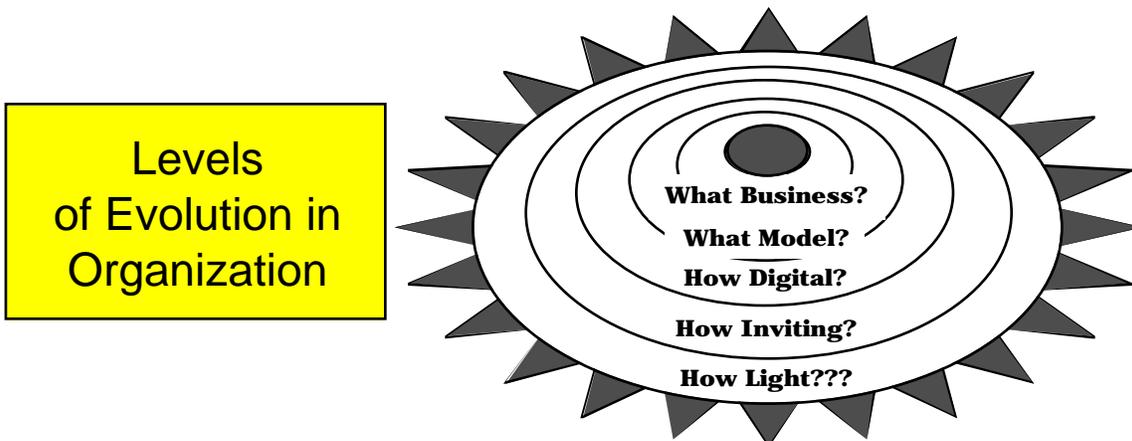
At some point, however, the luster of marginal gain, or the effort of calculation in the face of rising uncertainty, just doesn't matter anymore, and we begin to do what we REALLY want, without regard to returns. We make offerings, contributions and invitations, true gifts of ourselves and our time. We begin to connect our work to those issues, ideas and opportunities and questions that make us feel curious, passionate, healthy, whole. And in those moments when spirit shows up, it all seems to swirl together, everything really works. We make responsible ripples and have an effortless but amazing impact on the people and world around us, often without even knowing it.

The Inviting Organization Emerges

And there you have it, in about twenty nutshells. This is my story of evolution at work, mapped onto the oldest story of human evolution, as integrated and animated by Wilber, from the physics of excitement and matter, through the biology of body, the psychology of mind, the theology of soul, finally arriving at the mysticism of spirit.

Drawing on Wilber, Harrison Owen has developed his own story of the evolution of organization and leaders, based on his own personal experience in organization and Open Space. That story begins with the reactive organization, defined by the reptilian instinct of killing and eating whatever moves. The leader here is the pioneer, the entrepreneur. Next comes the responsive organization, customer-focused, aiming to please, and as reassuring as a good English pub, but don't mess with the bartender. The proactive organization comes next, characterized by an insatiable need to measure and analyze everything, led by the MBA. In Harrison's story, the interactive organization is emerging now, characterized by the energy of a good coffee break and the action of surfing, and leadership that is 'everybody.' This is, of course, just what Open Space looks like. And finally, the highest realm of organizational life, says Owen, is the inspired or inspirited organization. He is quick to add that while he's seen it show up often, he's never seen anyone sustain this highest level of organization, where leadership is invisible, it's nobody, or at least it's nobody we can see.

Coming at this from a more academic direction, Fred and Merrelyn Emery have studied what they describe as four kinds of organizational environments. The first level is 'random,' where the goodies and badies come randomly and can't be predicted. That's



Levels of Evolution	Matter	Body	Mind	Soul	Spirit
Operating Environment (b)	Random, Chaotic	Clustered	Disturbed	Turbulent/Adaptive	Vortical
Journey of Spirit at Work (d)	Reactive	Responsive	Proactive	Interactive	Inspired
Organizational Heroes (d)	Pioneer	Captain/Pilot	MBA	Everybody	Nobody
The Seattle Stories	Weyerhaeuser	Boeing	Microsoft	Starbucks	Chief Seattle
THE Strategic Question (a)	What Business?	What Model?	How Digital?	How Inviting?	How Light???
Individual Purpose/Passion	Excitement	Security	Achievement	Passion/Well-Being	Compassion
Organizational Story/Culture	News	Rules, Values	Plans	Invitation	Dream
Organizational Structure	Cast/Task Force	Team/Hierarchy	Network/Matrix	Marketplace	Movement
Individual Action/Making	Appearances	Deliveries	Investments	Contributions	Ripples

(a) Fast Company (b) Emery (c) Herman (d) Owen

why we have to be reptilean and reactive, per Owen, at this level. Next comes 'clustered,' where patterns emerge and learning and planning become possible. Then, they say, one group is eating into a pile of goodies and discovers another group eating into it from the other side. They call this environment 'competitive' and 'disturbed,' because the competition continually disturbs our well-laid plans. Next comes the 'turbulent/adaptive' stage, a state where the disturbances have resolved into permanent whitewater and continuous adaptation becomes essential for survival. Finally, they hypothesize that there is actually a fifth level. They could sense, but could never study it formally because, like Owen's inspired level, it can't be sustained long enough to document. They call this level vortical, as in vortex, which fits perfectly with our experience in Open Space and elsewhere. When spirit runs high in a workgroup, as it does so often in Open Space meetings, participants often report having planned to or even tried to leave, "but something kept sucking me back in." The energetic pull of inspiring work seems consistent with the physical sucking of the vortical (swirling, whirlpool) environment in the Emery story. While it's important to note that their research and analysis did identify distinct ideals, strategies, planning scopes and operating skills required to survive in each of the first four environments, we'll save those details for another day.

A more playful extension of this story, however, and one that might help this map sink a bit deeper in memory, is something I call the Seattle Stories. This is really a simple, five-stage history of the Seattle region, which has participated in every major wave of American economic development. The first wave was timber, led by Weyerhaeuser, an exciting, pioneering sort of business, gathering the raw materials (matter) that were the building blocks of the rest of business life. Next, came Boeing, literally in the business of manufacturing stable, secure bodies that make deliveries and are operating by chiefs who make monologues over loud speakers like CEOs on the company-wide conference call. In the information age there is Microsoft, a company that may have invented stock option incentive plans, has networked us all, and made us all a little out of our minds. Next comes free-agent nation, where the leadership is everywhere and the headquarters is Starbucks. Like the very first open space meeting, it's all about the energy of a good coffee break, simple, powerful, working, learning, relaxing -- and exceedingly profitable. And finally, there is Chief Seattle, the invisible, spiritual leader of the environmental movement, to whom all kinds of wise sayings are attributed.

Finally, if you step back for a moment, to the Evolution at Work table of contents, you see that the five sections of my own story flow through these same five levels. Opening Invitation (in organization) is about what had me so excited in the first place, about my own pioneering and discovering in open space. Inviting Evolution defined the body of this work, with mission, vision and values that include poetry and science, beginnings and endings, the personal and universal. Evolving Organization is the section we're in now, rational, logical, analytical, the strategic justification and business case for the inviting organization. Next, Organizing in Open Space introduces the soul of this work, where it all comes together, in practice, as inviting -- something we can do AND be, as individuals and organizations. The pieces there are built to travel as handouts, as the leaders of the practice become 'everybody.' Finally, the Opening Invitation (as organization) comes back to where we started, but knows the place for the first time. It's a last wisp of the spirit of (this) invitation to discover the inviting organization.

And so we return to the Fast Company story that gave rise to this whole adventure. As a strategic question, "What business are you in?" certainly rests on the obvious, the essential, the matter of work. "What's your business model?" demands more of a body: set the boundaries, integrate the parts, make the case for what's in and what's out. "How digital are you?" is all about information, data, mind, and running the business by the numbers, which is where most of our organizations are now. But I wanted to know what the new

leaders were doing now, not fifteen years ago. What is the NEXT great strategic question? Everything I've seen says it must be "How open and inviting is your organization?"

The Inviting Organization in Open Space

The inviting organization emerges from everything and everywhere we've already been, and indeed still are. The emergence of passion, curiosity, health and well-being at work come not at the expense of excitement, security and achievement. They come as the fruits of it. The excitement comes not from the outside, but from the rush of bringing our own personal art to the outside, at work. The security comes not from knowing this job or organization will last, but from knowing who we are and that we have options beyond this one. And while we still get things done, we do them better than ever because they are the things we see as most important to do.

Similarly, the emergence of strategic invitation and strategic conversation does not come at the expense of the strategic plan, but comes on top of it, animating and detailing it like never before. Every invitation, from the largest, company-wide strategic planning conference to the simplest "Joe and Susie are moving to California, come help us pack them up and send them off" gathering of friends is built on the same information: (1) the news, headlines or theme, (2) the mission, vision, values, and (3) the expectations and plans. In the case of Joe and Susie, the news is that they're moving. The values are love, friendship, community. The plan is for everyone to bring boxes and tape and for Joe and Susie to keep the pizza and beer coming until their stuff is all packed.

The strategic corporate invitation does the same: some news that needs attention, the boundaries, budget, and other known constraints, and the logistical details for where and when the working session will be convened. The invitation includes all the levels of story below it, and transcends them as something smaller, faster, clearer, stronger. They look like soundbites, but move at the speed of the grapevine, with the simplicity of a to-do list and the power of the entire strategic plan. And as we move beyond the soundbites, the mission statements and the plans, posting their essences in strategic invitation and hosting our most important work in strategic conversations, we transcend command-and-control, as well.

Command relies on the bartender, pilot, captain or other executive who can be heard over all the others. Control relies on measurement and constant observation. As we move beyond command-and-control into a world of post-and-host, we don't discard these things, we expand them. Over time, the initial cast grows into team, becomes bureaucracy, dissolves into network. When it finally blooms into marketplace, it allows EVERYONE to be heard over the turbulence of the work and demands that EVERYONE be paying attention to maximizing their own learning and contribution. In our most highly evolved organizations, ANYONE can post an invitation and host a working conversation to address business issues AS THEY ARISE and everyone can see all of the invitations, the entire work of their organization.

Finally, as our work evolves, we don't stop making appearances and discovering new and different things, we don't stop making deliveries and making good on commitments, and don't stop expecting a return on investment. But the nature of these things changes and merges. Most notably, as our circles expand and bloom into marketplace, we notice that we benefit from all kinds of unexpected contributions by others. As this happens, we contribute more easily and actively because we don't expect our returns to come as quickly or directly. Our commitments become pledges to stay together, stay present, until the work is done, as long as it takes. And finally, the appearances we begin to invite and be excited

by are no longer about our moments to shine, but those moments when spirit appears and shines through others.

The inviting organization emerges and re-emerges out of personal passion and artistry, strategic invitation and conversation, an open community marketplace, and the responsible pursuit of learning and contribution. It is truly extraordinary, and not where most of us live and work everyday. But it does happen -- and happen with regularity. It has appeared in most of the Open Space meetings and events I've facilitated. And when the work of those gatherings closes, the waves of thank yous, amazings and extraordinaries have been heard, I always remind the group that while the inviting organization that emerges in open space IS extraordinary, it need not be rare. Indeed, the passion and responsibility, clarity and quickness that is the inviting organization can be invited easily and often, in Open Space and otherwise, by the intentional practice of invitation at work.

Inviting Conclusions

This, then, is my own short story on Open Space Technology: It is the skillful and ongoing practice of invitation in organization. I say this not only because an open space event begins when the leader(s) of the organization issue a strategic invitation and open a strategic conversation, but also because of what can happen next, and next, and next... rippling through everything.

When the leader(s) of any organization notice (and dare to say) that the most important questions facing the organization are more complex, diverse and urgent than the current systems and structures can handle, that there is some conflict between what we have and what we want, Open Space Technology allows them to invite and engage anyone and everyone who has any concern or responsibility for resolving these questions. When that first invitation goes out, it naturally attracts all of those with real passion for the issues identified. This IS what any good invitation does: it raises issues, stirs passions, and links them to responsibility for showing up to work.

When the people gather on the day of the event, the facilitator walks into the open space in the center of the group (circle) and invites them again. This time the invitation is to identify the issues that they are most passionate about and for which they are willing to take some responsibility. Then any number of people jump out of their seats, grab markers and paper, and the next invitations go out. This time, however, the invitations come from all over the organization, from any of the participants in the room. These folks are inviting the rest of the group to their targeted breakout session to deal with the issue(s) that they see as most important.

When the conveners (hosts, if you will) of the breakout sessions capture the notes, ideas and next steps identified in their sessions, they can be distributed in a book or website with the same from all of the other sessions. These collected notes invite all participants, and anyone else with whom these notes and next steps are shared, to follow-through on the actions identified. Often, some of those next steps include convening other meetings in open space. In this way, the practice of invitation comes full-circle, and sets itself up as an ongoing practice in organization. When new leaders emerge in open space, new invitations spring forth, and new results tend to follow -- people and organizations growing together, by invitation.

In day-to-day organizational life, this identification of issues, assigning of responsibility, scheduling of meetings, discussion of options, and documentation of next steps all qualifies as "real work." In Open Space, however, so much of this real work happens so

quickly and easily, that we often fail to notice how much real work is actually getting done. Indeed we often slip into measuring "real action" and "real work" in terms of pain and suffering rather than promise and progress. And, as ever, we'll get what we ask for.

We could theorize that this new, inviting organization goes beyond command-and-control, to a place and practice of post-and-host -- the posting of working invitations and hosting of working conversations. We could reason further that while there is much to achieve in organization, nobody wants to BE an achievement. And while people want to BE inspired, as soon as we put "inspire the troops" on our to-do list, we flatten spirit into just another doing. Invitation begins to resolve all of this -- because inviting is something we can DO as an ongoing practice and can aspire to BE as leaders and organizations.

In practice, however, we quickly discover that things tend to get done faster and easier by invitation. In short, working by invitation really works.

And looking back, we see that nothing has been wasted. We've called it management flavor-of-the-month. Well, pick your favorite flavor and you're sure to find it on the map of our evolution, sure to find it contributing to the infrastructure that supports the emergence of open invitation at work. We've seen the emergence of "people goals" and "culture objectives" that give attention to the softer side of organization. Flexible schedules, open-book management, large-group meetings of all kinds have created new options, movement and markets within organization. We've seen all kinds of experiential team-building work, supporting both the rise and the fall of traditional leadership in organization. In our systems, we've seen technology explode into e-commerce marketplaces and knowledge management systems let everyone talk to everyone, even across time through the use of archiving functions. In the area of diversity, we have evolved from boundaries and glass ceilings as a focus, to quotas (diversity by the numbers), and now to various kinds of diversity training that helps organizations find valuable diversification rather than dangerous deviance in difference. The inviting organization rests upon and fully embraces all of our work to date, every flavor-of-the-month has been distance made good.

Looking forward, with this clearer picture in hand, we can see how our journey can be that much more carefully directed and quickly actualized. We can see now how evolution calls us to balance our work in the four dimensions. Over-emphasizing finance or speed at the expense of clear cultural story and passionate, personal artistry can only throw our wheel out of balance. We can see ourselves rise and fall between the levels of evolution, not a steady, mechanical climb but a series of peak moments that we keep working and practicing to make ordinary, everyday, routine. We can see that what happens in Open Space meetings and events are such peak moments and that the practice of invitation -- doing AND being inviting -- makes more of them. And finally, we can see that in supporting this seeing, this story itself invites you to create it and reaches for the vision, the dream, that lies beyond.

As I shared this picture with Harrison Owen one evening, it occurred to me that in the physicists' story, matter arises out of nothingness, the void. And in the mystic's story, spirit returns us into it. When I added that blackness in the center AND at the edges, it immediately followed that I should fold the four blackened corners into the blackened center, so the whole thing becomes a sort of doughnut. In this way, our seasonal evolution through the four quadrants becomes a spinning around the empty hole of that doughnut. And our evolution through the levels becomes a turning of that doughnut through the hole of that doughnut. This realization gave me pause, a quiet little moment of personal "oh, wow!" Then into that silence, Harrison told me for years he'd had recurring dreams of

such a doughnut, mysteriously spinning in space, around and through it's own hole...and that some years later a physicist friend of his explained that physicists call the doughnut a "torus" and know it as the shape of every energy field in Universe.

So we just might be onto something that's quite a bit bigger than we expected. I find it reassuring to rest inside of a story that goes so far and can still inform my day-to-day work in organization. In a recent Open Space conference on management renewal, inside of a giant pharmaceutical corporation, a number of managers noticed that once the event got underway, I didn't seem to do very much at all. The usual comment as they approached was something like, "Boy, I wish I had YOUR job." And my usual response was to notice aloud that when we get our most important issues and projects posted on the wall, with a space and time for each one, the people get moving, the work gets done and management gets a whole lot easier.

These kinds of Open Space events are inviting this kind of simple, powerful, productive ease -- in more and more major corporations, schools, churches and community organizations around the world. The case study that follows next, by friend and colleague Uwe Weissflog, tells the story of evolution at work, in Open Space, over the course of four years, in a major global engineering and design firm. I find it incredibly hopeful that so many of these stories are emerging in Open Space and in the world. More and more, it seems that as we get better at bringing people together at work, it gets easier to get the job done. It gets easier to breathe, easier to sleep, easier to let go... and easier to do the most amazing things, at work.