

5 Leadership Attributes: From my paper *Con versare*

The role of leadership is dramatically changed when we focus on self-organization. Leaders no longer simply set direction and launch large-scale change programs to get there. Several capabilities will prove essential for leaders interested in fostering living systems that are characterized by collaboration and networks of conversational relationships. These capabilities include the ability to frame questions that matter, convene learning conversations, support Appreciative Inquiry, foster shared meaning, nurture communities of practice and use collaborative technologies. (Brown and Isaacs 1996)

Conversations between people with shared interests expand quickly into large networks of relationships if they are based on questions that matter. These networks self-organize into powerful forces for change and innovation. At the Institute for Research on Learning (IRL, an outgrowth of Xerox's pioneering Palo Alto Research Center (PARC)), the networks are called Communities of practice. "These self-organizing networks are formed naturally by people engaged in a common enterprise -- people who are learning together through the practice of their real work". Further "...the knowledge embodied in these communities is usually shared and developed through ongoing conversations". (Brown and Isaacs 1996) Whether the community in question is social, business, family, or cause oriented, these conversations start by friends simply talking together, and these conversations are the core process leading to change and innovation.