

THORLO: An Entrepreneur's Vision of Sustainability

“What ensues when you commit to a cause larger than yourself? You become it. It changes you for the better.”

*Jim Throneburg, CEO and Owner,
THORLO Socks, Statesville, NC*

This is a story about a company whose idealistic and successful leader has long been engaged in re-inventing it as an American-based, community-rooted, profitable manufacturer and retailer. It is a case history of classic entrepreneurial skills at work, of a company that has excelled at reading changes emerging in the world and responding creatively in order to open up unexpected opportunities.

Jim Throneburg (JLT, as he is known at THORLO), owner and CEO of THORLO, a well-known hosiery company in Statesville, NC, sensed years ago that coming events would present unprecedented challenges and possibilities for business and communities. He was convinced that the social and environmental challenges of our time could be effectively addressed by new, practical ways of designing organizations and carrying out work. Both his company and his career have been dedicated to creating those possibilities.

Beginning in 2005, JLT teamed up with a consultant versed in cutting-edge systems thinking and attracted a team of leaders who shared his aspirations. Together, they are creating an innovative company and culture, which—though very much a work in progress—already offers an inspiring example to other leaders who are striving to bring about sustainable futures for their own enterprises. It's all happening in a small town in piedmont North Carolina.

THORLO's unique hosiery products are designed to provide preventive foot care and are sold in 37 countries. Since its founding in 1953, the company has provided outstanding craftsmanship and quality in an industry more typically focused on economies of scale. Over the years, THORLO's offer has been enhanced to include an unrivaled responsiveness to consumer needs.

From the start, THORLO's leaders understood that success in delivering consumer value depends on the commitment of all employees. Consequently, they have integrated a remarkably supportive and collegial culture into THORLO's business processes. As a result, the company has consistently grown in number of employees and dramatically increased the scope of its product lines.

In the last five years, JLT has engaged his leadership team in a mutual exploration of new socio-economic principles called *ecosynomics*. Ecosynomics is the study of the orientations, states and behaviors of specific social systems that produce outstanding levels of sustainable performance and of human meaning in organizations and communities of all types. Ecosynomics is being developed by the Institute for Strategic Clarity (ISC), a social systems research group committed to understanding and communicating new principles and practices that improve social health on large scales. The ongoing dialogue between THORLO and ISC has helped THORLO to evolve its innovative, practical business and culture.

The capacity to create and sustain high levels of social well-being—what ISC calls *harmonic vibrancy*—is emerging in business, organizational and community experiments world-wide. It is ISC's conviction that a new social-economic paradigm is arising that can address the challenges of individual, organizational, and societal transformation. High levels of vibrancy, well beyond what is typically experienced in conventional social systems, translate into capacities to transform

both individuals and organizations. THORLO serves as an example of this type of social pioneering.

I. Partnering for Innovation

In the early 1990's, JLT began to feel that emerging business and social challenges—on or just over the horizon—would demand new kinds of organizations. He embarked upon a study of biological research into living, self-organizing, self-evolving, systems in search of clues to sustainability. Could ecological systems, he wondered, be a metaphor for the kind of human organizations that can effectively operate in a time of increasing social complexity? Research has shown that complex ecological systems demonstrate a capacity to create effective, multi-layered interdependencies among all participating organisms. As a result, they can sustain themselves over centuries, using a resilient, self-evolving power that enables them to adapt and thrive, despite external crises.

The key to this resiliency is that these living systems work cooperatively, rather than competitively. They optimize results for all organisms in the system. JLT saw that these systems contradict the dominant organizational behavior and values of long-term competition, resource scarcity—in short, the game of winners and losers. He sensed that a self-aware social system made up of interdependent partner-players could operate completely differently from mainstream business models. Further, he felt that these organizations would need to build their employees' capacities to connect more and more closely with each other and with their customers. This kind of partnership could build brand-value collaboratively and successfully for a long period of time, capitalizing on intimate collective knowledge of how to navigate crises and respond creatively to opportunities.

THORLO's journey to learn to be and to act as a more self-aware, living system has been at times bumpy and difficult. It took time to find the kind of senior leaders ready to step into such a context. JLT needed to find professional managers who were dissatisfied with the status quo and were also convinced that THORLO would offer a long-term exploration into real business value, not merely an academic exchange.

JLT: "I failed three times, with different senior teams, to manifest my vision... a vision of THORLO as a living, self-evolving, self-organizing system. I was convinced that this would be our future competitive advantage, but it required a community of leaders who could shift away from an old layered, hierarchical structure that was inwardly focused, rule- and regulation-based. We needed to be able to develop the responsiveness and flexibility increasingly required of a globally competitive entity. This demanded leaders who were aware that modern, interactive communications and other technologies offer opportunities to transition away from antiquated "people control" systems, non-value-added work and excess layers of management. We had to evolve into a company of people in deep dialogue as they work: We needed to tap into a unique reservoir of unrealized potential, governed by common trust and by the systems they co-design under the pressure of ever-shorter time cycles.

"At first we had no shared understanding of how to *be*, how to *live* the experience of a living system ourselves. We had only my concepts and our initial awkward experiments. I was not able to bring our leaders to an experience of a collaborative, collective awareness of a living system. We had a team of experts, executives who still saw business in terms of a linear, incremental model."

During this difficult birthing process, as JLT describes it, some talented executives came and went and the vision remained unrealized. A turnaround moment occurred, however, when one day he experienced the humbling insight that his own way of holding the vision was the major obstacle to its manifestation. “When I finally ‘showed up’—and by that, I mean getting beyond my own ego, being real, vulnerable, and acting as a collaborative equal in dialogue, not as ‘boss’—then others appeared who could work in the same spirit.”

A senior leadership team of five was formed and earnestly set about the task of bringing forth the new way that they all felt was possible. But the going was not easy. Though they had a strong sense of shared intention, they could not yet sufficiently imagine or create the practical forms to enable them to establish it on the ground. Here is the story in their own words:

JLT: “We were struggling in the desert...We needed a practical model, not academic, not white collar. It had to work for everyone.... We had been through two successful business phases from our founding by my father, Lewis, in the early 50’s. The first was a technology phase from 1950s-70s in which we created the ‘best-manufactured, quality product.’ The second was a marketing phase from 1970s – 90s in which we developed a new model of ‘customer affiliation with the brand.’ I knew we had to master the next phase, which I called ‘our people as the heart of the living system.’ But for quite a while, we were not able to do it.”

Jay Harris, then head of IT, now “front-end business” leader, describes the situation this way. “JLT had always had a ‘possibility vision’ beyond that of a traditional management hierarchy or family-run business where ‘I’m the boss and you need to do what I say.’ He held the vision, and we would listen and talk about it. But when JLT pointed to the moon, we sometimes thought the moon was his finger and so did he. Intuitively we knew we were plugged into a bigger whole, so we dumped the puzzle on the floor, but could not see the picture on the box. The full meaning and context was not yet clear. We made many good, conscious, collaborative decisions, but we also made just as many dumb, bone-headed ones.

“In hindsight, I can see that we all wanted a non-hierarchical structure driven by a craftsman’s attention to detail, an entrepreneurial spirit of collective ownership, and a sustainable business model. We craved an environment where everyone in the community worked for more than a paycheck, for something bigger than him/herself.... But we didn’t yet have a way for our group to manifest this deeper intention, other than just working hard. We all sensed the same desired outcome, but frequently it came out in three differently-worded versions that had us tripping over each other.”

Richard Oliver, then head of Finance and currently President, characterizes his experience of this phase as follows. “I had a love for operations and a systems understanding of operations. I had a fairly strong conceptual grasp of systems thinking, but not a real practical grasp I could work with and share with my colleagues on the job. I was working from an expert perspective, rather than a systems view. We were all still relating mainly out of ordinary thinking and our content expertise – looking at issues in an analytic way, which tends to break everything into parts and argue for the one ‘winning’ interpretation.”

A critical breakthrough came in 2005 when JLT brought in Jim Ritchie-Dunham (called JRD at THORLO), a consultant specializing in systems thinking, to develop a business system simulator to show how an organization can be understood as being based on the same principles as a biological system. JRD leads the Institute for Strategic Clarity, which had had been working for some years in a more theoretical way on exactly the same challenge as the THORLO team. The synergy of their complementary approaches generated a new level of understanding and invention.

As the following comments demonstrate, the leadership team found that the conceptual and practical frameworks that JRD brought to the party enabled them to understand, with new clarity and certainty, the vision they had been struggling to manifest. They now began to move to shape and lead the organization in more effective ways.

JLT: “Five years ago I hired Jim Ritchie-Dunham, a systems thinking consultant, to develop a business system simulator to show how a business acts on the same principles as a living cell, a biological system. My senior colleagues were all functional experts or linear incrementalist thinkers, who did not see the connections and relationships I was seeing. They had patiently participated in the conversation with me for several years, but they still did not get it. Part of the problem was my communication style. JRD had a way of helping them see it practically through experience. Then we really began to see ourselves as a collaborative collective. We started to take off.”

Richard Oliver: “JRD helped me to begin to engage people I worked with from a systems view rather than as an expert. When we shifted out of ordinary thinking based on our content expertise, our conversations began to include “possibility thinking.” Possibility thinking enquires into different perspectives on a situation that can build on one another and produce collective insights not available in ordinary analytic problem-solving. We began to get how a non-linear interpretation of causality actually works, how things in a natural system are part of a bigger whole, bigger than one point of view. We each influence the ‘whole situation’ in some obvious, and in some subtle, unintended ways, which may not always be clear at the start. We began to get a practical grasp of how this way of thinking together leads to better business decisions.”

The kind of shift Richard points to enabled members of the leadership team to relate to each other and to the business issues they faced in a quite different way. They found themselves—individually and collectively—increasingly able to draw on inner resources previously not accessible to them and to perform at new levels.

Jay Harris: “With JRD, we began to see beyond JLT to the moon he was pointing to. We no longer needed JLT’s story. We saw him and each of us in one story. Now we were all talking about the moon, knowing we’re seeing the same story -- and the conversation shifted.

“I used to engage in a very structured, expert, business-centric mindset – ‘how do we go from here to here and who’s going to do that on our team?’ Contrast that with a very different awareness that we now cultivate deliberately. Now we presence: ‘What am I up to and why?’ That gets us to a conversational head and heart space that is inclusive of all the pieces we need to serve our loyal

customers. Now the pieces come in organically with a collective awareness of how they all actually fit.

“How do you differentiate between a head and a heart space? I was very skeptical at first, until I had an experience of being in a heart space and feeling how it better enabled us to serve the customer. I had been an athlete and knew such a space – the zone – from experience. But at first I felt, ‘Give me a break!’ Now we are not about ‘how to grow the business by 20%.’ Instead, we are about ‘Who are we being and how can we be in a way that will manifest what we want in a business setting?’ This is a completely different way to run the business.”

David Varsik, then head of R&D, currently head of Manufacturing: “JRD made it much richer for me – he helped us create a room where we could engage one another at a different level of consciousness. His ability to diagram what was working in a system and why enabled us to understand better the dynamics of THORLO’s business environment.

“Early on he showed us how a living system is always in flow – never static - everything always in movement. I began to experience how possibility flows, moves into probability and realized that out of one’s own conviction one can say: ‘This is real, this is going to happen.’ JRD’s introduction of the behavioral agreements (conscious or not) behind each part of a system—oneself, others, the whole collective—is a central insight for me. It gives me a way of relating that I am experiencing more and more in myself and in my colleagues among the leadership group and in my manufacturing unit, as well.”

Thomas Hudspeth, currently head of leadership development: “JRD brought us a language and tools that help us articulate the culture that we imagined and began to create. We’ve evolved our leadership conversations with all employees to be more invitational and enquiry-based. We no longer use the word ‘discipline.’ We stress in our leadership/mentoring process that the real opportunity is in relationship. It rests on the shoulders of leaders to be with anyone in our community who is struggling to contribute in a meaningful way so that we can bring about the outcomes we all want.... We can partner further with that person to help them get to a place where they experience more life. If they’re not excited about creating that for themselves here at THORLO then we help them see how they can have more life outside of THORLO.

“We always had a kind of open, trusting sense of being in service to something larger than ourselves. JRD brought in the dimension of whole and other(s) and how that connects with and opens up the individual beyond him/herself. We are moving beyond closed, declaratory statements to open, exploratory questions that get people beyond what they can see by themselves. Now there is an explicit invitation to have others enquire more, rather than just make a point. We have more participation, better ideas, more synthesis. In other words, we offer an invitation to enquiry and collective exploration that serves our customers better.”

“I had not been aware of systemic thinking pre-JRD. I never thought that solving a local problem was not necessarily solving **the** problem. Now we ask who needs to be in this conversation to have the best decision. Newcomers think it’s slow at first, but they see in time how it saves time, is more logical and serves our customer.”

The conceptual insights of ecosynomics, which Jim Richie-Dunham brought to THORLO, clearly had an energizing and liberating effect on this team in their efforts to develop an innovative organization. At the same time, the aspirations of JLT and his leadership team and their ongoing struggles to realize new competencies and practices had a profound effect on the evolution of ecosynomics.

JRD: “When I arrived at THORLO, I felt a very clear and strong sense of their deeper culture, which included service to the end consumer and to each other. I saw this in everyone, throughout the organization. They were struggling with how to name it, work with it, and bring leaders into a conversation about it. I brought an inquiry into what they were experiencing and language for describing it. Over time, as I became a member of the leadership team, I began to develop frameworks and processes for working with what we were discovering about how to live into the culture more deeply and more practically integrate it with the business. As leadership was taken up throughout the organization, there were many great discoveries along the way. This fertile playing field helped me see, embody, and work with new dimensions of ecosynomics I had not previously seen so clearly. We have been working collaboratively with these dimensions as they emerge, testing them on the ground at THORLO.”

II. Ecosynomics: How Vibrancy Works in a Living System

JRD helped THORLO’s leaders find a clearer way to think about and understand relationships and opportunities in their own living system. JRD calls this framework *ecosynomics*. It is a re-contextualizing of economic concepts designed to help individuals and communities become more aware of their possibilities and better able to leverage them successfully and sustainably. THORLO was already at least partially self-aware. It had a proven, entrepreneurial, successful brand, a working community, and a leadership group in dialogue about how to shift itself to a more self-aware, self-organizing, responsible level. What it lacked was a clear conceptual framework for understanding how to realize its aspirations and commitments.

Harmonic vibrancy is JRD’s name for the shared human experience that all of us have when we experience higher levels of performance, meaning and connection in our key relationships. The social vibrancy and health of a dynamic, interdependent system is the experience that the ecosynomic framework seeks to describe. JRD, JLT and other senior leaders now apply ecosynomic concepts to the strategic and operational innovations that THORLO had previously intuited and was partially implementing.

While THORLO has developed a unique language for its practices and systems, its leaders all acknowledge that ecosynomic concepts have been crucial to the business and cultural improvements they have evolved in recent years, including the actual experience of greater harmonic vibrancy on a practical operating level.

Ecosynomics, based on systems thinking, is a set of holistic principles and observations into how organizations and their stakeholders can sustain high levels of performance and well-being. Ecosynomics defines *harmonic vibrancy* in social systems as an energetic state of optimal health, well-being, and performance produced by the harmonious integration of five comprehensive dimensions of human relationship. These are the relationships to oneself, to others, to a collective, to spirit, and to nature. When these five fundamental aspects of an individual’s or a collective’s

reality—five “voices”—are integrated consciously, extraordinary and sustainable levels of performance and creativity can be experienced.

Harmonic vibrancy has an easily acknowledged empirical basis. JRD contends that, on a daily basis, each of us registers the experience of harmonic vibrancy at a partial or complete state. How aware we are of these states depends upon how conversant we are with the five voices. A larger vibrancy in a given system can be created that is palpably and demonstrably “more than the sum of the parts,” more than each of the voices is capable of energizing on its own.

When we focus on only one or a few of the five dimensions, ignoring the others, we invariably experience sub-optimal vitality and performance in all five dimensions. We all have examples from our own lives, however, of being in and sustaining real states of harmony, of deep satisfaction—in our families, workplace, or larger community. According to JRD, we do not need experts or studies to tell when we experience a real state of well-being and harmony. We immediately notice when we’re in a state of pain, confusion, or deep satisfaction in a social context.

When things are not going well in any or all of the dimensions, we can usually find someone or something to blame, or at least we can point a finger at the problem. We are typically less effective in solving the problem. When we seek, however, to listen to and bring all five voices into awareness when we address an issue or try to solve a problem, we can begin to see ways to achieve higher performance in our whole context. We begin to experience that understanding the larger social context in which we work or live requires us to listen to others’ needs and their impacts on ourselves and on others.

This is systems thinking in action at a practical daily level. Effective action in our own system means engaging other players (the parts of our larger whole) in meaningful conversation and collaboration. Then we experience better performance and deeper meaning. We are learning to leverage all of the parts in the system and the system as a whole.

As we study systems of which we are members, we may see that our ordinary self-interest or our immediate concerns are often the biggest barrier to system-wide effectiveness in planning and acting with other members of the system. How can we move to healthier, more effective system-states? Ecosynomics suggests that each individual in a system can acknowledge and transcend his/her ordinary self-interest and seek to collaborate harmoniously with others in the system, while at the same time contributing his/her deepest gifts to the whole. This process creates greater vibrancy and system effectiveness than working solely out of personal self-interest.

Ecosynomics describes how higher states of system performance and well-being are blocked through less “harmonic” behavioral states in individuals and in communities. Practical insights into how social systems can work in new ways are being applied in many contexts globally.

The experience of creating harmonic vibrancy requires intuitive, as well as analytic, thinking. Intuition, the capacity to cognize the whole as a whole, rather than the sum of its parts, enables us to see what is emerging before it fully develops. We can observe things in their *becoming*; it is a way of “knowing what is around the corner.” Intuition implicitly partakes of the purpose and future of the whole. Intuition applied to systems thinking enables us to objectively observe the causal relationships of parts and wholes and to see not-yet-present, emerging patterns. New possibilities can arise in one’s mind as fully-given intuitive pictures. These are spontaneous snapshots that, when explored in dialogue with colleagues, can turn future possibilities into probabilities.

THORLO describes individual and group intuitive thinking capacities as being fostered in “possibility or enquiry conversations,” dialogue on business or cultural concerns. In discussions, employees are encouraged to share new perceptions as they arise. These new perceptions of possibilities can then be explored and become part of decision-making. Intuition and analysis are

integrated in such conversations. It is crucial not to jump immediately to conclusion or solution, but to cultivate the capacity to bring everyone’s views into the dialogue and to see what new solutions might emerge as a unity from diverse views.

The Practice of Systems Thinking

Systems thinking evolved in the 1950s in many fields, including biology, engineering, economics, anthropology, sociology and therapy. It is now being applied increasingly to organizational dynamics.

System thinking integrates two modes of cognition—analytic and intuitive thinking. Both types of cognition result in insights into how behavior produced by a system actually drives the system and how it can be shifted to improve cooperation, well-being, and performance. Systems thinking assumes that emergent system properties that cannot be detected by analysis alone can be found by observing the feedback patterns between the parts and the wholes in the system.

Systems are innately collaborative and holistic as their feedback loops intimately connect all of their parts, with measurable, logical effects—for good or ill—on the behavior of the whole. Students of systems thinking are therefore taught to see and work with the causal relationships between the parts and in the relationships of the parts to the whole.

In support of the development of such organizational capabilities and practices, ecosynomics offers a set of behavioral agreements and a set of underlying axioms. The agreements and axioms express ways we can understand and work with the five dimensions of harmonic vibrancy in order to more consciously enhance our experience of working together. The behavioral agreements are described below.

Agreements Leading to Harmonic Vibrancy

Basic behavioral agreements around the five “voices” or dimensions of relationship create and sustain the human social systems that we participate in, starting with our own “self.” Typically, these behavioral agreements are not fully conscious. When we decide to act in clear relationship with these dimensions, however, we can take far greater responsibility, not only for what we do, but also for what happens to us individually and collectively.

Harmonically vibrant experience is produced by acting from our highest intentions and feelings towards self, others, the collective, nature, and spirit. We are ultimately better rewarded by the five dimensions if we seek first to serve, rather than take, from them. This altruistic approach is paradoxical, yet empirically verifiable. In system language, a more sustainable system is created when all of its parts/voices are in healthy, interdependent, working relationship. It may seem counter-intuitive, but “self” becomes more dynamically creative, sustainable and secure by giving its will over to what is best for all dimensions

(including itself) and by not seeking to advance a strictly self-based agenda. Strictly self-based agendas sub-optimize the system and increase costs, waste and system problems for everyone.

THORLO has defined behavioral agreements in the first three dimensions: self, others and whole (collective). Leaders at THORLO have not directly worked on the nature and spirit voices, though they acknowledge their importance.

Each behavioral commitment guides thought and action. Each commitment seeks the highest possible system vibrancy *by committing to serve what is inclusive of and larger than the self and what is potential in the system, though not yet realized*. The principle is that the best possibilities have yet to emerge in us and in the system in which we participate. You can create and refine those possibilities in dialogue with your colleagues, then put them into action through collaborative agreement:

Harmonic vibrancy Agreements between Individuals in a Collective

The following is quoted from the THORLO Employee Handbook:

We choose to make these agreements, for the expression of greater vibrancy in our relationships. In recognizing the power of these agreements to guide our interactions, we will witness each other's realization of our deeper potential ongoingly.

Self 1) To acknowledge this act of witnessing, I choose to accept, step into, and contribute from my creative self, my greatest gifts, as deeply as I can see them now.

*Other 2) I choose to accept and support your stepping into and contributing **of** the best you can be, as you request the same of me. I believe our collective is healthiest when you and I each contribute from our best.*

Whole 3) I choose to increase my awareness of how I, you, and we benefit when we are healthy as a collective. It is these choices that lead to realizing the sustainable relationships that realize sustainable value for our collective.

These choices are agreements that we make with ourselves and with others. These agreements are founded in harmonic vibrancy principles of collaboration.

An agreement to support harmonic vibrancy is a decision made with another person to benefit each individual as well as the whole. Human social systems, starting with the simplest agreements between two people, are built from networks of agreements (conscious or unconscious) that can always be renegotiated. The conscious harmonic vibrancy agreements described above effectively bridge the separate reality and striving of each individual by creating a shared, agreed-upon reality. They do so by acknowledging that in a healthy system, only conscious, shared agreements can lead to optimal states of well-being in the future. Making such systemic agreements creates new, better futures.

Harmonic vibrancy agreements bring more sustainable social realities into being, as they are driven from a collaborative motive, beyond egotistic self-interest. These agreements arise from the understanding that ego-driven, self-based agreements only advance the individual's agenda at the expense of the larger system. As noted above, focusing purely on self-based agreements can be objectively and empirically shown to *always* sub-optimize system performance. They are unsustainable and system-divisive, as they inevitably create more problems than they solve. Ironically, they diminish the capacity of the self-interested individual to manifest his or her own best possibilities.

Each individual's awareness of his/her responsibility to make and manage systemic, behavioral agreements is the basis for a healthy, productive, collaborative future for any organization or community.

Axioms Underlying Harmonic Vibrancy

Underlying the behavioral agreements that lead to social vibrancy is a set of social-system axioms. Axioms explain that the behavioral choices we make to create a healthy system can optimize the system, whether we are conscious of them or not. The axioms show that we intuitively seek to sustain a vibrant system by integrating the five voices as much as possible. Becoming more conscious of the axioms enables us to further strengthen the capacities of the system and of ourselves, other members, nature and spirit.

Healthy systems work, usually unconsciously, to improve relationships between and among each of the five dimensions. The system axioms explain how connections among and between the five aspects of human relationship are further enhanced when we are aware of and consciously act from these principles. Here are the four main axioms:

- i) **Holonism.** This axiom refers to the *level of analysis* of human behavior, which is based on the awareness that the whole one sees is a part of a larger whole made up of discrete parts, which is in turn, part of a yet larger whole, etc. This is a holon. In addition, just as the whole contains each part, each individual (part) contains the qualitative reality of the whole, as in a hologram.

Wholeness can be grasped and realized by seeking to understand and work with the relationships among all key parts in the system in order to understand the larger behavior that the system is producing. The capacity of individuals to apprehend wholes is rooted in the fact that each of us mirrors the whole situation of which s/he is a part and so can intuitively sense her/his identity with it.

The familiar THORLO question, “Do we have all the right people in the room on this issue?” shows an awareness that a holistic system solution comes only when all “members” (representing parts of the whole situation) are present and are working through their perceptions of the whole situation. (See more detail on THORLO’s practical applications below.) This suggests that one looks at a social system from the perspectives of the whole and the part simultaneously.

- ii) **Vibrancy maximization.** The intended purpose or outcome of an individual’s behavior is to maximize the social health—the highest possible harmonically vibrant goal—of the system he/she is a member of. This includes the self as a part of that system. The individual experiences this vibrancy and works with it through building and maintaining a vibrant connection with each axis. In the case of an organization, a vibrant state in each individual supports the organization’s main goal or mission, as the individual is supporting the ongoing development of his relationships to the five dimensions in the organization.

When you are seeking vibrancy in relation to the five dimensions in your organization, all of your actions must be seen as both a *means* (an ongoing process) and an *end* (*producing measurable improved results*). The individual and the whole (organization) experience and sustain a more vibrant state of health. *Health* here means a qualitative, inner state of felt well-being which also produces an outer material state of well-being.

The experience of harmonic vibrancy is based on an intuitive—and as you become more aware, a conscious—inquiry into each of the five dimensions. The

inquiry is pursued through conversation, which allows you to increase your level of conscious awareness.

Another common question at THORLO, when team conversations are in a low vibrancy and disconnected from the larger aim is: “Are we on purpose here?” This seeks to remind participants of THORLO’s larger system goal (mission) and to ask if the issue being addressed is appropriately tied to brand stewardship. In other words, is the discussion creating sustainable value through sustainable relationships? Participants tend to speak their experience of “being on purpose” and the conversation usually gets back on a more “vibrant” track. It may take a few minutes to get everyone’s view, but the energy shifts and the task is completed more effectively.

iii) Systemic leveraging of abundance in relationship to behavior. This axiom addresses the question: How can the individual and the collective relate to each other to optimize their working relationships? Individuals and their collectives connect behaviorally through their web of ongoing relationships—as parts and wholes. The axiom states that only through a holistic, harmonic understanding of the system of working relationships can high leverage points can be identified to generate greater abundance or greater productivity and meaning for the system as a whole as well as for its respective parts.

Typically, leaders focus only on the individual parts of a system, seeing them as a whole by aggregating them as a sum of diverse and similar strengths and capacities. But this does not provide the insights needed for optimal system change. The chances of producing unintended and/or counter-productive consequences are great if the parts are worked with as separate, unconnected entities in this manner. Likewise, if leaders focus only on the whole, the individual parts are subsumed and their specific gifts are not sufficiently seen, evoked and leveraged. It is only through an understanding of the dynamic, ongoing feedback relationships between parts and wholes within the system that one can know where to coordinate actions at key leverage points in order to shift the system as a whole to achieve the desired results.

Leaders and their collectives can increase their state of vibrancy by leveraging their abundance—a qualitative and quantitative dimension of what they “already have” and “what they can create”—through behavior (how they interact with each other). Leveraging abundance here means that the intangible and tangible strengths, capacities, and potential that individual members and the human system as a whole carry, are further increased by how individuals, in dialogue, plan and agree to act and then implement their actions together. These behavioral choices, based on highest leverage mutual understandings, are crucial for optimally productive system shifts.

Individuals are able to evoke strengths and gifts in each other when they share their own deeper sense of possibilities in a dialogue. This dynamic conversational synthesis builds a capacity in all participants to intuit, plan and implement actions that lead a stronger collective for the whole and for all of its parts.

This process involves more than aggregating each person’s separate ideas and intuitions. It is a collective, energizing, building process in which new understandings and solutions are generated that did not exist beforehand in any participant’s awareness. Such collaborative inquiry builds a collective will and

increases “abundance” when participants see and agree upon qualitative and quantitative improvements that can be put into action.

- iv) Systemic leveraging of abundance in relationship to resources.** Individuals and the collectives to which they belong seek to leverage their relationships to the tangible and intangible resources that sustain them. This optimizes the resources needed by the system and its members. These resources, material (natural) and innovative ideas, feelings, intentions (spiritual) will be more abundant (i.e. accessible and actionable) when individuals are acting in harmony with each other and with their collective as a whole.

Abundance of resources is a function of one’s relationship to these resources. All human and non-human resources can become more abundant, based on how the individual and the collective perceive and work with them. Scarcity is also an expression of how a system chooses to be in relationship to resources. Where harmonic vibrancy is low, human and non-human resources will inevitably be perceived as scarce and competition for them will become the norm; where it is high, the resources will appear as actually or potentially plentiful.

If the amount of a needed resource builds up faster than it is used, then that resource becomes more available to the system. Likewise, if the needed resource is used up more quickly than it is replenished, it becomes scarce, less available. Low harmonic vibrancy generates a scarcity mindset, which tends to focus on how much of a key resource is being used by whom. On the other hand, an abundance mindset, which is characteristic of high harmonic vibrancy, sees how much such a resource can be cultivated and maintained to keep the entire system healthy and prosperous. A tangible or intangible resource, then, can be in abundance for the system if members decide to cultivate more of it for whoever needs it and to consume it at a slower rate than they cultivate it. They can always decide to make resources more present and available in order to bring forth new possibilities.

What looks impossible from a conventional analysis of “what we currently have here” can easily shift when individuals creatively inquire into new ways of relating to resources. The entrepreneurial mind typically operates in this way, not acknowledging conventional limits. It is always willing to generate and test creative solutions to “impossible” situations. However, when one operates strictly from ordinary self-interest or “self-and-a-few-key-others” orientation, there is always scarcity of resources. From such a scarcity position, one relates to resources in a few limited ways—as a winner or loser or in a “more for you is less for me” mentality. These orientations are by nature restrictive and seek no resource optimization for the whole. They automatically preclude cooperative or collaborative solutions.

When one operates from a harmonically vibrant place, however, many possibilities are seen as ways to access resources that may not, at first glance, seem immediately present or in sufficient quantity. When a group cultivates the capacity to collectively imagine, plan and systemically leverage resources, it does not see itself as resource-poor. It understands that it is limited only by imagination and relationship.

See quotes in section 1 and below in section III for examples of how JLT, Richard Oliver and Jay Harris have articulated elements of the creative, actionable harmonic vibrancy orientation to the resources that THORLO now employs. The following quote from JLT epitomizes this orientation.

JLT: “The game of the future depends upon integration and decentralization and living systems innately play it to maintain themselves. A living system grows people’s relationships and enables their capabilities to be used. It’s so synergistic that we can’t calculate the savings. I have a fundamental belief in the living intelligence of the universe. In a living system an idea whose time is here draws resources to it to manifest. Our drive to listen for that kind of sustainability keeps us in the game.”

THORLO’s leaders are working out of a present-centered, flexible orientation to possibility instead of a fixed, past-based orientation to resources and challenges. They exemplify the harmonic vibrancy orientation to resources, rather than a conventional, self-interest-based, orientation.

In summary, we have described a conceptual framework for understanding and enhancing the harmonic vibrancy experience that includes:

- Five dimensions of relationship that comprise a harmonically vibrant, living system
- Behavioral agreements that optimize an harmonically vibrant system in its self, other, whole relationship aspects
- Principles that describe how individuals intuitively work to create harmonically vibrant systems

When consciously worked with, this conceptual and process framework can help leaders create more self-aware, self-organizing, responsible systems. Let’s look now in more detail at how THORLO is implementing these concepts through its own unique corporate culture.

III. THORLO’s Innovations

What were some of the key innovations that THORLO’s leaders developed, as they became more fluent in applying the insights of living systems? Following are some of the ways in which THORLO conceives of and operates its business and develops its people-culture, which JLT sees as the heart and core of a self-aware living system.

Sustainable Value Through Sustainable Relationships

Consistent with the axioms and agreements underlying harmonic vibrancy, THORLO’s mission statement—“Realizing sustainable value through realizing sustainable relationships”—reflects a core conviction that the sources of effectiveness and success lie in developing work relationships based on trust, respect, and mutual support. Exceptional care for the quality of relationships extends to all primary THORLO stakeholders: customers, employees, suppliers, business partners, and key others.

One way THORLO nurtures these relationships is by continually assessing itself, while making decisions and carrying out transactions against standards it calls the “four integrities.” This is a set of metrics for ensuring integrity in products, business systems, capital management, and culture. People in all aspects of the business are expected to sustain trust, respect and honesty in

their relationships with stakeholders by internalizing and operating from the four integrities. The four standards help keep everyone and every part of the business oriented to the mission.

Product integrity focuses on the needs the company serves—what the business provides and why. Here product is understood to be everything that the company does, from making socks to serving customers and maintaining business partner relationships.

Business systems integrity focuses on how the company addresses the business need—these are the processes and structures it uses to source raw materials, manufacture, distribute, market and retail its products.

Capital management integrity involves how THORLO supports financial resources, what it invests capital in, and how monetary resources are stewarded.

Culture integrity concerns “who and how” people are being “in relationship” when developing THORLO’s products and services. Here culture is understood to be the wider circle of THORLO’s identity and how it engages with the world within which the business sits.

Holding these dimensions as elements of integrity highlights the importance of achieving high levels of all four elements in every decision. One cannot hold high integrity in one element and not in the others; they are too deeply interwoven. While some managers in other organizations may know this intellectually, THORLO has integrated this understanding into its operations by systemizing communications to make measurement of these elements a critical component of all decisions.

This has had a direct impact on the business; each department directly takes up all four of these standards rather than assuming that someone else in another area will watch out for that perspective. The results are a deeper shared understanding throughout the company, better relationships across departments and more clarity about how everyone’s efforts are coming together to serve the company’s deeper intentions. Throughout THORLO, people report an increased sense of ownership of the whole business, no matter where they sit in the supply chain.

Another standard practice, which reflects THORLO’S remarkable focus on customers, is the way decision-making conversations are initiated. Before any discussion of the specific issues is begun, each participant in the meeting is asked to express to the group how his/her unit’s role in this matter is likely to affect the company’s “bonded loyal customers.” Commitment to current relationships is imaginatively brought in at the start of each meeting, not as an abstract principle, but as a concrete reality which is to guide deliberations and decisions.

No “Managing” of People

Another aspect of the THORLO culture reflects the exceptional regard for employees which underlies the collegial relationships enjoyed at every level of the enterprise. There are no “managers” and no “top management,” only leaders and employees. All employees are given the opportunity to self-select into leadership roles, to “step up” when they are ready, regardless of seniority or position. This commitment is clearly reflected in the language of the company. As in all companies, there are senior leaders of functions and departments, who are typically members of specific leadership groups, but they are not referred to as “managers.”

Management of physical assets and management of capital is acknowledged and spoken of in those terms, but not management of people. The “sustainable relationships” central to the company’s mission are understood to rest upon greater mutual respect than the conventional terminology expresses. The language employees choose to use in characterizing those relationships helps create enlarged possibilities. It encourages everyone to think and act at once independently *and* collaboratively; that is, to learn and act out of the best capacities in themselves, in others, and in the community as a whole. Careful language creates a collegiality and friendliness that is palpable to the visitor.

From a conventional perspective, this unusual linguistic rigor may seem excessive or trivial, but THORLO’s leadership is well aware that the language we use in our conversations creates our reality. We all know how friendly, respectful, and constructive language can elicit trust, candor, and commitment. Much of the language of modern organizational life, however, is not of this nature. Too often, it makes us feel as if we are merely means to a corporate end, “assets” or replaceable cogs in the organizational machine to be used and managed for greater productivity and efficiency. At THORLO there has been a conscious evolution towards transcending this “industrial model” language of command and control by striving to speak in a way that evokes the highest capacity, creativity, and responsibility in each employee.

Keeping the Business Generative through Relationship

Regard for integrity in relationships with multiple stakeholders provides direction and gives concrete reality to THORLO’s mission, without reifying or freezing it in forms unresponsive to the emerging demands and opportunities of the business. Its mission—which includes no mention of socks!—is expressive of a determination not to let THORLO “be institutionalized” or “go to sleep” by blindly following existing strategies and processes or by adopting management fads. The regard for integrity reflects a deep desire and sensibility among employees for real, honest give-and-take, sensitive to the possibilities of each encounter. Leaders value creative interactions with stakeholders, in which they honor SOPs, process requirements, departmental responsibilities, or proven protocols. They strive to do all this, however, in a way that keeps possibilities in play, not by acting mechanically or simply “by the book.”

The conviction that authentic relationships create more business, organizational growth, and value is reflected in the evolution of THORLO’s offer to its customers. The company moved from an initial devotion to craftsmanship and highest product quality to a focus on developing customers’ loyalty based upon their conviction that THORLO produces the best sock in many activity categories.

The new value proposition focuses on educating every potential customer about preventive foot health. This offer is a direct reflection of deep, long-term learning relationships with thousands of customers. Preventive foot health represents a commitment to universal education on how socks

and shoes can work together to create greater health and quality of life. As well as being visionary and differentiating THORLO from other sock-makers and sellers, the new offer reflects the ecosynomic axiom regarding holonism as a path to build awareness. The product evolved from a smaller part of a whole—those customers who wanted high-quality socks—to a bigger, more sophisticated stand for a larger social whole. The larger whole includes everyone who wants a more comfortable, active, and healthier quality of life based on knowledge and experience of comprehensive foot care.

THORLO's employees relate positively to this commitment to a larger collective whole, which is implicit in the mission. The mission is seen not as an intellectual construct, but as a way of living an expanding, evolving purpose. From product quality leadership to foot health for everyone on the planet – this is an aspiration to give something to the world bigger than THORLO's ROI.

Brand Stewardship

The emphasis on relationships so clearly expressed in the THORLO mission is also integral to the company's interpretation of leadership, which it characterizes as “brand stewardship.” In effect, brand stewardship functions as a proxy for harmonic vibrancy, as it is expressed in the axioms and agreements of ecosynomics. It is the super-ordinate organizing principle that produces maximum leverage for the system as a whole by enabling the highest expression of the self/other/whole ecosynomic dimensions.

Brand stewardship serves as a master criterion, or final arbiter, for assessing plans, attitudes and actions within the organization. Leaders who embrace it continually ask themselves, “Is this conversation in the spirit of brand stewardship and, if not, how can it be brought more fully into that alignment?” This practice enables them to integrate the dynamic of harmonic vibrancy into the day-to-day, pragmatic decisions and activities of the business.

THORLO's leaders are keenly aware that becoming a Brand Steward requires deep self-awareness and ongoing commitment to their personal development and that this cannot be mandated, compelled, or even taught in the usual sense. Yet the opportunity, invitation and assistance are there for all employees to “step-up” to this form of leadership (through the NEW THORLO LEADERSHIP program). Eligibility for Brand Stewardship has nothing to do with function or level in the company and everything to do with willingness and capacity to grow into deeper relationships with self, other, and whole. This invariably means a willingness to engage in authentic self-development conversations with colleagues: to “take oneself on.” Individuals are left entirely free to opt for such a path, or not, as they see fit.

CEO Jim Throneburg is very clear that this process is at the heart of the culture he has worked so long and hard to establish: “One foundation of a living human system is trust, which means that you don't have to be on guard all the time with everyone. We've created a trusting environment where you can participate without masks.

“I knew from experience that you must make a personal commitment to self-development, to self-awareness, to seeing that you are responsible to ‘take on’ 100% of what happens to you and to accept and work with it. Then real learning and change can take place; you overcome a sense of being a victim of your life or of anyone else here. You take off your mask in order to be authentic, to grow, to change. Otherwise, you can't accomplish anything of significance. This is a deep system axiom: that

you co-create what happens to you, are co-responsible for it. You can change yourself, your colleagues and the system only through integrated collaborative enquiry, dialogue, and action. You are the one responsible for your life and for what happens to you, to colleagues, to THORLO. And you can really work it out only in community.

“I also knew that members of a self-aware human system must each be able to freely choose to belong to the system. No one can be forced into being part of it. You are free and can choose to become aware of your own and of THORLO’s self-organizing dynamics. We have to ensure that all employees who self-select see and hear and understand that they are being asked to choose between ‘what it means not to take yourself on’ and ‘what it means to take yourself on’ and to evolve your awareness along with your colleagues.

“You get to learn through practice with taking yourself on and through being part of conversations with others doing the same. Those who step into this new way of being and acting become Stewards of the THORLO Trademark – Brand Stewards – who walk the talk, and commit to be 100% responsible for the brand with our customers, employees and other stakeholders. These include senior leaders and the 52 other folks (New THORLO Leadership participants) from around the company who are in training to become responsible Brand Stewards.”

The key principles, “taking yourself on” and “being 100% responsible” are clearly articulated in two brand stewardship documents which are continuously worked with by leadership training participants: *Giving and Receiving Feedback Heart to Heart* and *“Being Source:” A New THORLO Distinction For “Responsibility.”*

...The “listening from your heart” perspective is where we “feel” totally connected to everything and everyone in our environment. From this perspective we are aware of ourselves as individuals, others as individuals, all the relationships within the system, and the system as a whole. A perspective that does not include all the aforementioned levels of awareness limits one’s availability to “hear” and “see” themselves as the “creator” of their own environment. Therefore, one can still maintain the perspective that the responsibility for what is happening “to” them is external to themselves.” (Giving & Receiving Feedback Heart to Heart) (underlinomg by authors)

“I assert that responsibility begins and ends with “me.”. But the concept of “my” 100% responsibility is more than a mere abstraction. It is “my” experiencing the events and issues that are generated FROM “my” individual participation, as “CAUSE”, in a culture and in a society where “I” allow the possibility for negative things to exist in “my” environment: (with people, with process, with resources, with products, with customers, with partners, etc., etc., etc.). (Being Source)

Brand Stewardship, then, shows up at THORLO as both a way of doing business and a way of being in the world: a way of relating to life in general, fostered within the organization, but inevitably extending its effects beyond it. This reflected in at least a couple of ways.

THORLO's leaders consistently report that their relationships outside of work have been immeasurably enhanced by their participation in “taking on” Brand Stewardship. Spouses, children, friends and volunteer activities have all benefitted.

Also, JLT and his senior leaders share the understanding that, rather than a company which contains a culture—as in the conventional understanding—THORLO strives to be and create a culture which includes a company. This counter-intuitive insight embraces a deep understanding that when a business acknowledges in practical ways the larger social context in which it actually lives, people respond with whole-hearted commitment.

Though clearly not all THORLO employees aspire to be Brand Stewards, the expectations around supervision for all employees, as spelled out in the company *Handbook*, are quite consistent with this culture of responsibility and commitment:

You and your local Leadership are two essential parts of a close working relationship, each having a certain responsibility to the other. You may expect your Leadership not to be responsible for your work/process, and not to see that you perform your role correctly, thoroughly and safely; this is your responsibility. Your Leadership, in turn, can be expected to be available to listen to your needs, have a nurturing presence/attitude, and provide you information that saves you time and makes your work life easier.... (underlining by authors)

Relationship through Dialogue: Integrated Collaborative Conversations

The “sustainable relationships” that constitute the essence and purpose of THORLO are generated throughout the organization in “integrated collaborative conversations.” The intensity of the leadership’s commitment is reflected in a number of ways—not least of which is the amount of energy and time devoted to conversations to create and maintain the culture. This conviction that conversation is the medium for employee and organization development and good business decision-making is antithetical to how most companies operate.

Underlying the conviction is the awareness that human beings are continuously creating future possibilities through conversation. By becoming more conscious of and skillful in conversation with colleagues, employees can create far more business and relationship value with colleagues and stakeholders than is otherwise possible. It is in these conversations that they experience their own creativity and that the business develops better ways to operate and stronger stakeholder relationships.

One of the ways Brand Stewards strive to keep themselves and others aligned with the spirit of THORLO as a whole is to ask frequently—in a group, one-on-one, and even internally: “Are we on purpose?” Primarily, this means, “Is this conversation, in mood as well as in content, consistent with our commitment to serve THORLO’s bonded loyal customers?” Secondly, it may also mean, “Are the tactical details here clearly held in a strategic context, or are we losing the forest for the trees?” Because the “on purpose” question is often applied as the main criterion for a solid decision, or a productive conversation, all employees have a sense of what’s missing when conversation is not “on purpose.”

A pragmatic consequence is that employees strive to ensure that the tactical level of every discussion is appropriate to the deeper context of the specific meeting or conversation. It keeps meetings and talks from being “lost in the weeds” and disconnected from their larger rationale.

“On purpose” at THORLO has, however, yet another layer of meaning which is at least implicit in the ecosynomics agreements, especially where they address each person’s “creative self” and “deeper potential.” The agreements are rooted in a belief that each individual has an inherent sense of life purpose, which is the source of his/her commitments as a “whole part” of a “larger whole.” Organizations, or social “wholes,” will be more vibrant and prosperous when each employee’s deeper potential is recognized, honored, and evoked.

THORLO’s leaders would say that a business conversation is most “on purpose” when each individual participant is speaking both out of an attunement to the purpose of the whole (Brand Stewardship) *and* out of an intuitive sense of his/her own life-purpose or meaning.

To be “on purpose” in all the ways indicated above is to be in touch with the sources of creativity and abundance—both material and non-material—in the individual and in the community. This is what turns a mere collective into a genuine community. To collaborate in this sense is therefore not just to work together or cooperate, but to *co-create*.

The connection of integrated collaborative conversations with the ecosynomic axioms is well-articulated in the *Handbook*:

- 1) *Collaborative engagement starts with the premise of abundance and regenerates it in the awareness of all participants, making possible self-sustaining processes that are not visible from the competitive agreements formed around scarcity.*
- 2) *Collaboration in the preservation and use of resources fuels the belief in and knowledge of abundance, because it expands our ability to see ourselves and other people as a harmonic whole.*
- 3) *In collaborative abundance, the system catalyzes and expands externally exchanged energy and generates its own energy to thrive. The knowledge of the possibility that there is “enough” enables the system to think creatively and enact solutions that can actually reverse negative trends.*
- 4) *Agreements reached in an environment of perceived abundance are therefore self-sustaining.*

Strategy as Conversation

After years of working through stages of seeing strategy as entrepreneurial effort, plan and process, the leadership at THORLO started to experiment with “strategy as conversation.” Consistent with their interpretation of the organization as a network of conversations and their emphasis on the importance of “integrated collaborative conversations” to the realization of their mission, they have evolved an innovative communications structure.

This structure contains two mutually-interpenetrating dynamics, the first of which is depicted in Figure 1 below. This matrix is organized around the concept that there are four directions of relationship with the world, which happen through outreach (sales & marketing), fulfillment (supply chain), development (R&D), and control (finance). There are people, on the outer levels

of the matrix, who are responsible primarily for communication with the stakeholders in each direction of relationship.

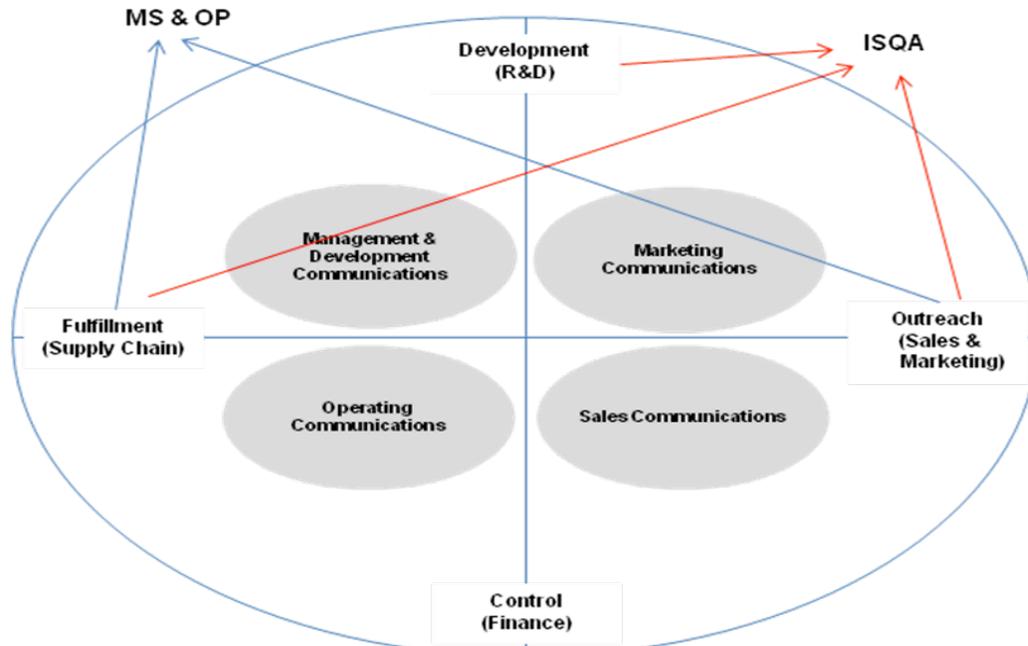


Figure 1: THORLO Communications Matrix A

In the “corners,” where these directions intersect, recurrent integration conversations are depicted: (1) Marketing Communications, between outreach and development; (2) Sales Communications, between outreach and control; (3) Operating Communications, between fulfillment and control; and (4) Production *[Production seems right and this change should be made on the graphic].* and Development Communications, between product development and fulfillment. There are two additional integration conversations, for two cross-organizational directions: ISQA (integrated system quality assurance), and MS&OP (marketing, sales, and operations). Each of these groups meets weekly to integrate cross-group efforts and maintain optimal coordination across departmental lines and between the front and back ends of the business.

The second dynamic in THORLO’s structure expresses the leadership’s determination that the values and practices reflected in their mission and their institution of Brand Stewardship are, as much as possible, operative in all the conversations which constitute the business. That is, that all these interactions evolve toward truly integrated collaborative conversations. The graphic below (Figure 2) represents their strategy for realizing this ambitious objective.

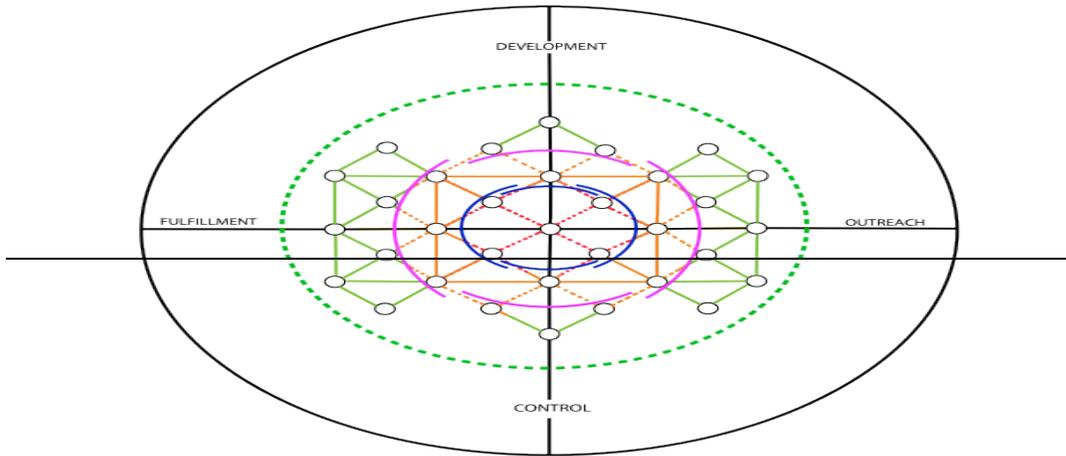


Figure 2: THORLO Communications Matrix B

THORLO’s leadership is engaged in four continuous, very distinct, yet interwoven conversations. These conversations concern different types of questions, including emergent long-term strategy, short-term strategy, organizational integration, resource allocation, and tactical deployment optimization. Each conversational type has evolved its own appropriate structure-process which is a kind of continuum relating to strategy at one end and deployment at the other.

Structure is oriented towards tactics, probability, and form; *process* encompasses what is idea-rich, possibility-oriented, but not ready to materialize. Being clear about where a given conversation should be on this continuum enables participants to both speculate freely on new ideas and focus on the challenges of efficiently realizing them.

In the diagram, the blue circle represents the work of the central leadership team in addressing emergent long-term strategies and the business models that might facilitate them. This is a group of people who have stepped deeply into Brand Stewardship; they meet weekly. This group is also in an ongoing conversation focused on the evolution and sustainability of the collaborative community culture. In fact, this is their first priority, as they have come to see the culture is the basis for sustainability into the far future and the chief differentiator for long-term industry leadership.

The second (pink) circle in the diagram represents recurrent conversations designed to ensure integration of information, planning, and execution across all departmental boundaries. These conversations, aimed at a “whole-system” perspective at the most strategic level, can be effectively communicated outward into operational conversations throughout the business. One critical aspect of this is determining optimal resource allocation, in the light of the requirements

of the system as a whole. Participants are the core leadership team, plus individuals who are integrators responsible for bringing and sharing feedback to and from the field.

These integrated collaborative conversations are designed to ensure two things: 1) that the flow of information up, down, and across the organization is neither impeded nor filtered by political considerations and 2) that Brand Stewardship—not only the *what* and *why*, but also a contextually aligned high-level *how*—is never missing in operational meetings throughout the company. This ensures that everyone is moving in the same direction, guided by the same collective higher purpose.

The third (green) circle of conversations in the diagram represents the developmental work of the New THORLO Leadership (NTL), the 52 people from all levels and areas of the company, who have personally committed to step up into Brand Stewardship. This group includes all of the members of the previous groups. They meet monthly to work on their own understanding of Brand Stewardship and their leadership within the company.

The fourth conversation works at the team level with all employees, including the front end of the business, the back end, and customer-specific teams. These integrated team meetings were discussed above and depicted in Figure 1. Typically, they are facilitated—or in THORLO terms “hosted”—by one or more Brand Steward, often with a member of the NTL leadership-in-training group. Beyond conventional facilitating, the hosting role entails holding responsibility for keeping a meeting “on purpose” and maintaining relationships in sync with the corporate mission.

The net effect of these two communications dynamics and the structures they generate is that:

- ∅ a holistic perspective, with all that that entails in terms of the organizations super-ordinate purpose, is brought to bear on every aspect of the enterprise; and
- ∅ that people at every level and across all departments are well mobilized to coordinate their actions effectively in support of that overarching mission.

Conclusion: Implications of THORLO’S Story

THORLO’s experience offers a number of possible lessons and practices for leaders of organizations and communities of all sizes, who are working to develop more effective, holistic cultures in their own systems. THORLO had already intuitively evolved its innovative concepts and practices to improve its business over many years. When its leaders began to work more consciously with living system concepts, however, they entered into an even deeper, vibrant experience of business growth and cultural vitality.

Until three years ago, THORLO did not know about the study of systemic leveraging or of ecosynomics. It has since embraced these insights as a set of tools and orientations for more deeply understanding and enhancing the development of its own distinct culture—as a useful, rigorous logic that provides conceptual and process rationales for how it is seeking to evolve.

THORLO’s innovations seem fully applicable to any community or organizational context. The dimensions of ecosynomics are clearly transferable to other organizations, and can help to support the regeneration of communities and organizations facing the social and environmental challenges of our time. They seem immediately accessible to innovative leaders who are striving to create greater harmonic vibrancy in their own systems.