



## LILA Member Call with Dr. Monica Worline

### Adaptive Culture & Resources for Change

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#### Introduction

During the October gathering, we explored ideas relating to both parts of the theme of Adaptive Culture. Mary Ann Glynn shared her thoughts on whether there are advantages to culture, where it is helpful, where it enables innovation and adaptation and offered a framework for thinking about how to use culture as a tool.

Michael Muthukrishna shared ideas from cultural evolution – viewing culture as the software that runs on our brains’ hardware. One of the ideas that Michael introduced that was of particular interest to LILA members was the role of copying in transmitting cultural elements from one generation to the next.

In the last member call, Mats Alvesson shared his findings on what is organizational culture change and how possible is it. How do people react to significant organizational change?

Today we are fortunate to have Monica Worline, affiliate faculty at the center for positive organizations at the Ross School of Business of University of Michigan and research scientist at Stanford University Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education. Monica’s research looks at how to enliven work and workplaces through courageous thinking, compassionate leadership, and cultures that bring our best to life. Her research addresses challenges you have identified pertaining to how to create the a positive culture at work such as What are the elements of an adaptive culture that drive engagement, motivation resulting in a sense of purpose? What cultural nudges can be put into place by the Chief Learning Officer group to shift the organization towards an intentional succession and talent development mindset? How do you organize for nimbleness in order to respond to market shifts? Monica will now share her thoughts on resources for change.

#### The presentation is organized around two guiding questions

1. What if everything is a resource?
  - a. This is a provocative question from Martha Feldman.
  - b. Every cultural change or systemic change will result in unexpected results. Everything that happens in response to change efforts becomes a resource to understand the system better and to move it toward the desired state.



## LILA Member Call with Dr. Monica Worline

### Adaptive Culture & Resources for Change

---

2. How do I think about the social architecture of my organization as a resource for change?
  - a. 4 levers from Monica's research with Jane Dutton
    - i. Am I harnessing energy in networks?
    - ii. Are we creative in making roles work?
    - iii. What key routines could make a big difference?
    - iv. Are we living the values we need?

#### A note on adaptive culture & strategies of change

- One view of culture is a composition of practices and recurring action that we can pick up and put down, like a "toolkit." We have to perform these practices in order to be the people we want to be or do what we want to do. (Anne Swidler, Culture as Toolkit, or her book *Talk of Love* (2001))
- In *Talk of Love*, Swidler interviews people about their love relationships to see how they perform practices (recurrent activities) to become the kind of people they want to be in their relationships. I come from this perspective; recurrent activities shape who we are.
- Daily conversations develop a deep cultural taken-for-granted "common sense" that colors our reality.
  - If we are disconnected from others, we develop incompatible views of common sense without being aware of it—they have their "common sense" and we have ours.
  - Different parts of the organization can have different "common sense"—these are subcultures.
  - To be a skilled cultural worker, you have to be able to navigate these multiple ways of making meaning.
- Changing culture involves changing repertoires of **doing** that feed into new repertoires of feeling and being.
- Unsettled times prompt us to learn new ways of being by trying out new possible selves and new cultural repertoires (Swidler, 2001).

**What if everything is a resource?** This is the heart of Martha Feldman's resource theory. Money and time are not the only resources. Anything that is put to use is a resource. Cash is a resource for exchange, but if you roll it up around some explosives, it's fireworks. Money is only a resource to the extent that we put it into action, in service of specific goals.

A resource is an action combined with a schema (idea of what you want to accomplish). Thinking of it this way gives you a wider range of things to use to change culture.

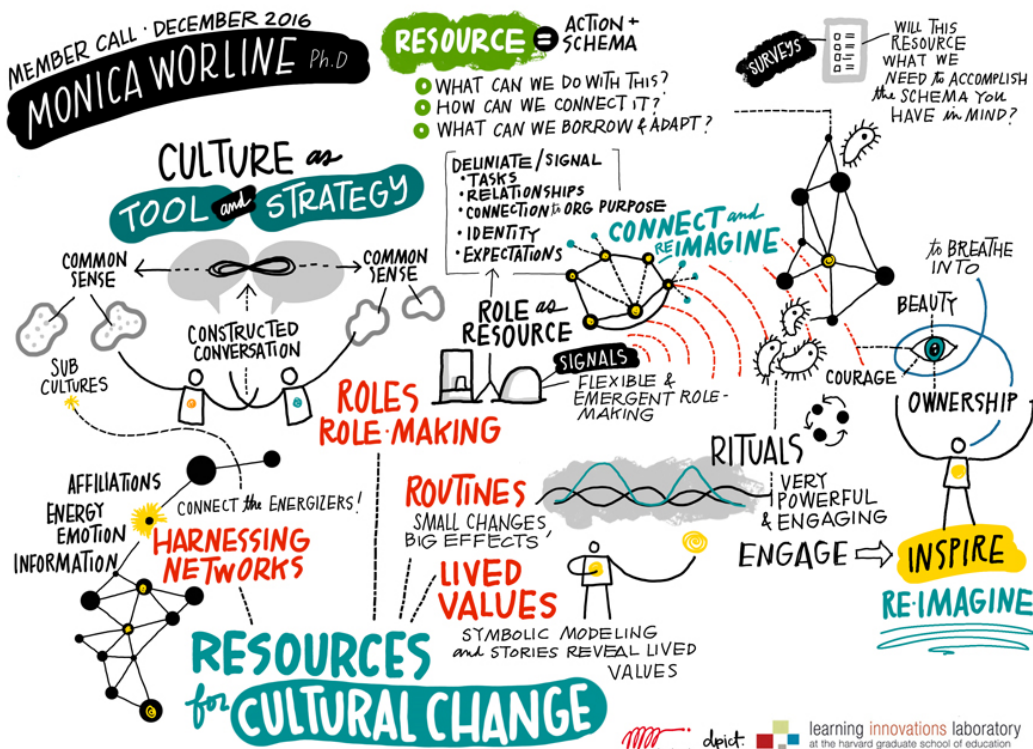
## LILA Member Call with Dr. Monica Worline

### Adaptive Culture & Resources for Change

#### Three key questions for resourcing:

1. What can we do with this?
  - a. Resistance, anger, apathy, excitement... what can we do with this?
  - b. Anything you encounter can be used to create change
2. How can we connect things to generate new potential?
3. Are there practices we can borrow and adapt?
  - a. From other organizations, from other cultures

Question 1 will be the focus of the rest of this talk. There are 4 fundamental resources for change in organizations.



#### Four resources for change:

##### 1) Harnessing Networks

- “Webs of affiliations”
  - Not just technological networks like online social networks; but people-to-people networks
- Energy, emotion, information, and advice travel through these webs
- Research: Grand Rapids, the city was trying to draw people into the city change process with a survey; some viewed it as exclusive rather than inclusive and were angry.
  - The leaders said “how can we treat this anger as a resource for change?”



## LILA Member Call with Dr. Monica Worline

### Adaptive Culture & Resources for Change

---

- Reached out to the angriest citizens, who were the most engaged, and asked them to become a citizen advisory board to decide what to do with the survey results.
- Took the energy of anger to draw people into a new network structure; turned the energy into an asset.
- To resource networks as a lever for adaptive culture change, map who is included vs. excluded and connect the energizers to the issues

### 2) Roles & Role-Making

- Roles are expected patterns of behavior; they identify us to others and signal our zone of responsibility
- In addition to taking on a formal role, roles are created and re-created as people take on responsibilities and keep their work meaningful
  - Flexible role-making to incorporate new tasks, relationships, meanings
  - Emergent role-making
- Research: Large organization with dispersed members. People took on the role of “inclusion ambassadors” who looked at their environment to figure out how they could make their local environment more inclusive. It began as an emergent role in light of an adaptive need, and it became a formal role over time.

### 3) Key Routines

- Martha Feldman and Brian Pentland
- Routines are recurrent, interdependent ways of accomplishing work
- Research: large healthcare organization that wants to create a culture of compassionate care. What are the key routines that help or hinder people from engaging in compassionate care? We found that during the shift care process, people were not compassionate; a source of blame and an energy sapper. They invited people to create a mindfulness and compassion routine. It was a small change with a major impact.
- Because routines are taken-for-granted patterns, small changes can have big effects

### 4) Lived Values

- Values are deep assumptions about what is good and appropriate, but they are not necessarily amenable to espoused change
- How do we tap into lived values, the sources of what is taken as common sense in the organization, to create change? To introduce new ideas into people’s experience.
- Research: An educational program was trying to teach adaptability. We did an improv activity with staff and students; emphasized the messages of adaptability, but it felt like a one-off activity. So we thought, how can we change the lived values in this same direction? Suggested to make improv into a practice, whenever



## LILA Member Call with Dr. Monica Worline

### Adaptive Culture & Resources for Change

---

someone enters a program or a classroom, take it as an improvisational moment to integrate them into the space. That's a challenging practice that makes you think about this value more deeply.

#### As you create adaptive cultures, think about:

- How can I treat everything as a **resource for change**?
- How do I think about using the **social architecture** of my organization to resource change?
  - Networks – connections & structures
  - Roles – existing & emergent
  - Routines – small change, big impact
  - Values – what is lived vs. espoused
- Note this is the subject of a new book with Jane Dutton coming out in February 2017.



## LILA Member Call with Dr. Monica Worline

### Adaptive Culture & Resources for Change

---

#### Community Discussion

- Teresa Roche: I like this perspective because it helps you not miss the juicy moments where there might be resources you are not seeing.
- Laurent Bernard: I feel encouraged by the approach we took at Steelcase. In our culture transformation we started to think that leadership was the most important thing, but the things that Monica described are actually more effective. Instead of “routine” we use the term “ritual” to make it more appealing. When we open a new innovation center, we ask them to come up with rituals that will create the kind of culture we want. People found it very engaging.
  - Monica agreed that rituals or routines are so valuable; inviting people to engage in rituals or create them is an important doorway toward contagion. Once people have seen their power, you can use that same logic or “common sense” to invite them to re-imagine other kinds of routines as well.
  - When I talk to people trying to architect major cultural change, I ask them to think about *all* the decisions they make. For example, in the healthcare setting, they have all these rituals for end-of-life care, to make it compassionate, so I asked them to apply this same sense to their decision-making around retirement pensions. What if you extend the same compassion to that discussion? Change the decision making routine into an opportunity for cultural change.
- David Hooten: At Cigna, we are shifting our focus from trying to “engage” people to “inspire” people. How does that resonate with you?
  - When you think of the shift from engaging to inspiring, for you, what is the essence of that shift?
    - It’s sort of push vs. pull; from trying to drive, measure, accelerate to getting people to take ownership on their own.
  - I think exploring what you mean by the difference as a team will be a space to uncover the resources you have available to make that change.
  - Inspiration means to breath into. It taps into the power of passing emotions around an organization. The feeling of being inspired is tied to feeling beauty, wonder in organizations. I studied inspiration during my dissertation which was about courage in systems and inspiration comes along with role-modeling and watching what happens in the system.
  - What are the resources we have to inspire? How can everything we do as leaders be put to use to inspire, in addition to whatever else it is supposed to do?
- Peter Hutton and Nancy Caruso: At Beaver Country Day School we are setting up a research and design center. Trying to get people to re-think the teacher’s role and the question is how to staff the center. Could we hire people with the right mindset and ask them to figure out their roles? We never tried that before but maybe we should.



## LILA Member Call with Dr. Monica Worline

### Adaptive Culture & Resources for Change

---

- I think that sounds smart, very adaptive. If you search for “role as resource” you can find organizational scholarship on this.
- Invite others to be part of the process too. This involves the social network. Invite everyone to think about what kind of roles and responsibilities would create the kind of future desired. Even if they don’t end up in the final position, it will give them some inspiration and a repertoire of community desires.
- Monica said that she doesn’t like surveys either.
  - I don’t want to throw them under the bus, but I think because surveys are so easy to do now, along with the pressure to associate everything with a number, they are over-used.
  - The survey is not just a measurement; it is also an intervention. The way of measuring may not help you create the kind of culture you want. It may not resource the kind of collaboration you want to resource. Ask if it will resource the kind of relationships you want, the kind of collaboration you want, the kinds of knowing you want to privilege, etc.
- Josh Alwitt. Can you say more about role as resource? Even creating a role is a cultural signal that can drive change; how does that work?
  - Roles are, by definition, socially shared expectations about our zones of responsibilities in a system. So they have a symbolic signaling function.
  - That’s part of their resource value. How you name a role, how you symbolically identify it, communicates to the whole organization about expectations.
  - 3 ways that a role is a resource
    - They delineate the tasks that we do as part of our job;
    - They delineate the relationships we should have to accomplish those tasks;
    - They delineate the meaning of our work and how it connects to the broader vision. Roles help resource the understanding between my individual contribution and the purpose of the organization overall.
  - Amy Resneski and her colleagues write on job-crafting: all those elements can be reshaped. Can you re-imagine the tasks you do as part of your role more in line with this cultural change? E.g. a more collaborative culture. Ask every role in the organization how they can shift their role’s **tasks** to be more collaborative. Ask them to say who they would need to have **relationships** with regularly in order to live out that collaborative culture. And, ask them about the **meaning**. Rearticulate how what you do relates to the cultural agenda.
  - In the city of Louisville, mayor is trying to create a compassionate city. In the transit department, they had a problem with violence. So they built networks of all the people working in transit including bus drivers and asked them to do a design thinking exercise. How can your role feed into compassion? The bus drivers said, we shouldn’t be bus drivers, that’s the task. The role is “stewards of safe passage through the city.” One of the things we do is drive the bus, but



## LILA Member Call with Dr. Monica Worline

### Adaptive Culture & Resources for Change

---

that's not all. So the meaning of their role shifted to match the compassionate culture initiative.