



The LCL Initiative

'Looking for generative Life, building on Trust'



As people strive to influence the communities they love and the systems in which they work, they seek the emergence of life and vitality. We believe this emergent vitality is the *creative force of life*, and that it can be strengthened by skillfully exercised, wise practices to transform our environments. Together we can lend our lives consciously and purposely to this work. The *Leading Causes of Life* (LCL) is a new lens that brings into focus how we find our lives in nurturing the life of communities and systems.

Basic orientation

The LCL Initiative sees *the idea of generativity* as key to rethinking and reshaping disciplines and practices in health, business, education and other dimensions of social life, including the religious assets and spiritual capacities that contribute to this goal.

How do we plan to take the Initiative forward?

First, convinced that 'life finds a way' that is rich, complex and continuously evolving, we seek to discover and connect people who are already engaged in some way in working with a vision of generative life. We do not think we invented life! Our desire is to help strengthen webs of *transformation* wherever they are emerging.

Second, we will probe, expand and deepen the theoretical lens offered by the idea of 'leading causes of life' (LCL)—initially captured in the concepts of *coherence, connection, agency, intergenerativity* and *hope*. We expect the idea will become even more robust by drawing on what others have thought and discovered.

Third, we are concerned about how to make these insights practical in concrete expressions of a vision of work, action and engagement that is sensitive to all that is generative of human thriving. We call this *poesis* work: more than technical or instrumental activity, more than a job or a career, it is 'thought and action that transforms and continues the world': a durable vision of what makes life worth living.

Fourth, we conceive of the Initiative as a web of transformation that engages people in *collaboration and cooperation* across activities, disciplines and locations wherever this may be mutually enhancing and enlivening. We are not naïve; deeply aware of the real, pervasive presence of forces of death (individual and social) that threaten life and human thriving, we yet find great hope in building webs of generative life.

Fifth, we will make available the insights, information and materials that the LCL Initiative gathers or produces as an *open-source reservoir* for anyone who finds it useful, over time and given standard copyright and other similar limitations.

Why this Initiative?

The LCL Initiative emphasizes generativity—or the positive 'causes' of life. We find it remarkable that despite regional and local variations, so many spheres of activity are oriented, literally and metaphorically, towards what causes 'death'—that which must be resisted, attacked or overcome for the sake of life or of flourishing.

This monocular view on death has dominated our imagination and creativity so completely that we have largely left undone the work of understanding the phenomenon we are trying to protect—life.

Two examples:

- 1) In healthcare pathologies (or morbidity and mortality) are definitive of both science and practice, and massive investments of thought, energy and materials go into understanding and dealing with them;
- 2) In development practice in its post-World War II period, despite important shifts in perspective during that time such as 'human-scale, fourth generation' approaches to poverty, the emphasis remains largely on the negative — on 'needs' and 'deficits' rather than assets, agency and strengths.

We cannot and do not deny, nor seek to set aside, the importance of dealing with pathologies, confronting systematic distortions of power, and combatting poverty and inequality. Yet we find equally compelling that many, in theory and practice, have begun tentatively to approach, or at least notice, the positive with which we can work.

Still, it is not yet easy to discern a concerted and systematic focus on what generates life, or an integrated view on what understanding this might entail. Knowledge about 'generativity' or 'life' is not yet intellectually and practically established as 'standard wisdom' in learning and action, nor in the way we develop policy or allocate resources. There is great intellectual work to be done.

Deepening what we know

Given the dominant way of looking at things, LCL's work will require that we better understand what generates life, and why and how, primarily as relationally embodied, human thriving, rather than genetics, evolutionary dynamics, chemical processes, basic physical necessities and the like (although these may offer valuable insights).

To be persuasive, with a robust and durable set of ideas that are practically rooted and promising for transformation, we need to find existing stores of knowledge and wisdom, including theories, concepts, indicators, practices, policies and networks, and help build new knowledge appropriate to our goal.

This includes identifying the new exemplars that will:

- (a) offer the basis for a different way of seeing and acting that makes sense,
- (b) show how that can be operationalized, and
- (c) provide the knowledge, evidence and materials to ground the education and training of practitioners and policy makers accordingly.

Rationale:

The LCL lens has the advantage of:

- a. Providing a relatively robust conceptual framework within which a wide range of relevant topics, issues and ideas can be dealt with—an embracing and unifying framework that *currently does not exist*.
- b. Providing an immediately recognizable terminological link to various fields, including public health, development practice, civic engagement, and more—while indicating an obvious *reorientation* of that field from 'death' to 'life', an important linguistic shift necessary to any mental or practical shift.
- c. Providing an equally important linguistic connection to *the interpretive worlds* of those many engaged people and bodies who live out of a religious or faith tradition ('life abundant', 'shalom', 'salaam', 'bophelo', and so on).
- d. Highlighting the importance of dealing with 'causality', a *key point of conflict, tension or misunderstanding* across the fields of practice associated with science on the one hand and human or communicative realities, including 'religion' and 'faith', on the other.

Taken together, these advantages are sufficient to offer a sharp focusing lens for the work to be done by the Initiative.

The *five central ideas* of LCL (connection, coherence, agency, intergenerativity, hope) each in their own right identify narrower fields that are readily linked to *existing* understanding, inquiry and practice across a wide range of disciplines.

More than this, each points in an intuitively sensible direction for pursuing further systematic insight into what 'causes' life and, together, the 'causes' have sufficient integrity to offer good reasons for believing we can through them grasp a patterned interaction of key points of leverage for understanding the complexity of life.

In short, the LCL framework provides the *right kind of structure* for developing the arguments and evidence that the vision requires to be persuasive beyond a small circle of 'true believers.'

Above all, the five central ideas provide a *unified framework* for articulating that vision in precise terms adequate to the complexity of the 'life'—strategies that we want to see take a central place alongside the still necessary attention to pathologies. There are many tools, models and insights relevant to every one of the five central conceptual foci of the LCL theory, but very little in the way of an *integrative theory* to match fully what the LCL theory might have to offer.

As a theory, to be sure, it is and must be wholly open to what many others have come to know that is compatible with or precedes our work. Indeed, it draws upon and is inspired by what many others have done (for example, around an 'epidemic of life', or 'salutogenesis'). Our purpose is not to promote the five central ideas in the LCL lens for their own sake; rather, they are offered to guide our efforts to grasp the whole in its full complexity in the search of life abundant for all.

The shape of a 'murmuration'

Core Group:

The core group – who have set up and will drive the initiative, holding its vision in place – includes Gary Gunderson, Jim Cochrane, Teresa Cutts, Andy McCarroll, Heather Wood Ion and Sana Ndinga.

LCL Fellows:

Participants in our workshops, together with other individuals with whom we are working closely, are invited to become LCL

Fellows. Those who accept will help enhance the LCL initiative over time, bringing insights from their own fields of work and experience into play and relating to other Fellows where this is helpful. They will also help probe the LCL ideas more deeply to help build a persuasive case and body of evidence for a 'generative' approach to life. In turn, the LCL initiative, within its limits, will seek to support the work of Fellows in whatever ways are desired, appropriate and feasible. We see LCL Fellows as part of the bedrock of a growing movement, a network of people who share the same vision and can benefit from knowing of each other across places and time.

LCL Fellows generally will be the 'SPICE' of the Initiative:

- **Searching**—curious about the necessary science and practical wisdom needed to solidify a new paradigm for generative life
- **Public-minded**—focused on what helps transform the conditions, social and environmental, that are crucial to the health and well-being of all
- **Innovative**—able to move beyond standard wisdom, and capable of incorporating what we already know into what still needs to be known, inventing the language and practices that gives expression to it
- **Collaborative**—intrinsically oriented, personally and practically, to working in concert with others who share the basic vision, rather than building personal or own institutional fiefdoms
- **Engaged**—already actively working in the field in their own way.

“Web feet”

As part of a broad-based 'web of transformation' that includes the work of many people and groups around the world, the LCL Initiative will over time also establish a World Wide Web presence, including the means to be in touch with each other, relevant documentary resources, and other notifications.

Secretariat:

The operational side of the Initiative rests in the hands of Jim Cochrane, supported by Sana Ndinga at the University of Cape Town and Sharon Engebretson at Wake Forest Baptist Health/University, Winston-Salem, NC. While remaining small, it will handle basic operations, it will support the work of the Initiative as a whole and its link its Fellows.



* Drawing of 'hand & seedling' by Tebo Cochrane; 'Murmuration' sketch by Paul Laurienti