



# Thrivability

Jean M. Russell

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Breaking through to a world  
that works

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## Conclusion

There are two ways to be successful, if I can be so dualistic at this point. The first is to try to outmaneuver everyone else in our herd as we compete to reach the same finishing line – shoving each other aside as we, like lemmings, fall off the proverbial cliff of possibility. The second is to devise a new game that we can play together, with others – a game with a shared goal and a game that we can all win. This second approach asks us to be wildly creative, bold, daring, courageous, adventurous, vulnerable, anxious, and honest with ourselves.

We need to be all those things, because there are massive challenges at hand. All around us there are signs of crisis, collapse, and breakdown. And at the same time we are also seeing significant and far reaching breakthroughs. We are learning more about who we are and how our minds work which, in turn, enables us to develop better systems better suited to our needs and capabilities. Yes, we are irrational and we can be greedy. We are also wired to be altruistic, our brains are rewarded for caring, sharing, and helping. We have many forms of intelligence and plasticity in our neural pathways. We can and do learn and evolve.

We are also coming together into a social evolution far beyond any social evolution we have experienced in human history. While we are not in control of that evolution, we are consciously and deliberately contributing to it as we develop new technologies, new social systems, new ways of working together, more effective group processes, and more effective collaborations. We have developed leaderless networks – and are beginning to generate self-awareness within these network organisms. Our businesses are learning how to interoperate as they enter the Social Era (the right antidote to the downsizing they are condemned to as they pass their peak rates of growth). What better way to maintain a sizeable footprint in the world than by including what is outside the organization in what the organization does?

We have developed better ways of seeing ourselves through data collection, formatting, and visualization. It improves our efficiency and makes us smarter about what actions to take as individuals and as collectives.

We can also increasingly act on the values we hold as we can see more clearly what aligns with them. We can see more of what works and we can do more of it.

While these are significant breakthroughs, the world seems to be changing faster than ever. And with more things and information and people being connected, the unpredictability of the complex, adaptive and sometimes even chaotic systems that we are a part of still has us confused and anxious. To navigate all this uncertainty with agility, we need to know what kind of system we are working within so we can select suitable actions and know what to expect from them.

We also need to continue improving our ability to be creative and to innovate. We can't control creativity, but we can create the conditions where creativity can show up. Humans don't perform creativity the way they perform mechanical tasks. We need different incentive systems for these different types of tasks. So game design, applying insights from neuroscience and behavioral economics, can motivate people (you and me) to move in desirable directions together.

Still, there is this huge challenge of uncertainty. Even with small iterations, bold moves, and collective intelligence, the challenges we face are monstrous.

I believe the only way we will make it through these changes is by believing that we will. As Jessica Hagy puts it: "If we don't know that greatness is possible, we won't bother attempting it."

I hope this book has helped you see that greatness might be possible for us. Significant work is being done – and much has been done already – that provides the crucial breakthroughs for a world that works differently than it has in the past. A world that works better because we all participate in it. I dare myself every day to help co-create a thrivable world. I dare you to join me. Dare greatly. Dare to create, innovate, and change. Dare to create more than we consume, because generating value thrills us. Dare to live into a vision of a world that works for you, your loved ones, your community, your organization, and our society. I dare you.



Reflecting on the book, I recognize that at the heart of thrivability is gratitude. Not only that. Gratitude is not only *at* the heart, it *is* the heart of thrivability.

I want to invite us all to step into gratitude. From a place of gratitude we can acknowledge the gifts the past offers us. From a place of gratitude, we can move beyond systems that were well designed with the best of our abilities and intentions at the time. From a place of gratitude we can generate new (or evolve newer) systems that better serve our more discerning goals. From a place of gratitude we can adjust our goals based on the feedback we have received on how well our earlier versions served humanity and the (eco)systems we depend on. At the heart of thriving is gratitude to one another for the gifts we bring to the table. Gratitude for the technology that allows us to better understand ourselves and our universe. And gratitude for becoming conscious, albeit irrational, creatures who can play games that delight us. The heart and the soul of thriving is gratitude. A thriving life stems from gratitude. A thriving organization expresses gratitude. A thriving society and culture breathes gratitude. Yes, I mean that in an airy spiritual way. And yes I mean it in a technical, psychological-wiring way. And finally, I mean it in a practitioner's sense of being witness to, and practicing, gratitude deeply. So, let's be grateful and...

Level up!

## Acknowledgements

I met with a man that friends and I have affectionately called the Merlin of our age. He doesn't look like Merlin though. Rather, he looks the part of a well educated Englishman you might find at the University Club or walking out of a business meeting in the financial district. I sat in his Manhattan apartment, drinking coffee with him during an intense two hour conversation. I knew he was over 80 at that time, because I heard he went to burning man – as his friends suggested – for his 80th birthday. At the end of our wide-ranging conversation, he said, “you should write this as a book.” So I did. I outlined this book, based on that conversation, as soon as I got back to my friend's place in South Brooklyn. Two months later, I had 3 chapters written.

Okay, maybe not everyone would actually work for two years on a project of this scope after a single conversation in New York. But I am pretty sure several books each year give credit to Napier for nudging them into existence. He is the kind of quiet magical 'leader' that makes things happen in the world without most people even knowing his name. To me, he exemplifies thriving. He lives in an ongoing state of committed deep curiosity. He plants seeds where he sees sparks of life emerging. He nurtures what takes hold and begins to unfold. He is immensely generative. I hope I can be like Napier someday. And I hope he was right that this book might plant a seed for you and for us.

I want to thank very deeply and humbly my editor, Andrew Carey. He played with me through all the twists and turns of transforming a rough draft of a book into this finished version. He says I made the gem in my mouth. I say he polished it just so. Having worked as an editor, I know just how much the editor does to transform a work into a final product – it is the labor that makes rock into sparkling jewelry delightful to behold.

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