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RESOURCES

# Life's Universal Design Principles

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In our practice of thriving, we can find helpful guidance from a core set of “life’s universal design principles” – fertile conditions that are present in any thriving living system.

At first glance, this set of principles may seem so simple that it’s not clear why we should point them out. But they’re Copernican in their significance. These patterns serve as a blueprint and practical guide to the transition from a mechanistic, reductionist worldview to an ecological paradigm. They bring together people and planet into a single narrative, not in conflict with each other or even in awkward balance and trade-off, but in natural alignment. They give us permission to do what really needs to be done,

making it sensible to do what our hearts often know to be the right thing in our own lives, in our organizations, and in our communities. And they help us accomplish our objectives more effectively, as we work with the true nature of the systems we're serving.

As thriving practitioners, these are the principles we have to work with in seeking to steward any living organization or community.

# Whether it's your body or a rainforest or an ant colony, we find:



1

## PARTS

*the divergent  
contributions and needs  
of individual parts...*



2

## RELATIONSHIP

*connected and supported  
in patterns and  
structures of dynamic  
relationship...*



3

## WHOLE

*in a way that enables  
convergent wholeness  
and the emergence of  
system-level capabilities  
and needs...*



4

## LIFE

*all self-organized and  
self-integrated as a  
function of life or  
aliveness, in all its  
complexity...*



5

## CONTEXT

*and shaped  
by surrounding context.*

In human contexts like projects and organizations, these are the strategies we must employ and the conditions we must design for:

1

### **INVITING DIVERGENCE**

Developing each person's passion to contribute their unique gifts and to be nourished in the process.

2

### **DESIGNING FOR FLOW**

Shaping the connective, supportive practice and practice ground of relationship and flow.

3

### **SENSING CONVERGENCE**

Cultivating system-level cohesion and emergent capability through compelling shared purpose.

4

### **STEWARDING LIFE**






Serving collective potential that can't fully be known or controlled but can be discerned and tended.

5

### **GROUNDING IN CONTEXT**

Attuning to the foundational influence of place.

# Life's Universal Design Principles *In Human Contexts*

					
<b>UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES</b>	<b>PARTS</b>	<b>RELATIONSHIPS</b>	<b>WHOLENESS</b>	<b>LIFE</b>	<b>CONTEXT</b>
<b>UNIVERSAL TRAITS</b>	Diverse and novel expressions and contributions among component parts	Systems and structures that connect and support the flow of information, resources, learning and response	A whole, integral system with emergent capabilities and characteristics not found in the parts	The system property of self-generation, self-organization, self-healing and emergence	The web of relationships and greater wholes the living system is nested within
<b>HUMAN PRINCIPLES</b>	<b>PASSION</b>	<b>PRACTICE</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>POTENTIAL</b>	<b>PLACE</b>
<b>HUMAN TRAITS</b>	Our diverse individual gifts, talents, interests and needs	The processes, structures and quality of our interactions	The collective capabilities and needs that emerge when we come together in shared purpose	The complex emergent potential that can't be fully predicted or controlled but can be tended	The culture, landscape and other factors that influence us and our work
<b>DESIGN STRATEGIES</b>	<b>INVITING DIVERGENCE</b>	<b>DESIGNING FOR FLOW</b>	<b>SENSING CONVERGENCE</b>	<b>STEWARDING LIFE</b>	<b>GROUNDING IN CONTEXT</b>
<b>CORE QUESTIONS</b>	What are we each passionate to contribute and how can we be nourished in the process?	How can we design our infrastructure and interactions for more flow, creativity, learning, life?	How can we grow ever more cohesive in enabling the healing and creativity that can only happen through us?	How can we deepen our ability to sense what is needed and to respond with wisdom, compassion and effective action?	What is the story of this place? What wants to come more fully to life here?

As we actively tend to these conditions, we cultivate thriving, supporting the systems we're stewarding to:

- express unique potential
- generate new forms and possibilities
- regenerate continuously, enabling healing and cohesion
- integrate endings, compost and renewal
- be ever more at home and in harmony with context.

As we work with these patterns, we begin to see what else is possible beyond our current habits of thought and action. This ushers in a shift in the purpose of all our activities – indeed, it changes what it means to be human and alive and at work in the world.

As the world becomes more complex, your success in life and work will increasingly depend on your ability to tend these core patterns and principles. And our ability to navigate humanity's mounting crises will depend on our collective practice of stewarding life in these ways.

# Propagate the learning

Share this resource with others:

<https://www.thrivableworld.com/tools/life-s-design-principles/>

