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## Burning Man Values Examined: Gratitude as a Culturally-Driven and Value-Based Organizational Mainstay

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## **Burning Man Values Examined: Gratitude as a Culturally-Driven and Value-Based Organizational Mainstay**

### ***Abstract***

*Gratitude expression is examined as a culturally-derived principle that can be adopted as a best practices strategy that can make organizations more dynamic and human relationships more meaningful. Burning Man is presented as an exemplar of gratitude implementation by crafting the expression of gratitude into an elevated organizational phenomenon (including a cultural principal of unconditional gifting). Burning Man has also crafted a “Culture of Appreciation” as a set of organizationally-derived practices complementary to processes of gratitude implementation. The paper concludes with a discussion of gratitude and appreciation as an organizational mainstay.*

### **Introduction**

***Kindness is like the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.***  
— Mark Twain

The general thrust of this paper is encapsulated if the word “gratitude” is substituted for the word “kindness” in the Mark Twain quote above. This is because the power and behavior potentialities of gratitude are often poorly developed and rarely manifested in organizational settings. Yet, with proper execution and timing, gratitude can transform relationships, spawn motivation, and create lasting organization and/or relationship commitments. A values-based decision to operationalize a concept such as gratitude can be viewed by organizational members as a trigger for organizational commitment (Yates, 2014). Gratitude produces a language and a virtuous cycle of exchange and appreciation that can work equivalencies such that a non-motivated individual can learn consequence of effort and a non-committed individual can see purpose and individual focus. As Solomon (2004, p. vii) states, “Gratitude is one of the most neglected emotions and one of the most underestimated of the virtues.”

A bonus from an application and practitioner-adoption perspective is that the expression of gratitude can usually be delivered at a low-economic cost. While some of the gifts and gratitude exchanges described in this paper are material, many and perhaps most gratitude exchanges are zero or low-cost behaviors. Extrinsic rewards cost money and often only function to produce extrinsically-driven motivations that can be temporary. In contrast, gratitude exchanges very often trigger intrinsic motivational factors. As an additional practitioner bonus, a low-cost gratitude exchange — such as a timely act of recognition — can activate intrinsically-motivated behaviors that can become self-perpetuating.

This paper addresses the manner in which Burning Man has taken the general concept of gratitude, and crafted the expression of gratitude into a cultural phenomenon (including unconditional gifting) and the creation of a Culture of Appreciation as a set of organizationally-derived practices. The paper begins with an examination of the concept of gratitude and the role gratitude plays in human relationships. The discussion will then move to a focus on the Burning Man organization as an exemplar in the creation of gratitude processes and dynamics, as well as the preservation of gratitude and appreciation as an organizational mainstay.

## **Aspects of the Concept of Gratitude**

Gratitude falls under the general umbrella of the positive psychology movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It is both a manifestation of a human virtue and a human strength. As a virtue, it allows people to live their lives well, with a better quality of existence as they live their lives in the world of the present. As a strength, gratitude reflects aspects of many religious practices and many cultures and philosophies.

Free Dictionary.com (2016) defines gratitude as “the quality of feeling or being grateful or thankful” and “a feeling of thankfulness or appreciation.” This definition reflects the emotional aspects of gratitude. Gratitude also impacts the person receiving the gift of gratitude, and as it affects the relationship between the two parties going forward. Fitzgerald (1998) describes gratitude as having three components: 1) appreciation for someone or something, 2) a goodwill towards that person or thing, and 3) a disposition to act that flows from appreciation or goodwill.

Buck (2004) distinguishes between the gratitude of exchange and the gratitude of caring. In the former, the sender of gratitude accrues benefits and the receiver accrues costs (Buck, 2004). Gratitude as exchange triggers imageries such as reciprocity, equity, and lingering obligations in relationships (Becker, 1986). Feelings of pride of accomplishment and a deepening of a relationship could come from gratitude of exchange wherein the benefactor gives unconditionally. Failure of gratitude as exchange can yield feelings of failure in reciprocity (Becker, 1986), guilt, or shame.

In contrast, the gratitude of caring occurs in a relationship of love and bonding, and is thus mutually supportive such that the more one gives, the more one receives (Buck, 2004). This in turn creates potential for trust, active listening, empathy, and perhaps altruism. Thus, the intent of an act of gratitude matters.

Adam Smith (1790/1976) envisioned a society based on gratitude and goodwill. The culture and 10 principles of Burning Man are based on community and shared values, including the concept that no one has to share anyone else’s values. The purposeful adoption of gratitude

as an organizational mainstay reflects Burning Man's adoption of a transformational leadership approach designed to facilitate participant transformational experiences. Burning Man's application of gratitude has aspects of the four transformational leadership dimensions identified by Ghasabeh and Provitera (2017): idealized influence, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation. The behavioral examples described later in this paper will illustrate these phenomena as they have been actualized and observed at the Burning Man event. This is one factor in Burning Man's extraordinary growth into a worldwide cultural movement (Harvey, 2000), and Burning Man's survival for over 30 years as a cultural phenomenon. The Burning Man organization, now officially named the Burning Man Project, has recently shifted into a non-profit dedicated to modeling possibilities of a new social system and a unique cultural viewpoint based on the 10 Principles of Burning Man. We examine gratitude via Burning Man's 10 Principles, the Culture of Appreciation within the Burning Man Project, and the practices of gifting at the Burning Man event as a cultural exemplar for the 21<sup>st</sup> century organization.

### **The Norm of Reciprocity**

The giving and receiving of gratitude involves patterns of exchange and reciprocity between parties. Gouldner's (1960) seminal work on reciprocity begins by quoting Cicero: "There is no duty more indispensable than that of returning a kindness" (1960:161). Cialdini (2001) discussed the rule of reciprocation: "The rule says that we should try to repay, in kind, what another person has provided us" (2001, p. 20) and characterized the rule as universal, as have others (Becker, 1986; Gouldner, 1960). Gouldner (1960) discussed two reciprocity demands – helping and also not injuring those who have helped them. Becker (1986) considered the obligatory aspect of reciprocity in the context of families, society, the law, and to future generations, thus rendering this argument as virtue-based and essentially a reflection of character. People with character and integrity reciprocate following their intrinsic interpretation of the norm of reciprocity – not out of duty or obligation – but as an extension of their personal set of values.

Finally, we contend that reciprocity must be purposeful to be sincere. Reciprocity is a well-defined activity with an aspect of focused behavior, not a collection of random events.

### **The Setting: What is Burning Man?**



*Figure 1: Desert flats – Home to Black Rock City*

The Burning Man festival has been described as "new-age apocalyptic" – analogous to Mad Max meeting the Disneyland Light Parade, the internet being brought to life, the confluence of the Super Bowl and Mardi Gras, "Disneyland turned inside out" (Harvey, 2002), and "the most profound and subversive idea to surface in decades" (Doherty, 2004: foreword). Regardless of these descriptors, the truth is that Burning Man cannot really be fully or completely accurately depicted; it can only be experienced and subsequently internalized on an individual basis.

This annual weeklong alternative festival takes place in the Black Rock Desert of northern



**Figure 2: 40-foot Wooden Man Figure Used in Festival**

Nevada at the end of every summer. Annual attendance over 30 plus years has grown to a capped number of over 75,000. Out of nothing, Black Rock City (the name given to the temporary city built in the Black Rock Desert) appears in the barren desert flats (*Figure 1*) as people from 50 states and over 30 countries worldwide converge for a transformative, life-changing week. It all culminates when a giant 40-foot tall wooden man figure (*Figure 2*) is set aflame and burned to the ground. The Burning Man festival is part social experiment, part performance art, and part desert endurance race. “Burners” — as participants of the Burning Man festival are known — become members of a unique culture, complete with explicit rules based on the ten principles of Burning Man.



**Figure 3: Fireball characterizing Burning Man**

## The 10 Guiding Principles of Burning Man

Burning Man is characterized by visually spectacular sights (*Figure 3*), spontaneous energy and unique transformative experiences. As a result, the event could be naively seen to be chaotic or perhaps even poorly organized. However, the Burning Man Project is actually a highly purposeful organization. This purpose combines cultural creation, managerial effectiveness in a turbulent environment, and cultural maintenance to confront threats to organizational survival.

Participants or “Burners” are defined by Burning Man (2017) as citizens “of the worldview that Burning Man is omnipresent and may be encountered anywhere.” Gratitude and appreciation are organizing principles of the Burning Man community and worldview, and are embedded in the organization’s practices and behavioral guidelines.

The Burning Man Project’s culture adopts 10 unique guiding principles which generate aspects of community and shared experience that yield the requisite energy for transformation of self — all the while immersed in a unique cultural environment. The 10 Principles of Burning Man are:

**Radical Inclusion:** Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community.

**Gifting:** Burning Man is devoted to acts of gift giving. The value of a gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value.

**Decommodification:** In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships,

transactions, or advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation. We resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience.

**Radical Self-reliance:** Burning Man encourages the individual to discover, exercise, and rely on his or her inner resources.

**Radical Self-expression:** Radical self-expression arises from the unique gifts of the individual. No one other than the individual or a collaborating group can determine its content. It is offered as a gift to others. In this spirit, the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient.

**Communal Effort:** Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote, and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction.

**Civic Responsibility:** We value civil society. Community members who organize events should assume responsibility for public welfare and endeavor to communicate civic responsibilities to participants. They must also assume responsibility for conducting events in accordance with local, state, and federal laws.

**Leaving No Trace:** Our community respects the environment. We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities wherever we gather. We clean up after ourselves and endeavor, whenever possible, to leave such places in a better state than when we found them.

**Participation:** Our community is committed to a radically participatory ethic. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. We achieve being through doing. Everyone is invited to work. Everyone is invited to play. We make the world real through actions that open the heart.

**Immediacy:** Immediate experience is, in many ways, the most important touchstone of value in our culture. We seek to overcome barriers that stand between us and a recognition of our inner selves, the reality of those around us, participation in society, and contact with a natural world exceeding human powers. No idea can substitute for this experience.

Larry Harvey, as visionary, created his synthesis of the 10 Principles for the nascent Burning Man community. This vision forged the foundation a new cultural entity which transformed the annual trek to the Black Rock Desert into a global community (Harvey, 2000) with lasting cultural outreach:

*Every year thousands of people return from the desert and ask themselves how they might take what they have learned from Burning Man and apply it to the realm of daily life. Increasingly, they are surrounded by communities of other burners — people like themselves, who are accustomed to cooperating and collaborating with one another, not merely competing. These are folks who know that there are certain values that depend on one's immediate experience — essential spiritual values — that should never be commodified (Harvey, 2006).*

Burning Man is thus not a mere “drop in” casual event, but an intense, immersive experience that transforms participants. The Burning Man culture and ethos, whether actualized in a dust storm on the desert or in a San Francisco office cubicle exemplify what

Weick (2007) calls “moments that matter.” Expressions of gratitude and appreciation represent some of those moments.

## **Burning Man’s Culture of Appreciation**

Burning Man’s focus on expressing gratitude and showing appreciation came into focus somewhere around 2005. The issue surfaced and was then discussed in detail at the 2005 Burning Man Annual Retreat, a weeklong post-event gathering of Burning Man staff members and key decision-makers. Questions were discussed such as: 1) “How can we do a better job of showing our gratitude to the volunteers and selfless workers who make our event possible?” 2) “What are some reasons people feel unappreciated?” and 3) “What are the impacts or costs of people feeling unappreciated?”

From these discussions, the phrase “Culture of Appreciation (COA)” was coined to encapsulate an emerging philosophy centering on behaviors and practices central to showing gratitude and feeling appreciation. This culture transcends relationships and exchanges, and reflects emotions that are as much a heartfelt philosophy as a relationship practice.

When Burning Man implemented COA, several key insights emerged. One is that timing and context are important in gratitude exchanges and appreciation expressions. If gratitude is overly institutionalized, acts of gratitude can become routine, seem forced, and ultimately become a hollow ritual, delivered on schedule and without passion. This can result in gratitude thwarting attempts for a COA.

Conversely, when acts of gratitude and appreciation contain spontaneity and genuineness, they give the receiver immediate gratification, leading to a greater sense of organizational identity and aligning individual and organizational purpose (Yates, 2014). Executed in this fashion, gratitude becomes more than simply being grateful to the source of a gift of appreciation, but also reaffirms relationships with each other and to the organization’s COA as an expression of transformational leadership (Ghasabeh & Provitera, 2017). Ideally, such moments may yield personal transformation and self-insight, reminiscent of Mark Twain’s saying, “The two most important days of your life are when you are born and when you find out why.”

## **Appreciation and the 10 Principles**

The COA, as exercised within the 10 principles of Burning Man,<sup>1</sup> implements the power of gratitude via a chosen set of behaviors. In this sense, appreciation has three dimensions:

- 1) **Appreciation of behaviors.** This is gratitude experienced through the welcoming of exchange.
- 2) **Appreciation of the Other’s point of view (AOPOV).** Appreciation does not require agreement if expressed correctly. AOPOV simply recognizes and validates that a person has invested energy, time, and thought (rational or not) in the stance they have taken. When people use active listening techniques such as empathy or reflection to demonstrate their understanding and appreciation of another person’s

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<sup>1</sup> <http://blog.burningman.com/10principles/>

point of view, they are essentially honoring another's investments. This conveys AOPOV, even if agreement is withheld.

- 3) **Appreciation of the Other as a whole person.** This involves an appreciation of a person's intellect, emotions, demonstrated behaviors, and spiritual perspectives and values. This holistic type of appreciation epitomizes the Burning Man principle of radical inclusion. By appreciating another as a whole person, you include them in your sphere of influence by: a) rewarding them with recognition, b) giving them acknowledgment, and c) showing them appreciation. Therefore, when you use radical self-expression to communicate your understanding and appreciation of their point of view, you honor them as persons.

Burning Man's COA allows people to speak and be heard, to express emotions and feel that they made an impact. This creates intellectual and emotional "venting" that allows the person to feel grounded in the moment and available for participation. Subsequent participation behaviors convey more honesty and depth of emotion, mindfulness, creative ideas, and values. Fun and passion, now become attainable.

### **Representative Examples from Burning Man**

The expression of gratitude is a valuable organizational asset, and instances of gratitude and exchanges are common Burning Man experiences — by design. The stories, personal expressions, and narratives described below illustrate this conscious effort. The lead author has been engaged in the Burning Man event as a Burning Man Senior Staff member (equivalent to a VP position) for 18 years. Acting as scholar, the lead author actively engaged in participant/observer research beginning in 2004. Numerous notes and journals comprised the first phase of data collection. The researchers systematically screened and interviewed participants via videotape recordings in 2013 and 2014. The interviewed participants were asked to reflect on their Burning Man experiences. The examples listed below are gleaned from these observations and interviews. The examples cited are arranged from more general examples to examples that are more specific.

***Temples of gratitude.*** One of the most moving art installations on the playa is the annually constructed and burned temple, which burns on Sunday night, often in reverent silence, surrounded by thousands. In the setting of the temple, people experience deep feelings of gratitude, sorrow, and joy as they commemorate significant milestones in their lives. A picture of a pet is taped to the wall of the temple with the inscription, "Thanks for all your love for all those years." Next to a faded picture of a young man circa 1950, someone writes, "Dad, you gave me so much. Only now after you have left me do I see the value of what you taught me." These acts of expressed gratitude are evidence that the person



**Figure 4: Temple of Gratitude**



making the statement(s) has been profoundly moved. Participants move through and around the temple in respectful silence and speak in whispers. When the authors asked participants how they felt in the temple space, they almost universally expressed gratitude to the temple builders for gifting them this experience.

***Temple builders' expression of gratitude.*** A common question to temple builders has been "Why do you do this?" The answers consistently reflect the exchange of gratitude. One young man travelled in 2014 from Ireland just to help to build the temple, having undergone a transformative experience at Burning Man in 2012, saying "I just had to come back and repay to this community for what this community has given to me. Since the temple is the place with the most emotion, I felt it was the best place to repay my debt." Another builder responded, "My intent is to create a space here where people feel safe enough to look within themselves. I feel lucky to be able to do this for Burning Man, and I feel blessed that people use it in ways they find meaningful."

***Tears and tea.*** The 2013 temple was a wooden pyramid containing a giant basalt rock altar (see Figure 4). We observed a young woman serving from an elaborate self-created tea setup, complete with tablecloth, teapots, and personal touches. When approached, she would offer a small, almost symbolic cup of tea and crackers. When we asked why, she replied, "I am not a great artist..., so I cannot give a gift of art. I am not good with tools so I cannot help people build things. But I do make a good cup of tea... This place gives me the chance to be myself." Then, with tears in her eyes, "I sit in this temple, I look into myself and I am transformed."

***The Department of Public Works (DPW).*** Denman-Underhill (2015) labeled the DPW as "the dedicated soldiers of Black Rock City." These temporary workers who build, tear down, and clean up Black Rock City do so as an expression of gratitude. DPW workers describe "putting their lives on hold" to work on the playa. Says a heavy machinery crew member, "It's about doing what is right...You get to work with people who not only appreciate what you do, but as an operator, are inspired and want to help them create their vision. It's very fulfilling." He goes on, "At your normal job back home, people don't care. You are there to just do what you do. Here, you play an integral part, and the artists really appreciate that you are helping them. You create something great out here, and you can't really put a price on that." These quotes illustrate the intrinsic motivational aspects of the giving part of gratitude mentioned earlier. A different individual expressed a gratitude feedback loop, saying "Once you start working, it's not the event that keeps you here. It's the people who you work with...The event becomes the least significant part of your experience." This statement demonstrates individual-level gratitude exchange dynamics and how they create and reinforce quality in relationships.

***Scene observed during Burning Man.*** A typical moment from 2002 illustrates the Burning Man principles of unconditional and spontaneous gifting, immediacy, radical self-expression, radical inclusion, and leave no trace. It was late afternoon on a hot day and a woman who was evidently new to being topless has a mild sunburn. In the dry heat, she looks tired and thirsty. Suddenly, she is approached by a pirate ship (The 2002 event had a nautical art theme). The ship consists of a cascading stack of couches on top of the bottom half of a VW microbus. The "pirate ship" hull is adorned with a couple of colorful masts, a skull and crossbones pirate flag with the Burning Man symbol in the middle, and noisy, enthusiastic individuals participating as marauding pirates. As the ship pulled up next to the young woman, a costumed pirate leapt to his feet, waved a comical wooden sword, and launched

into an impassioned speech with “Avast, ye maties ...” The marauders performed to an audience of one, then pulled away after one of the pirates handed the woman a frozen orange Popsicle. She placed the wrapper in the waistband of her tutu to leave no trace, licking her Popsicle and grinning ear to ear all the while.

***Gifts without expectations of exchange.*** Souwine (2015) relates this experience: “On the day of the burn, I headed out on my bike to give a message to a friend. Coated with a week of dust, my creaky bike started to give out half way...So I found a random camp of people I didn’t know and asked if I could borrow a bike. They said sure, and off I went...In the time I was gone, someone in the camp had taken the time to fix my bike. And I wasn’t even surprised. Because that is the culture of Burning Man.”

***Examples from a Burning Man veteran.*** The narrative below is excerpted from an interview with a woman who had been to Burning Man 10 consecutive years in response to, “What can you share about your experiences with gratitude at Burning Man? Try to think of examples of both showing gratitude and receiving gratitude.”

- *I see the way participants use the temple as examples of gratitude...Some come to meditate, some come to decorate, and some come to mark significant milestones in their lives: births, marriages, divorce, securing or losing a job, or the death of a loved one. These commemorations are communicated in the form of photographs, art, cartoons and writings – both sacred and profane. In 2013, someone made hundreds of colorful origami cranes to decorate a corner of the temple. I saw this act as a gift to the temple builders and to Burning Man fellow participants. In the somber space of the temple, they provided a spot of joy to soothe the soul.*
- *The overwhelming majority of volunteers are participants at previous year’s events who saw there were opportunities to give back to the Burning Man community. The most recognizable volunteers on the playa are those who wear uniforms (the Black Rock Rangers and Emergency Medical Services), those who wear similar costumes (the Lamplighters), and those who man specific sites (Lost and Found, the volunteers at the Department of Mutant Vehicles (DMV at Burning Man), and the ice stations Antarctica, Ice Nine, and Ice3. These volunteers are all intrinsically motivated and are grateful to have an opportunity to enhance the quality of the day-to-day lives of the participants.*
- *Man’s principle of decommodification helps preserve the spirit of gifting. You cannot buy a commemorative t-shirt or anything else at Burning Man, but someone may design a t-shirt or piece of jewelry and you might be lucky enough to be gifted with an item that commemorates that year’s festival. This also speaks to the principles of participation and immediacy. Other remembrances include jewelry, yoga classes, henna body art, a pancake breakfast, tutus to wear on Tutu Tuesday, and cold tap beer. I have always found the unexpected gift at Burning Man to be the one that is the most joyful to receive.*
- *I observed a ceremony wherein the Black Rock Rangers showed gratitude to law enforcement who cover the event by purchasing a memorial plaque commemorating a deputy sheriff who died during the past year. A copy of the plaque was given to the man’s widow, and the other plaque was to be burned when the temple burned. This*

*was an expression of gratitude, but it was also an example of radical inclusion at its best as Burners embraced law enforcement.*

**COA in Burning Man meetings.** A practical application of gratitude can be found in Burning Man meetings – on- or off-playa – that usually conclude with specific appreciations. These appreciations are typically offered in the lingering moment of the act that is being recognized (timing is often an important element in the experience of gratitude). Appreciations honor positive behaviors and the absence of negative behaviors. For example, a Burning Man senior manager said to a meeting participant *in the group's presence* at the end of a particularly turbulent meeting, “You have my thanks for not overreacting when the group seemed to crap on your idea. You hung in there despite what was said. What you did made the whole meeting work.” This made the individual feel appreciated and recognized in the moment, and cemented the COA as an organizational asset to the rest of the group.

The above examples indicate the centrality of gratitude to the Burning Man experience. Like many organizations, Burning Man relies heavily on intrinsic motivation to drive outcomes such as identification with organizational purpose and creativity. Gratitude and appreciation are pillars of this motivation and culture. Indeed, the very simplicity and even mundane quality of many acts and behaviors serve to reinforce gratitude and symbolic meaning as predominant over material quality and economic value.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

Burning Man is a radical, aspirational organization that seeks to imagine and create a utopian alternative reality in contrast to the Western paradigmatic norms of self-interest and material gain. Instead of the rational and instrumental “economic man” predominant in the Western ethos, Burning Man builds a universe based on other-centered acts seeking to transform individuals and the self to a higher level of consciousness, expression, and morality. The COA and 10 principles are key cultural mechanisms in effecting this reality, and expressions and exchanges of gratitude are one key behavioral manifestation of that culture and principle set. In this sense, gratitude serves as a medium of exchange and has a role similar to money in a traditional economy. However, this role is profoundly different in its psychology – a psychology of intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation.

Our last example expresses the principle of Leave No Trace (LNT) to demonstrate how the aspirations of the Burning Man organization manifest as part of a positive feedback loop of gratitude. The Burning Man organization employs a Matter Out of Place (MOOP) system to track the areas where the messes created by 75,000 participants occur. This system has identified that trash is primarily created by newbies, those who do not yet embrace the 10 principles or the Burning Man community, and those who have not yet internalized a “Burner” identity through their behavior.

In response, citizens of Black Rock City actualize the “Burner” identity by doing their best to clean up after themselves. Burning Man purposefully has neither provisions nor resources (i.e., trashcans) for citywide garbage collection and instead relies on the Leave No Trace principle. Burners make a concerted effort to clean up the camps and areas where they have lived for a week, as if they had never been there at all. Many camps also clean up adjacent areas to ensure that surrounding camps have left no trace as well. Two of the authors have repeatedly observed scores of Burners walking the area and picking up even

the smallest items of debris (e.g., cigarette butts). This heartwarming set of behaviors embodies the Leave No Trace principle as Burner individuals are acting out this aspirational aspect of the Burning Man organization. This can be seen as gratitude expression by participants as they appreciate the Burning Man event, its volunteers and workers, and the Bureau of Land Management for enabling the site's use.

Leave No Trace provides evidence of the positive feedback loops unleashed by gratitude. The Burning Man organization aspires to a Leave No Trace event and unconditionally gifts the event to participants. Each person in Black Rock City, due to radical inclusion, is welcomed without preconditions. Radical self-expression enables each person to find and ascribe personalized and individualized meaning to the experience. The result is transformational learning for many participants, an unconditionally gifted experience they receive with gratitude. This becomes part of the internalized identity of the Burner, a source of intrinsic motivation, and ultimately part of the recipient's behavioral repertoire. This is exactly what is meant by "the social psychology of the gift" (Schwartz, 1967). It is therefore not surprising to see the positive feedback gratitude loop manifest as thousands of Burners reciprocate Burning Man's gift by assiduously cleaning up after themselves.

Such civic responsibility is not normal organizational behavior. However, it becomes the "new normal" for those who actualize the power of gratitude within and reinforced by a purposeful organizational culture through the norm of reciprocity. Unconditional reciprocity does not require scorekeeping and is both efficient and effective, characteristic of friendship, familial, and love relationships (Becker, 1986).

Burning Man's concepts of radical inclusion and immediacy leave no place for rank or differentiated status. Instead, via communal effort as equals, and fueled by civic responsibility, gifting is done without expectations of quid pro quo exchanges, status enhancement, or power acquisition. Thus, gifting at Burning Man has purity in purpose and benevolence in execution. This has allowed Burning Man to elevate gratitude into a cultural principle and an organizational mainstay.

We believe that this same process can apply to any organization, wherein a community of kindred spirits, guided by cultural principles and fueled by the power of gratitude, can manifest not only elevated support of organizational purpose, but also enhanced personal experiences for organizational members. First, top managers should serve as role models. All top managers should show sincere gratitude in all their dealings with all levels of personnel on a regular basis. One way to implement this would be through "management by walking around" with an attitude of gratitude and appreciation driving the content of communication feedback. Second, organizations should publicize and honor notable instances of gratitude in both internal and external communication. This would provide recognition and reinforcement of the gratitude dynamic. Third, gratitude could be one important organizational citizenship behavior that might be incorporated, perhaps with other OCBs, into an element on performance appraisals to provide a formal reward structure. Fourth, a firm might consider developing covenants with employees and managers, and include gratitude as one important element in the covenant. Finally, a firm could consider gratitude in codes of ethics and conduct by linking gratitude to recognition of the fundamental human dignity of all employees and stakeholders.

It is in this light that the power of gratitude has the potential for efficacy as a management and leadership tool in any organization.

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