Nourish to Flourish

Nourish to Flourish brings together practitioners' voices and creative practices, and appreciative reviews of books that support strengths-based approaches to human interactions.

Appreciative Resources

This November 2021 issue is about AI and technology. "Resources" when the journal started meant primarily books and journal articles, hence the title Book Appreciation. Neena Verma, who has supported *AI Practitioner* in so many ways, took on the role of editor of the column of the journal in May, 2018. She wrote thoughtful, in-depth reviews about books she perceived to be especially relevant for AI practitioners until February 2021. We'd like to thank her for the rich diversity of treasures she shared.

"Resources" more than ten years after the column started means something quite different: not only books and journals, but blogs, videos, podcasts ... and all the other technologies that will develop to connect people with the information they are looking for. So it is fitting that we change the name of the column to "Appreciative Resources". Alexandra Arnold has agreed to take on the role of editor of the column. It will be exciting to see where the resources take us in future.
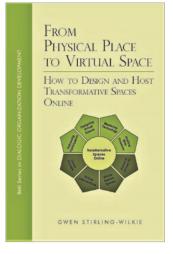**The Co-Publishers**

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From Physical Place to Virtual Space: How to Design and Host Transformative Spaces Online

Gwen Stirling-Wilkie
BMI Publishing, 2021
ISBN 978-1-7771846-2-9

A brand-new book, *From Physical Place to Virtual Space*, has just been published, in the spring of 2021, by BMI Publishing, a branch of the Bushe-Marshak Institute for Dialogic Organization Development. The author, Gwen

The term is key here: transformative, as in spontaneous and open, as opposed to transformational, or planned.

Stirling-Wilkie, has over 20 years of consulting experience in OD. This little green book is an account of her personal experience, written in the moment, without jargon, as she had to transition to virtual interventions when the Covid-19 pandemic shook the world in the spring of 2020. She admits that she didn't believe it was possible, but because she was just starting a big project involving 600+ stakeholders with a new client – like many of us – she jumped right in.

Her intention is to share her own experience while answering three questions:

- How do we design virtual interventions?

- How does one host online gatherings to create connection and safety that increase contribution?

- How do we facilitate relational dynamics that create "transformative moments that matter?"

The term is key here: transformative, as in spontaneous and open, as opposed to transformational, or planned. One of the book's appeals is that it takes the view that the expertise of DOD (dialogic organization development) professionals lies in "creating generative conversations that enable or unlock the transformative potential" of teams and organizations (p.11). This book is not for experts giving webinars, presentations, courses, training sessions or calling regular meetings. It is for consultants and leaders involved in workshops or large group events who are willing to embrace the idea that there is no right way, who work with what is unfolding, live in the moment, and recognize that "solutions" are socially constructed within conversations.

A reminder of how much we've learned

For those of us in the field, much of the content may be second nature. Those who will benefit most are new practitioners, managers and leaders, or those just entering the virtual space. A year before publication, this book would have been a lifesaver for many who had to swiftly reinvent their ways of working due to the pandemic. Today, it is a reminder of just how much we have learned and how much is possible to achieve online – especially if we plan and execute as carefully as the author has done.

Seasoned facilitators are likely to pick up a few new, practical tips out of the many the author shares (for example, use the "slides as background" feature in Zoom to avoid sharing your screen and keep the group together in gallery view). Or, perhaps they will understand what is behind the best practices they have

naturally embraced over time: the specific elements that impact psychological safety, group dynamics or presence.

The book is structured in two parts, one about preparing virtual spaces, with chapters on participation, design, technology (offering options for both low- and high-tech organizations), and presence. This section is particularly valuable as it invites practitioners to reconsider the time dimension of their work. For reasons beyond "Zoom fatigue", the author emphasizes the importance of the invitation, preparation and follow-up phases, as well as the "in-between" spaces (checking-in, checking-out, breaking, reconvening, etc.). Also a stretch for those who might underestimate the complexity of virtual gatherings is the break-down of design principles, design options and organization maturity levels to be considered.

Mastering virtual consulting

The dialogic (vs diagnostic) OD focus is where the real value is.

The second section, mastering virtual consulting, introduces facilitation skills, from understanding group processes to reading the room, tuning into or using your body, how/when to intervene (and there is much more to it than you might think). A succinct chapter on common dialogic approaches suggests that Open Space Technology, World Café, and Appreciative Inquiry can be adapted to the virtual space – not enough details are given for practitioners unfamiliar with these approaches, though. On the other hand, another chapter recounts in detail the decision points, approaches and lessons learned from the author's client engagement at the time.

Overall, this book fits perfectly within the theme of this *AI Practitioner* issue: Technology and the Wholeness Principle. Tips on how to use online platforms may be basic for some, but the dialogic (vs diagnostic) OD focus is where the real value is: a real-life story showing that for generative change, the whole system needs to be in the room. Virtual OD, according to Stirling-Wilkie, increases our chances to have an impact. These platforms "democratize contributions by removing hierarchy, power dynamics, and strong presences" (p. 80) when we each inhabit the same-sized square displayed in random order. In 135 pages, this short read raises some very big questions. One is whether virtual organization development interventions, when done skillfully and thoughtfully, are in fact more effective, or even essential, to today's diversity, equity, and inclusion agendas. Another prompt is for readers to consider that, sooner than we think, OD facilitators might have to trade flip charts and sticky notes for avatars, holograms and 3-D virtual reality platforms.