

LEARNING JOURNEY

LAO3: EXPLORING STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE MY NGL (ESTIMATED TIME 90 MINUTES + VIDEO)

Context

“If you are feeling confused and as though everything is impacting you all at the same time, this is not a personal, private experience. This is actually a collective experience” (Adam Tooze). And this experience has a name – the “Polycrisis”.

“First say to yourself what you would be; then do what you have to do.” **Epictetus**

“The confluence of crises facing leaders and managers is nothing short of remarkable. The concern for leaders and managers should be whether they are prepared.” (PwC)

The “My New Good Life” Learning Journey series has been developed to support leaders / managers better handle the “Polycrisis” to create successful and resilient teams and organisations.

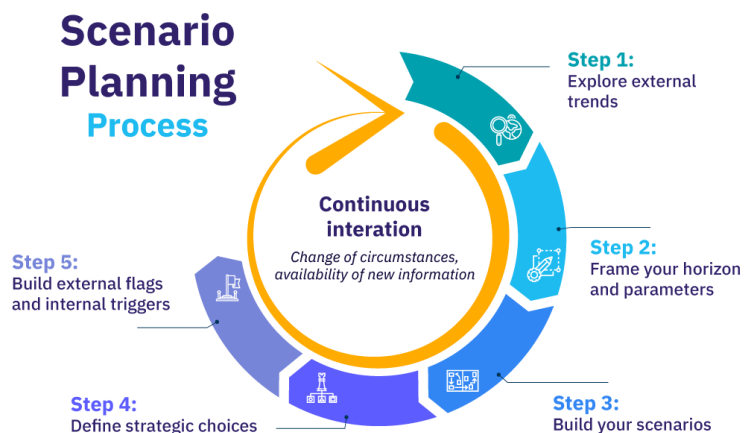
This Learning Journey comprises four *Learning adventures* designed to support you to:

- examine potential opportunities and threats to your organisation (LAo1).
- consider how the future may evolve by developing scenarios (LAo2).
- explore strategies to achieve your vision in a way that is resilient to change (LAo3).
- reflect on how to go about transforming your organisation (LAo4)

Objectives

This *Learning adventure* focuses on Step 4 of the [AIHR](#) Scenario Planning process introduced in LAo1 i.e. exploring strategic options and making choices.

When we talk about strategic options, there is a tendency to look for one “right” solution.



However, finding the right balance of elements can help us to find sufficiently sophisticated solutions for our complex challenges, that are resilient or even antifragile to the changes that you are likely to encounter in the short to medium term. The difference between resilience and antifragility is explored in more depth in [Appendix 1](#).

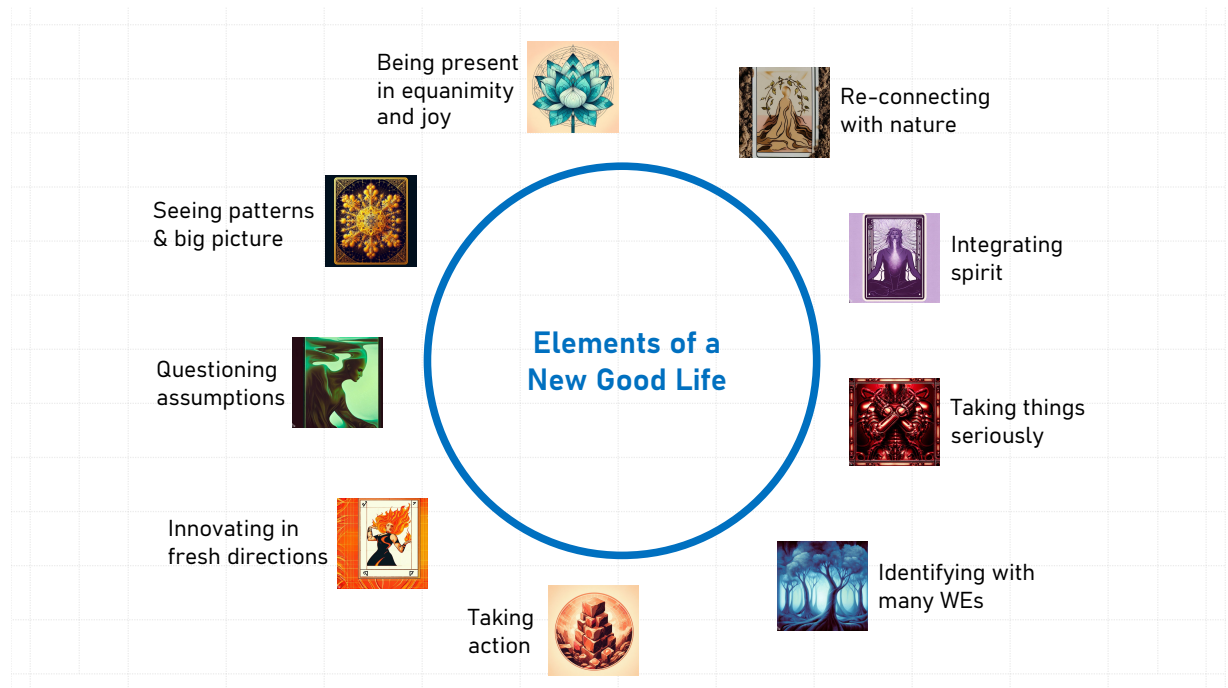
Depending on the context, some Elements may be more important than others. The more complex the contexts are, there more Elements we may need to handle the situation.

Specifically, we will be exploring:

- what each Element has to offer.
- which Elements are beneficial in a specific context.
- how they may be combined into a helpful sequence.
- how to calibrate each Element – enough, but not too much.

The Elements

The elements that we will be exploring are:

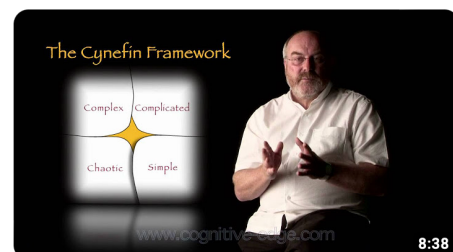


The New Good Life (NGL) Elements and their Gifts are:

- **Soil:** Re-Establishing a Cyclical Connection to Nature
- **Air/Breath:** Integrating Spirit
- **Metal:** Taking Things Seriously
- **Tree:** Identifying with many WEs
- **Stone:** Taking action
- **Fire:** Innovating in fresh directions
- **Water:** Questioning assumptions
- **Crystal:** Seeing Patterns and the Big Picture
- **Lotus:** Presencing in Equanimity & Joy

Before we start, it is worth mentioning that, as David Snowden explains using his [Cynefin Framework](#), depending on the complexity of the situation you face, you will need to think differently.

In a complex situation, it is not possible to know in advance what the “right” way forward is. Rather it is necessary to try things (Probe) using “safe-to-fail” experiments, see what happens (Sense) and continually adapt what you do (Respond) as more information becomes available.



Exploring the Elements

The following is a brief introduction to each of the Elements. More detailed descriptions are available at newgoodlife.net and in subsequent *Learning adventures*.

Element: Soil

The message of Soil: **Being a part of nature**

In recent centuries, we have come to see ourselves as somehow separate from nature. We need to relearn how to see our cyclical connection to nature and to think in ages and cycles.

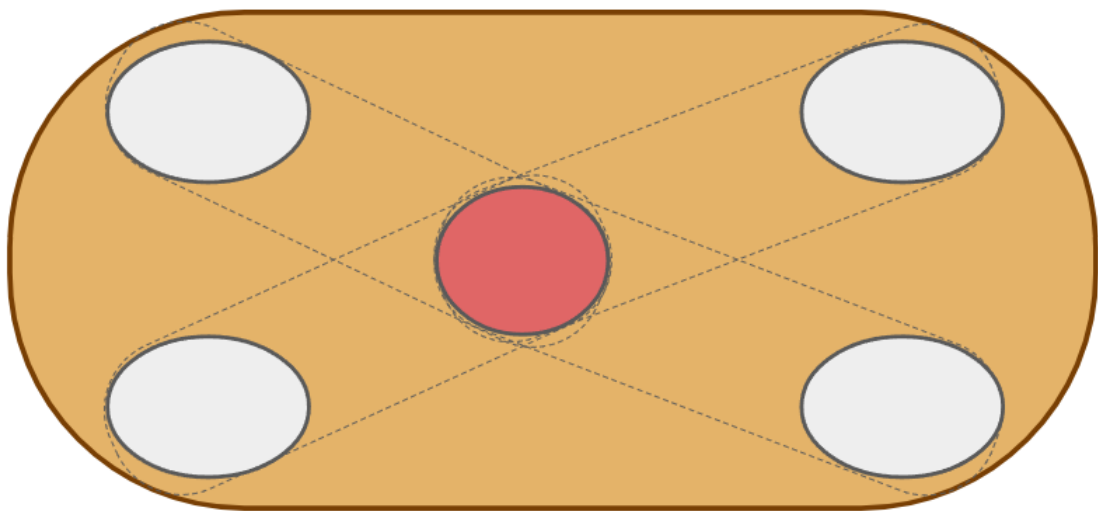
See also:

- [Blue Economy](#)
- [From Cradle-to-Cradle design](#)



The Gift of Soil for Handling the Shadows: **Re-establishing a Cyclical Connection to Nature**

For different cycles e.g. air, soil, water, energy etc.: what does your organisation take from nature and give back to nature. Is it net-positive?



Implications for Organisations:

What the Element Soil could mean for different aspects of your organisation e.g.:

- **Business model:** Integrating Nature as a stakeholder for decision making and marketing.
- **Structure / Processes:** Making visible how your processes and products affect nature. Using the 5 Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Rot and Recycle
- **Culture and values:** Nourishing a culture of respect towards nature, we being part of nature. Reducing the environmental footprint of the organisation
- **Leadership:** Taking account of the biology of our employees and their families e.g. age

To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your organisation's NGL? How might you use it?

Capture any initial thoughts or ideas here:

Element: Air / Breath

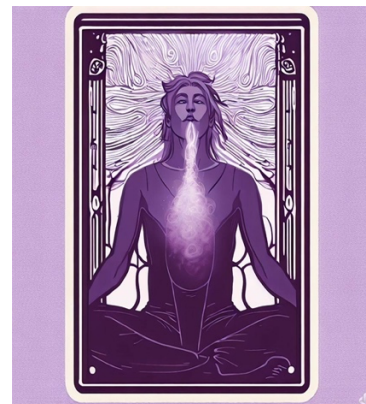
The message of Air / Breath: **Being / becoming related.**

Air / breath is essential for life. It relates us with ourselves and the whole.

We can conceptualize spirit as an “energy” or “just” something that emerges in or between us. Moving beyond purely rational thinking, **Integrating spirit** includes acquiring wisdom from our own or the collective unconscious.

The Gift of Air / Breath for Handling the Shadows: **Integrating Spirit**

Spirit connects us beyond ideologies and can integrate perspectives: our minds, hearts and souls.



Implications for Organisations:

What the Element Air / Breath could mean for different aspects of your organisation e.g.:

- **Business model:** Connecting your purpose / brand with a deeper dimension.
- **Structure / Processes:** Titles and terminology that make clear that we are “stewards”, not really owners.
- **Culture:** Integrating rituals of reverence and gratitude for stakeholders and nature.
- **Leadership:** Taking account of the spirituality of employees and connecting the employees’ purpose with the purpose of the organisation.

To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your organisation’s NGL? How might you use it?

Capture any initial thoughts or ideas here:

Element: Metal

The message of Metal: Being / becoming strong.

Metal can be moulded and then stays strong in this shape. Metal is used to defend and to attack. It makes us strong, and strength enables courage and determination.

The Gift of Metal for Handling the Shadows: Taking Things Seriously.

This Element lays the foundation for many of the others. Our human nature tends to avoid realities that are overwhelming. This can be a useful talent or a dangerous trait.



Some future developments can be tackled when they appear. For others it will too be late to invent a reaction - they need proactive consideration. Looking at the facts, **Taking things seriously**, pondering the consequences for all aspects of life, beyond denial or superficial thinking. This requires having the courage to make tough decisions.

Implications for Organisations:

What the Element Metal could mean for different aspects of your organisation e.g.:

- **Business model:** Thinking ahead about the consequences of the Shadows. Taking courageous decisions about markets, strategies and business models, if it becomes clear that this is needed.
- **Structure / Processes:** Enabling people to make big decisions.
- **Culture:** Encouraging a culture of debate about purpose, priorities and what the future is demanding from us. Staying true to values, against resistance if need be.
- **Leadership:** Encouraging people to open their eyes, looking beyond what is visible now and integrating the impacts of scenarios into their actions.

To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your organisation's NGL? How might you use it?

Capture any initial thoughts or ideas here:

Element: Tree

The message of the Tree: Being / becoming a part.

“No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore, never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

John Donne

One tree is never alone. It needs to be part of different ecosystems to live and thrive. One tree is a holon: a whole, with many parts (e.g. branches, leaves and roots), while being part of other wholes.



The Gift of the Tree for Handling the Shadows: Identifying the many WEs.

Identification often entails defining “others”: our nation vs. other nations, our block (e.g. “West”) vs. the others, humans vs. the rest of nature. Experiencing larger “WEs” can enable us to transcend egoism so that we can value others’ needs.

Implications for Organisations:

What the Element the Tree could mean for different aspects of your organisation e.g.:

- **Business model:** Focusing on stable sustainable relations in the ecosystem, enabling all to identify with the system e.g. Keeping the DNA of the system alive and connecting future developments to this DNA.
- **Structure / Processes:** Clarity in decision making processes internally and representation to the outside.
- **Culture:** Symbols and Rituals that make the DNA, Purpose and Structure of the whole visible. Cultivating a culture of caring for the needs of stakeholders e.g. instigating stakeholder dialogues about the strategic issues in the field.
- **Leadership:** Taking care of people who become part of the system – treating them as “family”.

To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your organisation’s NGL? How might you use it?

Capture any initial thoughts or ideas here:

Element: Stone

The message of Stone: **Being / becoming active.**

The person who is active is not satisfied with what is. They use what is there (e.g. stones) to create something new that is stable and robust.

The Gift of Stone for Handling the Shadows: **Taking Action.**

Taking action can simply mean continuing to do things. It can take a lot of energy to just to persist. Taking action can also mean changing things. This could be changing habits, processes, structures etc.

This can involve “technical challenges”, which can be difficult and require specific expertise.

Worse still are “adaptive challenges”, where we need to adapt our mindset to enable change to happen.

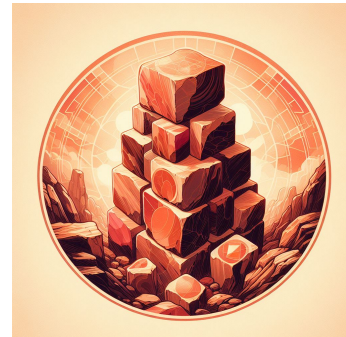
Implications for Organisations:

What the Element the Stone could mean for different aspects of your organisation e.g.:

- **Business model:** Constantly questioning your organisation’s business model – how else? Regular processes to optimise the business model, using metrics wherever helpful.
- **Structure / Processes:** Paying attention to robustness. What is stable? Enabling more flexibility in organisational structures and processes. Defining functions with clear responsibilities and the necessary competences for each role.
- **Culture:** Encouraging personal development and making visible the expertise of people who grow their talents and strengths.
- **Leadership:** Seeing people as individuals who can make a specific contribution.

To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your organisation’s NGL? How might you use it?

Capture any initial thoughts or ideas here:



Element: Fire

The message of Fire: Being / becoming free.

Fire is powerful. It burns and can turn things to ash. It can be created, sometimes with difficulty and can be controlled within a certain range.

Fire stand for the power of reason to burn away what is no longer useful (e.g. specific beliefs) and create something new.

The Gift of Fire for Handling the Shadows: Innovating in Fresh Directions.

To develop strategies and identify options, you will need creativity and innovation. The goal is greater resilience or even anti-fragility.



When we can let go of old beliefs, new things become possible. Innovation entails technological innovations: mechanical, electrical, digital and beyond, but it also entails societal innovations: how to decide and work together, how to share what we have, how to resolve tensions, etc.

Implications for Organisations:

What the Element Fire could mean for different aspects of your organisation e.g.:

- **Business model:** Systematically learning from other organisations of the same sector and beyond to improve your business model.
- **Structure / Processes:** Questioning existing structures, roles, processes and rituals. Are they still appropriate? Where might innovation be necessary?
- **Culture:** Building a meritocracy: valuing people for what they bring, not their position or past achievements.
- **Leadership:** Systematically developing the individuality of people: type, talents and knowhow.

To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your organisation’s NGL? How might you use it?

Capture any initial thoughts or ideas here:

Visualising the Gift of Fire: Innovating in Fresh Directions.

	Incremental Innovation	Radical Innovation	Disruptive Innovation (New rules)
In one Sector			
Connecting Sectors			
Encompassing Many Sectors			

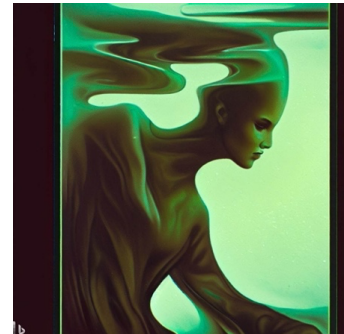
Element: Water

The message of Water: Being / becoming fluid.

Water seems to be a soft element: It fills whatever form it finds. However, water can be powerful. It creates new courses and can dissolve what appeared solid.

The Gift of Water for Handling the Shadows: Questioning Assumptions.

We take many things for granted. What if we question them? What kind of buildings and working arrangements do we need? What is central to our product or service? What quality for the NGL is our contribution?



Implications for Organisations:

What the Element Water could mean for different aspects of your organisation e.g.:

- **Business model:** Questioning fixed categories: perhaps Competitor AND Partner; Customer AND Co-producer; Profit AND Non-profit; Organisation AND Platform etc.
- **Structure / Processes:** Integrate standardised dialogue to learn from experiences and question conceptions about oneself, the organisation and the world. Less focus on rules and regulations, more on principles and virtues.
- **Culture:** While having clarity about differences in roles within the organization, we move towards a culture of “we are all equal”.
- **Leadership:** Seeing employees, customers and partners also as humans with needs. Creating a culture where people can speak their truth without fear.

To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your organisation’s NGL? How might you use it?

Capture any initial thoughts or ideas here:

Element: Crystal

The message of Crystal: Being / becoming fractal.

Romanesco says: Look at my shape and the world. Patterns of the whole appear again at smaller scales and vice versa. How do the Big Picture and small structures relate? How can you influence the Whole with small interventions? Why might large interventions have little impact?



The Gift of Crystal for Handling the Shadows: Seeing Patterns and the Big Picture.

Once we open our eyes to the Shadows and their impact, we can easily fall into hectic busyness. Seeing systems, their contexts, processes, relations and transformations can open our eyes to interventions that could have more impact.

Implications for Organisations:

What the Element Crystal could mean for different aspects of your organisation e.g.:

- **Business model:** A fractalized organisation increases antifragility (see Appendix 1) by allowing it to follow the energy where it goes, rather than clinging to anything. All employees are encouraged to think about reinventing the business model and experiments are encouraged and supported.
- **Structure / Processes:** Towards a decentralised “Starfish” model (see Appendix 2).
- **Culture:** Moving towards the idea that we are all entrepreneurs and humans in an organisational community space.
- **Leadership:** Encouraging people to continually grow, while inviting them to support us so that we can grow ourselves.

To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your organisation’s NGL? How might you use it?

Capture any initial thoughts or ideas here:

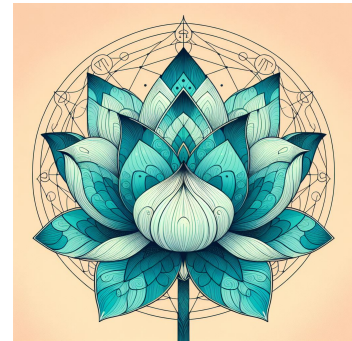
Element: Lotus

The message of the Lotus: Being / becoming spacious.

Many of the Elements described above call us in the direction of DOING things. The Bowl asks us to pause, make space for what there is within you and outside of you. Experience the sensations, thoughts and emotions that arise and flow by, if we do not cling to them.

The Gift of the Lotus for Handling the Shadows: Presencing in Equanimity and Joy.

The Bowl contains the “Power of Now”. Within the “Now” we can experience equanimity, whatever there is, whatever comes. Within the “Now” we can experience joy, share it with others, celebrate and play, while work is left undone.



Implications for Organisations:

What the Element Bowl could mean for different aspects of your organisation e.g.:

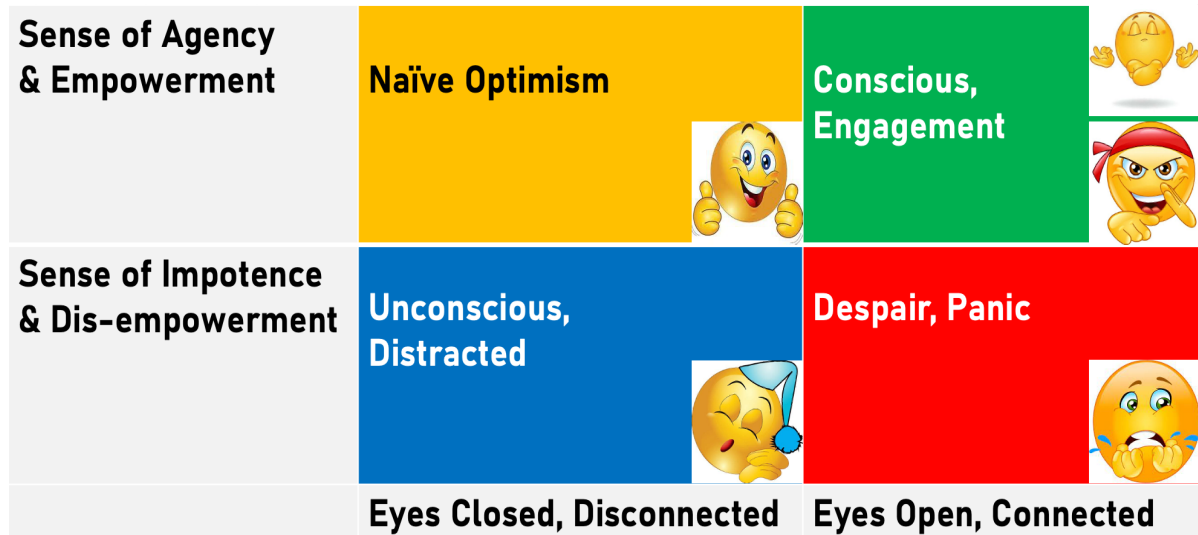
- **Business model:** The organisation identifies only with the purpose. Once the purpose is fulfilled, the organisation gladly dissolves. The driving question is not “How can we fulfil our purpose ourselves?”, but rather “How can we inspire others to serve the purpose?”
- **Structure / Processes:** The structure is more like a tent. It is only as much as is needed. We avoid creating an unnecessary structure that becomes a distraction later.
- **Culture:** Fully embracing the pro-purpose mindset. The organization does not have competitors. We will try to cooperate with others, without being naïve.
- **Leadership:** We encourage people to reinvent the system all the time, exploring disruptive ways to be better. People are free to do so without “permission”.

To what extent could this be an important Element to bring into your development of your organisation’s NGL? How might you use it?

Capture any initial thoughts or ideas here:

Choosing Elements

In *Learning adventure* LAo1 – we explored four broad stances that all of us probably adopt at one stage or another when facing significant challenges:



Depending on where you find yourself, your team or your organisation in the four quadrants, certain Elements can be more helpful for you personally and for your team or organisation. For example, if you find yourself or your team or organisation in the:

- lower-right quadrant (Despair/Panic) - helpful Elements to start with could be:
 - Air (Integrating spirit) e.g. practising meditation to become more centred.
 - Soil (Reconnecting with nature) e.g. spending more time in and appreciating nature.
- lower-left quadrant (Unconscious/Distracted!) - helpful Elements to start with could be:
 - Crystal (Seeing patterns and big picture) e.g. exploring how local challenges relate to more global issues.
 - Metal (Taking things seriously) e.g. looking at the facts and reflecting on consequences.
 - Tree (Identifying the many WEs) e.g. exploring the systems the organisation is part of.
- upper-left quadrant (Naïve Optimism) - helpful Elements to start with could be:
 - Water (Questioning assumptions) e.g. checking whether fundamental beliefs and assumptions are valid in the light of the “facts”.
 - Stone: (Taking action) e.g. consider some immediate actions on “low hanging fruit” to build momentum.
- upper-right quadrant (Conscious Engagement) - helpful Elements to start with could be:
 - Lotus (Being present in equanimity and joy) e.g. balancing action by taking time to pause, to be present and at peace in the “Now”.
 - Fire (Innovating in fresh directions) e.g. exploring how new innovations could help you move towards your NGL.

Combining Elements

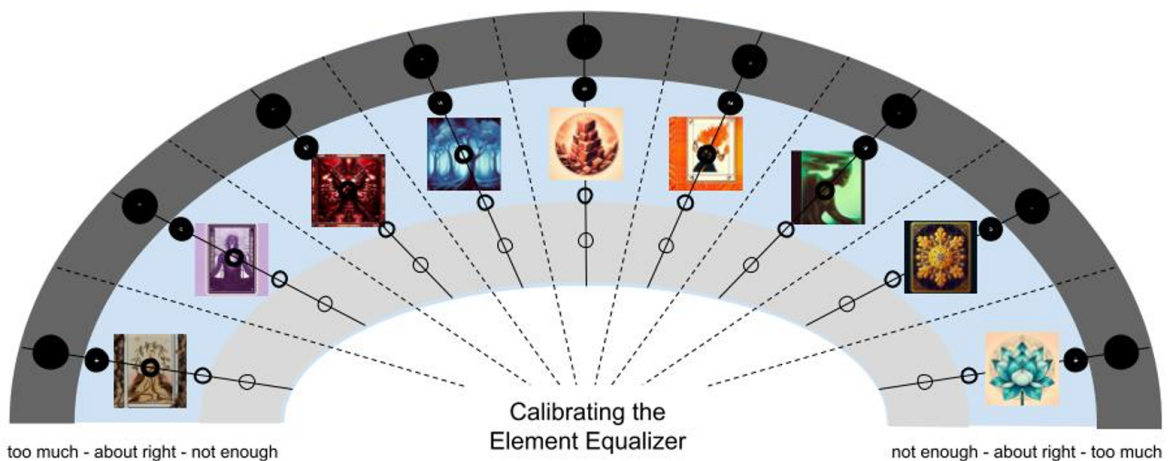
Individual Elements may be used on their own or combined into a sequence.

One approach to combining the Elements is to consider them in relation to a problem-solving process. You can think of a problem as a gap between what you would like and your current situation. If you use the Elements in a typical problem-solving process, the sequence could look like the following:

- Problem identification – analysing the situation:
 - Metal (Taking things seriously) – to gather the salient facts.
 - Soil (Reconnecting with nature) – e.g. to pay attention to your organisation’s consumption.
 - Tree (Identifying the many WEs) – to better understand organisation’s relationships.
 - Crystal (Seeing patterns and big picture) – to better understand your organisation’s context.
 - Water (Questioning assumptions) – to test whether your organisation’s assumptions are correct.
- Solution Finding:
 - Air (Integrating spirit) – to create a mental state that is conducive to creativity.
 - Fire (Innovating in fresh directions) – to explore new solutions or strategies.
- Implementation:
 - Stone (Taking action) – to implement your ideas/strategy.
 - Lotus (Being present in equanimity and joy) – to remain in a resourceful state as you put your plan into action.

Calibrating Elements – The NGL Equaliser

Remember amplifiers with graphic equalisers to calibrate the sound? The graphic equaliser can serve as a useful metaphor for the NGL Elements.



As with most things in life, you can have too much of a good thing!

We can think of 5 positions for each Element: Not enough, Minimum, Balanced, Maximum and Too Much. Imbalance can arise, for example, when we develop the capacity for new Elements, we may neglect other Elements.

Here are some possible warning signs that you might be focusing too much on a particular Element:

1. Soil (Reconnecting with nature): rejecting all that human culture has created.
2. Air (Integrating spirit): in the extreme, spirituality can lead to non-rational thinking.
3. Metal (Taking things seriously): focusing only on the shadows with no time for enjoyment.
4. Tree (Identifying the many WEs): over-focusing on others' needs and not on our own.
5. Stone (Taking action): too much doing and not enough time for reflecting or just being.
6. Fire (Innovating in fresh directions): believing that innovation alone will "save" us.
7. Water (Questioning assumptions): too much questioning can lead to paralysis.
8. Crystal (Seeing patterns and big picture): being overwhelmed and unable to act.
9. Lotus (Being present in equanimity and joy): thinking "Everything is wonderful, suffering has a purpose and there is no need to interfere".

Mark with dots for each column where you think / feel your organisation is and indicate with arrows, the direction in which you would like to move:

Too much									
Maximum									
Balanced									
Minimum									
Not enough									
	Soil	Air / Breath	Metal	Tree	Stone	Fire	Water	Crystal	Lotus

It's also worth mentioning that achieving your NGL will not just be about identifying and solving problems. It will also include more effectively balancing polarities. Polarities are interdependent and complementary aspects or values. Important polarities in creating your NGL could include:

- Analytical thinking and the use of intuition
- Working and resting
- Doing and reflecting
- Meeting my needs and the needs of others

For more information on how to identify and better manage polarities, please see the separate links to videos on Polarities and Polarity Management below.

Summary

In this *Learning adventure*, you have started to explore the different NGL Elements and how they can be used to help you develop a NGL for your team and / or organisation that is more resilient / anti-fragile in the face of the global and your local Shadows. In the next Learning adventure we will focus on how to lead the transformation of your team and / or organisation in line with your strategy.

Support

If you would like to speak with someone to clarify any aspects of this *Learning adventure*, or to join our community for leaders and managers, please reach out to us at [support](#).

References

Websites:

[New Good Life](#)

[Integral Life](#)

[What is Polarity?](#)

Jennifer Garvey Berger: [Polarity Management](#)

Books:

Emerson, Brian & Lewis, Kelly: Navigating Polarities: ISBN 978-1-7333828-0-9

Contributors: Bernhard Possert, Anna Zanghi and Rob Bigge

Appendix 1 – Resilience and Antifragility

It is important to differentiate between:

- **Fragile:** breaks down in a crisis
- **Robust:** for a while unaffected by a crisis until it gets damaged or breaks
- **Resilient:** bends in a crisis and recovers quickly after a crisis
- **Antifragile:** bends in a crisis until it learns how to thrive under new circumstances

In the last decades we have developed considerable expertise in building robust organizations. Despite this, many organizations were not able to survive times of crisis and even fewer to adapt or even thrive under new circumstances.

The following questions can be helpful in developing antifragile organisations:

- What is the most precious thing you want to preserve in any case, e.g.
 - Income for the owners
 - Serving a specific group of clients
 - Bringing a special quality into an ecosystem
 - Providing employees and their families with a decent living
 - ...?
- What are the precious qualities that you want to preserve?
 -
 -
 -

Towards the antifragile organization

- A fragile organization would stick to the structure, process, persons, USP, brand, business model etc that were working once under different circumstances and hope that nothing changes.
- A robust organization would try to ensure with legal, financial and political power that circumstances stay stable, with stakeholders not able to move even if they would want to.
- A resilient organization would be able to let go of people, products, even markets in order to hibernate, being able to pick up where they left later.
- An antifragile organization would be fractalized so it can follow the energy where it goes. Not clinging to anything, always open to follow a new path that enables life and enables the fulfillment of its purpose.

What would resilience and antifragility look like for your organization? Capture your thoughts:

Appendix 2 – Learning from the Starfish

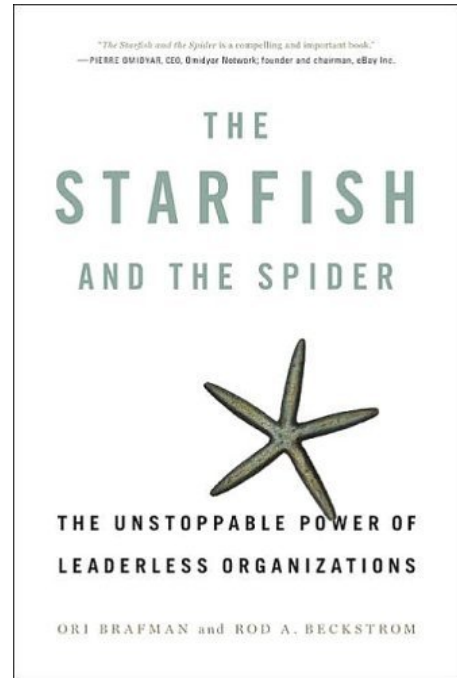
Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckström describe in their book "The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations" the differences between centralized and decentralized organizations, using the metaphor of a spider and a starfish to illustrate these organizational models.

Centralized Organizations (The Spider)

In a centralized organization, like a spider, if you remove the head, the entire organization collapses. These organizations have a clear hierarchy and centralized control. Examples include traditional corporations and governments.

Decentralized Organizations (The Starfish)

In contrast, a decentralized organization is like a starfish; if you cut off one of its arms, not only does the starfish survive, but the severed arm can grow into a new starfish. These organizations lack a clear hierarchy and can adapt quickly. Examples include the Internet, Alcoholics Anonymous, and some social movements.



What would your organization look like if it was a starfish? What would processes, culture etc look like so that this new starfish can adapt to a changing world?

Collect your thoughts here :

Becoming like a Starfish

The following are suggestions to move your team or organisation to become more like a Starfish. They are organized according to Ken Wilber's [Four Integral Quadrants](#):

	Interior	Exterior
Individual	<p>Individual Consciousness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Self-awareness:</u> Train leaders and employees in mindfulness and self-awareness so they can operate autonomously. • <u>Values Alignment:</u> Ensure that the values of the individuals align with the values of the decentralized organization. <p><u>Empowerment:</u> Foster a culture where individuals feel empowered to make decisions without always seeking approval from 'higher-ups'.</p>	<p>Individual Behavioral</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Skill Development:</u> Equip team members with the skills they need to function effectively in a decentralized environment. • <u>Accountability:</u> Implement systems that hold individuals accountable for their actions and contributions. <p><u>Flexibility:</u> Encourage adaptability to different roles and responsibilities.</p>
Collective	<p>Shared Values & Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Trust:</u> Build a culture of trust where information is shared freely. • <u>Community:</u> Foster a sense of community and shared purpose. • <u>Transparency:</u> Maintain transparency in decision-making processes. • <u>Dialogue:</u> Open forums for exchange where all levels of employees can participate. <p><u>Values Alignment:</u> Develop a values statement and ensure it is integrated into daily operations.</p>	<p>Systems and Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Decentralized Decision-making:</u> Implement decision-making processes that involve more team members while staying agile. • <u>Technology:</u> Use technology to facilitate decentralized operations. • <u>Governance:</u> Develop a governance model that supports decentralization. • <u>Feedback:</u> Implement a feedback mechanism where employees can express their thoughts and feelings. • <u>Metrics:</u> Use performance metrics that align with the decentralized model. <p><u>Methodology:</u> Implement agile methodologies that allow for role flexibility (e.g. SDO - Self-Organizing and Developmental Organizations, www.sdo.works)</p>