

# Pioneering a Harmonious Future

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My [last post on biomimicry](#) talked about the importance of sacredness as a biomimetic practice. This post will focus on the power of applying biomimicry to social innovation, or the work we do that leverages relationships, communication, and behavior change in diverse professional settings.

For the last six days, I participated in a [Biomimicry Thinking for Social Innovation Immersion Workshop](#) at the [Occidental Arts and Ecology Center](#), led by intrepid instructors Toby Herzlich and Dayna Baumeister. This first-of-its-kind workshop is part of a movement called Biomimicry for Social Innovation; the goal is to shape human communication, cooperation, and action in ways that mimic nature to create conditions conducive to life.

I showed up with my fellow participants and dived into what would become a life-changing, soul-affirming, intense, and beautiful week of learning from nature through deep biological inquiry, fun and challenging teamwork, and many games and exercises that yielded a-ha moments for all twenty-six of us. We observed, designed, learned, shared, presented, performed hilarious skits, danced, laughed, cried, and became humble at the realization of how much more there is to learn and do. We became colleagues, friends, and a community...we found our tribe.

Some of the highlights for me are:

**Mutualisms** - A mutualism is a win-win relationship between two organisms who exchange something different of value with one another so that both can live well. Reinforcing feedback loops keep the relationship positive over time, and this type of relationship is optimal because it takes less energy to participate in, and provides ongoing benefits to both parties. Sounds pretty wise, right? As we cultivate relationships in the workplace and elsewhere, it will behoove us to focus on cooperation, mutually beneficial exchange, and tight feedback loops (i.e. instant and effective communication) so we adjust to changes in our context. And, we can practice applying the really golden rule in nature: when disturbances and stressors increase, mutualisms increase. How might we cooperate and help each other more, when times get more difficult?



Mutualisms abound in the Redwood grove we visited, including the “Batcave,” where the Redwood tree provides a home for bats, who in turn fertilize the tree with their poop. Mushrooms such as mycorrhizae and mycelia also provide nutrients (e.g. nitrogen) to the trees in exchange for food (sugars)

**Scoping (Function and Context)** - Scoping is the first phase of a biomimicry inquiry. Function is what we want our design (or solution) to do; context is a description of the situation we are operating in. For example, we might want our design to create illumination, and our context might be in poor villages in the developing world. In biomimicry, we would ask, “How does nature illuminate?” Then we would look at champion examples and deep patterns in nature and derive design principles that would guide our solution building.

**Adapting to Change** - One of the Life’s Principles in Biomimicry is called “Adapt to Changing Conditions.” This includes incorporating diversity, maintaining integrity, and building resilience to preserve the function of our design or solution, as context changes. An example of resilience I experienced was pretending to be a bird, and moving with my team of about thirteen participants in a flock-like manner on the beach as part of a biomimicry exercise. Our simple rules were: stay equidistant from one another, fly into the wind, disperse as needed then return to formation, and the last rule: follow these rules. We learned that following one of us was flawed, as we would make the same mistakes as the person we were following. Changing the rules, we discovered, could change our configuration sometimes dramatically.

In this exercise, the presence of a predator (picture Toby screaming and charging toward us in a random pattern without warning) would cause us to disperse as we need to (decentralized authority), screech or flap our wings frantically (diversity of communication modes) and then return to our formation when it was safe. If the wind blew in unpredictable ways (indicated by Toby), we would fly into the wind, according to one of our rules. If the predator ate one of us (thankfully this didn’t happen, as Toby is nowhere near cannibalistic) the rest of us could still survive and keep moving forward because we all have the same survival skills (redundancy). Clearly, this was a hilarious and simultaneously essential exercise to sensitize us to how nature builds resilience through decentralization, diversity, redundancy, simple rules, and the overarching mantra: cooperate, cooperate, cooperate!

As I reflected on this exercise, I realized that innovative organizations are embracing these principles of resilience. For instance, Google is about to launch a supplier diversity program, and they have decentralized purchasing, which allows every employee to make their own purchasing decisions; this has fewer and smaller repercussions if problems arise with any single purchase or supplier, compared to a centralized model.

What these gems and all my learning in this workshop means for me, and for the Alchemus Prime Diamond Model, is that the more biomimicry I infuse into the model, the more integrity the model contains because the central goal of the model is to actualize win-win solutions for all life. Just as importantly, I realized during this workshop that each component of the model is a mutually reinforcing partner to the others– for example, biomimicry and design thinking share convergent and divergent processes, and all components speak to the importance of changing behavior to reach our goals. Biomimicry and meditation relate to planetary and personal integrity, and my goal is to merge those for a life-affirming outcome every time the model is applied.

What more affirmation could I ask for? I am on my way, feeling more hopeful and inspired than ever, and grateful for the stellar community of diverse, decentralized, and focused leaders with whom I have the privilege of co-creating a thriving and harmonious future. **Let's do this!**