

PART 1: DESCRIBING YOUR EXPERIENCE

CHAPTER 1: SEEING SCARCITY AND ABUNDANCE IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS

I really enjoy asking people, all over the place, about their experiences with scarcity and abundance. My various roles as a business school teacher, an organizational consultant and coach, a leader in my own organization, an academic researcher, and often just as a friend, give me many opportunities to start this conversation that I am passionate about. In classrooms, in boardrooms, in people's offices and homes, in factories and on the street, over the past three years, I have been in hundreds of conversations, from as short as fifteen minutes to hours-long, about the observations and ideas we will explore in this book.

A typical conversation, like the ones I had last week in Boston, last month in North Carolina, two months ago in Mexico City, or three months ago in Germany starts off with a simple question, "Are you experiencing the best you believe you can in your life?" So far, everyone has said that sometimes they experience the best they can, but not all the time. When I ask why, they look at me quizzically and say, "Well, that's just the way it is. I don't know." When I tell them I think they do know, they give me the look of, "Oh yeah? Show me." This is where it gets fun for me, because I know I can show them something they know to be true but often do not realize.

EXPERIENCES OF GROUPS, AWFUL AND GREAT

"Ok," I say, "Have you ever experienced a group where you feel awful?" This usually gets me another funny look, of "what do you mean?" I suggest that they might feel bad while in the group or realize it afterward. After being with these people, they feel fatigued, tired, frustrated, and they want to change something. They want to medicate themselves. Whether it is going for a walk, watching television, or drinking a coffee or a beer they need to do something else, to get away from the feeling of fatigue from the group. At this point in the conversation, people are nodding their heads, acknowledging that they have had that experience. Some even make comments about the meetings they were just in earlier in the day: "You should see our meetings. They would kill you!"

I then ask whether they have had the opposite experience that makes them feel great, where they are stronger and more energized because they are with that group. After being with these people, they want to spend even more time with them. They nod their heads excitedly, remembering such an experience in the recent past.

In a few of my conversations, usually with people working in large organizations, I have asked people what percentage of the day they typically spend in the fatiguing experience. For many, the answers are up in the range of 70-80 percent of the time. Ouch.

At this point I suggest to the group that we have established, from their own experience, that they know when they feel awful in a group and when they feel great. They confirm this. I have also shown that they have both experiences on a rather frequent basis. So, then I ask the seemingly obvious: "Do you have a preference for one over the other?" Here I get

chuckles and nodding of heads, “Of course.” To be a little naughty and provocative, as well as to make my point more strongly, I suggest that the obvious preference is for the fatiguing experience. “Right?” This always gets me a laugh and a firm response, “No. We prefer the energizing experience. It has a better vibe.” While this seems like hammering home the obvious, I like to anchor the conversation with a clear statement of people’s preference for energizing groups.

Next I invite the group to delve into the differences between the fatiguing and energizing experiences. When I ask for details, people describe the fatiguing experience as “exhausting”, “draining my energy” or “painful.” Often I hear something like, “I have to work really hard to get anything done.” Many people tell me that this experience feels frustrating, with a sense that they are just doing what they are told to do, with little or no creativity, even though they are trying. They even share that they are often not sure what they contribute to the group or, in fact, what anybody contributes to the group.

In contrast, when I ask about the energizing group—no big surprise here!—my conversation partners have much more positive things to say. This experience is “enlivening.” They have more energy afterwards than when they started. Anything seems possible in this group. Everyone has lots of creative ideas, building off of each other, usually ending up in places they feel they would never have seen on their own, “It’s really cool!” Here is where the idea of abundance starts to surface. Many people say that in this energizing group they “experience abundance all over the place.” This leads me to ask, “If this is an experience of abundance, what is the other experience?” Most people respond, “Scarcity. Nothing. It is very hard. There is a much lower vibrancy to the group.”

This is fascinating. The awful place is an experience of scarcity and low vibrancy, and the great place is an experience of abundance and high vibrancy. And, now, we are getting to a critical insight. “If you could live more in the abundant world, would you?” I ask. Well, duh... “Yes.” I counter with, “Then why don’t you?” This starts us on a new path. When people respond that it is hard to live in greater abundance in most groups, I suggest that maybe it is and maybe it is not. To see how it might become easier, however, we need to explore the differences in the two experiences in more detail.

The five relationships: Self

As I have described, I like to draw people into the conversation about abundance and scarcity through their experiences in groups—often work groups, but not necessarily. Humans are social animals, so unless one is living as a hermit, he or she is likely to be part of a variety of groups. We all know, however, that we have more relationships than just ones to groups. Having pursued this issue extensively in the field of psychology and in various spiritual traditions, I have found a broad consensus around the idea that there are five fundamental human relationships: to oneself, to other individuals, to groups, to nature, and to spirit (which may signify different things in different traditions). For a deep dive into experiences of scarcity and abundance, I invite my conversation partners to look systematically at each of these relationships.

How do people experience themselves differently in groups where the dominant feeling is one of either scarcity or abundance? Time and again I have heard that, in the scarcity experience, it feels like the self simply does not show up. For example, a friend described, “In the awful experience, I am just there, getting the energy sucked out of me.” On the other hand, he said, “In the great experience, not only am I more creative, I also experience parts of me showing up that are new and exciting. I am better for having been in that experience.”

Across all my conversations, “vibrancy” is the word that keeps coming up when people talk about these experiences. So it became obvious that this is the best term to capture the different levels of energy experienced in the five relationships. I also figured out that “a picture is worth a thousand words” when it comes to communicating what people are sharing about different levels of vibrancy.

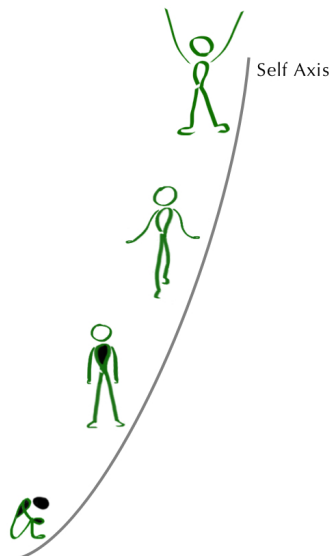


Figure 2: Experience of One's Own Self

Figure 2 captures the high, low, and midpoints of the experience of one's relationship to oneself. In the lower left we see a representation of when you experience your “I” as slumped over, with your head in an invisible darkness through which no light can enter. Everything is dark—from here nothing or very little can be seen. Here you experience great vulnerability, moving into the fetal position, literally or figuratively, to protect all of the core systems, such as your will, your heart, and your head.¹⁴ This is the collapsed state in your relationship to self.

There is another experience you often have of the “I.” You experience your “I” as standing tall, acknowledging what you have to bring to the world, with the gifts, talents, and abilities you have developed over your life. This is the second individual in Figure 2.

You also experience the “I” moving through everyday life, learning, developing new capacities, and developing new relationships as you engage with the dance of life. This is the third individual in Figure 2.

The outstretched individual in the upper-right of Figure 2 represents yet another experience you have, in some places and groups, where the “I” not only stands tall, but also opens to the world, fully participating and sharing everything that you have to give and everything that might come. You experience this position of complete openness and invitation as one of great strength and happiness, with your full will, heart, head, and soul engaged. While this looks like the most vulnerable position, as everything is exposed, it is the one in which you experience the most strength.¹⁵

Just as you have experiences of scarcity and abundance in different group situations, chances are you have all four experiences along the continuum of your relationship to yourself. At each higher level, from the collapsed experience of low vibrancy to the fully open experience of high vibrancy, more of you becomes available. Since you experience all four levels of vibrancy in your relationship to yourself, depending on the situation you are in, they are all part of who you are. They are all available to you. This is an important point.

The suggestion I want to make here (to be developed more fully in Chapter 3) is the following: how much of your vibrant self is available in any given space or group is determined by an agreement. You agree to this, whether or not you are aware of the agreement. This also means that you can make a different agreement and step into a different relationship to yourself in that group or situation.

Think, for example, of a day when you woke up feeling negative about yourself and a bit shut down. Perhaps you felt like going back to bed, but you got yourself up and out to school or work, and maybe you congratulated yourself on “just showing up.” Maybe later in the day you decided to take a risk and offer an idea or a suggestion and possibly you were rewarded with the great feeling of having your offering accepted and appreciated. Looking back on an experience like this, you can see that your choices have an impact on your relationship to yourself. This is what I think of as making different agreements. Being able to see the scarcity or abundance in our relationships is the first step toward changing agreements to bring greater vibrancy into our lives.

The five relationships: Other

Your relationship to the other is how you experience another human being. The other is the “you” that your “I” experiences—someone who is also having an “I” experience. The quality of the relationship rests largely in your ability to see the “I” that uniquely expresses the identity of the other person, as well as in his or her ability to see the “I” that is a unique expression of you.

In my inquiries about how people experience scarcity and abundance in the groups they are part of, I often hear that in low energy groups that they do not experience anything of the other group members as individuals. The other individuals in the group are just there, perhaps neutral or possibly a source of annoyance or disturbance. In contrast, in the

descriptions of groups where energy is abundant, I hear that the experience is one of seeing and appreciating all of the different people who are part of it, and even sensing that together you can see further and accomplish more than you could alone. As one woman in a recent conversation shared, “Everyone is really creative, just as I am, and we support each other in that.”

From what people have shared with me, it seems that we have two possible, distinct experiences. When you see another person, do you see a brilliant soul or someone intent on disturbing you? The disturber is everywhere. He cuts you off in traffic, gives you extra work to do, makes you pay taxes, disappoints you, spoils your appetite, and hurts your feelings. She makes your life more difficult. That is one experience. In this experience, you turn your back on the other, protecting yourself from his influence. It is impossible for you to see her, and you experience that she does not see you. This is the relationship of the two, dark, slumped over, back-to-back individuals in Figure 3. This is the collapsed state of the relationship to the other.

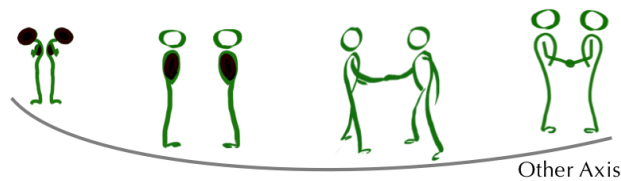


Figure 3: Experience of the Other

Depending on the situation, you also have the experience of being able to stand tall and face each other, seeing him as separate from you, with his own unique talents, gifts and abilities. You too feel seen by the other for what you can do and contribute. This is the relationship of the two individuals facing each other in Figure 3.

You also experience being seen and met by the other. He is with you on the path of learning, engaging with you in the development of new capacities and new relationships. This is the third relationship in Figure 3, where the two individuals are open to each other and shaking hands.

Occasionally, you also have the experience of being seen completely by the other, both who you are and who you can be. That other person sees right into your soul, witnessing the light that streams through you, your full potential for possibility and creativity. When this happens, you feel liberated at what another was able to see in you. At the same time, you see gifts in the other that he may not even see in himself. You see his potential, and it fills you with warmth to experience this flow of light-spirit potential in another. In this relationship, the other brings lightness to your life. She makes you smile or even makes your heart overflow with joyful tears. He proves to you, continuously, how beautiful life can be. Whether it is the artist down the street, the author of your favorite book, the genius you respect, your mother, or your kid shining on stage you experience the brightness of their light shining through their offering. This is the high vibrancy experience represented by the two individuals on the right side of Figure 3.¹⁶

To appreciate that the level of vibrancy available in your relationship to another is an agreement, consider those times when you have been able to resolve an interpersonal conflict or convert an enemy into a dear friend. What did it take to make that happen? Most likely one or the other individual took the first step, perhaps a friendly overture or an apology, but ultimately both of you had to agree to put your relationship on a more positive path. Then the door could open to mutual respect and appreciation. Similarly, with someone you feel neutral about or barely know, both people must be agreeable to greater openness and connection for a vibrant relationship to emerge.¹⁷ At the risk of repeating myself, I like to point out the role of agreements, because if the current state of relationships is based on an agreement, it means we can also choose a different agreement—an agreement to go for greater vibrancy. This holds true for our relationships to groups as well.

The five relationships: Group

Your relationship to the group is how you experience the “we.” It is completely different from the “I” that you can only experience for yourself or the “you” that you experience with another “I.” We-ness is experienced collectively as well as individually. For example, it is the identification we have of “our” family, which in my case is the Ritchie-Dunham’s. The experience of “family” is different from that of me as an individual member of the family. I am both Jim (the “I”) and Ritchie-Dunham (the “we”).

By the time I get to the point of talking about this relationship in my conversations, I usually find that people are pretty comfortable drawing distinctions between scarcity and abundance and high and low vibrancy, and there is always a lot of enthusiasm for sharing stories about group experiences. These are stories about immediate and extended families, communities, workplaces and places where people hang out with friends. Recently, a young man from Germany captured the essence of what many have shared about the relationship to groups:

When the vibrancy in the group is low, we all act like we just want to be told what to do. It seems clear that none of me is needed, other than what I can do right then. It feels very frustrating. We are all in our little boxes, somebody has a whip, and I am submissive to the task at hand. But when I experience high vibrancy in a group, we are all looking for the unique contributions our creativity can make to the group. It’s like the harmony we create when we each sing our piece. It feels like together we are able to take on anything.

You often experience your relationship to the “we” as one of “just tell me what to do.” This is an experience many of us have at work or in a community where we have no voice. It can also be the experience we have when everyone talks but no one ever listens. These exhausting groups bore us, increase our fatigue, and always ask too much of us (“yet another endless meeting?”). In this relationship, you are clear that you make no unique contribution, as a matter of fact, many people could replace you in your job or another family could live in your house and it would make no difference. You are all just cogs in a machine and no one feels he can do much about it. This experience of alienation and disempowerment in low vibrancy groups is represented at the top-left in Figure 4.

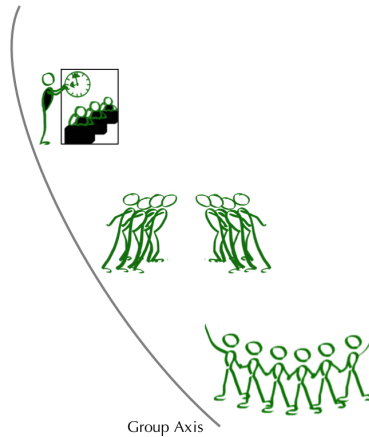


Figure 4: Experience of the Group

Chances are you have experienced another quality of relationship to the group, when you feel that you can stand tall, shoulder to shoulder with others who are all, like you, valuable members of the group. You experience your contribution as clear in this group, and the group is clear that it is stronger because you are bringing your abilities. At this level of group vibrancy, there is a positive sense of collective identity; perhaps neighborhood pride or, at work, a passive tolerance and a feeling of competing with other units or businesses. The group bets on who can make a valuable contribution to the group, bringing them in and keeping everyone else out. This is the cooperative competition of us versus them, as seen in the middle group in Figure 4.¹⁸

You may also have had the more rare experience of a group where the relationship was one of deep collaboration. This is the experience of “united we can,” when people come together in an active embrace and find they can achieve outcomes that they previously thought were impossible. The group knows that not everyone will make a value contribution to the group, but anyone can.¹⁹

For musicians this is experienced as “being in the groove,” when the ensemble melds fully, and a much greater possibility emerges for the group. These are moments of greatness, often experienced on sports teams, in transformational family moments, or when a country comes together to face an extraordinary hardship. In these group relationships, no matter how many hours you put in and how much effort it took, you feel invigorated afterwards. You made a contribution, which the group appreciated and engaged with, and it felt great. You are a better person because you were with them today. This is the experience of the united group at the bottom-right of Figure 4.

Like the people in my conversations, I expect you have experienced your relationship to the group along this continuum, from the subsuming experience of low vibrancy to the uniting experience of high vibrancy. As you experience greater harmonic vibrancy along this continuum, what is present at the lower levels of vibrancy is also available at higher levels, along with new dimensions.

In the experience, of low vibrancy, you are just a doer. In the experience of medium vibrancy you are now a contributor; both able to do as before, and to bring greater talents and abilities to the group. In the high-vibrancy experience you are a doer, a contributor, *and* full of a potential you may not even be aware of, all at the same time. This phenomenon takes place in all of the relationships we have looked at so far: at each higher level of vibrancy, you have access to more of your gifts, so you can make a larger contribution to the group, just as you can access more of your creativity in relationship with another individual and see more and more of the potential inside yourself.

It's usually when I get to this point in my conversations that the insight about agreements appears most powerfully. I say something like, "It seems that there is a huge difference in the experience of the low and high vibrancy groups." This statement gets lots of agreement—people are clear that they feel scarcity everywhere in the low-vibrancy experience and abundance everywhere in the high-vibrancy experience. Then I push a little. "Why is there scarcity in one group and abundance in another?" Often the first response is something like, "There just is. Right?" "Why?" I ask again. After awhile I can always count on at least one person coming forward with a statement like this one from the executive director of a non-profit research group:

Because that's what we agree to. Or, at least, that's what I accept. What I mean is that this has something to do with me. You see, I have two very different experiences with two of the committees I lead. One is a low vibrancy group" and the other is a "high vibrancy group." One is exhausting—it is very hard to get anyone to do anything and we are stuck. The other is exhilarating—every one participates and we have made huge advances. I have assumed that this was just the reality of these two committees. Now I realize that if I am the one leading both committees, and many of the same people sit on the two committees, then there must be something in what I am doing that makes the difference. I agree to the lower-vibrancy experience and that is unnecessary.

Yes! Once we clearly see that we are experiencing different levels of vibrancy in different situations, we can begin to raise our awareness of the underlying agreements. Only then can we set about changing them to move toward higher vibrancy. Often the impetus for change comes from an external event, for example, a crisis or at work the arrival of a new leader who wants to "shake things up." These external forces can shine a light on the internal group dynamics and create an opportunity for a shift in agreements. Maybe you have also experienced a shift that was internally generated. Perhaps one or two people decided to push for change, or possibly the entire group just realized that things could be better and took steps together to achieve that. The fourth relationship, to "nature," provides an important clue as to how these shifts toward higher vibrancy and abundance can come about.

The five relationships: Nature

We have now seen how we experience scarcity and abundance in human relationships—to the self, the other, and the group. However, from psychology and the spiritual traditions, as well as our own experience, we know that we humans have important relationships to other

dimensions. I call these nature and spirit. When my inquiry takes my conversation partners and me into these dimensions, we find that there is scarcity and abundance in these relationships as well.

One way to experience our relationship to nature is simply in terms of how we relate to the natural world. Another involves seeing how we experience the nature of reality—that is, it involves giving some thought to what is real for us. These two are closely interrelated, as we shall see.

I like to enter the conversation about the relationship to nature by asking people to think of their favorite place in the whole world, the place that makes them feel the best. When I ask this question, most people tell me about a place in nature—the beach, a river, the mountains. Then I ask, “What is the essence of this place that makes you love it so much?” Interestingly, what I usually hear about then are things. For example, the beach lovers mention sun, sand, salt water, and heat. Well then, I suggest, I will give them a bright lamp, some sand, salty water, and heat, right where they are. Will that make them really happy? This usually gets me a laugh, “No, of course not.” But, if it’s not those things, then what is it that evokes their deep feelings of pleasure? They then begin to describe the movement of the water, the waves, the tides, the energy of the sun, and the wind moving clouds across the sky. If the setting is a river, I hear about the force of its flow, the teeming life beneath its surface, its earthy smell, and its ever-changing nature. These are descriptions of the forces that enliven the things we encounter in nature. People love the lively sense of emergence that is everywhere in the natural world.

In one of my conversation groups I was fortunate enough to have a forester, someone who has devoted his whole adult life to preserving natural habitats for people to enjoy. He captured the idea beautifully when he said it is “the experience of manifestation” that accounts for the strong positive feelings we humans have for the natural environment. The manifestation we experience most directly in nature is the transformation of infinite light-energy potential into continuously unfolding processes, and the things these processes produce. We love the strength and growth in the tree through the seasons, as much as we appreciate its fruit on a given day. At the same time, we sense the flow of energy from sunlight into the tree, then into leaves, flowers, and fruit that exist for a while then fall to the ground to fertilize the soil and nurture the tree in its continuing growth. It is this manifesting cycle of life that mesmerizes us in our relationship to the natural world.²⁰

When we tease apart these three different ways we experience nature; as things that we can touch and see, as vital processes of growth and change, and as the energy that flows through all and makes everything possible, we have the basic elements for seeing how our relationship to nature is related to our perceptions of reality.²¹ Sometimes we are immersed in the reality that is touchable. “If I can’t touch it, it is not real,” is how people express this to me. In this state, the reality of the tree is the bark, the branches, the leaves, and the apple. Reality-as-things in our daily lives shows up as food, money, a house, a car, and sometimes other people (depending on the quality of our relationship to them).

We also have the experience of reality as something more intangible, like the processes of growth in the tree. People in my groups often mention growing older and wiser, learning, practicing new skills, and getting stronger. They resonate with a positive sense of reality as a

journey of growth and development, which is just as real as whatever the concrete outcomes of that journey might be. My son's soccer coach expressed this to the team at the beginning of the season, "Yes, I want you to enjoy the game, and it will be fun to win. And, most of all, I want you to improve as a soccer player this year. We will work to develop your skills and understanding of the game, so that you mature as a player." The kids have found this very exciting, rejoicing in both the wins and the improved skills, endurance and understanding of the game.

Building on this theme, I invite folks to recall a time when they experienced reality as that sun-like energy of limitless possibility. It's one of my great pleasures to hear the stories they offer about what it feels like to be in that experience—stories of inspiration and motivation to realize an audacious vision for a community, a family or a team. When I ask, most people tell me that they love the experience of seeing a possibility that they know they can choose to make real. The director of a continuing-education company for dentists told me, "You should see what happens when our dentist-students see, usually for the first time, that they can be health-providers for the patients, and not just highly skilled technicians. In addition to fixing problems with the teeth they can bring greater health to their patients. For example, seeing that they can address sleep apnea, a major issue for many patients, shows them a possibility they had not seen—one that enlivens their sense of purpose."

What's most interesting to me about that experience of possibility is that you know that something has become "real" long before it becomes tangible. Then you witness the development phase, as resources come together, perhaps over a long period of time, until at last the concrete outcome or product—the thing—appears. This is where I like to share my own story of experiencing nature as the manifesting of possibility. My wife Leslie is an architect. In the design phase of her projects, she sifts through all the possibilities of what a home might be like to come up with a vision that fits the wants and needs of the future homeowners—her clients. It is so exciting to see that moment when the image of that home materializes in the minds of the homeowner, Leslie, and all of the contractors who will work from that image for many months to develop it into a tangible reality. It is real to them at every stage in that process of manifestation, not just when the house is "done."

However, at each stage the relationship to the nature of reality is distinctive. Figure 5 captures these distinctions, using Leslie's home design projects as an example. On the lower left, the image of a light bulb with a house design in it represents the experience of the highest vibrancy in the relationship to nature, where one experiences the infinite possibility, the choosing of a vision to manifest—the dream of the house—the process of developing that possibility by building the house, and the actual home. All three levels are available in the high-vibrancy experience. The joy experienced, the vibrancy, is in imagining the house, building it, and in living in it over time.

In the middle level of vibrancy in the relationship to nature, reality includes both the development of the house and the finished house. These are now fixed in the design and plans. There is no longer the possibility of an alternate vision.

At the lower level of vibrancy in the relationship to nature, the only reality is the completed house. While it may have many wonderful attributes that will make it a home for the family for which it was built, the completed house alone represents a lower-vibrancy experience of

reality because it is fixed. It is a manifestation of the vision of what could be possible and the development process that realized that vision, but it does not hold their vibrant characteristics. It has become a thing.

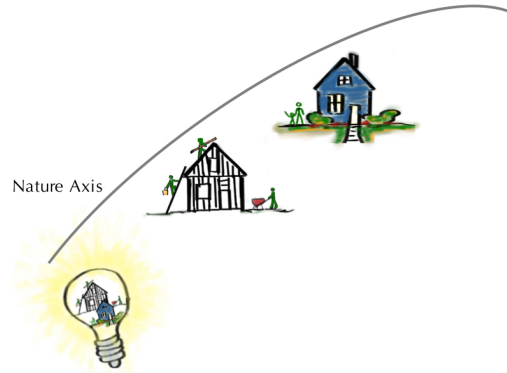


Figure 5: Experience of Nature—What Is Real

The fact that you can shift perspectives to see reality at these different levels of vibrancy—just as you can access different qualities of relationship to self, other, and group—is a sign that what you experience in your relationship to what is real in any given group or place is an agreement. Let's come back to the experience of the leader who reflected that the same group of people in two different committees could tacitly agree to operate at high or low vibrancy under different circumstances. Now we can imagine how that might be so. When a group defines its task in an inspiring way, it may give itself permission to start from the perspective of limitless possibility, thereby creating the context for each group member to show up as his and her most creative self. In contrast, when in a different committee, work is assigned that is defined as totally detail-oriented and perhaps insignificant, the committee members' unstated acceptance of this view of the nature of the task can create a context in which they also accept a low-vibrancy relationship to each other.

This is similar to the difference between the design phases in one of Leslie's projects, when she evokes creativity by inviting her clients to start by imagining their dream house without worrying about constraints. In contrast, when the house is built and the project has reached the stage of selecting among a million different drawer pulls or doorknobs, and working through a long list of details to be finished or fixed, Leslie understands that staying focused on the concrete and tangible is what she, the contractor, and the clients most need to do. However uninspiring that may feel, she agrees to operate in that mode.²²

The point I want to emphasize is that once you begin to see these different relationships and see how you experience them differently, you have the insight and the motivation to shift your perspective and to operate from a place of higher vibrancy. You can choose a different agreement, one that will bring greater vibrancy and abundance into your life. This is the whole point of Ecosynomics.²³

The five relationships: Spirit

In my conversations, people have shared lots of ideas and stories about how they experience the relationship to spirit. Some emphasize religion or spirituality; others speak about the spirit in a family, a community, an organization, or a team. “It’s when you feel a part of a much greater whole,” said a young woman in one of my business classes. “You are a part of the cosmos; you know that you are supported by something greater than yourself.” However they choose to acknowledge that relationship to a greater power, the stories all convey a sense of spirit as the source of creativity. Like the sun in the natural world, spirit is the light-energy that unleashes the potential in those who tap into it.

So, what do higher and lower vibrancy look like in our experiences of this relationship? A corporate executive answered this question as follows:

In scarcity mode, there just isn’t any creativity. We know what to do in this mode, because the rules are given. They are in the book. We just ask what we are supposed to do. I mean, somebody just tells us what the rules are. This is very different from the abundance place, where we never even ask, because I can see what we can do, the creativity and knowing is everywhere. The essence of the spirit of the group in this mode is that anything is possible.

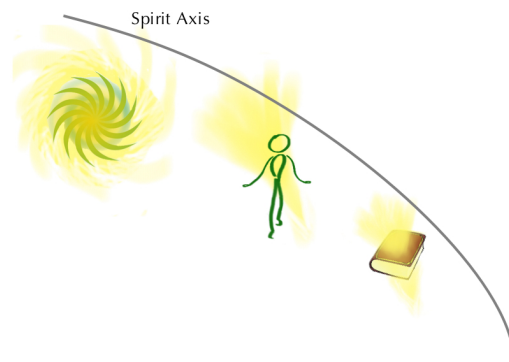


Figure 6: Experience of Spirit—the Source of Creativity

Figure 6 depicts these distinctions. In many groups, you experience the light coming from a respected, well-established source. Often in the form of a book, this is the story that shows the way. At home, these may be the family standards for how things are done—the current generation’s interpretation of the family traditions. At work this might be the employee handbook, the industry standards for best practices, or the code of ethics. In religions these are the books of the guiding word of the divine spirit. This relationship you have to spirit as being the light coming only from the accepted word is in the bottom-right of Figure 6. A young man living in Ohio described this experience, “When my wife and I moved here, our kids came to a new school, a school old with traditions, which we found comforting. The families in the school knew who they were and where they came from—they knew what they were doing. It was great to experience the strength of this wisdom. Until I tried to share some ideas I had about new ways to do things. Then the traditions started to feel like a constraint.”

A somewhat higher vibrancy experience is one in which the creative force flows from you, as well as from the book. The light shines on all and shines through you. This is when you experience the exhilaration of creativity, the capacity to discover new truths, because you are both able to work with the teachings from others and to offer your own ideas and interpretations. This is the experience of yourself as the portal, the host, for the flow of spirit, as depicted in the middle of Figure 6. It is the creative force in you that makes others' hearts sing, your parents cry, and your friends adore you. Exploring this point, the same young man from Ohio interjected, "And this is what I experienced with our minister. While the school board would have none of my suggestions, the minister invited me to share my ideas. He said, 'You are very creative, and we can always improve on what we have done in the past.' I felt like I was standing on the shoulders of giants."

Sometimes you also experience your relationship to spirit as one in which spirit radiates from you and everything all around you—it is everywhere. In these moments, you and the people with you invite spirit to show up everywhere that it exists. You see that, and with that awareness you are actually co-hosting the flow of spirit. What makes this experience different is that you are not just an observer, as when the light is sourced from outside of you. Rather you are an active participant, bringing spirit-awareness to the flow all around you. This high-vibrancy relationship to spirit is represented in the light-energy swirl at the top-left of Figure 6. My daughter and son play in occasional jam sessions with other musicians. They love them. "Everyone is creative," they tell me. "People come up with really cool harmonies that I would never have thought of, and I get to play with them. That's chill."

The agreements in these different groups invite in different levels of spirit's presence, from received wisdom in the book, to what you can see in yourself, to what can be experienced in everyone and everything. Seeing the creativity around you or not is a choice, an agreement you accept, an agreement that you can change. The next time you are in a situation completely lacking in creativity, you can realize that there seems to be very little creativity and you can begin to look around, looking for the creativity that you know must be there. Once you begin to see it, the juices begin to flow, as you have experienced many times in your life, and you do see the spirit, the source of creativity in everything and in everyone. You can recognize this moment and shift this agreement, because you trust, you know, that the creativity is there. It only needs to be seen and invited in, which is what the people we call "creative" do all the time.

Harmonic vibrancy: from scarcity to abundance

At this point in the conversation, having looked at the five primary relationships, people tell me it all starts to seem like a bit much, "Five relationships experienced at three different levels—give us a break!" This is my opportunity to introduce my favorite image, "The Three Circles of Harmonic Vibrancy."

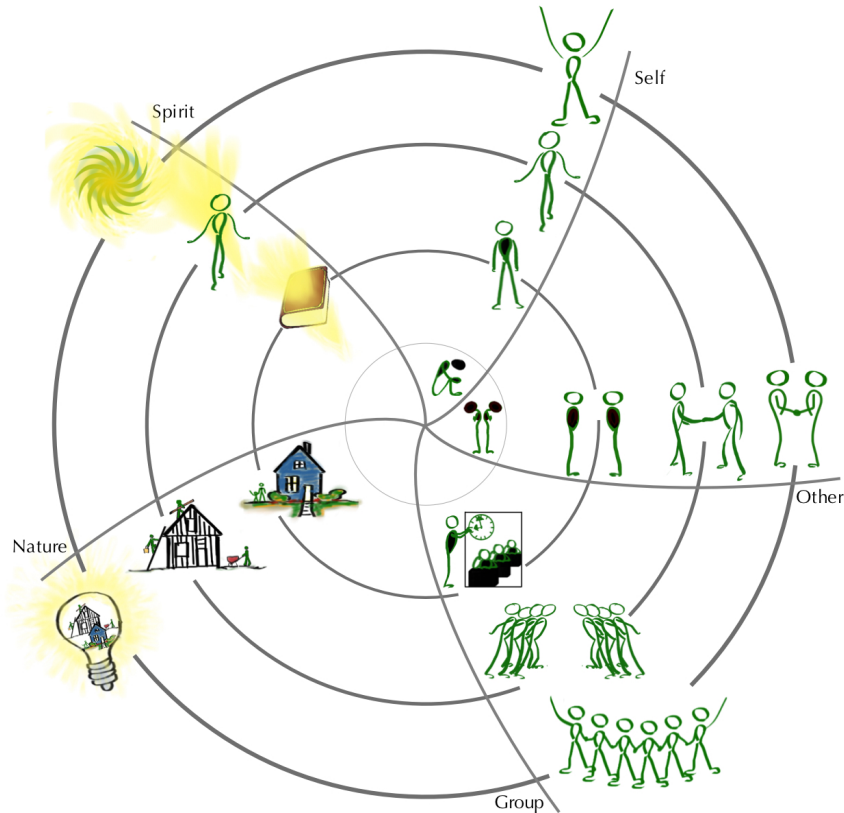


Figure 7: Experience of Scarcity-Abundance in All Relationships

The conversation now begins to focus on describing the differences among the experiences of the inner circle, the middle circle, and the outer circle. The stories that people share as we look together at the image in Figure 7 invariably lead the group to a realization: in real life, we do not have a separate experience of vibrancy in each of the five relationships. Rather all the relationships interact and work together to produce an overall sense of more or less wellbeing. This is “harmonic vibrancy.”

When people experience greater harmonic vibrancy, which is what they want, all relationships are taken care of, and through those relationships they accomplish more. Conversely, when people experience less vibrancy, which they do not want, it is hard to pay attention to any relationships. Everyone does what he can alone, accomplishing much less. Starting from scarcity, the lack of relationship in all five dimensions generates a lower vibrancy. Starting from abundance, all relationships work together to generate a higher vibrancy.

Do you recognize the experience captured in the inner circle in the figure? In one group, a school administrator jumped in: “Well, you should see our meetings; they are numbing.” Everybody nodded knowingly. We have all at times felt this kind of energy-draining dreariness. The inner circle describes this experience of the lack of relationship in all five relationships, an experience of what I call “apart-from-ness”—being apart from all relationships of vibrancy.

The middle circle of the Three Circles of Harmonic Vibrancy describes the experience of medium vibrancy in all relationships. This is an experience of “next-to-ness.” A Dutch engineer captured this experience of the middle circle in terms of what it feels like when outside consultants come in to work with his team. “When they are in the room,” he said, “we develop new skills, see new relationships, and learn. Sometimes it’s frustrating, but I see that it works. We see each other’s capacities and what we each bring to the team. We get stronger, more resilient standing with each other, and we get better outcomes, both in our individual and team development, and in the things we are producing.”

The outer circle describes the experience of high vibrancy in all five relationships, an experience of “one-with-ness.” A Russian lady in one of my groups recognized the outer circle in an experience with her daughter in the toy store Mir Detstva in Moscow. “I was more alive, trying new activities I would have never tried before. I was doing them with my daughter, who was also shining. We each brought something new to our relationship in the way we did it together. Creativity was flowing everywhere, in both of us and in the lovely girl helping us. The possibilities were endless, we enjoyed the process, and we came out with beautiful works of art. A high level in all five relationships—all in one!”

People naturally liken this experience to music, where the songs that move us most have rich harmonies. Each voice contributes a distinctive element, yet no voice can achieve the harmony alone. My favorite image, however, is one that folks have suggested more than once in my conversation groups: ice cream! One person might notice the experience of taste (“it’s all about the sweetness”); another emphasizes texture (“it’s all about being both smooth and crunchy”); yet another thinks temperature is key (“it’s all about being cold); while another describes appearance (“it’s all about the colors of the ice cream, the cone and the sprinkles”). But, of course, nobody wants just sweet, just smooth and crunchy, just cold, or just colorful. Ice cream is about the perfect combination of taste, texture, temperature, and appearance. In the same way, our experience of harmonic vibrancy depends on the quality of our relationships to self, other, group, nature, and spirit, altogether.

Towards the end of one of our early presentations about the Three Circles of Harmonic Vibrancy, held in Mexico, a banking executive asked my colleague, “Do you have that graphic as a sticker or a magnet?” We had never been asked that before. “Why?” asked my colleague. “Because I want to put it on my refrigerator to remind me that when I am experiencing the inner circle of scarcity, that it is an agreement that I have accepted. I know the experience of abundance, and since I am often the leader, I can choose another agreement. The graphic would remind me of this choice, what I feel like when I choose it, and the outcomes we can achieve when we live within the abundance-based agreements.” Since then, hundreds have asked for that graphic. Now we have magnets.

The realization that it is our agreements that are determining our experiences of scarcity or abundance in different groups can be a rude awakening. People are choosing to experience lower vibrancy most of the time. That is the inner circle of scarcity. Why would we do that? Maybe because we are not aware that it was an agreement we were making. Could we make different agreements? Sometimes it is easy to see how to go about this, but in many situations it can seem hard to figure out how to even start. It gets pretty complicated and difficult. Or does it? I like the way Tom Robbins puts it in his novel, *Jitterbug Perfume*. “The universe does not have laws. It has habits. And habits can be broken.”²⁴ That’s where

Ecosynomics comes in—to help us see our habit of accepting agreements that produce scarcity, so that we can take steps toward abundance and greater harmonic vibrancy.²⁵

Summary: Four principles of scarcity and abundance

So let's review what has emerged from my many conversations. It seems that people agree to scarcity or abundance in different situations, whether or not they are aware of that agreement. When they agree on abundance, they experience a greater harmonic and a greater vibrancy. Everyone seems to recognize that this is what he wants and that he just does not always get it. It also seems that when people experience greater abundance, there is a greater vibrancy in their relationships to self, other, the group, nature, and spirit. Conversely, when they experience greater scarcity, there is less vibrancy in all of these relationships. This seems to show something about people's ability to bring vibrancy to all of the relationships or to none of them, and that is related to the level of scarcity or abundance they experience.

Furthermore, when the group is in scarcity mode, it is very hard to attend to the vibrancy in any of the relationships. In abundance mode, it just shows up in all of them. There's relationship all over the place. Specifically, in the scarcity mode, each person tries individually to do what is required to move the thing along, to keep life going. No relationship there, just a lot of everyone doing her own thing. The abundance mode is completely different. It is through the relationships that people get things done—a lot more done. And, just as important, it is not harder to get more done, rather when people experience greater vibrancy, there seems to be creativity and energy in abundance. They are in the flow, and they get a lot done. In lower vibrancy, they never have enough, and everything gets stuck.

Often, when I share this summary of the conversation, someone will speak up and say that this sounds like a set of principles—guiding principles. “Right!” I say, and here they are:

First, groups that start with an assumption of scarcity, experience mostly scarcity and low harmonic vibrancy, and groups that start with an assumption of abundance, experience mostly abundance and high harmonic vibrancy. It is not that scarcity or abundance is absolutely right, rather that one or the other shows up depending on which one is perceived to be the underlying basis of the agreements in the group. Having said this, I will also suggest that abundance has to exist for the whole system to work. By this I mean that the abundance is always there, it is just a matter of peoples' capacity to perceive it. When the abundance, the infinite light, is not perceived, it is kept in the dark. By keeping it in the dark, it is undernourished, underutilized, underdeveloped, and undervalued.²⁶

Second, the degree of harmonic vibrancy you experience in any one of the five relationships is very similar to what you experience in all of the relationships. The experience of a low harmonic vibrancy in any relationship seems to be present when they are all low, and a high harmonic vibrancy in any relationship is only experienced when they are all high. This suggests that to experience abundance and greater harmonic vibrancy, one needs to pay attention to all five relationships at the same time.

Third, the individual and the group are better off, experiencing greater abundance and harmonic vibrancy, when all five relationships are stronger. Relationship matters, and the agreements in those relationships determine what is possible. It is a system.

Fourth, people prefer the experience of greater harmonic vibrancy to the experience of less, and people experience that harmonic vibrancy in all five relationships—to self, to other, to group, to nature, and to spirit.

These principles have important practical implications. High-vibrancy groups start from an assumption of abundance; low vibrancy groups start from an assumption of scarcity. High-vibrancy groups pay attention to all five primary relationships and low-vibrancy groups do not. High-vibrancy groups realize that the web of relationships makes up a system and low-vibrancy groups do not. Finally, people prefer higher harmonic vibrancy, as experienced in all five relationships. With these four principles about your experience and the five primary relationships, we have the foundation we need to see, explain, and choose healthier, freer agreements—agreements for higher harmonic vibrancy and abundance. You can paint your own world, as in Figure 8. The rest of this book will show you how.



Figure 8: *Painting the World You Agree To*