

Mapping Dialogue

A research project profiling dialogue tools and processes
for social change

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ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication is the product of a collaboration between the German Technical Co-Operation (GTZ) and Pioneers of Change. As it is our intention to disseminate it as widely as possible, it can be downloaded on www.pioneersofchange.net.

We are very interested in receiving feedback on this toolkit and its usefulness. If you are a dialogue practitioner and you have feedback or additional tools or resources, we would greatly appreciate hearing from you. Any reading materials, contacts, books or articles, or reflections and input to the content of this report from your experience will be greatly appreciated. Please contact dialogue@pioneersofchange.net.

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INTRODUCTION

“An answer is always the part of the road that is behind you. Only questions point to the future.” - Jostein Gaarder

The modern world loves answers. We like to solve problems quickly. We like to know what to do. We don't want to “reinvent the wheel”. We don't want to “waste our time”. And when we have the answers or have a wheel invented we like to pass on the information to others. We do this through the media, through training programmes where teachers pass on answers to students, or through conferences where experts speak on panels while hundreds listen (or pretend to listen) in the audience. This approach may be useful for some situations, but is problematic for a number of reasons, particularly when working on social and human challenges in the 21st century.

Firstly, we live in a world of increasing complexity, where answers have a short life-span. Adam Kahane in his recent book “Solving Tough Problems” (2004) points out that tough problems are characterised by three types of complexity. *Dynamic* complexity means that cause and effect are distant in space and time. To address this type of complexity you need a *systemic* approach to the problem and the solution. *Social* complexity means that there are many different and usually conflicting points of view and assumptions about the issue, and the problem isn't owned by a single entity. This demands a *participative* approach. Finally, *generative* complexity means that the old solutions are no longer working, and the problem is constantly changing and unpredictable, which requires a *creative* approach. Not all problems are dynamically, socially, and generatively complex, but most if not all of the major social issues South Africa as a country is currently trying to work through are. Hiv/AIDS, black economic empowerment, democratic transition, globalisation, unemployment, and crime are all perfect examples.

Secondly, it seems to us that people have an inherent desire to want to solve their *own* problems. When universal, formulaic responses are imported or imposed from the outside, they meet resistance and often fail. This is partly because they are not exactly appropriate in the given context, but just as much because there is a lack of ownership from people who haven't participated or been consulted in the decision-making. Human beings have a living, deep impetus for freedom and self-determination, and given appropriate circumstances, people are usually more resourceful than expected in terms of finding their own answers. They buy in to, and own, solutions they have been a part of creating. The success of implementing interventions on social issues often depends more on ownership and motivation of those involved than on the cleverness of the idea.

Even if only for these two reasons, we need to be adept at asking questions, and at talking and listening to each other. These are age-old competencies. For millennia, people in villages across Africa have worked through collective challenges, creating solutions through conversation. But it is not only when the group is faced with problems that dialogue comes in. Life in an African community is an ongoing conversation.

Why is this art of talking declining? Many of us seem to have forgotten how to engage in, and be present to, such conversations. In these times of busy-ness, information overload, electronic communications, scientific rationality, and organisational complexity, we are forgetting how to talk to each other. Fortunately, as a response to this trend, a number of methods for facilitating dialogue have been emerging globally, in particular over the past 20 years.

This collection profiles 10 such methods in depth and a number of others more briefly. The approaches are diverse in many ways. Some are designed for small groups of 20 people, some can accommodate up to 1200 or even 5000 in dialogue at the same time. Some focus on exploring and resolving conflict and differences, while others emphasise looking first to

what is working and agreed upon. Some are explicitly dialogues between groups while others require each participant to be there only as themselves and individuals.

Yet across all these dialogue methods are some clear common patterns. They focus on enabling open communication, honest speaking, and genuine listening. They allow people to take responsibility for their own learning and ideas. They create a safe space or container for people to surface their assumptions, to question their previous judgments and worldviews, and to change the way they think. They generate new ideas or solutions that are beyond what anyone had thought of before. They create a different level of understanding of people and problems. They allow for more contextual and holistic ways of seeing. They lead to “a-ha” experiences.

Each of the profiled approaches has a life story behind it. Many of these stories begin with a person who posed a question. *“How do the questions we ask shape our reality?” “Given that the coffee breaks seem to be the most useful part of the conference anyway, what if the whole conference was designed similar to a coffee break?” “What is being lost when we just take majority decisions and don’t hear what the minority has to say?” “How do we create a networked conversation, modeled on how people naturally communicate?” “Why are we re-creating the same conference rituals when they are passifying us and limiting our creativity?” “Why are we not managing to bring in the collective intelligence of hundreds of people but rather choosing over and over to just listen to a few expert voices?”*

These inquisitive characters proceeded to experiment with new ways of organising conversations. They drew inspiration from indigenous cultures, lively cafés, international peace processes, and personal experiences of trial and error. The result is the potpourri of possibilities described in the following pages.

As we were reading about dialogue in doing the research for this project, we were struck by how often South Africa is mentioned again and again as an inspiration to these originators of dialogue methods internationally. South Africa’s peaceful transition to democracy is hailed as an example of dialogue. Concepts of Ubuntu, and the indigenous African processes which are as much from South Africa as from the rest of the continent, are also looked to for wisdom. To the rest of the world, this country is a living testimony to the power of conversation. But as we spoke to South Africans currently trying to promote dialogue, there was a sense of sadness that something is being lost. There is a question as to whether South Africa is still managing to cultivate internally what it is so well-known for externally. Or are we overlooking this gift, and “moving on” to the modernity where quick fixes and answers are more important?

Our assignment

This research project was commissioned by the German Technical Co-operation (GTZ). It is part of their supporting the Nelson Mandela Foundation (NMF) to explore ways in which dialogue can be used to address social challenges in South Africa. During and since South Africa’s transition to democracy, Nelson Mandela has exhibited a formidable ability to forgive and suspend judgment, along with an awareness of the importance of listening to all sides. We were asked in this context to map out a variety of approaches, and to provide an overview, case examples and our own subjective commentary on each. We are hoping that this material will be useful not only to NMF but to anyone who shares our questions and our desire to improve the quality of human conversations.

In navigating the field of dialogue, it became apparent to us that the term is very broad. In one of our interviews, it was pointed out to us that dialogue includes dialogue with oneself, dialogue with nature, dialogue with the past and future, and online dialogue. For the scope of this project, we would like to be explicit that we have been asked to focus on dialogue methods applicable to *face-to-face* gatherings of *groups* of people meeting to address collective *social challenges*. We have also for now not broached the topic of what a “Nelson Mandela dialogue method” would look like, but have rather been asked to map the main

approaches available globally. We have, however, included a brief section on indigenous African approaches to conversation.

How to use this document

This report, or toolkit, is divided into three parts. **Part I is called “Foundations”**. It offers a brief “Dialogue Dictionary” to help distinguish the term dialogue from other concepts such as discussion, debate, and negotiation. It then goes deeper into what some of the generic foundations are for a good dialogue process. These are aspects that are more overarching and fundamental than the choice of method, and which can help guide that choice. Finally, Part I includes a brief introduction to the African tradition of conversation, honoring the deep roots of these processes on this continent.

Part II is the actual toolkit. This is where you will find the in-depth explanation of 10 methods as well as shorter descriptions of an additional 14. Each of the 10 methods contains an overview, a review of applications, a case example, and our subjective commentary. The methods have simply been ordered alphabetically, as we found other types of categorisation too constraining. This means, of course, that the order in which you read them is completely up to you as well.

Part III offers initial guidelines on how to assess which method to use in a given situation. We have outlined a series of different purposes a dialogue may have as well as a series of contextual factors, and we give some pointers as to which tools are most suited to different aims and situations. We also look at different types of facilitation, offering points to consider in choosing a facilitator for a dialogue. As you read, you may want to flick the pages back and forth between sections II and III.

A note on “tools”

We will emphasise multiple times through this report that we don't see these methods as recipes that should be applied universally, and we are not prescribing specific tools. The ideal is to understand deeply the purpose, context, and participants of a given dialogue and design the process accordingly. We encourage you to read each of our descriptions and to look for the context, story and impetus behind how these processes were developed. A deeper understanding of how processes are designed would help you in turn to design the appropriate process for your own situation. We find it useful to continually pose the question of how these different tools and processes can also be combined in new ways. If dialogue itself is about exploration, so should our process be about exploration.

There is an obvious paradox in this whole assignment. All of these approaches have evolved as a way of bringing people together to understand problems in context, challenging and moving beyond universal answers and prescriptions. And yet they are themselves tools which in some cases claim to have universal applicability across cultures, group sizes, and situations. Are they somehow above the trend they are criticising because they are focused on dialogue, and so in a different dimension? Yes and no.

We do believe that there are underlying archetypal patterns that recur, that conversation is a universal need, and that some of the principles in these methods are deeply human. But it is also important to be aware that we are at risk of falling into the very same trap of thinking our favorite tool is what will save the world. Tools have an interesting effect on us – they provide safety and comfort, and we become attached to them because they help us to function in a complex world. A tool can become like a lens that affects how we see our surroundings, and if we wear only one lens all the time, our perception of the very thing we are trying to change may become distorted.

The challenge is for us to use these tools wisely to be effective, while being able to hold them lightly and to let them go when they are not serving us any longer. As you read this, we invite

you to try with us to find that balance between honouring the energy, and the power of these tools, while holding their answers lightly.

About the authors

The three of us have been working in a variety of situations as facilitators over the past 10 years. In 1999, we co-founded an international learning network called Pioneers of Change and through that, experimented with new ways of organising and hosting meetings. We have used many of the approaches profiled here personally, and have met and become friends with several of the originators. We are currently working in different contexts. Mille works as a facilitator of dialogic change processes in her capacity as associate of Generon Consulting and Pioneers of Change. Marianne has founded and co-leads a learning village in Zimbabwe called Kufunda Village, primarily focused on building self-reliance in rural communities. Colleen manages the Gordon Institute of Business Science's "Dialogue Circle".

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PART I: FOUNDATIONS

A DIALOGUE DICTIONARY

What is Dialogue?

The most common dictionary definition of a dialogue is simply as a conversation between two or more people. In the field of dialogue practitioners, however, it is given a much deeper and more distinct meaning. David Bohm went back to the source of the word, deriving from the Greek root of “dia” which means “through” and “logos” which is “the word” or “meaning”, and therefore saw dialogue as meaning flowing through us. Elements of this deeper understanding of the word include an emphasis on questions, inquiry, co-creation, and listening, the uncovering of one’s own assumptions and those of others, a suspension of judgment and a collective search for truth. Bill Isaacs calls a dialogue a conversation “with a center, not sides”.

What is Dialogue Not?

Advocacy. Advocacy is the act of pleading or arguing strongly in favor of a certain cause, idea or policy.

Conference. A conference is a formal meeting for consultation or discussion.

Consultation. In a consultation, a party with the power to act consults another person or group for advice or input to a decision. The decision-maker generally retains the power to take the advice or not.

Debate. A debate is a discussion usually focused around two opposing sides, and held with the objective of one side winning. The winner is the one with the best articulations, ideas and arguments.

Discussion. As opposed to dialogue, Bohm points out that the root of the word discussion, “cuss”, is the same as the root of “percussion” and “concussion”, meaning to break apart. A discussion is generally a rational and analytical consideration of a topic in a group, breaking a topic down into its constituent parts in order to understand it.

Negotiation. A negotiation is a discussion intended to produce an agreement. Different sides bring their interests to the table and the negotiation has a transactional and bargaining character to it.

Salon. A salon is a periodic social, unstructured, and informal gathering involving open-ended conversation with no particular objective.

FOUNDATIONS FOR A DIALOGUE PROCESS

The different dialogue methods in this collection may seem very diverse and distinct, which means we risk using them as separate and unrelated tools. In this section, we intend to give some perspective that may be helpful in thinking about how these tools are connected, and what is required to design integral processes of change and learning, whether for very small groups of people, or gatherings and processes of several hundred.

These points are aspects which we feel are foundations to be considered for any dialogue process to be successful. They are not prescriptive, but rather areas to consider as you work through your design, making choices about process, flow, and which of the many tools for dialogue and interaction you will make use of.

1. Purpose and Principles

“Clarity of purpose is a sweet weapon against confusion” - Toke Moeller

Within most if not all of the tools that we are presenting, but also beyond them, lies an essential principle of clarity of **purpose**. Before deciding on which tools to make use of, we need to be crystal clear on our intention for bringing together a group of people or initiating a process of change. Sometimes we may find ourselves having begun something without quite knowing why, or for reasons that are inappropriate or external to the particular context and the needs of the people involved.

Before clarifying a purpose, it can be necessary to connect with the need. What is the need that has propelled us to come together? What do we hope to achieve as we respond to it? From a genuine need, a clear purpose can be derived. It's also important to be clear on whether the amount of investment of time and attention we are demanding from participants is in proportion with the importance to them of meeting this need.

The purpose needs to be attractive, but it should not be in the form of too specific, structured, and quantifiable goals. If objectives and expectations are too dominant in the room, this can deter dialogue and openness. Some proponents and practitioners of dialogue emphasise that it needs to be completely open-ended and not attached to specific outcomes, but there is still clarity on why the group is together.

Principles are our aspiration of how we would like to be together as we pursue our purpose. The principles can be used to design and guide the process and the involvement of participants. Even if we simply come together as an informal group for a conversation of a few hours, making a simple set of agreements for how we wish to be together is important. The longer and larger an initiative the more critical working through principles together becomes.

Most of the tools here have a set of principles attached to them, and this is a significant part of what makes them work. Some examples include: “Rotate leadership” (Circle), “Access the wisdom of the minority” (Deep Democracy), “Explore questions that matter” (World Café) and “Whoever comes are the right people” (Open Space).

Often a convener will share (or co-create) the purpose and principles with participants both before and at the beginning of an event or process, and where possible allow for its evolution during the process with the broader group of participants. Ideally the group, not just the convener, should “own” the purpose and principles. Taken as a whole, a clear purpose together with the principles provides a compass helping us to navigate and make decisions about how to move forward.

2. Good Strategic Questions

The power of a good question cannot be underestimated. Good questions are catalytic. They open up the learning field. They stimulate thought processes, curiosity, and the desire to engage with a group, and they are central to what defines and distinguishes dialogue.

Often we arrive with answers and expertise, statements to be discussed, or positions to be advocated or negotiated. But in dialogue, questions are actually in many ways more powerful than answers. Questions pull people toward the future, while answers – while useful of course - are of the past. A question that has meaning to the people involved can ignite the whole process of learning and change. The knowledge that people involved are genuinely needed to bring forth the answers and solutions *collaboratively* changes the entire field of interaction. Where Bill Isaacs describes dialogue as a “conversation with a center, not sides”, that “center” is often created by one or more good questions.

It is an art to identify questions with real power and meaning to a group of people, a community, or a nation. These are questions that can come alive inside of us, as we seek to work with them. The most powerful questions come directly from the field (the hearts and minds) of the people involved.

There might be one or more overriding question/s framing an entire process. During a process we can then continue to work with questions as a powerful tool. Many of the tools here use questions as an integral part of their make-up.

3. Participation and participants

How serious are we about the people we bring together?

So often we bring people together to listen to experts, ask a few questions, and make some comments, and we feel that we have involved them. We may label it a “dialogue”, or a “consultation” but actually only a few people have been heard. In contrast, this dialogue work comes from a deep belief in, and appreciation of, the intelligence and wisdom that is accessible to us from each person we connect and engage with.

Depending on our purpose, different forms and levels of participation will be required. Based on our purpose, who needs to be involved? What do we hope to do and achieve with them? What will each of them be bringing and what will they be wanting to gain? Do we really trust that they each hold an invaluable part of the puzzle we are trying to solve? How do we best involve and engage them?

Many dialogue methods support the work of going from fragmentation to connection and wholeness through *inclusiveness*. As we find ways of connecting and including different voices and parts of a system, surprising and new discoveries can be made.

If time and resources allow, it can make a big difference to interview all or some of the participants in advance of a workshop. This will help you plan, but will also make them recognise this as a process in which their voice is appreciated and get them started thinking about the topic in advance.

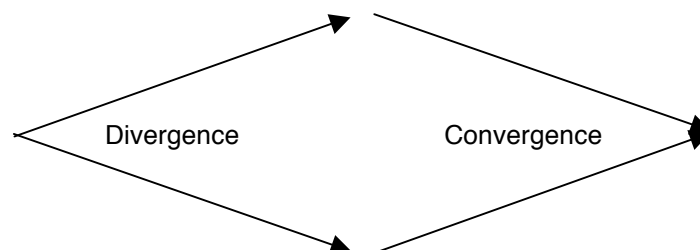
The ultimate level of inclusion is when the participants all step into a role of co-hosts, such that the group’s leadership and facilitation is completely shared. That of course is not possible with processes of thousands, but imagining what that level of involvement and engagement would look like can help us stretch ourselves in making the most of the people who are involved in any given process.

4. Underlying Structure

There is an underlying *rhythm* to most processes of change. Some of the tools and processes we have included here have integrated their own understanding of deep-rooted change in their overall design. However for many of the tools, we need to design a daily rhythm and an overall workshop *flow* paying attention to the underlying architecture that might best serve our intent.

It can help to look at a dialogue process as a story. What is the “beginning”, the “middle” and the “end”? How will people arrive, clarify their individual and collective intentions, agree on how they want to be together and set out on the journey? What will be at the center of their process? How will they close, note individual and collective commitments and conclusions, and prepare to return to where they came from?

There are several models that can help us think through the most appropriate underlying structure of a process. One simple version is the model of divergence and convergence:



The *divergent* phase of a process is a time of opening up possibility. It is about generating alternatives, gathering diverse points of view, allowing disagreement in and suspending judgment. We are often afraid of really opening up, to allow for full divergence to occur, because we are uncomfortable or even fearful of the messiness of too many new and divergent ideas and perspectives. Yet the greater the divergence, the freedom of voicing wild ideas, at the beginning of a process, the greater the possibility of surprising and innovative outcomes.

If divergence is all that occurs, however, we risk facing frustration and lack of positive results. The *convergence* is therefore as important to plan for and design into the process. Convergence is about arriving at, and making explicit, the conclusions, insights, and next steps of the process, and perhaps what the new shared questions are. The two movements of divergence and convergence can happen multiple times during a process or as one pattern. Some tools are better suited for divergence, others for convergence.

Transformative dialogue processes that truly allow for divergence often include a “groan zone” or “grey fog” situation in the middle. The groan zone is that somewhat painful place, where everything is a little too chaotic, unclear and unstructured. Sometimes this is a time of conflict and “storming”, sometimes it’s characterised more by confusion and feeling overwhelmed by complexity or even despairing. It is however also here that innovation and breakthrough has a real chance of occurring. When the group manages to “stay with the messiness” for a little while, and then enter into a process of convergence, they can go through major changes. On the other hand, if divergence is less, and convergence is premature, the potential is lower for major shifts to occur. Kurt Lewin, in his famous theory of change, talks about this as the process of “defreezing” (which involves some anxiety and letting go of one’s old assumptions) followed by “refreezing”.

Different models will highlight different aspects of underlying architecture. Some of our ten methods have an architecture and a flow associated with them. They have a storyline or a set of specified phases they move participants through. For example, we profile the Change Lab process which works with a very specific structure, in broad strokes following the general

principle of allowing initial divergence followed by very clear convergence, with a phase of *emergence* in between. Future Search moves through looking at the past, then the present, and finally the future. Others of the methods like World Café or Circle are less focused on flow and can easily be incorporated as a tool into a variety of processes.

5. The Facilitator

The tools, the design, the process. It is easy to let concerns around these preoccupy us, and yet the most important tool that any one of us have at our disposal as a facilitator is ourselves and our presence. That is not to say that the others don't count. It is simply to state that the importance of the preparation, presence, and state of mind of the facilitator are often neglected. As a convener and host of groups, the facilitator influences the space and the group in visible and invisible ways.

Although much can be planned in advance, a true master will stay present to what shows up in the moment. For dialogue to work, the facilitator should not be getting caught up in a predetermined structure and timetable that has to be followed at all cost. The rule of thumb: *over-prepared, under-structured*, speaks to the criticality of preparation, coupled with the flexibility to respond creatively as the process unfolds in real time. This may sound like *laissez-faire*, but actually requires great clarity, and the ability to listen to the group and the process. This is where the value of purpose and principles shows up strongly: A clear purpose and set of principles that are alive and embodied in the facilitator will enable him or her to improvise and respond with freedom that is rooted in clear direction.

The ability to hold clear and strong the intention and principles of a gathering or process is directly related to how able the facilitator is to be fully present. Some of the most successful facilitators we know take time for a meditative practice, and time to tune into an intention to serve the group before stepping into the facilitator role. To perform well a facilitator needs to develop humility, but also courage to go with the flow. If the facilitator has this kind of confidence and groundedness, they will also gain more legitimacy and trust from participants.

In the last section of this report, on assessment tools, we go further into different qualities a facilitator may embody.

6. Physical Space

Many typical conference-room setups are actually not conducive to dialogue, but we continue to use them out of habit. We worry more about the agenda, and less about the set-up of the rooms or halls. Meanwhile, the physical space exerts an invisible but incredibly strong influence on what can happen in a process.



Will people meet in circles, in theatre style, board-room style, or around small café tables to allow for more interaction and participation? Some of the newer more interactive methods can be run with hundreds of people, so size shouldn't deter us from a set up that allows for true interaction. Will we meet in nature, in a conference room with fluorescent lights, in a coffee-shop with music playing in the background, in someone's home, in a shebeen for the ultimate relaxed conversation? Will there be music playing? Refreshments served? Or do those seem alien to the aim of getting work done?

When people step into a room that is appealing to the senses, something happens to them in turn. It is as if more of the person has been invited in. Before the conversation has even begun, before the intention has been introduced something has already shifted. The physical space can also hold the collective intelligence of the group as it evolves. Places with lots of wall space can be helpful especially if there is someone in the facilitation team with the role of making visible the learning and break-throughs of the group on the walls.

We can do well to think more about where we ourselves feel comfortable and relaxed, yet alert and awake, and pay attention to creating those kinds of settings in every single conversation or dialogue process that we initiate.

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The set of considerations outlined in this section – the purpose and principles, the questions at the center of the dialogue, the participants, the underlying architecture of the process, the facilitator, and the physical space – provide a list of thinking prompts and discussion items for you to go through in designing a dialogue process. We hope you will keep them in mind as you read through the toolkit in Part II.

AFRICAN CONVERSATIONS

“In the end our purpose is social and communal harmony and wellbeing. Ubuntu does not say ‘I think therefore I am.’ It says rather ‘I am human because I belong. I participate. I share.’”

– Desmond Tutu

In embarking on this research, we were acutely aware that it is in some ways absurd to import dialogue methods from the West into Africa, where conversation is so deeply engrained in the indigenous culture. Given that Africa is the “cradle of humankind”, this may well be the place where people first sat down in circle to communicate. Before we move into looking at more recent dialogue methods, we therefore wanted to explore and recognise this tradition.

We started our inquiry into African dialogue intending to clarify and rectify the meaning of terms such as “lekgotla”, “imbizo”, and “indaba”. These words which signify traditional African gatherings have today become popularised, and some would say co-opted, in South Africa as a label for myriad conferences and workshops. The intention with using these labels so broadly may be to somehow honour Africa, but what gets overlooked is that these words have meanings that are very different from a modern conference complete with panel discussions, event management companies, and hotel buffets. We naively thought that we would be able to define these indigenous approaches to clarify the difference, and include them in our “tools”.

It’s important to emphasise that what became apparent to us quickly is that this exploration is a universe beyond the scope of this initial report. Firstly, it is impossible to characterise African processes sweepingly because Africa is a continent with 2000 tribal groupings each with their own particularities in terms of governance, decision-making, and community life. Secondly, the meeting forms are inseparable from the wider culture in which they are used. Thirdly, if we really want to engage with these processes in their entirety, they challenge fundamental assumptions and preconceptions about our world.

Still, we feel it is relevant for us to attempt to document briefly here what we have learned to date. This section is inspired by two interviews with Dr. Magomme Masoga and Nomvula Dlamini, as well as our own experience and a few readings. It should be read as a general description and is not intended to be cited as factual evidence that has been thoroughly researched.

Living Conversations

With the above-mentioned caveats about the diversity of Africa, the easiest approach to this section seems yet to be to try to imagine a “typical” traditional African village. In this village, conversation is constantly alive as an ongoing process from the family level to the communal level. Women are meeting by the river during the day, young men and boys talk while herding cows, families gather around the fire. Conversations weave together. Through oral history, story-telling, and proverbs, the principles and rules for the community are shared and alive.

These ongoing conversations are not goal-oriented, but rather a way of life. The men of the village do gather in specifically convened meetings (lekgotlas or imbizos) as necessary, where they come to an overview of what is going on in the village and take decisions. But this is only a small part of the village conversation. The women, youth and families converse outside and influence the conversation that takes place at the lekgotla.

When conversations happen, it is always with an engrained awareness that these are not just individuals communicating. Each person is connected to a family, a community, and a group of ancestors. They represent a larger whole. They do not just speak for themselves and interact on their own behalf.

Communication is not only direct and verbal. Art, drama, drumming, and song are used as ways to communicate, especially about things that may be difficult to confront. Women in particular may compose a new song to communicate what is going on for them. The community is in some ways even architecturally designed for conversation and meeting. The houses are circular, the fireplace is circular, the houses in relation to each other make up a circle. The conversation is embedded in the physical space.

The Lekgotla

The Lekgotla process of Botswana is likely to be the most well-documented African council process of Southern Africa. It is often criticised these days because it has to be convened by the Chief and only includes the men of the village, but many argue that there are other ways for the women and youth to get their issues across to the Lekgotla. (In Venda culture, apparently the final decisions must still pass by the matriarch of the village.) For our purposes, we feel it is useful to draw lessons from this process even for dialogues across genders, though it may be inappropriate to label such dialogues “Lekgotla”.

In the village, the decision to convene the Lekgotla is not necessarily transparent. The chief's councillors play a role of listening in the community and paying attention to issues as they arise. When something is building up they bring it to the Lekgotla to make sure that conversation happens as early as possible before a conflict escalates.

A Lekgotla is always held in the open air, because the outdoors belongs to no one. This provides a sense of freedom, openness and invitation to people to attend and speak honestly. There is also no time limit on the process. It may go on for days or even weeks until the issues being addressed have reached resolution. According to Nomvula Dlamini, *“People's lives unfolded into time. Time wasn't imposed on people's lives.”* This is a whole different conception of time to that of the modern world, and it is a fundamental frame of mind. Nomvula points out that this freedom from time restrictions enables participants to suspend judgment and be willing to listen to someone's point of view and story *in context* without rushing them.

The Lekgotla meets in a circle. The circle represents unity, and the participants are aware that it is only if they are whole and united that they can address their problems. The circle also ensures that they face each other and speak honestly to one another. As they gather, they greet each person around the circle. They make sure that those who really matter to the process are present. Though they may be seated by rank and speak in order of a hierarchy, the emphasis is on every voice being heard equally.

The conversation is opened up. Each person in turn talks about how the issue affects their lives directly. Nothing is seen as an isolated event. All the stories are heard in context, respectfully, and taking the time it needs to take. The different orientation to time allows for a deeper quality of listening, and every voice is listened to and given equal weight. The same person won't speak twice or respond until they've heard the views of others. Silence is also an integral part of the conversation as in between each voice the words are allowed to sink in. Emotion is expressed freely but constructively. The process enables each participant to reflect on and assess his own behaviour in relation to the community.

The Lekgotla is partly a court, passing judgment on conflicts, but can also be a more general gathering for conversations around the main issues facing the village. When resolving injustices, the focus is less on determining right and wrong or on punishment, and more on healing, restoration of relationships, and finding ways of moving on. The accused is always heard, first in the process of clarifying what happened, but he is also given a chance to assess at the end whether he thinks the group's decision is fair and whether the rehabilitation and restoration he is being requested to undertake is within his means. He is never silenced.

The group takes collective responsibility for the issues. The solutions are explored meaningfully together, rather than imposed from one side, and the orientation is towards consensus and compromise. The community's collective need is at the center, above any individual's needs, and the concern is always what is best for the community. To the Western mind, this may sound oppressive, but in this culture it is not seen as sacrifice, because what is good for the collective is completely intertwined with what is good for the individual. The concept of freedom is that you should have the maximum degree of freedom as long as it is not at the expense of the freedom of others.

Through the community's ongoing conversation there is a level of shared clarity around the principles and sense of right and wrong. These principles are then applied through the deliberation at the Lekgotla to determine what should be done in the particular context. There is no law outlining the standard punishment or regulations for each situation.

Drawing Lessons

Some of the deeply held worldviews behind the integral nature of conversation in a traditional African community may seem incompatible with modern life. The idea that we are not first and foremost individuals but members of a community, and that we don't need to be slaves to the clock are difficult to practice in their entirety. But exploring African culture can challenge our mindsets and it's certainly possible to draw inspiration and to see how the nature of our conversations changes if we try to shift our worldview.

Many of the tools and processes in this collection have taken part of their inspiration from similar underlying views and cultural practices as those we know from the traditional African village described above. Some have found their inspiration directly from the soil of Africa, others from Native American traditions that share similar beliefs. Many of them share a return to circular time, to the people and the purpose for coming together being more important than timing and structure. Most of them make use of the circle as a way of coming together in an unbroken whole.

Many of the processes also recognise and work explicitly with story telling as a way of sharing inspired knowledge and building on memories of the best of what is and was. Dialogue is in many ways about creating a culture of coming together as a whole – letting each voice be heard, but in service of the community and the whole. Many of the methods that we are presenting seem to be coming back to much of what we already know from our own culture and history in Africa. And so while at first it may look inappropriate to be bringing in western methods to a place from which dialogue and conversation may have originated, there is something affirming in the way many of these methods are coming back to some of our very own roots.

One of the most important lessons is to appreciate the value of African rural culture, rather than seeing it as backward and in need of development. There is life and community available to us here, and these are among the most essential components of any meaningful and lasting positive change. Those of us who come from here, and who might even have grown up in a traditional rural setting, would do well to allow our memories of being together in community, in conversation – in all their different shapes and forms – to inspire us as we continue on our journey of facilitating groups, communities, organisations, or even nations in coming together in conversation.

As we continue into the description of a variety of dialogue methods, we invite you to hold these two perspectives from the last two sections: the foundations for dialogue, as we have experienced them through our work and experience, and our sense of what the African approach might be. We hope you will let both of these challenge you as you imagine what is possible in bringing people together in bold and possibly unusual ways for meaningful dialogue and discovery.

PART II: TOOLS

Appreciative Inquiry

“Human systems grow toward what they persistently ask questions about.”
 - David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney

Overview

Appreciative Inquiry is an approach and process which turns problem-solving on its head. Instead of finding the best ways to solve a pressing *problem*, it places the focus on identifying the best of what *already is* in an organisation or community, and finding ways of enhancing this to pursue dreams and possibilities of what could be.

Appreciative Inquiry originates in the work of David Cooperrider. As a doctoral student in 1980 Cooperrider made a shift in his approach from identifying and mapping what was and was not working at the Cleveland Clinic, which he was studying, to more specifically looking for those factors that contributed to the organisation’s health and excellence. Recognising the power and change brought about simply from his shift in focus, he began to lay the first foundations for what is today Appreciative inquiry. He worked under the guidance of his advisor Dr. Suresh Srivastava, and the encouragement of clinic leaders who were seeing the potential of his approach for more widespread organisational development.

Ap-pre’ci-ate (verb):
 valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems;
 to increase in value, e.g. the economy has appreciated in value

In-quire’ (kwir) (verb):
 the act of exploration and discovery
 to ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities

A key underlying assumption of this approach is that the questions we ask influence the answers we find. Questions that can elicit strong positive responses can be more powerful in driving people towards a positive future. This approach allows people to work towards something that is energizing and inspiring instead of working to overcome something that is deficient and dysfunctional. In the process, they improve systems, organisations and communities.

Appreciative Inquiry is by its nature a cooperative process that collects, builds on and works with the strengths, life-giving forces and good news stories that are found in any community or organisation.

The main differences between problem solving and Appreciative Inquiry are illustrated below:

Problem solving	Appreciative Inquiry
“Felt need” & identification of problem Analysis of causes Analysis of possible solutions Action planning Assumes: <i>Organisation is a problem to be solved</i> <i>What’s in the way of what we want?</i>	Appreciate & value the best of <i>What Is</i> Imagine: <i>What Might Be</i> Dialogue: <i>What Should Be</i> Create: <i>What Will Be</i> Assumes: <i>Organisation is mystery to be discovered</i> <i>Front Door – what is it we ultimately want?</i>
Deficit Thinking	Possibility Thinking

There are four guiding principles:

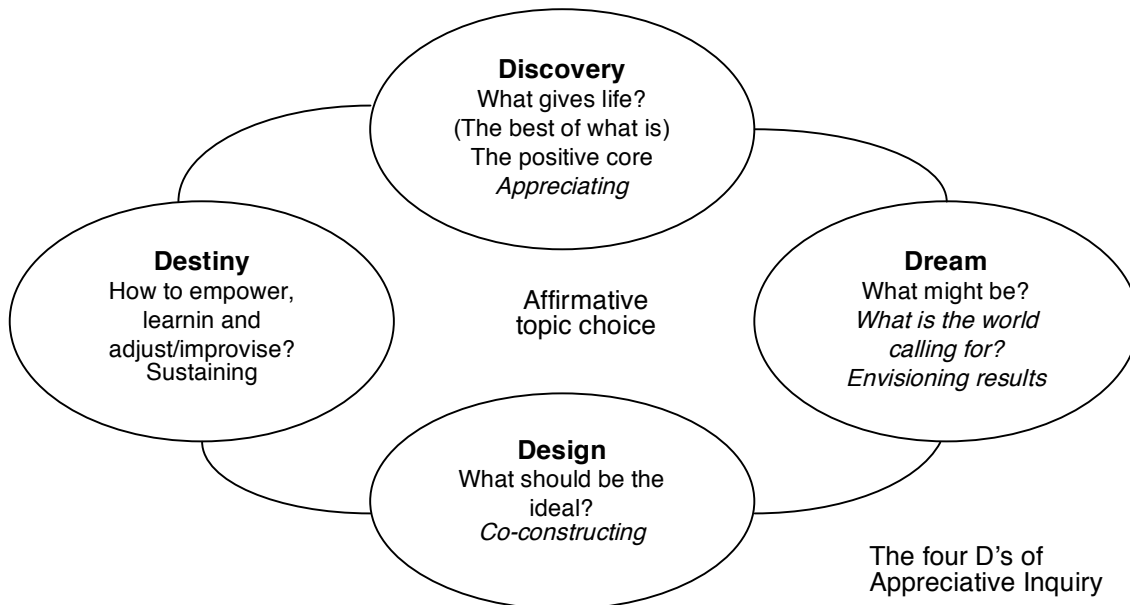
1. Every system works to some degree; seek out the positive, life-giving forces and appreciate the best of what is.

2. Knowledge generated by the inquiry should be *applicable*; look at what is possible and relevant.
3. Systems are capable of becoming more than they are, and they can learn how to guide their own evolution – so consider *provocative* challenges and bold dreams of “what might be.”
4. The process and outcome of the inquiry are interrelated and inseparable, so make the process a *collaborative* one.

(Source: Appreciative Inquiry, An Overview – compiled by Kendy Rossi)

The AI process

As the below diagram shows, there are four main steps to the AI process.



Although this is the typical depiction of the four D's of AI, there is actually an initial step of Defining the focus of inquiry. Doing this collaboratively is an incredibly important point of departure. And it is important to frame it as an affirmative topic, and not a problem statement. For example: “creating and sustaining high-quality cross gender work place relationships,” is an affirmative topic, whereas “cutting incidents of sexual harrassment” is a problem statement.

Discovery – Appreciating and valuing the best of what is. This is a system-wide inquiry (through interviews and storytelling) into people’s experience of the group, organisation or community, at its most vital and alive, reflecting on those highlights and clarifying what made those experiences possible. This is also known as identifying the positive core of a system. This phase includes clarifying those elements that people want to keep even as they (their organisation, community) change in the future, as well as identifying intriguing potentials for the future.

Dream – Envisioning “What might be”. Together people build a vision of a future they want. They respond to their sense of what the world is calling them to become. They imagine that the best of “what is” forms the foundation for the way things are in the future. Questions in this phase include: “What does our positive core indicate that we could be?” “What are our most exciting possibilities?” “What is the world calling us to become?”

Design – In this phase, people determine “what should be,” crafting an organisation or community in which the positive core is vibrant and alive. The design focus is placed on elements that can help bring the dreams to life, such as practices, structures, policies, technologies, etc. The work is to develop provocative propositions (bold ideal possibilities) and principles of design that integrate the positive core.

Destiny – This final phase takes the step towards creating the initiatives, systems or changes needed to make real the future as articulated in the design propositions. This phase can be done using Open Space to make the most of the creativity and insight of the people involved, and allowing self-selected groups to plan the next steps in the areas that they are most passionate about, and willing to take responsibility for. (See separate section on Open Space Technology).

The full AI Process

- Select focus area or topic(s) of interest
- Conduct interviews designed to discover strengths, passions, unique attributes
- Identify patterns, themes and/or intriguing possibilities
- Create bold statements of ideal possibilities ("Provocative Propositions")
- Co-determine "what should be" (consensus re: principles & priorities)
- Create “what will be”

The full process can be done in what is called an *AI summit*, including several hundred people coming together for 2-6 days. In an AI summit, the first phase (Discovery) always kicks off with personal interviews around several questions that elicit stories of highlights and strong positive experiences. This is followed by people working in smaller groups and teams, to map patterns and distil the positive core from the stories. Together they continue into envisioning “what might be” together, followed by co-constructing “what should be.” In each of these phases there is continuous feedback to the whole, to enable the whole system to integrate what is happening in other groups.

Applications

Appreciative Inquiry can be used in several ways – one is using an AI summit as described above, where an organisation, community or any system comes together for 2-6 days to go through the full AI process with the aim to engage in a large scale change or developmental process. It could be strategic planning, community development, systems change, organisational redesign, vision development, or any other process in which there is a genuine desire for change and growth based on positive inquiry, and for allowing the voice of people at all levels of a system to be heard and included. Although this application can be seen as an isolated process, it is very much based on a way of being where organisations or communities can co-create a desired future building on the best of the past. The AI summit is often simply the beginning of a continuous process of examining and building on strengths and possibilities. These can include anywhere from 100 – 2000 people.

Secondly, Appreciative Inquiry can also be done without an AI summit as an on-going process of interviews and dialogues that take place throughout a system (organisation, community, city). The case below is an example of such a process.

Finally the principles of AI can be integrated in simple yet powerful ways in most workshops and other gatherings, following its basic principle of asking appreciative questions, and working with storytelling as a powerful agent to engage and involve people. A simple guideline is to learn the art of asking appreciative questions that elicit compelling stories, and questions that help envision the future.

Case Example – The Imagine Movement

Partly excerpted from 'Imagine Chicago – Ten Years of Imagination in Action,' written by Bliss W. Browne and Shilpa Jain.

Imagine Chicago is part of a movement of imagination. It considers itself as a catalyst in this movement, supporting the sprouting of Imagine initiatives on six continents. While each Imagine effort is distinct, all the efforts share a few common convictions: that human beings can unite around shared meaning; that each person's contribution is vital to a flourishing community; and that creating a culture of public learning and civic engagement that connects generations and cultures is at the heart of self- and social transformation.

Bliss Brown, the founder of Imagine Chicago, began in 1993 with a vision inspired by conversations with many well-known city pioneers and social innovators. She began to imagine a city:

- where every citizen, young and old, applies their talents to create a positive future for themselves and their community.
- where hope comes alive in the flourishing and connecting of human lives.
- where young people and others whose visions have been discounted, develop and contribute their ideas and energy.

In seeking ways to bring the vision to life, she created what has today become Imagine Chicago. The initial project was an attempt to discover what gives life to the city, and at the same time, to provide significant leadership opportunities for youth, who most clearly represent the city's future.

During 1993-1994, the Imagine Chicago team initiated two parallel pilot processes of intergenerational civic inquiry as the starting point for a broad-based conversation about the future of the city of Chicago. They were: 1) a city-wide appreciative inquiry, and 2) a series of community-based and community-led appreciative inquiries.

The citywide interview process involved approximately 50 young people as interviewers. They interviewed about 140 Chicago citizens who were recognized by the Imagine Chicago team as "Chicago glue," including artists, politicians, business and civic leaders, and other young people. Over a period of many months, deep, one-on-one conversations took place between the adolescents and adults about the city's past and about visions of its future. Both youth and adult participants later described these conversations as "energizing," "rejuvenating," "and transforming."

IMAGINE CHICAGO INTERGENERATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (1993-1994)

1. How long have you lived in Chicago? In this community?
 - a. What first brought your family here?
 - b. What is it like for you to live in this community?
2. When you think about the whole city of Chicago, what particular places, people or images represent the city to you?
3. Thinking back over your Chicago memories, what have been real high points for you as a citizen of this city?
4. Why did these experiences mean so much to you?
5. How would you describe the quality of life in Chicago today?
6. What changes in the city would you most like to see?
 - a. What do you imagine your own role might be in helping to make this happen?
 - b. Who could work with you?
7. Close your eyes and imagine Chicago as you most want it to be in a generation from now. What is it like? What do you see and hear? What are you proudest of having accomplished?
8. As you think back over this conversations, what images stand out for you as capturing your hopes for this city's future?
9. What do you think would be an effective process for getting people across the city talking and working together on behalf of Chicago's future?

In the community-based pilots young leaders interviewed local community builders across different ethnic communities. All of the pilot interview projects broadened the participants' views of what was possible, both within themselves and within the city. The stories conveyed in these small group interviews were shared in a series of civic forums where Chicago citizens convened and began devising projects to bring about positive change in specific neighborhoods and public institutions.

The appreciative questions were clustered around three main stages of appreciative inquiry, which still today is the common organizing structure for all of Imagine Chicago's initiatives. This approach moves from idea to action in a generative cycle, which borrows its inspiration from the basic structure of appreciative inquiry:

- *Understand what is (focusing on the best of what is)* - All of Imagine Chicago's work begins with and is grounded in asking open-ended and value-oriented questions about what is life-giving, what is working, what is generative, what is important.
- *Imagine what could be (working in partnerships with others)* - New possibilities are inspired by interesting questions or stories, which stretch our understanding beyond what we already know.
- *Create what will be (translating what we value into what we do)* - For imagination to lead to community change, it needs to be embodied in something concrete and practical — a visible outcome that inspires more people to invest themselves in making a difference. Imagine Chicago supports the creation of initiatives and programmes in partnership with local organisations and institutions.

All three processes feed into and out of each other; the interdependent relationship enables them to transform individual and community visions into realities.

"For the twenty years we have been in Chicago, we have only been talking in our community organisation about survival. Now we have been asked what we have to contribute to the city. It is an exciting question that we are now asking ourselves." - Filipino leader

Commentary

Appreciative inquiry is particularly impactful with people who have been disempowered and are focusing too much on their deficiencies. It is an important contrast to the common approach of seeing people as "poor" and in need of "help" from the outside. A general tendency in "development work" is to focus on deficiencies, survey needs, and seek to solve problems. Not only does this mean we overlook some opportunities, but this approach also has a negative impact on the self-esteem and creativity of people involved.

We have used Appreciative Inquiry with rural people in Zimbabwe, and there has been an amazing shift as they begin to operate from a clearer and stronger sense of the wealth and wisdom they have as a community. When they discover that they can harness their own wealth in various forms they can break out of a scarcity and dependency mindset, which generates a sense of freedom and possibility, as well as creativity and self-esteem. Their ability to imagine and plan for the future comes from an entirely different place of strength. Appreciative Inquiry in this context is related to other development tools such as the "community asset map" and "capacity inventories".

On the other hand, Appreciative Inquiry can focus so entirely on the good, that it prevents a full view of a situation, and becomes illusory. It can also feel restrictive, as if only the positive is allowed in. Our experience has been that when we bring in an appreciative approach it needs to go hand in hand with releasing what has been painful, or feels limiting. This could for example be by complementing it with circle dialogue, deep ecology work, scenario exercises or other tools. This is especially the case when working more intimately with a community

over an extended period of time. Working appreciatively should not be about closing our eyes to the things we don't want to see.

Finally, Appreciative Inquiry is a great exercise in becoming aware of our questions and the impact that questions have on human thoughts and actions.

Resources

Cooperrider, David, Diana Whitney, and Jacqueline Stavros. *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: The First in a Series of AI Workbooks for Leaders of Change*

Cooperrider, David and Diana Whitney. *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change*

Whitney, Diana, Amanda Trosten-Bloom and David Cooperrider. *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change*

<http://www.appreciative-inquiry.org>

<http://www.imaginechicago.org>

Change Lab

Overview

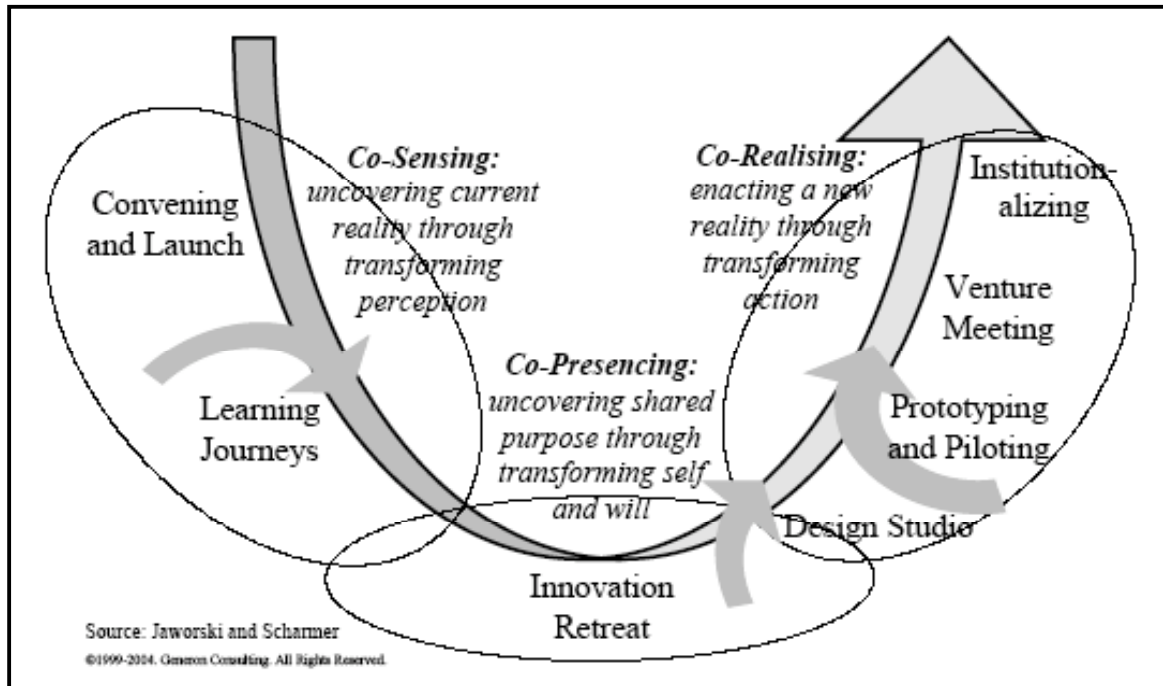
The Change Lab is a multi-stakeholder dialogic change process. It is designed to generate the shared commitment and the collective insight needed to produce breakthrough solutions to complex social problems.

Each Change Lab is convened around a particular problem that appears to be stuck with no obvious solution in sight. It is convened by one or more organisations, that are committed to effecting change, and aware that they cannot solve this problem alone. The convener(s) brings together 25-35 key stakeholders of the issue who somehow represent a “microcosm” of the problem system. These people need to be influential, diverse, committed to changing the system, and also open to changing themselves.

The process which these people move through together in the Change Lab draws inspiration from the “U-Process”, a creative ‘social technology’. The U-process was co-developed by Joseph Jaworski and Otto Scharmer, based on interviews with over 150 innovators, scientists, artists, and entrepreneurs. In applying it, an individual or team undertakes three activities or movements:

1. *Sensing* the current reality of the system of which one is a part, carefully and in depth, by suspending judgment and redirecting one’s vantage point to that of the whole system;
2. *Presencing* by letting go of past expectations and agendas, and reflecting to access one’s “inner knowing” about what is going on and what one has to do; and
3. *Realising*, acting swiftly to bring forth a new reality, through prototyping, piloting and institutionalising new behaviours, activities, or initiatives.

While the *U-Process* is an archetypal change process that can be applied at an individual or collective level, the *Change Lab* is specifically for multi-stakeholder problem-solving.



Overview of a Change Lab

In the Change Lab, the stakeholders go through a series of activities together, associated with each movement of the U-Process.

In **Sensing**, they transform the way they perceive the problem. They are trained in, and practice, an approach to dialogue interviewing which is intended to uncover the systemic issues around the problem and the deeper motivations of stakeholders. They share their diverse stories about the problem and seek to genuinely understand each other's frame of reference. They surface their shared body of knowledge, and formulate the 'problem space' and the 'solution space' in multiple iterations. Most importantly, they participate in experiential "learning journeys" - visits to affected communities and organisations - during which they immerse themselves directly in the field of the problem at hand.

In **Presencing**, the participants usually spend time in silence. The Presencing aspect of the Change Lab often involves a "wilderness solo", a reflective period of time spent alone in nature. This is a powerful practice to enable the capacities of presencing: letting go and letting come. While the Sensing experience may have overwhelmed them with complexity and information, the Presencing experience is about returning to simplicity, creating emptiness, and connecting to what really matters. In focus is uncovering shared purpose and connecting to their deeper will: what do they each deep down want to do about this issue?

In **Realising** they crystallise insights in terms of the basic characteristics that need to define a new system as well as creative ideas for breakthrough solutions. These ideas are now translated into "prototypes" – "mock-up" versions of the solution that can be tested first with the Lab Team and then with a wider group of stakeholders. The prototyping process is about going beyond writing up the idea in a document to trying to create an experience of the initiative for people. It is also about taking a more emergent approach which allows a constant adaptation of the initiative in conversation with the context. This is in contrast to a more traditional approach where the activities of planning and implementation are separate in time and space. The prototyping approach enables team members to build, test, improve, and re-test interventions in the real world.

Innovations which, on the basis of this prototyping, hold the greatest promise for effecting systemic change, are then developed into pilot projects. Finally, these pilots are scaled up, mainstreamed, and institutionalized with support from committed government, business, and civil society partners.

Applications

The Change Lab is intended to address problems that are complex in three ways:

- *Dynamically*: cause and effect are far apart in space and time, resulting in the need for a *systemic* solution;
- *Generatively*: the future is unfamiliar and undetermined, and traditional solutions aren't working, resulting in the need for a *creative* solution;
- *Socially*: no single entity owns the problem and the stakeholders involved have diverse-potentially entrenched and antagonistic-perspectives and interests, resulting in the need for a *participative* solution.

Because of the level of complexity being addressed and the scope and scale of these problems, the full Change Labs are often run over a period of several years requiring investment of significant time, attention, and financial resources. However, it is possible to run shorter and condensed versions of a few days to a few months, and still have a remarkable impact. It also has both global and local applications.

Generon Consulting, which is the key organisation behind the Change Lab, runs these processes both within organisations and across organisations, but we are focusing here on

the work in the cross-sector, multi-stakeholder approach. In this situation, if you are trying to convene a microcosm of a system across sectors, it is important to be aware of whether parties from all three of these sectors are willing to be involved. If the key actors needed in order to construct a “microcosm” of the system cannot be convened and committed, the Change Lab may not be the right approach.

Case Example: The Sustainable Food Lab

[primarily excerpted from the SFL website at <http://www.glifood.org>]

The purpose of the Sustainable Food Laboratory (SFL) is to create innovations that make food systems more economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable — in other words, profitable and affordable, in balance with nature, and good for producer and consumer communities. The 35 members of the SFL Team first gathered at a “Foundation Workshop” in the Netherlands in June 2004. Together they make up a microcosm of the stakeholders in global food supply chains: farmers, farm workers, processors, wholesalers, retailers, consumers, representatives of government agencies, activists, financiers, researchers and others. They are primarily from Europe, the United States and Brazil. Individually, each of the team members has a proven track record as an innovator, has both on-the-ground experience with and a bird's-eye perspective of food systems; and is passionate, entrepreneurial, and influential.

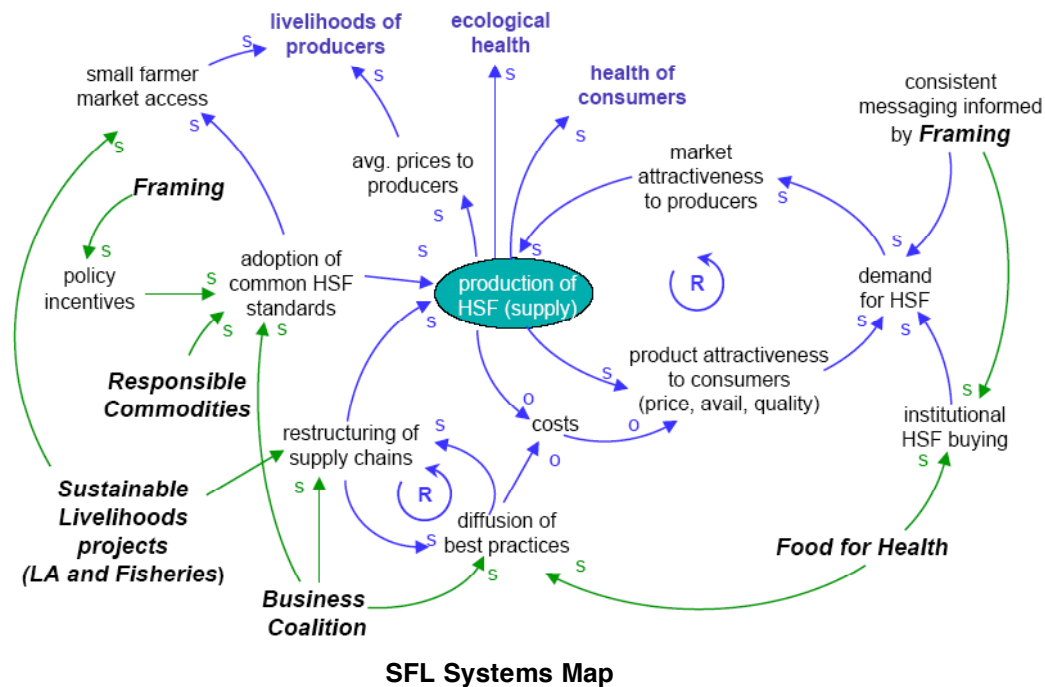
Each of the team members was frustrated by what he or she has been able to accomplish working only in his or her own organization and sector. In joining the Lab, they committed to 40 days or more of work over two years, in whole team workshops, learning journeys and sub-team work on prototype and pilot projects. Through the SFL, they are now engaging in dialogue and action to achieve changes more ambitious than they could achieve separately.

The Process: After the Foundation workshop, each Lab Team member went on one of three five-day learning journeys in Brazil. When they had returned from and synthesized the results of their journeys, the whole team reconvened for a six-day Innovation Retreat. This process supported and informed their choices about initiatives which the participants started working on in sub-teams. At a subsequent meeting in Salzburg in April 2005, they prototyped the new initiatives, which are now being piloted. Each initiative is aimed, in some way, at creating sustainable food supply chains and bringing them into the mainstream. Recently the team reconvened for a mid-course review in Costa Rica. At the final Venture Committee Meeting in the Spring of 2006, the Lab Team, Executive Champions, and other interested parties will review the results from the prototyping process and decide which initiatives will be taken to scale, how and with what resources, and by which institutions.

The six initiatives that are currently being piloted are:

1. Linking sustainable food production from Latin American family farmers to global markets
2. Delivering high-quality nutrition from regional farmers to schools and hospitals
3. Building a business coalition for sustainable food
4. Creating sustainability standards for food commodities and related investment screens for food companies
5. Re-framing food sustainability for citizens, consumers, and policy makers
6. Increasing the sustainability of fish supply chains

The diagram below reflects the link between these initiatives and the overall map constructed by the SFL team to illustrate the linkages in the food system:



It is still early to document the results of the SFL initiatives, but it's clear that the Lab has generated new thinking, new relationships and strong partnerships across sectors, and has started shifting the global food system both by changing the participants and through the initiatives they are now busy carrying out.

Commentary

The Change Lab has some key distinguishing strengths:

1. *The approach is systemic.* Throughout the Change Lab, participants are building "system sight". They are defining the problem space and solution space in a systemic way, and as a microcosm of the system, they are also a reflection of the wider issue.
2. *It is action-learning.* The Change Lab is a dialogic process and has dialogue embedded in it throughout. But it is also an action process. It doesn't stop at the point where new ideas or insights have been generated. The Lab Team stays together through piloting the new initiatives and continue to relate these initiatives back to the picture of the whole system, so the effort doesn't become fragmented.
3. *The Change Lab is a process, more so than a tool.* It draws on 20 years of experimentation with different kinds of tools and integrates the best ones in various phases. The theme, pattern, and glue that holds these different tools together is the U-Process. This also means that the Change Lab is very flexible and can adapt around that core pattern.

There are a number of risks and challenges involved in convening a Change Lab as well. Working with stakeholders from a diversity of organisations and sectors and coordinating the different interests involved can slow the process down significantly. This can be exacerbated because the process is unfamiliar to many, and some of the practices may lead to resistance. In some cases, it helps to start with a "mini-Lab" – a 3-day miniature version of the Change Lab – to give participants a sense of what a larger process could achieve.

Generon Consulting's approach to the Change Lab is constantly evolving as experiences of applying it accumulate. Generon has a "Change Lab Fieldbook" available, a living document which contains many of the lessons learned to date, as well as both success factors and potential pitfalls of the process. To request a copy email Mille [bojer@generonconsulting.com]

Resources

Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers. *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*

Kahane, Adam. *Solving Tough Problems*.

<http://www.generonconsulting.com>

<http://www.glifood.org> - Sustainable Food Lab

<http://www.ottoscharmer.com>

<http://www.dialogonleadership.org> - Documentation of a series of rich and in-depth interviews with innovators in this field, conducted primarily by Otto Scharmer

Circle

Overview

For as long as humankind has been around, the circle has surely been with us. Human beings have naturally been gathering in circle, around the fire, sometimes in deep conversation, sometimes in the quiet space of simply being together. At its most essential level, the circle is a form that allows a group of people to slow down, practice deep listening, and truly think together. When practiced fully, it can be an embodiment of the root of the word dialogue: “meaning flowing through”.

“Council” is another word, which expresses the promise of the circle. Imagine a circle of elders, passing a talking piece around one by one. Everyone’s attention is on the person currently holding the piece, sharing his or her thoughts, perspectives, and wisdom. Each person’s voice is valued and honoured. Long pauses of silence are an accepted part of the conversation.

People can meet in a circle as a once-off gathering, or coming together regularly over periods ranging from a few months to several years. In both these forms, and everything in between, the circle is in recent years making something of a comeback. From business executives in corporate boardrooms to community organizers in rural hinterlands, people are re-connecting with the value of sitting in circle.

Many of the processes described in this collection make use of chairs set up in a circle because it is generally the most suitable configuration for a dialogue. This section, however, looks specifically at Circle as a process in its own right, not only as a physical set up. We draw here on the guidelines developed by Christina Baldwin of PeerSpirit. Inspired by her exploration of Native American traditions, Christina wrote a book entitled “Calling the Circle”, which has made a major contribution to re-introducing circle process and developing a set of practices that can help us to facilitate meaningful circle dialogues. These guidelines can be used in their entirety or held more lightly.

Three principles of circle

Three principles help shape a circle. They are:

- **Leadership rotates** among all circle members. The circle is not a leaderless gathering - it is an *all leader* gathering.
- **Responsibility is shared** for the quality of experience.
- People **place ultimate reliance on inspiration** (or spirit), rather than on any personal agenda. There is a higher purpose at the centre of every circle.

Intention

As with most of the tools and processes of good dialogue, the starting point is with the purpose and intention. The intention will determine who should be invited to join, when, where and for how long they will meet, as well as what questions they will focus on.

The clearer the intention and the stronger the commitment to it, the stronger the circle. There are leadership circles, where people gather to support each other in their respective leadership practice. There are also circles that come together to solve a specific challenge such as improving a programme in an organization, or working together to make a neighbourhood more safe. It could be a group of workers coming together in circle with management to find the best way to deal with a need to retrench people, or even a group of homeless people joining members of a local church congregation to together come up with the best ways to support the homeless.

Sometimes a circle is more simply a tool used in a larger process during the course of a workshop, or as a weekly or monthly meeting in an organization, or community. In this case the intention is more informal – to share expectations, to connect with how each other is doing, and to surface and address any concerns or needs people may have.

The host

Although leadership is fully shared in circle, there will always be a host for the particular circle. Often the host is also the caller of the circle, but where a circle meets continuously over a longer period of time, the host role can change from circle meeting to circle meeting.

The host will ensure that the circle flows through its main phases and that the intention is at the centre of the dialogue. The host is often also responsible, with the “guardian” (see below), for the actual physical space. Special attention is paid to the physical centre of the circle – a colorful rug, some meaningful symbols or objects, and/or a plant may mark the centre of the circle and often represent the collective intention. This paying attention to the centre of a circle, brings with it a sense of the sacred, when people gather together around it. Something out of the ordinary is being invited in.

The Guardian

The Guardian is the person who pays special attention to the energy of the group, and that the group is not straying from the intention. The Guardian may interrupt during the course of the circle to suggest a break or a moment of silence.

Flow of a typical circle

Welcome. The welcome helps the group shift into circle space. A good welcome can be a poem, a moment of quiet, or a piece of music to help people fully arrive, and to become present to each other and their circle.

Check-in. One thing that distinguishes a circle from many other ways of coming together is the importance placed on bringing each voice into the room. The circle therefore begins with a check-in where each person has a chance to speak to how they are feeling, as well as sharing their expectations for the meeting that day. The host may pose a specific question for each person to respond to in the check-in. It is also not unusual to invite participants to place an object representing their hope for the circle in the centre, sharing a little about the object as they do so. The result is a meaningful visual representation of the group’s collective hopes in the center.

Agreements. When any circle gathers, its members need to formulate guidelines or agreements on how they wish to be together. This is an important part of shared leadership, and everyone taking responsibility for their time together. An example of commonly used agreements of circle are:

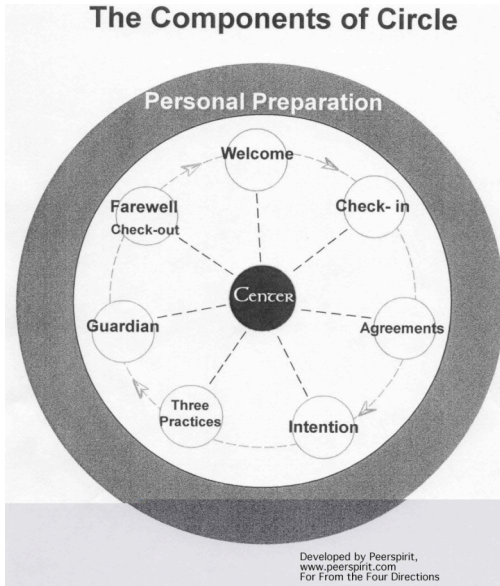
- Listen without judgment
- Offer what you can and ask for what you need
- Confidentiality – whatever is said in circle, stays in circle
- Silence is also a part of the conversation

Farewell/Check-out

At the end of a circle, similar to the check-in at the beginning, there is now a check-out for people to share where they are at. The focus of the check-out can be as diverse as each circle. It can be on what people have learned, how they are feeling about what transpired, or what they are committing to do moving forward from the circle. *Every* participant usually speaks in the check-ins or check-outs unless they explicitly choose not to.

Forms of Council

The circle is well known for the use of the talking piece. The talking piece is passed around the circle, with the person holding it being the only one to talk. The talking piece can be anything – an object from nature, a photograph, a pen, or even a cellphone. Some people think circle is only about working with talking piece council, but this is just one tool of the circle. Often the check-in is done with a talking piece, but then people can move into talking without it.



This is called *conversation council*, where anyone who has something to say speaks. When people have been using circle for a while, even in conversation council, the practice is ingrained to not interrupt someone, and to let each person finish before a new person begins.

Sometimes this conversation does speed up a little too much, and the centre – or calm – is lost. This is where the Guardian, or anyone who feels the need, can call the circle into reflection, or silent council, where everyone is silent for a while, letting things settle, before continuing either with the talking piece or in conversation council.

Three Practices

Essentially the circle is a space for speaking and listening, reflecting together and building common meaning. Three practices have been clarified, which can be useful to help people come into a higher quality of attention:

- Speak with intention: noting what has relevance to the conversation in the moment.
- Listen with attention: respectful of the learning process all members of the group.
- Tend the well-being of the circle: remaining aware of the impact of our contributions.

Applications

As mentioned earlier, the Circle is the most fundamental form of human organising, and in that sense, it is of course used all over the world, and has been for millennia. Christina Baldwin's work in particular also has quite a global reach. She has done trainings in Europe, North America, and Africa, and frequently emails out "Peer Spirit Tales" of how the circle is being used in different settings. An initiative launched in collaboration with the Berkana Institute, called "From the Four Directions" led to the launching of numerous leadership circles in North America, Europe, and, to a lesser degree, beyond.

The Circle is good for:

- Enabling a group to connect more intimately
- Creating equality among people who are at different levels in a group, organization or community – giving equal value to each person, and requiring everyone to participate
- Slowing people down and allowing them to think together

There is a lot of power in using the circle for a group meeting over a period of time, but it is also valuable to bring depth to a process or workshop by including circle check-ins and reflections during the course of the gathering.

Case Example – Kufunda Village

At Kufunda Village – a learning centre focusing on rural community development in Zimbabwe – the circle has become a core part of the work with communities as well as the way the centre itself is run. Every time the centre does its evaluations of its programmes, or of the work in the communities themselves, the circle comes up as a key factor of success. People seem to connect fully with it, perhaps because it is a part of the traditional culture.

“The circle – we were brought up there. Round the fire was where conversation took place. Every evening we would sit around the fire, and talk.” – Silas, Kufunda Village

At its simplest, there is a daily morning circle during community programmes in which each person checks in with how they are feeling around the programme, key learnings that survived the night and hopes and expectations for the day. The effect of using the circle with rural community organisers is that, where it might typically have been primarily adult men who would contribute, here everyone speaks. Slowly but surely, they build the confidence and naturalness of each person to contribute fully to everything that is done together. At the end of several programmes, men express their surprise at how much they have been able to learn in honest conversation with women (in the Shona system women and men often confer separately), or the elders from youth. The circle is taken back home to the communities that Kufunda works with, and it has become a natural way of meeting for all of the partner communities, allowing for the voice of the youth and the Chief alike to be expressed.

At Kufunda, a monthly team retreat day, where circle is used a lot (though not only) brings the team together in a more intimate way, giving space for people to express and work through concerns, needs or new ideas that may not make their way to the group during daily business.

Each team at Kufunda, meeting weekly, begin and end all their meetings with a talking piece check in, and check out. It means that people don't dive straight into business, but allow themselves to arrive and connect with each other, before getting into work. The check-out usually allows for reflection on how people are feeling about what was covered or decided. In times when the team struggles with misunderstandings, dedicated circle work has been invaluable in clearing the air – through a practice of truth-telling, choosing to listen without interrupting and jumping to defense. These are all aspects which the circle help promote.

The following list is a reflection on what the circle means both to Kufunda's employees and community partners from a series of evaluations done.

- The circle brings a sense of belonging
- Everyone contributes
- Everyone is a leader
- People speak from the heart
- Silence is ok
- It takes you out of your comfort zone
- It disrupts hierarchy
- It connects people
- It is intimidating
- It is liberating
- Everybody's voice is heard
- It is effective in conflict
- The circle is regulated by guidelines created by the group
- It fosters equality

Another example of a powerful use of circle is in the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Essential to the AA model are weekly meetings of alcoholics to be in dialogue and reflection together,

bearing witness to each person's challenges and progress. At these meetings people can ask for help with personal problems in staying sober, and they get this help from the experience and support of others like them. There is no hierarchy, but it is rather a place to create a community of support for people who all share a desire to stop drinking and stay sober. It is a place where people can show up as who they are, letting their masks down, and not needing to hide their fear.

There are open and closed AA meetings. The closed meetings are the ones that most resemble circle as we've described it here. AA is sometimes ridiculed by those distant from it, but in reality, it is a very effective and creative organisation. The relationships and capacities people build at AA often turn out to be lifelong and relevant in a much broader range of situations.

Commentary

In our experience, up to 30 people (max 35) can be in a circle together. With 8-15 people one is able to go much deeper. It can also be used in larger processes, breaking the group into several circles. For this it does need someone familiar with the basics of circle to facilitate each group initially.

Another variation if the group is large can be to use the "fishbowl", or what is known as "Samoan Circles". Here, participants are divided between an inner circle and an outer circle, with only the inner circle speaking and the outer circle listening. The inner circle can either be representative of the whole group, or of a sub-grouping, and sometimes it is set up so that people can move in between the inner and outer circles. This process is particularly useful when issues are controversial, or if the group is large.

For many who are not used to the circle, the slowness of the conversation and thinking can be frustrating. With time most people learn to value and appreciate the gifts of slowing down together, to really listen to each other. Generally, people who tend to be less vocal and less powerful will appreciate the circle immensely because they are given the space to speak, while those who are used to dominating a conversation will be more frustrated.

It's worth noting that Social Science research has actually been done to show that the first person to speak can have a large influence on what is said and the direction the conversation takes. The circle seems particularly prone to this dynamic. This can be useful, but it can also be problematic. The way around it is to give people time to reflect in silence and collect their own thoughts before people start to speak. In general, the host should be aware that while the circle has a great equalising influence on a group, informal power dynamics still exist, and can influence the conversation.

Finally, there are rituals connected to some circle practitioners, which can be off-putting to some. The circle can be used in as ceremonial or as bare-bones a way as one wants.

Resources

Baldwin, Christina. *Calling the Circle*

<http://www.peerspirit.com>

<http://www.fromthefourdirections.org>

Deep Democracy

Overview

There are a variety of reasons why people in a group may not be saying what they really think. Perhaps it is considered taboo, politically incorrect, or too sensitive, or they may just feel that they will never actually be heard and able to influence the majority view of the group. *Deep Democracy* is a facilitation methodology which is based on the assumption that there is a wisdom in the minority voice and in the diversity of viewpoints, which has value for the whole group. The approach helps to surface and give expression to what is otherwise left unsaid.

Deep Democracy was developed by Myrna Lewis in South Africa with her late husband Greg Lewis based on 15 years of intense work in the private and public sectors. It is closely related to, and draws on, Arnold Mindells' process-orientated psychology and "worldwork", but offers a more structured and accessible set of tools.

Picture an iceberg. Generally, only 10% of the iceberg is above the waterline, while 90% is concealed in the depths of the ocean and not visible. Many psychologists use this as a metaphor for the conscious and unconscious of human beings. Only a part of what drives us is conscious while the bulk of it is unconscious. Similarly, in a group coming together for some purpose, there are aspects that are conscious to the whole group and aspects that are in the *group's unconscious*. The group's unconscious will often be reflected in the one-on-one and small group conversations that happen outside the formal meetings, in hints and jokes, in the excuses people make for being late or not doing what they were supposed to, and in unexpressed emotions and opinions.



Much of our work is comfortably done above the surface in the realm of the *conscious*. But sometimes there are underlying emotional dynamics that continuously block us from moving forward, from solving a problem or coming to a decision. In this situation, Deep Democracy is designed to bring these issues to the surface and facilitate their resolution. The idea is that the group's highest potential and wisdom is hidden in the depths and will be brought out by surfacing what is in the unconscious.

If issues in the group's unconscious have built up over time because of a lack of open communication, the group may have to go through a conflict process to release them. Conflict here is seen not as something to be avoided, but as an opportunity for learning and change. The earlier a conflict is expressed and spoken about in the open, the less painful it will be.

A key aspect of Deep Democracy is that the process focuses on *roles and relationships* rather than on individuals. We normally think of "roles" as social roles, jobs, or positions. In Deep Democracy, a role can be anything expressed by a person, for example, an opinion, idea, emotion, physical sensation, or an archetypal role like the parent/ the child, the teacher/ the

student, the oppressor/ the victim, the helper/ the needy, and so on. A role is usually held by more than one individual, and an individual usually holds more than one role in the group. The most personal is linked to the universal, in that each person actually deep down has the capacity and potential to express any role. S/he has both an individual identity as well as access to the overall pattern and knowledge of the whole.

A system will tend to be healthier if roles are fluid and shared. If one person is alone in a role, it becomes a burden to that person. If roles are too fixed, the organisation or group isn't growing. In Deep Democracy, the role of the facilitator is to help people make the roles more fluid, to become aware of themselves, each other, and their interdependence, and through that to access their wisdom. The facilitator is trying to help the group to "lower the waterline" of their iceberg.

The first four steps

There are five steps to Deep Democracy. The first four make up a unique approach to decision-making and take place "above the waterline":

1. **Don't practice majority democracy.** Traditional majority democracy will take a vote and then move forward with a decision. But the idea that the minority will just go along happily with the majority decision is actually a myth. In Deep Democracy, the decision with a majority vote is not the end point. The minority voice is encouraged to express itself. Don't settle for the vote.
2. **Search for and encourage the "no".** The facilitator needs to make it "safe" for people to express their dissent, and not feel afraid to say "no". The minority view is encouraged and given permission to speak.
3. **Spread the "no".** Once the "no" has been expressed, other participants are asked if they agree with the "no" even if only in part. People are encouraged to express agreement with the "no". This process avoids scapegoating and people being singled out and ostracised for disagreeing.
4. **Access the wisdom of the "no".** When the majority have decided to go in a certain direction, the minority is asked "what do you need to go along with the majority?" This is not a second chance for the minority to say "no". The minority will add wisdom and elaborate on the decision by qualifying it with what they need to come along. This helps the group come to a more conscious decision.

This decision-making process is an unusual attempt to get a decision where the minority actually comes along and buys into a decision. It looks like a consensus but is not exactly the same. In many situations this decision-making process will be enough, if there is not too much baggage or underlying conflict behind the decision. If decisions are taken in this way, the minority will feel heard, the group will be more conscious about why it's doing what it's doing, and conflicts will be settled early before they become painful.

Below the waterline

Sometimes it is not enough to stay above the surface. When resistance to a decision continues, when people keep having the same small arguments, when they start "sounding like a broken record", when they feel unheard, or are being very indirect, there is a need to go "under the waterline", and move into the 5th step of Deep Democracy. This is done through a process whereby the facilitator "turns up the volume" on a conversation. When a participant speaks in a way that is indirect, the facilitator goes in and speaks for that person, amplifying what they are saying, making it more direct and taking out the politeness.

The facilitator in effect becomes an instrument for the group. The participants talk directly to one another, rather than talking at the facilitator. The facilitator is making the message clear and direct, which gives people something to respond to. Ideally, she is not adding meaning, but literally speaking on the participant's behalf. It's like putting an electrical charge on the

words, and looking for a reaction from other participants. Participants are always made aware that they can correct the facilitator if she gets it wrong.

In order to do this amplification, the facilitator needs to apply a set of “metaskills” - attitudes and behaviours with which the facilitation skill or tool is used. The two most important ones are neutrality and compassion. The facilitator needs to not be judging what people are saying as good or bad, and to really support people in the totality of their experience. This can for the facilitator require a lot of “inner” work on her own personal awareness, so that she can come into the group centred and still without her own baggage.

If the discussion becomes polarised through the amplification, the group may decide to actually go into a conflict. This is always made as a very conscious agreement, and participants are told to remember that the purpose of the conflict is growth and about remaining in relationship. It is not about winning a battle. In a Deep Democracy conflict, all participants agree to express themselves fully and to *own their own side* completely. This is different from many other forms of conflict resolution where participants are encouraged to focus on trying to understand the *other* side or point of view first.

During the conflict, the participants are explicitly requested not to express defensiveness, but must take turns getting everything off their chest. When a conflict starts to be resolved, you generally find that the different sides start saying the same thing. They become more silent and contemplative. At this point, each participant is requested to share at least one personal learning – a grain of truth that they have received from the conflict. The wisdom from these grains of truth is taken back to the initial issue the group was trying to resolve.

Applications

Deep Democracy is a relatively young process, but is spreading quite rapidly. In South Africa it has been used in corporate settings as well as in schools, with hiv/AIDS counsellors, and in youth groups. Myrna Lewis is currently training Deep Democracy facilitators from a number of countries including the UK, the US, Denmark, Israel, France, Ireland, and Canada.

The key strength of Deep Democracy is in recognising the important role that emotional dynamics can play and in incorporating wisdom into decision-making. Deep Democracy is most useful in situations where: things are unsaid and needing to be brought into the open; people are stuck in roles and conflict may be arising; there is a diversity of views in a group, and different sides to an issue need to be considered; power differences are affecting people’s freedom to act; there is a need to gain the buy-in of a minority; and/or, people are being labeled by others.

Case Example – Immigration in Denmark and the Topic of Honour

Immigration is currently one of the most politicised problems in Denmark. As an issue, it is having an impact on how elections fall out, and not a day goes by when it is not covered in the news. In particular, there is an emphasis on the conflict between the Muslim culture of many immigrants and the mainstream Danish culture.

In May 2005, a group of 20 people gathered in Copenhagen, Denmark to learn about Deep Democracy. About a quarter of the group were non-Danish residents, while the rest were Danish citizens, half of whom were ethnically Danish and the other half second-generation immigrants or of mixed ethnicity. The group was asked by the facilitator to make a decision together on what they would like to talk about. Two participants self-selected to facilitate the decision-making process. One of them started by immediately saying he wanted to speak about the issue of “honour”. He was working with youth of an immigrant background and found that they often justify violence with an excuse that someone has breached their honour. He wanted to understand what that was about and how to deal with it to stop the violence.

Participants “cycled” around wanting or not wanting to discuss this topic. One person, a non-Dane, said that the issue of honour was entirely irrelevant to him in his work. Another person suggested that the group should rather discuss immigration issues, seemingly unaware that the honour question was at the very heart of immigration issues. It was the moment when someone personalised the issue, sharing that he had felt a breach of honour in relation to another participant, the group decided to go into a facilitated conflict.

Through the conflict, some participants gained awareness of their own racism and privilege while others became aware that they had been in a victimhood mentality and not taking responsibility. It turned out that some of the immigrant participants felt that the Danes had left honour behind generations ago and didn’t understand why honour was important in Muslim cultures. Part of what was striking about this process is that Danish culture has in the past been, and seen itself as, very generous towards immigrants. The space in which immigrants could be allowed to criticise Danish culture, and speak openly about their concerns is never created partly because this would be seen as ungrateful.

Following the conflict where both sides had been allowed to speak their mind, each participant owned a “grain of truth”. The following day, there was a deep understanding towards each other in the group, and a sense of joint endeavour and desire to collaborate around working to improve the cultural clashes in the broader society. As one participant reflected afterwards, *“Immigration is such a burning issue for us in Europe and this was the first time I experienced an honest and open conversation about the issue where everything that needed to be said was said and we were all stronger for it.”*

Commentary

Deep Democracy is obviously quite an unusual process. We are used to trying to avoid or contain conflict, polarisation, and disagreement. Instead Deep Democracy invites it in, and at times even provokes it. The result, when this process works at its best, is a lively openness and transparency and a very powerful strengthening of relationships and collaboration. Participants may go through a process where a large part of the time is spent in discussion that is antagonistic and polarising, and yet feel afterwards as if they have experienced a deep heartfelt and empathetic dialogue.

It’s important to recognise that when Deep Democracy encourages conflict, it is based on an assumption that conflict is already present and actually inevitable. But sadly, conflict is often contained until it is too late to do anything about it or for it to be resolved peacefully. The idea here is to try to bring it on as early as possible so that it will be less painful and explosive and more generative and transformational. This is done by helping people to express themselves honestly to each other through the facilitation tools of the five steps.

In our view, it’s vital to have a well-trained and experienced facilitator when working with Deep Democracy, especially in groups where the stakes are high. This is probably the tool in this collection which takes the most in-depth training to be able to facilitate, and it is never mastered completely. Even with a good facilitator, Deep Democracy is usually at first a frustrating experience for participants. This is part of the experience, but it just makes it all the more important that the facilitator is confident and clear on what they are doing and why.

The value of Deep Democracy in relation to dialogue facilitation is as much the philosophy and assumptions behind it as the specific tools. There are some simple tips from Deep Democracy thinking which are useful for any group dialogue process. In particular, we find the idea of “spreading the no” and not letting participants get stuck in a role very useful. Rather than following the tendency of answering criticism and singling people out in a group, invite the critical voice in by asking if anyone else shares that viewpoint. When there is dissent to the direction in which a group is going, ask “what would it take for you to come along?”

Resources

<http://www.deep-democracy.net>

Future Search

Overview

Future Search brings the “whole system” into the room to look at the past, present and future experiences of participants, through a task-focused agenda. The design is based on the intention to have all participants take ownership of this past, present and future, thereby finding common ground for collective future action. A Future Search conference has a specific theme which all stakeholders work on over a 3-day process. An important principle of the process depends on all the participants accepting an open invitation to spend a few days together in an explorative process.

Future Search was designed by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff as a process where diverse groups of people with a stake in a community or organization can plan their future together. They have written a book called *Future Search* which explains the process in detail, and is summarized in this short overview.

A Future Search process has a specific structure to follow, which has been designed and evolved based on the experience of hundreds of similar gatherings. The process would typically bring together 60-70 participants. This number works on the principle of bringing the “whole system” into the room, by selecting at least 8 stakeholder groups, who are equally represented by approximately 8 participants each. The agenda works through the following steps:

- Review of the past
- Explore the present
- Create ideal future scenarios
- Identify common ground
- Make action plans

The Process

The Future Search process recommends that the agenda includes at least 2 “sleep-overs”, and spans over three days. A typical Future Search agenda would look as follows:

Day 1, Afternoon (1-5pm)

- *Focus on the past.* Mixed groups sit, share life stories and discuss milestones which they have experienced over a specified number of years. Each person from these groups then plots their experiences on massive flipcharts on the walls, which have been divided into categories of society/self. The end result will be a long row of experiences which have filled flipcharts on the wall. This gives everyone in a room a sense of the collective past experiences, and the parallels between individual trajectories and societal trajectories.
- *Focus on present, future trends:* The whole group together now reviews trends which currently affect our lives and communities. These experiences are documented by the facilitator onto a “mindmap”. After these have been put onto the mindmap, participants are given stickers of colored dots to “vote” which trends they feel are most important. The session ends here, and gives participants the opportunity to reflect on this overwhelming diagram of complexity overnight.



Example of Mindmap above with sticker dots

Day 2, Morning (8:30am-12:30pm)

- *Continued – trends:* The larger group is now divided into their stakeholder groups (around similar interests/context). These stakeholder groups review the trends and decide which ones are important and which they want to take ownership for.
- *Focus on present, owning our actions:* Each stakeholder group then discusses which of their group’s contributions to these trends they feel proud of or sorry about. This is where each stakeholder group takes personal responsibility for the current issues at hand. The groups present their “prouds” and “sorries” to the bigger group, which relates to the trends they have been prioritising.

Day 2, Afternoon (1:30-6pm)

- *Ideal future scenarios:* The group returns to their mixed groups from the day before. The purpose of this exercise is to imagine their desired future 10-20 years from now, and act out this scenario to the bigger group as if it is happening today. It is important to encourage the groups to think with their minds, bodies and emotions, tapping into unconscious aspirations. They also need to highlight which barriers they overcame from the time of the Future Search up until the time of the scenario.
- *Identify common ground:* Once these scenarios have been acted out, the mixed groups highlight what the common future themes are that have emerged. They also look at potential projects or strategies which will help them get to these futures. Finally, they note what disagreements still remain.

Day 3, Morning (8:30am-1pm)

- *Continued – confirming common ground:* The whole group reviews the lists from the previous afternoon. A discussion is facilitated to try to understand what each statement means, and whether or not there is agreement. If there is no agreement, then it is noted, and the group moves on. This exercise also explores the tension between the actual and the ideal. The group needs to decide whether they want to delve further into the conflict areas or focus on the common ground already created within the limited time remaining.

- *Action-planning*: Participants now have the opportunity to invite others interested in a particular project or theme to join them in action-planning. This process is similar to “Open Space”, explained in a separate section, and the purpose is to encourage people to work across boundaries in addressing these themes. These groups then report back, highlighting how this information will be implemented and disseminated, and then the conference is closed.

Conditions required for a successful future search conversation

1. The “whole system” needs to be in the room.

Future Searches only work if “the whole system” is in the room. It is critical that as many key stakeholders of an issue are present in the room and that the different voices of a “whole system” are contributing. Diverse perspectives allow new relationships to be built, and a stakeholder can learn more about itself and the world by interacting with other constituencies.

If there is only part of the story being told by a group of people who normally interact with each other, a collective future cannot be envisioned, and a Future Search can't work.

2. The “Big Picture” as context to local action.

To get participants on the same wavelength, it is important to get everyone talking about the same world. Therefore it is important for the group to describe this world in as much detail as possible before doing anything about it. The conference therefore starts by exploring the “global trends”.

3. Exploring current reality and common futures, not problems and conflicts

Future searches delve into future scenarios, rather than problem-solving or conflict management. The process acknowledges differences, but does not work through them, as the purpose of the meeting isn't about team-building. Common ground is the backdrop for planning in this process.

4. Self-managed explorations and action plans

Self-managed groups are used throughout the process, reducing passivity, hierarchy and dependency on facilitators. The intention is to shift control from external facilitators. Small groups are recommended to rotate roles of facilitator, reporter and timekeeper.

5. Attending the whole meeting

It is important that every participant be involved in the shifts which change their perspective on what needs to be done, and to build common ground. For this to work, everyone needs to be there for the whole meeting. It is also discouraged to have non-participants or observers present.

6. Meeting under healthy conditions

As has been highlighted in the introduction to this toolkit, good food and a healthy atmosphere with natural light help people's energy and ability to concentrate. The space should be easy to move around and have the flexibility to change for small or large groups, with lots of wall space for flipcharts.

7. Working across 3 days

It is not the amount of time which is important, but the space to absorb the learning over 2 nights which is a benefit. We assume that the unconscious works on unfinished business overnight, which is how the programme is designed.

8. Taking responsibility publicly for follow-up

Having people select the action groups they sign up for and to publicly acknowledge their next steps helps to share ownership and commitment to the follow-up process.

Preparation for a Future Search

The preparation process of a Future Search conference is key to the success of the meeting. Getting all the stakeholders taking ownership of the meeting, as well as attending, is a process which takes time. A Future Search is usually “sponsored” by a particular organization or person (sometimes a key stakeholder), who pulls together the other stakeholders, and “hosts” the preparation. It is recommended that at least 2 preparation meetings with a representative from all stakeholders are present to do the following:

- define the purpose and expectations
- introduce facilitators
- agree on programme
- decide on an invitation list
- organize logistics

Applications

Future Searches have been used extensively around the world, on each continent. Countries include Sudan, Russia, Sri Lanka, Botswana, Sweden, Northern Ireland and Australia. It has also been used within sectors for example healthcare, education and business. For a more extensive list of applications, please see:

<http://www.futuresearch.net/method/applications/world.cfm>

Case Examples – Nation-building in Bangladesh and the Inuit in Canada

These cases are adapted from the Future Search book, 2000.

Nation-building in Bangladesh

UNICEF agreed to sponsor a Future Search training in Bangladesh, a country with a population of 110 million people, and many social challenges. The intention was to train local facilitators who would in turn host future searches to envision new realities for Bangladesh’s future, and move the largely poor population out of poverty.

In 1994, 50 Bangladeshi consultants, trainers and managers came together for the training. One of the challenges was that participants struggled to envision large future dreams, for example, a country without child labour. The participants agreed that “we need to learn how to dream”. A number of follow-up conferences were planned, and future searches were run on topics including “Stopping Children with Diarrhea from Dying”, “Early Childhood Development”, “Child Labour”, “Stopping the Spread of HIV/AIDS, and others. These conferences have proved to be very popular as planning tools in Bangladesh, and have subsequently spread to other parts of South East Asia, including Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Regional Economic Development: the Inuit People, Canada

When the Inuit people of the Arctic region were granted a new homeland, they embarked on a Future Search to develop a strategy for economic development. The Future Search process was conducted in both the local language and English, and included drum dancing and other traditional features. The conference included a range of stakeholders of the newly formed homeland, and produced frameworks for education and training, social development, preservation of culture and language, small business development, transportation, infrastructure and other organizational aspects of action-planning.

The Inuit people have sponsored several subsequent future searches, and local community leaders have learnt the future search techniques of facilitating community-based planning at many local levels.

Commentary

A Future Search is quite a structured process with a sophisticated meeting “architecture”, that has been consciously designed to flow in a particular order. This is a strength, but it can also appear too rigid. It’s important to realise that while the instruction on how to do a Future Search may seem to imply that there is only one way to do it, the Future Search website and newsletter include active discussions among practitioners who have adapted it in various ways to different cultural contexts. There is clearly some variety in how it is applied.

One of the aspects of Future Search which we find most powerful is it’s use of visual techniques and creative processes. The history timeline which the group puts together on the first day across an entire wall usually tells a striking story, as does the colorful mindmap of current trends. Similarly, the challenge to people to act out their scenarios of the future rather than just drawing them up on a flipchart invites in multiple intelligences and invokes imagination.

It is important to note what Future Searches cannot do. For example, future searches cannot make up for weak leadership. If leadership doesn’t act on the actions from a Future Search, or buy in to the process, it will not work. This process stops at the point of action planning and leaves the implementation as the responsibility and ownership of the stakeholders participating.

Future searches also cannot reconcile deep value differences. If people disagree deeply based on religious or political differences, it is unlikely to be solved in a Future Search. Future Search quite explicitly chooses to put disagreements aside and focus on commonalities. In many contexts this is sufficient but if underlying issues or disagreements will block action, it may need to be replaced or complemented by other processes.

Finally, great facilitation trainings are available for Future Search, but we also feel that if one has strong general facilitation skills, it is possible to be able to facilitate a Future Search based on the excellent written materials available in the book and on the website.

Resources

Weisbord, Marvin and Sandra Janoff. *Future Search*.

<http://www.futuresearch.net>

The Israeli-Palestinian School for Peace

Overview

In 1972, a group of Arabs and Israelis came together to create a village where they would live together voluntarily. They called this village “Neve Shalom” / “Wahat El Salam”, which means “Oasis of Peace” in Hebrew and Arabic. In 1976, the community founded a School for Peace which was to create encounter programmes for Jews and Arabs, drawing on the community’s rich experience of living together. They believed that if they could just bring Jews and Arabs together in a real personal encounter, the dominant stereotypes would be reduced, and peace would become possible.

Today, the founders recognise that they began with a naïve outlook. They soon discovered that the “contact hypothesis” – the idea that all you need to do is to meet and get to know the other - doesn’t actually fare well empirically. If you just bring people together and enable them to become friends, what happens is that they simply manage in their mind to separate their new friend from his/ her group. The attitude is essentially, “You are ok, you can be my friend, but you’re not typical, you’re not like all the other Jews/ Arabs/ black people/ white people...” This mental rationalisation is called “sub-typing”.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a conflict between two *peoples*, rather than between individuals. The School for Peace team realised that stereotypes are just a symptom, revealing deeper conceptions that are hard to eradicate. Collective identities are real, and constructed by stable and deep-rooted beliefs. Contrary to some theories, they are not easy to educate away, or to buy off with economic development.

Based on this reality, the School developed a more sophisticated and critical approach to encounter programmes. They set it up as an encounter between two national identities, and started encouraging participants to identify with their *group*. Today’s approach was developed through trial and error, and only gradually and in hindsight did they find more and more social science theories supporting it.

The Process

The intention with the programmes is to allow participants to examine their own identity through the encounter with the other group in authentic and direct dialogue. It is really around creating awareness and understanding, enabling participants to comprehend the turbulent and violent processes taking place all around them in Israel, and their own role in the conflict. The School creates a safe space that allows participants to examine their feelings and thoughts in a group. They critically examine things ordinarily taken for granted, challenge the existing reality, and pose new possibilities. According to Rabah Halabi, *“In awareness, however painful, is embodied one of the most human values: the right to have a choice, and the option to change and be changed.”*

Each of the programmes involves equal numbers of Arabs and Jews as participants, and equal numbers of Arab and Jewish facilitators as well. The groups are usually divided into small groups of approximately 16 participants – 8 Arabs and 8 Jews, with one Arab and one Jewish facilitator assigned to each group. Both Arabic and Hebrew are official languages and participants are encouraged to speak in their mother tongue with translation. The facilitators’ role is to clarify the processes, to analyze and mirror back to the group what is going on, and to create links to the external reality in ongoing dialogue with the participants.

The groups meet in two fora: the binational encounter group (Arabs and Jews together), and the uninational group (Arabs and Jews meeting separately). The participants usually spend about 3/4 of the time in the encounter group and 1/4 of the time in their uninational group. At first, participants tend to criticise the introduction of the uninational group. They don’t see its value given that they have come together in order to meet across cultures. But as the

conversations become more conflictual, the uninational group becomes a safer place where they can feel free to be vulnerable, to examine their own identity, to share deep realisations, and also to explore sub-identities within their group. These sub-identities include for example the difference between Muslim, Christian and Druze Arabs, and between Ashkenazi (European) and Mizrahi (Middle Eastern) Jews or liberal and nationalist Jews. It is harder to examine these differences in the bi-national encounter group because the Jewish-Arab line of identity is what is prominent there.

The topics that are central to the intergroup dialogues are around *inequities, Israeli politics, cultural dynamics, and the experience of being Jews and Arabs in Israel*. The participants are invited to bring up topics that they find interesting or troublesome. The idea is that for social change to happen, a dialogue needs to happen between these two groups that is real, genuine, and eye-to-eye. In order for the two groups to come together at an equal and authentic level though, the facilitators have found that the Arab group in every process has to first become strong, to shake off their inferiority, and uproot their internalised oppression. If they can build a clear, confident, aware, and demarcated in-group identity, they are better equipped to conduct intergroup dialogue.

The groups at the School for Peace are assumed to be a “microcosm”. This means that even though they are not demographically representative, all the elements of the larger society may be found in some form in each person and each group. The facilitators at the School believe that the process that unfolds over and over again in these groups reflects the path the overall society is on, and the journey Israel as a country needs to go through.

The actual process may differ depending on the programme. We provide two examples below – a university programme and a youth programme.

Applications

So far, the School’s programmes have been attended by 35000 people from different walks of life – from attorneys to activists, schoolchildren to teachers. Through these programmes, they have not only impacted the individuals participating but also their friends, colleagues, and families. They also teach courses at Israel’s main universities.

We are not aware of the extent to which the approach has spread and been replicated in other countries. The situation in Israel and Palestine is of course extreme, but many of the dynamics that show up sharply in this process are archetypal dynamics common between minority groups and powerful majority groups. We feel that the process is highly relevant to racial, ethnic, or other minority-majority dynamics in different contexts, and aspects of it even to dialogues between sectors, generations, or other kinds of groupings.

Case Examples – Adult and Youth Programmes

Adult Programmes

The university programme described here took place at Tel-Aviv University in 1996-97. A group of 16 students, half Arab half Jewish, met over 22 sessions of 3 hours each. The group went through five phases, typical of these programmes:

1. **Initial explorations and declarations of intent:** In this first phase, the participants were being polite and cautious and the group boundaries were unclear. Each group was identifying with members of the other group, and the discussion was focused on the nature of the encounter. The Jews were trying to focus on the individual level, to avoid political discussions, and to separate this experience from reality, and were more vocal. The Arabs were criticising the process for being unreal because it wasn’t representative.
2. **Strengthening the Arab group:** Now, the Arab group started to solidify and unite, showing courage, and drawing strength from each other through the uninational

meetings. They would express differences in the uninational meetings but not in front of the Jewish group. The groups started sitting separately and expressing their identity more clearly. The Arabs started dominating, focusing on demanding rights, and criticising the Jews as oppressors. The Jews, as liberal university students would support their cause, but start to feel hurt and distressed.

3. **Resumption of power by Jewish group:** The Jews experienced a loss of control and power, and hence an eradication of their identity. They didn't know how to cope with the unfamiliar, strong Arab identity. They expressed frustration and despair and considered leaving the programme. They started now joining the victim position, pointing out how the Arabs were reversing the roles, and alluding to the Arabs' lack of sensitivity and humanity. "We understand you, but you don't understand us." A struggle ensued over who is more humane. The Jews regained control by targeting the Arabs at their weak spot. The Arabs now felt distressed, and the Jews felt they were back in control.
4. **Impasse:** Both sides were exhausted and despairing. The dialogue felt as if it had been wrung dry. Then, one person started speaking to the choices facing them. Despair shifted to action, and out of a sense of lost cause emerged a different depth of dialogue. The Jews accepted the balance of power and met the Arabs "eye to eye".
5. **A different dialogue:** The Jews owned up to their own sense of superiority and became willing to talk about themselves as rulers and the strong group. There was a sense of breakthrough and mutual respect. The humanity of both sides was restored as both the "oppressed" and the "oppressors" were liberated within this microcosm. The group identity became less central again and participants returned to being individuals. The dialogue returned to practical questions around how to live together and how to return to reality.

Youth Programmes

The Youth Programmes are the most common programmes at the School for Peace. These are four-day programmes, more structured than the adult programmes, and not quite as psychologically intense as what is described above. In the youth programmes, usually about 60 eleventh-grade students aged 16-17 come together and divide into four groups of 14-16 people who work in parallel through the four days.

The first day is focused on getting acquainted personally and easing anxieties. A comfortable and optimistic atmosphere is created. Participants introduce themselves, learn each other's names and the significance of their names, talk about familiar topics such as school, home, and future plans, and share personal stories in pairs. The focus is on what they have in common. Games and activities help to break the ice, and an exercise is introduced that can only be solved through collaboration across cultures. Political discussions are avoided. The power relations are still present however, in that the Jews will tend to be most vocal and everyone is speaking Hebrew.

The second day they start getting to know each other's cultures. In mixed groups of 4, they are given cards with discussion topics about cultural differences. The conversation starts being about "the way we do..." and "the way they do...". Here the dialogue transitions from interpersonal to intergroup dialogue, and the youth start coming face-to-face with their feelings of superiority and inferiority. After a uninational meeting, they come back into an encounter session that now starts to broach politics through a "photolanguage" exercise. Participants are asked to select a photo from a collection, and use it to describe how they feel as an Arab/Jew in Israel. The Jews tend to pick photos that reflect peace, comradeship, complexity, and possibility while the Arabs tend to pick photos that reflect destruction, despair, and grief. The Arabs become strong and start talking about rights and discrimination. The Jews challenge them on their humanity. Each side is struggling to justify its own narrative. The day ends in uninational meetings. Here, the Arabs oscillate between actively demanding unity and feeling disappointed and hopeless. The Jews oscillate between

their desire for equity and friendship and their need to protect the status quo. This is the first time many of them have been required to really engage and argue with a group of Arabs.

The third day is run as a simulation game. The youth are asked to imagine that 50 years into the future there is a comprehensive peace between Israel and the Arab states but the status of the Arab minority within Israel hasn't changed. Demonstrations happen, and the Israeli government opens up negotiations with the minority around: security, education, symbols and representation, and the character of the state. The youth now have to create negotiating teams for each of these four topics and imagine that they are in this political process. They struggle with whether it is just a game, or whether it is for real. They are challenged to really figure out what they stand for and what kind of society they want.

The fourth day, they have a closing dialogue and talk about how to take their lessons home. Each participant writes a letter to be copied for all the others in an album to remember the experience, and each is given a certificate of attendance in a celebratory ceremony.

Commentary

The School for Peace approach is surprising and contrary to much of what we have been taught about dialogue. What attracts us to it is its emphasis on authenticity and facing up to reality, and developing a process that is not imported from a different context, but truly applicable to Israel.

Most, if not all, of the other methods in this collection emphasise strongly that individuals have to speak for themselves, and that being a representative of a group or organisation inhibits dialogue. Here, the centrality of collective identity is not ignored but incorporated. It is interesting that the Jewish participants at the School for Peace often initially want to emphasise the individual, develop friendships, create sub-categories, divide the Arabs into different types of individuals, and generally separate people from politics. The Arabs in turn emphasise unity and group affiliation. We feel that it's important to understand this perspective of minority and disempowered groups, and we are aware that many of the other tools profiled here have been developed by people of more privileged backgrounds.

That said, the School for Peace approach is difficult and complex, and participants can feel it is not respectful of individual differences and allowing personal expression. To us, including this approach is not so much a suggestion of replicating it as a whole, but more to consider the questions it raises about the difference between individual and group encounters, and to incorporate aspects of it in other processes where groups are coming together and power differences are present.

Resources

Rabah Halabi, Ed. *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in Dialogue: The School for Peace Approach*

<http://sfpeace.org>

Open Space Technology

Overview

“With Open Space, there are not ideas that remain hidden or unspoken. Everything emerges.”
- An Open Space practitioner

Open Space Technology allows groups, large or small, to self-organise to effectively deal with complex issues in a very short time. Participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme of strategic importance. What Open Space presents to us is, at the very least, a new way to hold better meetings. It can however grow to become a new way of organising that infuses entire organisations or smaller communities.

Harrison Owen initiated Open Space Technology in the mid 1980's. He had had several experiences of good to great conferences where the real highlights were the conversations *outside* of the formal agenda. This led him to wonder whether a different way of organising might not be possible. His question moving forward became how to combine the level of synergy and excitement present in a good coffee break with the substantive activity and results characteristic of a good meeting.

In seeking for answers, he took some of his inspiration from witnessing a four-day long rite of passage for young men in a west African village in Liberia. Though there was seemingly no organising committee or formal structure, the four days ran smoothly with all 500 people managing themselves, the activities, events, food, music, and all the other aspects of the ceremonial process. From this experience, Owen took some of the fundamental principles that have come to shape Open Space today. In brief they are: the circle as a centre from which organising takes place; a breath, or rhythm, that people know and can organise around; the village market place where connections are made around different offerings; and the bulletin board, where information is posted and shared.

Open Space has since become the operating system beneath some of the largest self-organising meetings the world has seen. The benefit of Open Space is that people get involved in contributing, and working through, the areas that they are truly engaged in and committed to. The danger (to some) is that freedom is given to people to choose their response and involvement without being controlled by a planner or organiser.

How it works

An Open Space meeting can last from two hours to several days. When people gather they co-create the agenda of the meeting together, allowing it to be shaped by the passion and interest of the people.

Every Open Space meeting begins in a large circle. One facilitator is all that is needed. After an initial welcome, he or she will open the space, by introducing the theme, or burning question, which has brought people together. She explains that within the next hour, their agenda will be formed on the large seemingly very blank wall. She explains that all of the sessions will be posted and hosted by the participants themselves. People are invited to propose sessions and discussions on topics that they themselves are *passionate about and willing to take responsibility for*, in response to the theme or question at the centre. But before beginning the collective agenda-making, the facilitator still needs to explain the basic principles and one law of Open Space.

Four Principles

‘Whoever comes are the right people’. This principle speaks to people to let go of their need to have certain specific people join their group. Perhaps they would like the people in established positions of power, or the experts in an area. With this principle people are invited

to acknowledge that those who care enough to freely choose to join a conversation are the best ones to do good work in that area.

'Whenever it starts is the right time'. This principle recognizes that while a session may begin at a certain hour, creativity and inspiration don't always work according to our desired timing. Things really get started when they are ready, not before, and not later.

'Whatever happens is the only thing that could have'. This invites people to let go of expectations for how things should go, or where they should lead to. We need to learn to let go of these expectations and instead be present and pay attention to what is actually happening and emerging between us.

'When it's over, it's over.' We don't know how long it takes to deal with an issue. In Open Space, the issue is more important than the schedule. If we finish before the allotted time is over, then move on to something else. We should not stay somewhere just because the schedule tells us to. It also works the other way. If we have not finished when our agenda slot is over, we can self-organise to extend it into another agenda slot, making sure we post it on the wall for others to know, and/or find ways to continue the work on the issue beyond the conference.

One Law

The "law of two feet" encourages people to take responsibility for their own learning, peace of mind, and contribution. If someone is in a place where they feel they are not learning, or able to contribute, the law of two feet encourages them to leave and move on to another group, where they think they might add more value, and feel more engaged. They may also choose to do something else altogether. Most importantly people shouldn't be somewhere where they feel they are wasting their time.

From this law follows that some participants will become "bumblebees", people who fly from one session to another, and just like bees, cross-pollinating what is going on between sessions, and/or "butterflies", who choose at times to skip formal sessions and listen to their own sense of what they need to do in a given moment. Sometimes two butterflies meet outside of the sessions in informal conversation, and a new topic might arise out of that conversation.

These principles and the law provide the *container* for the Open Space, enabling people to take full responsibility for their own learning and contribution. They create a context in which people can be focused and work hard, but remain flexible and open to surprise. "Be prepared to be surprised" is a typical reminder in an Open Space gathering.

With these basic instructions, the group is now ready to fill their empty wall:

	Main Room	Tea Room	Lounge	Library	Garden
8:30-9:30	Community Meeting				
9:30-11:00					
11:30-13:00					
13:00-14:00	Lunch				
14:00-15:30					
16:00-17:30					
17:30-18:00	Convergence				

The facilitator asks people to think about their idea or burning question in response to the theme. After a short period of silence she invites whoever is ready to come to the centre, grab a marker and piece of paper, and write down their idea or question, read it out loud, and post it on the wall – choosing one of several pre-arranged space/time choices. Sometimes there are a few moments of quiet, but invariably people jump up and begin to write and post sessions. Within a short period of time, the agenda for the day or for the week is laid out. People go up to the wall to read the different offerings, signing up for the groups they wish to join. Now the work can begin.

During a longer Open Space, the group will come back together as a whole for a brief meeting in the morning and evening, to report on main breakthroughs, to post new sessions as they occur to people, and to help maintain a sense of the whole.

The facilitator of each group needs to compile the report of their session. Typically the outputs are typed and compiled during the duration of a meeting for people to go home with the final report. Where decisions need to be made, time needs to be allowed for focusing and prioritizing the full output. This can be done in a matter of a few hours, even with larger groups.

“The 2 days of Open Space that followed were a success, a miracle in the words of the CEO and he added that 3 years ago they received a thick report from ____ (a famous international strategic company meeting in Israel) that cost \$1.5 million, and they could implement a little. Now we produced something much better in the cost of 1 page of their report, and it seems that we can implement it all.” – Avner Haramati

Application

Open Space is being used around the world – it has been used in townships in South Africa, in dialogues between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East, in many corporations, in the NGO sector for planning and community involvement, and in the Public Sector with similar uses. It can be used for 5 people or 1000.

According to Harrison Owen, Open Space works best where conflict is present, things are complex, there is huge diversity of players and the answer was needed yesterday. The personal investment is critical coupled with a real sense of urgency among participants. The greater the diversity, the higher the potential for real breakthrough and innovative outcomes. It works particularly well in the move from planning to action, where real action is facilitated by people stepping in and taking responsibility where they care.

Case Examples – South Africa’s Transition and International Summer Villages

The first case is a description taken from an article by Harrison Owen on the beginning of Open Space Technology. In the early summer of 1992, OST was used in one of the South African townships to promote useful discussion among several political groups. The focus of conversation was on improving communications in the area. For a full day, representatives of the various political parties along with nearby industry (largely white) worked together. It would be a supreme overstatement to say that all issues were resolved, or that love and light broke out in full abundance. But the discussions were intense, productive, without rancor, and contrasted sharply with conditions in a neighboring township where conversations had ceased and bloodshed commenced. There was also a continuing benefit. Several days after this particular gathering, one of the participants called to say that for two years as president of a local school organisation, he had been attempting to get the people involved in creating their future. Nothing had worked. They sat like bumps on a log. Then he tried Open Space Technology, and his problem was reversed. The people became involved, and he had but one option. Get out of the way.

A second case shows an example of how Open Space together with an Appreciative Inquiry process helped an international organisation build a common platform and plan for the future.

Children's International Summer Villages (CISV) is a not-for-profit organisation, which develops cross-cultural understanding in children and youth from around the world through peace education. They have over 60 national offices. They wanted to develop a new strategic plan involving the grassroots of their organisation.

They decided to use an Appreciative Inquiry process with Open Space to combine the potential of Appreciative Inquiry to collect information, and build a shared foundation, direction and vision for the future with the potency of Open Space to mobilise people into action in areas they care deeply about.

Each country received a handbook explaining the Appreciative Inquiry process, and began a large-scale interview process to collect stories of personal experiences of inspiration and beauty that people carried with them from their time with the organisation. Several thousand interviews were synthesized into a storybook with a summary of core values and wishes for the future. The book became the foundation for a 2 1/2 day AI summit, in which people immersed themselves in the stories and data, building pride and clarity around what they do well and where they can naturally grow their strengths. From this, they developed tangible goals for the future (in the form of provocative propositions).

An overall umbrella theme for the future became the theme for a one day Open Space session, which included 150 people from across the world. The results were explosive. Lots of practical ideas, and plans, and focus areas emerged for CISV, which at the end were prioritized and voted on by the participants and several others who participated online. When reporting on outcomes from small groups, people related their reports to the overall goals, ensuring that everyone understood the implications of each report and how it tied to the overall vision before voting. Everyone, including online participants, voted on the top priorities for CISV. They also identified where they were willing to initiate moving the organisation forward.

What they accomplished with this process was a plan, which had become alive in people and had in a sense begun even before the action steps were executed. They used AI and Open Space to rekindle grassroots passion, engaging commitment to implement from the outset.

Commentary

Open Space works particularly well when the passion, engagement and burning questions are present. In such a situation, it truly helps a group move forward swiftly and clearly. On the other hand, it can fall flat when the engagement or interest is low. People need to be present because they want to be, not because they have been told they must be. For these reasons the intention is vital, as is expressing it clearly in the invitation to join an Open Space session, meeting or conference. With a clear intention and in the presence of a real need, Open Space is a beautiful testament to how little organising is required by an organiser when allowing people to self-organise their way forward. In fact, the art of the planner, with most potent Open Space sessions, is learning to truly get out of the way.

Open Space can be run on its own, but our feeling is that it works equally well and sometimes better when combined with other tools and processes, such as World Café, Appreciative Inquiry, Scenario Planning, and others. In this case, ending with Open Space is most typically the norm, allowing an initial process of clarifying ideas and views to be followed by stepping into taking responsibility for certain pieces.

One of the reasons why it's important to combine Open Space with other processes is that a key risk is that an Open Space conference ends without convergence happening between the different groups. A lot of great conversations may have happened in small groups, but they haven't been woven together adequately. Finding the ways to lay the groundwork for a productive Open Space session and to create this convergence and reconnection with the whole is an important challenge for facilitators and organisers using this process. Also, while Harrison Owen points out that Open Space is useful in situations of conflict, the risk is that

conflicting parties choose to just work with the people who agree with them. In that situation, combining it with processes that are more directly aimed at resolving conflict (rather than being productive in spite of conflict) can be useful.

Open Space is all about handing the responsibility back to people themselves. Two core questions characterizing Open Space are: "What do you really want to do," and "why don't you take care of it?" As with the World Café and many other forms, the real art form lies in identifying the right calling question that truly draws people out of themselves and into a shared arena of thinking and acting together.

"I can't imagine that there could be a better method for enabling a group to discover its potential." - Open Space practitioner

Resources

Owen, Harrison. *Expanding our now. The story of Open Space Technology.*

Owen, Harrison. *Open Space Technology, A users guide.*

<http://www.openspaceworld.com>

Scenario Planning

Overview

Scenarios are possible and plausible pictures of the future. They are created through a series of conversations, through which a group of people invent and consider several varied stories about how the world may turn out. Ideally, these stories should be carefully researched and full of detail, able to expose new understandings and some surprises. Scenarios are powerful tools for challenging assumptions about the world, and in so doing, they lift the barriers of our own creativity and understanding about the future.

The term “scenario planning” was originally coined by the RAND Corporation during and after World War II, as part of their corporate strategy. When Herman Kahn left the RAND Corporation, he set up the Hudson Institute and further developed the process, and went on to write a book called “The Year 2000” which was published in 1967. Since the late 60’s, the process has taken off as a tool and has evolved considerably from its origins.

Scenario planning as a process started with a paradigm of “predict and control”, where probabilistic scenarios were sketched out about the future. This paradigm as a basis for the process has changed significantly over the years, mainly due to the work of Pierre Wack at Shell in the 1970’s. Wack separated issues which were predictable from those which were uncertain, and worked with uncertainties and how they influenced various scenarios.

Nowadays, scenario planning then supports the notion that the world is inherently uncertain. Scenarios are used not so much as a tool for predicting the future, but rather as a process which challenges assumptions, values and mental models of various stakeholders about how uncertainties might affect their collective futures. By encouraging scenario planning processes at different levels of an organisation or community, old paradigms are challenged, and innovation encouraged through surprising possible stories of the future. Scenarios therefore help develop new and valuable knowledge.

By bringing multiple perspectives into a conversation about the future, a rich and multidimensional variety of scenarios are created. Scenarios encourage storytelling and dialogue between people who would not necessarily share their perspectives with each other. As Peter Schwartz points out: “Scenario-making is intensely participatory, or else it fails.”

Preparing for a Scenario Planning Process

Before embarking on a scenario process, it is important to establish whether it is the right process to use, and in what context it would be most useful. Scenarios are generally used when the following conditions exist:

- There is a high level of complexity in a given situation which is difficult to understand
- There is a longer term (at least a few years ahead) focus required in looking into the future, and how to respond to it
- There is uncertainty about how the external environment will impact a particular situation
- There are resources available to invest in a series of conversations amongst different stakeholders over a period of time, and to distribute these scenarios extensively.

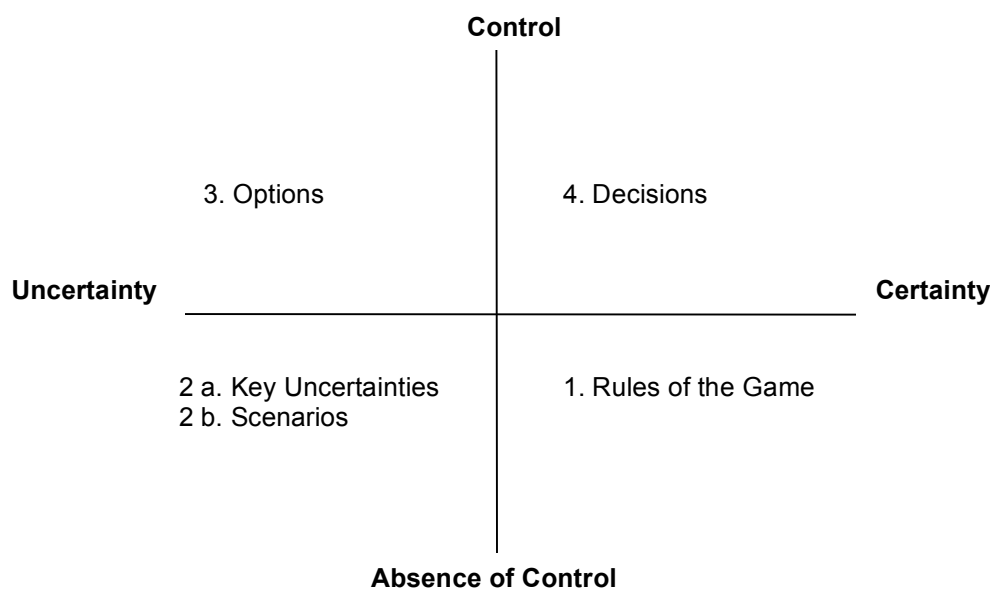
Scenarios can also be very broad and are not necessarily useful if the focus and purpose is unclear. Once a particular organisation or community has decided to use scenarios, the following questions will help make the outcome relevant to all concerned. The scenario-planning process can then be adapted to these specific needs:

- What is the purpose of this process?

- How many “players” need to be part of this process in order to view the necessary perspectives of the future?
- What parts of the external environment are important to focus on when considering these scenarios?
- Is there any level of control by any of the stakeholders of these external variables?
- What is the time horizon?
- Who is endorsing this process at a leadership level?
- Who needs to “buy-in” to the potential outcomes?

The Process

There are *many ways* of developing scenarios. The process below is but one simple example of how to facilitate a scenario-building exercise, which considers the important principles of *uncertainty* and *control*. South Africans Chantal Illbury and Clem Sunter have mapped out this process for building a set of scenarios to consider for future strategy:



The horizontal axis represents the continuum of certainty/ uncertainty, and the vertical axis represents the continuum of control/ absence of control. All of the steps of this scenario process are numbered in order and move through the four quadrants highlighted in the diagram. The scenarios themselves are generally based on a set of different uncertainties which may play out in the future, and where there is absence of control by the “players” of the game.

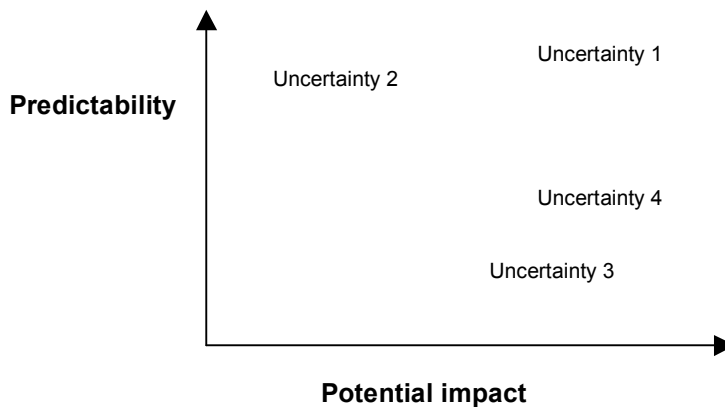
The steps of the process are explained as follows:

1. What are the rules?

In any given situation, rules of “the game” are certain, but not necessarily controllable. “The game” is a metaphor of the context being examined in the scenario process. It is important to firstly distinguish between the written and unwritten rules of the game. The unwritten rules can also be referred to as “tacit”, and are often socially constructed. By surfacing these unwritten rules, it is easier to better understand “the game”. On the other hand, written rules are often aspirational – they are aspired to by the organization, but not necessarily implemented in reality.

2. a. *What are the key uncertainties*

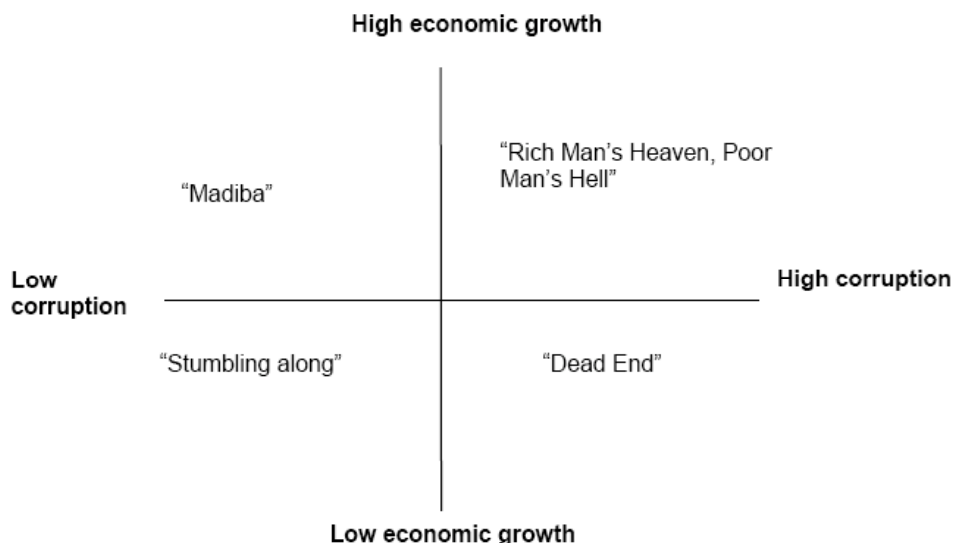
The next step in this scenario process is to map out the key uncertainties for the future. This is a highly creative step, where it is important to get multiple perspectives of what is uncertain. By mapping the key uncertainties in order of importance and level of uncertainty, the group can start to decide which ones to explore in more detail to start developing scenarios. The diagram below assists the process of prioritizing scenarios:



2. b. *Develop the scenarios*

As mentioned above, scenarios can be viewed as multiple pictures of the future. This glimpse can give participants an understanding of what is possible, and the motivation to plan towards their preferred scenario.

A useful technique to decide on the preferred scenarios is to expand on the key uncertainties by examining the possible outcomes of those uncertainties. For example, in a country context, one of the uncertainties might be economic growth. So the scenarios could explore the stories which would unfold if there would be high economic growth or low economic growth. To give a scenario a more multi-dimensional aspect, two key uncertainties could be explored – see graph below. Scenarios are developed to surprise us, and to bring to the surface possibilities we wouldn't normally anticipate for the future. This means it is important to base the scenarios on uncertainties which have low predictability and high impact (uncertainties 3 and 4 in graph above). The graph below is an example of scenarios which may be developed based on 2 key uncertainties.



3. Identify options for future action

Options are determined from the scenarios. The scenarios can be seen as the bridge between the key uncertainties and options – they help order a group process in a way that paints a set of vivid and detailed pictures of what is possible, and therefore the possibility to map out options to match each of these scenarios. It is therefore important that the scenarios are written up in a lot of detail, and explore all components of a given situation. This will assist the process of mapping out options of action for each scenario.

4. Make decisions

The final stage is to make decisions based on the scenarios and the options. Illbury & Sunter refer to George Kelley who introduces us to the “personal construct theory”. He claims that we make decisions based on our own interpretations of the world, which are informed by our experiences. If our experiences are cut off from those of others, we limit the decisions we make. Scenarios help bring these different experiences into pictures of the future through a dialogue, which in turn helps us make more informed decisions for the future.

Applications

Scenarios have been used since the 1960s. Back then, the process was mostly used within companies to help them make more informed decisions about the future. Since then, the process has been more widely applied to social contexts with multiple stakeholder involvement. Scenarios have been used extensively all over the world in varied contexts from mapping out country strategies (Jamaica, South Africa, Botswana, Kenya and others), corporate strategies (Shell, Anglo American, OldMutual), as well as at multiple community levels.

Case Example: Mont Fleur Scenario-Process, 1991, South Africa

In his book, *Solving Tough Problems*, Adam Kahane tells the story of facilitating the Mont Fleur Scenarios. In 1991, 22 key influential South African figures came together for a scenario-building process about the future of the country. It was shortly after Mandela’s release, when the future was very uncertain and divided.

The group attending included leaders from the left (ANC, PAC, National Union of Mineworkers, South African Communist Party), as well as their adversaries from white business and academia. They all saw the reality of South Africa from different perspectives. Participants included Trevor Manuel, Tito Mboweni and Vincent Maphai.

The group sat for a couple of days talking to each other. They met multiple times over a period of months, and talked through a number of scenarios. They eventually decided on four scenarios they found most plausible for South Africa. These scenarios were all based on the question of: “How will the transition go, and will the country succeed in “taking off”?”

The four, richly explained stories were based on bird analogies. Firstly, there was the *Ostrich*, where the white government sticks its head in the sand to avoid a negotiated settlement. Then there was the *Lame Duck* where the transition goes on for too long, trying to satisfy all parties and not succeeding. Thirdly, there was *Icarus*, where a black government comes to power and institutes a massive public spending policy which bankrupts the economy. Finally, the most positive scenario was *The Flight of the Flamingos*, where a successful transition takes place, and where everyone in South Africa rises slowly together.

From the group, the Flamingo scenario was unanimously agreed on as the best alternative. These scenarios were written up in a 25-page report and distributed widely through the media, and workshops all over the country. From these multiple engagements, the outcomes of Mont Fleur had a significant effect on the economic policy of South Africa. Many leaders and politicians have referred to these scenarios in various debates and discussions.

This process was so remarkably successful for four overarching reasons:

1. The timing was right – it was the window of opportunity to create a new future at the beginning of South Africa’s transition. There was much uncertainty and absence of control.
2. There was top political buy-in and participation at all levels.
3. The process itself built meaningful relationships and all involved bought into the scenarios, which also demonstrates excellent facilitation.
4. The follow-up was extensive – the stories were well written in detail, and communicated through mass media, television, and workshops. Many political speeches and strategy sessions referred to this documentation.

These scenarios proved to be powerful tools for both planning and debate, and are still spoken of over 10 years later. The Mont Fleur process highlights the impact of facilitated dialogue about the future, and the power of stories.

Commentary

Many organisations work in an increasingly complex situation both internally and externally. When we are faced with complex systems, one of the key capacities that is needed is to be able to not only work from one point of view or frame of reference. Scenarios help us to work simultaneously with more than one perspective and story, and to take actions that make sense across multiple frames. The real power of the scenario planning process is the ability to bring many different stakeholders into a conversation about the future, thereby creating collective ownership of these sets of pictures, and building important relationships across differences.

The outcome of a scenario-building process can be useful in two ways:

1. The set of possible stories of the future help a group/ organisation/ community respond to that situation should the event arise. This is a more responsive interpretation of the process. The 4 scenarios chosen at the end may not have an order of preference (good or bad), but rather map out the positive and negative outcomes of all scenarios. This is typically an outcome of an organisation-specific process, where the primary purpose would be to respond in a more informed manner to situations as they arise.
2. A more proactive response would be to strive towards the scenario of choice, and map out strategies to help a group move towards that picture. Scenarios would therefore have an order of preference amongst stakeholders involved, and the most preferred scenario is the one to strive for. Peter Drucker once said: “The best way to predict the future is to create it”. Scenarios are a powerful way of moving towards a more desired future, as has been highlighted by the incredible outcome of the Mont Fleur scenarios. The process and examples we have used in this explanation demonstrates this view of futurist thinking.

Resources

Hansen, M. et al. *What’s Your Strategy for Managing Knowledge?* In Harvard Business Review: 106-117

Illbury, C & Sunter, C. *The Mind of a Fox: Scenario Planning in Action.*

Schwartz, P. *The Art of the Long View: Planning for an Uncertain World.*

Van der Heijden, K. *The Art of Strategic Conversation.*

Kahane, A. *Solving Tough Problems.*

Sustained Dialogue

Overview

The key distinguishing feature of Sustained Dialogue is precisely that it is *sustained*. Over extended periods of time, the same group of people join in consecutive meetings. The underlying assumption behind this is that, in order to address conflictual issues, we need to not just look at the concrete problem to be solved, but at the underlying *relationships* that get in the way. And, changing relationships isn't something that happens in a day, or at a brief workshop or conference – it's a dynamic, non-linear process which takes time and requires commitment from those involved.

Sustained Dialogue was developed primarily by veteran US diplomat Dr. Harold Saunders, inspired by a long career in international affairs and peace processes. Key to the inspiration behind Sustained Dialogue was his work as co-chair of the "Dartmouth Conferences", an unofficial, multilevel, unique peace-making venture between the US and the USSR, started in 1960 and continued over a process of more than 30 years. Over years, the same participants sustained their conversation from one meeting to the next, speaking with an increasing sense of freedom, reaching greater and greater depth, and building trusting relationships and a foundation of shared knowledge. The agenda was open-ended and cumulative, picking out themes and taking them to their logical conclusion, and allowing new themes to arise. In 1992, members of the Dartmouth Conference's Regional Conflicts Task Force decided to draw on their experience to foster dialogue in a national conflict in Tajikistan, and it was through this work that Sustained Dialogue was further elaborated and conceptualised into its current basic model.

While the process was born from situations of conflict and extreme stress, it reflects a more universal pattern of human relationships, and can be used in a variety of community, corporate, regional and national settings. This section is based on writings of Harold Saunders as well as an interview and materials provided by Teddy Nemeroff, who is currently working with IDASA in Pretoria specifically on Sustained Dialogue. Teddy has worked with Sustained Dialogue in a wider range of contexts beyond the international peace-building arena, including on youth issues, local governance, and with universities. He launched the Sustained Dialogue programme at Princeton University which has now evolved into a programme at 10 US university campuses, specifically looking at race relations among students.

Sustained Dialogue is informed by two conceptual frameworks: five elements of relationships and five stages of a sustained dialogue.

Five Elements of Relationships

As mentioned above, the focus of Sustained Dialogue is on the underlying relationships that affect a given problem. Given this focus, it's important to understand what is meant by relationships and what the different aspects of relationship are. The following five components or arenas of interaction make up a definition of relationships. They work in constantly changing combinations.

Identity: The way that participants define themselves including the life experiences they bring to the present moment

Interests: The things people care about, that are drawing them together

Power: The capacity to influence a course of events

Perceptions of the Other: Including misperceptions and stereotypes

Patterns of Interaction: Including respect for certain limits on behaviour

This framework is analytical but also operational in the sense that participants in a Sustained Dialogue will usually be introduced to these elements and will draw on them in understanding

the nature of the relationships that divide them. Sometimes participants can find it hard to talk about relationships, but they become apparent in the dialogues, to both participants and moderators. In that situation, this framework provides a point of reference.

Five Stages of Sustained Dialogue

The Sustained Dialogue process is mapped out in five stages. These stages have been identified, not based on what the creators of the process necessarily would *want* to happen, but rather on what they observed happening as a natural evolution when participants came together in a dialogue sustained over time. It's important to point out that these stages are a kind of idealtpe description and not a recipe. Generally participants will move back and forth between the stages, and will not follow this rigidly. The Sustained Dialogue facilitator also will not push them through the process. Still, this basic pattern seems accurate and provides aboveall a sense of direction for both participants and facilitators to a process that is otherwise open-ended.

Stage One - Deciding to Engage

First a group of participants needs to be convened. A good size for a Sustained Dialogue is 8-12 people. They should ideally be people who are respected community leaders (but not necessarily in official positions), who reflect the key viewpoints of the topic, conflict, or community, and who are willing to come together to listen to one another in an ongoing process. Though Sustained Dialogue is intended and designed to shift *relationships*, the participants will generally be coming together because they are motivated by, and focused on, a particular problem. They don't necessarily see relationships as the heart of that problem from the outset.

Convening an appropriate group of participants can be a difficult and drawn out process. It may be hard to get them to commit the time, to accept the value of the process, or to be willing to engage with others where there is a dysfunctional relationship. Their motivation to join will depend on whether they are the right people to be involved, whether they have a compelling desire to solve a problem, whether they are aware of their common interest and interdependence in solving it, and whether the conveners succeed in communicating the value of the dialogue process.

Once the participants have been identified, Stage One is also the time where they together agree on the purpose, scope, and ground rules of the dialogue. Sometimes the participants actually sign a "covenant" to contract with each other.

Stage Two - Mapping Relationships and Naming Problems

This is where the conversations actually begin. Stage Two is first a process of naming the issues – telling stories of personal experiences, venting grievances, downloading or "dumping" all the concerns, letting it all out, and clearing the air. Towards the later parts of this stage, participants will start to map the problems and the related underlying relationships out in a more structured way and they will identify a few major issues they want to focus on in a deeper exploration.

Stage Three: Probing Problems and Relationships

At the end of Stage Two and beginning of Stage 3, the character of the conversation shifts. "Me" becomes "We". "What" becomes "Why". Participants shift from speaking "to" each other to speaking "with" each other. The group is finding patterns and explanations, making connections, and developing concepts. They are more interpretive and analytical at this stage, probing the dynamics of the underlying relationships causing their problems, and identifying broad possible ways into changing those relationships. The group is now focusing on some narrower or deeper issues or leverage points in the system, bearing in mind the connections to the other issues that were mapped in Stage Two. They are arriving at the insights that will drive their choices for action. They are also accessing their individual and collective will to enact change, and coming to a sense of direction.

“I would as a white student talk about interacting with a black student, and how it was uncomfortable. A black student would tell a story about how a white student treated them. Stage Three would be where someone would say ‘maybe our experience is similar’. ‘Maybe in my story, the way I felt is like how the white person in your story felt.’ This is where we are getting into each other’s shoes.” – Interview with Teddy Nemeroff

Stage Four: Scenario-building

While the group has been primarily focused on problems until this point, they really step into a positive solution space now. They work out what practical steps they and the wider community need to take in order to change troublesome relationships and to overcome obstacles to their agreed direction. If the dialogue is related to the political level, they will suggest steps to be taken in the political arena, and may relate to actions needing to be taken by influential players beyond the dialogue group. If it is at a more local or organisational level, the dialogue group may be focusing more on designing its own direct actions. These may be collective or individual.

The use of the word “scenarios” to describe this stage in Sustained Dialogue is quite different from its use in our section on scenario-planning. A Sustained Dialogue facilitator could choose to do an actual scenario-planning process in this stage, but the stage is really about defining scenarios in the very broad sense of simply, options for action and possible ways forward.

Stage Five: Acting Together

In Stage Five the shift is from talking to action and the previously inward focus is redirected outward. The participants are now either working out how to put their suggestions in the hands of those who can implement them, or going out to implement their activities themselves. The nature of this action depends greatly on the subject of the dialogue, the level of influence of members, the level of risk involved, and the specific context in which it is taking place. This may be the conclusion of the process, or it may be that the participants now start addressing a new issue or return to one of the issues that was raised earlier in the dialogue and not followed up.

As stated earlier, these five stages are not linear, but there are some patterns even in the non-linearity: a genuine and effective Stage Three will typically depend on the group having gone through Stage Two, so it would generally not happen that a group skips from Stage One to Three. They may oscillate back and forth quite a bit between Two and Three though, and then jump to Stage Four when ready.

In Stages Three-Five especially the difference between the diplomatic/ political level work with Sustained Dialogue and the more community/ youth level work is apparent. There is a lot of diversity in how these stages play out in different processes, and Sustained Dialogue takes a healthy open-ended approach to that variety.

As the group moves through the five stages, they will usually increasingly take ownership of the process, and at times will easily self-manage it. It’s important to have a facilitator guiding them through it, who understands the needs of the group and who is able to recognise the five stages and help the transitions to happen without pushing the group into a new stage prematurely. The style of facilitation and the degree to which the facilitator intervenes will vary greatly from dialogue to dialogue. At times, the facilitator may not need to say anything at all. At other times s/he may be intervening much more directly, in a more workshop-style form. This depends on the characteristics of the dialogue group and what elements of relationship are at the forefront at any given time.

Applications

Sustained Dialogue is being applied in several distinct types of settings. Hal Saunders and the Kettering Institute focus on its effectiveness in conflict resolution at a political or societal level. In addition to the extensive work in Tajikistan they have applied it in

Azerbaijan/Armenia/Nagorno-Karabakh, in the Middle East and elsewhere. Teddy Nemoroff's work at Princeton as mentioned has led it to being used on about 10 university campuses in the US, primarily focused on improving race relations. Meanwhile, IDASA with Teddy are now applying it in both urban and rural areas in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

IDASA is also working on training moderators for the groups. The training is always run alongside an intervention and so is very action-learning oriented. In KwaZulu-Natal currently 9 villages are running their own Sustained Dialogue process.

Case Example – IDASA Youth Project in Zimbabwe

In a time of deepening crisis in Zimbabwe, youth are a particularly vulnerable group, more at risk to hiv/AIDS, and suffering greatly under the economic collapse and high unemployment. Because of this, they are also more likely to be taken advantage of by political parties. From May 2004 through December 2005, IDASA supported a Sustained Dialogue initiative to empower youth in Zimbabwe in collaboration with the Coordinating Committee of the Organizations for Voluntary Service (COSV), and its Zimbabwean partner the Amani Trust. The intention of this project was to reduce the political exploitation of youth and strengthen their self-reliance, by building relationships, developing a deeper understanding of their issues of concern, and developing actions to improve their lives. The project engaged 120 youth leaders in Harare from across the socio-economic and political spectrum.

The collaboration between the Zimbabwean organisations originally was formed as a media and advocacy campaign, mobilising 14 Zimbabwean NGOs to participate. But as this became an increasingly risky political exercise, they decided to try Sustained Dialogue instead. This shift significantly changed the scale of the project, now reaching only about 120 rather than the intended 1000's. But depth of impact replaced breadth. The project worked strategically with youth leaders who could subsequently make a difference in their communities, and impact could be more easily monitored. Also, rather than the message being defined centrally and broadcast to the youth, the youth defined the issues they wanted to focus on themselves, primarily unemployment and hiv/AIDS.

Eight youth dialogue groups of 15 members each were launched simultaneously throughout the city of Harare. Each had one youth and one NGO activist as co-moderators, who were trained in Sustained Dialogue by IDASA. These moderators held orientation sessions for the participants, where expectations were aligned and discussion topics were selected. The groups launched at two-day overnight retreats, and then they started meeting at monthly half-day meetings at venues in their communities. The groups started out cautious because of the political situation and the sensitivity of the issue of hiv/AIDS, but as they progressed and trust increased, they began opening up to sharing more intimately.

The political climate and events in Zimbabwe made it difficult for the project to function and for youth to make it to meetings. Despite these challenges, the project achieved significant results. It succeeded in created spaces the youth didn't have, for talking and thinking together about their challenges. Half of the groups managed to engage youth from both sides of the political spectrum while all of them managed to bring in diversity of interests and backgrounds. The youth gained knowledge about the issues, an increased sense of agency, stronger relationships and skills in dialogue and conflict management. This led to increased youth leadership in the communities, mitigation of community conflicts, and youth violence, and the development of plans for addressing community challenges.

Commentary

According to Teddy, there are two questions to be asked. The first is: will dialogue and improved relationships help this situation and is it worth the effort? Convening and sustaining a Sustained Dialogue can be a lot of work. The second question is: is the timing right and how is this going to interact with the context, with what is going on in the outside world? Will it conflict with other processes that are already going on to try and resolve the issue?

Sustained Dialogue is most useful in situations where relationships are dysfunctional, there is a lack of trust, and official processes are not working because the issues are not easily solved in a negotiation-type setup. Sustained Dialogue is not a space for debate or for official negotiations among formal representatives. It is also not a purely interpersonal process, nor is it a skills training. And it is not a quick fix.

The strength of Sustained Dialogue is in its flexibility and simplicity. The open-endedness allows a group to go where it needs to go, and it is important to look not only for the expected impact, but also for the positive unexpected results. The main challenge is that it isn't a ready-made methodology, with a step-by-step guide. The two frameworks – the five elements of relationship and the five stages of Sustained Dialogue – provide a very basic but useful sense of direction and reference point. This means that the process relies greatly on the intuition of the facilitator, as well as his/her skills, personal attitudes and capacities, and contextual understanding. The facilitator needs to be able to respond to a wide variety of situations and to draw on a wide repertoire of possible ways of interacting in the group. Ideally, this repertoire is built up from experience.

Besides the nature of this process as sustained over time, another aspect that strikes us about this process as distinguishing it from most of the others in this collection is the nature of Stage Two and the transition to Stage Three. Venting seems to us to be highly underrated in many processes. The release participants get from letting everything out and getting things off their chest, and the shift that happens when that has been done, can be highly generative.

Resources

Saunders, Harold *A Public Peace Process : Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts*

Sustained Dialogue: A Citizen's Peace Building Process – Guide prepared by Teddy Nemeroff

Diving In: A Handbook for Improving Race Relations on College Campuses Through the Process of Sustained Dialogue By Teddy Nemeroff & David Tukey

Empowering Zimbabwean Youth Through Sustained Dialogue by Teddy Nemeroff (case study prepared for UNDP)

www.sdcampusnetwork.org

www.sustaineddialogue.org

www.kettering.org

The World Café

Overview

The World Café is an intentional way to create a living network of conversations around questions that matter. It is a methodology which enables people (from 12 to 1200) to think together and intentionally create new, shared meaning and collective insight. Although people have been meeting in ways sharing the same spirit of the World Café for centuries, the actual methodology was 'discovered' and formalized by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs in 1995. Since then hundreds of thousands of people have been meeting in World Café style across the world.

The host of a World Café makes use of the café metaphor quite literally. The room is actually set up like a café, with people sitting spread out in groups of four at different tables, for deeply participative, high-quality conversations. They are guided to move to new tables as part of a series of conversational rounds around questions that matter to them. With each move, a table host remains behind, sharing the essence of his/her table's conversation. The others move out into the room and connect to what other tables have talked about, in this way



networking and cross-pollinating the conversations. The café, with its ability to weave and further build insights, new ideas or new questions, enables collective intelligence to evolve through a group.

The World Café is based on a core assumption that the knowledge and wisdom that we need is *already present and accessible*. Working with the World Café, we can bring out the collective wisdom of the group - greater than the sum of its individual parts - and channel it towards positive change. Finn Voldtofte, one of the early World Café pioneers actually sees the café as the unit of change force in any system or organization as it engages, inspires and connects different parts of a system. As Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that small groups of committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

Four conditions to create café magic

Many people who have participated in a really energetic and effective World Café, speak of the human "magic" that arose in the conversations and exchanges, as they moved from one to another conversation, evolving a theme or deepening a question.

Through the work of café practitioners, four conditions have been identified that enable 'café magic' to occur:

1. *A question that matters*: Identifying compelling questions is an art form. For a question to matter to a group, it needs to have personal relevance to each person. They need to be invested with a real stake in the question and its answers. Good questions open up to a diverse range of thinking, are thought provoking and stimulate creativity. A good question places the ball in the court of the participants – showing them they are needed, valuable contributors to the whole.

2. *A safe and hospitable space*: Often meeting spaces are not very inviting. Here the café metaphor gets played out, and care is taken to create an inviting and warm environment. Often it is complete with café tables, table-cloths, flowers and candles. When people step into the World Café, they immediately know that this is not just another formal meeting. In addition to the physical environment, though, is the creation of an actually *safe space*, where people feel comfortable enough to contribute what they are thinking and feeling. If for example a group from the same organization participates in a World Café, care should be taken that people know they will not be punished later for saying something in disagreement with a colleague or superior.

3. *Mutual listening*: This condition emphasizes the importance of listening over talking. It connects to the underlying assumption that the knowledge and wisdom we need is already present. Collective insight will only emerge as we honour and encourage each person's unique contribution. Margaret Wheatley has said that "Intelligence emerges as a system connects with itself in new and diverse ways." As each person offers his or her perspective, they are contributing to the increasing intelligence and insight of the whole, often in surprising ways.

4. *A spirit of inquiry*: It is common for people to arrive to workshops and events with their expert knowledge, deliver it and leave without having shifted or grown in their own views at all. In the World Café, a spirit of inquiry is key. This means that people are truly in exploration together. They bring what they know, think and feel about a given question to the table, but they are willing to go beyond that, to work together to uncover new insights, different perspective, and deeper questions. We can all always learn more. Fostering a spirit of inquiry and curiosity for what is not known, will help overcome resistance to new or different thoughts.

The following *guidelines* are directly related to the four conditions, and can help a facilitator to enable the creation of these conditions.

1. *Clarify the purpose*: Before bringing together people for a café, clarify the purpose of the café. Understanding the purpose is necessary to be able to decide who should be there, the questions to discuss and the finer details of the design.

2. *Create Hospitable Space*

3. *Explore Questions that Matter*: Don't underestimate the care needed to succeed in identifying good questions.

4. *Encourage Each Person's Contribution*

5. *Connect Diverse People and Ideas*: The opportunity to move between tables, meet new people, actively contribute your thinking, and link discoveries is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the World Café. Design your cafe for maximum cross-pollinating without making the rounds themselves too short.

6. *Listen for insights and share discoveries*: Encourage each café group to take a bit of time for reflection to notice "what's at the center of our conversation?" After several rounds of café conversation it is helpful to engage in a conversation of the whole group to explore together which themes and questions are arising.

Café Etiquette

The World Café homepage suggests that a simple way to invite participants to engage optimally in the World Café is by sharing the following "Café Etiquette" with them.

- *Focus* on what matters
- *Contribute* your thinking and experience

- *Speak* from the heart
- *Listen* to understand
- *Link And Connect* ideas
- *Listen Together* for deeper themes, insights and questions.
- *Play, Doodle, Draw*—writing on the tablecloths is encouraged!

Applications

The World Café website and the new book released in 2005 about the World Café profile numerous stories of how this approach has been used in different contexts across cultures, sectors, social classes, and generations. According to the website, the World Café is valuable when you aim:

- * To generate input, share knowledge, stimulate innovative thinking, and explore action possibilities around real life issues and questions
- * To engage people--whether they are meeting for the first time, or are in established relationships--in authentic conversation
- * To conduct in-depth exploration of key strategic challenges or opportunities
- * To deepen relationships and mutual ownership of outcomes in an existing group
- * To create meaningful interaction between a speaker and the audience
- * To engage groups larger than 12 (up to 1200!) in an authentic dialogue process

The café is less useful if there is a predetermined outcome, there is a desire to convey one-way information, or a group is working on detailed implementation plans.

Case Examples – From Maori Forestry Claims to Norwegian Town Planning

The café is a very simple tool, which has been used in many different settings. We include a couple of examples to show its breadth of use. *These cases have been chosen from several others from the World Café website.*

In New Zealand the café was used by an organisation to create a gathering to increase knowledge, networking and agreement among diverse Maori groups all working to claim back forests from the Ministry of Justice. The informal warm atmosphere of the World Café worked incredibly well with the traditional ways of the indigenous Maori people. Experts on the claims process were brought in to provide insights and perspective, and conversations among claimant groups and others around tables occurred throughout. The purpose was to progress Maori treaty claims, and the process was to hear diverse views, network with those who knew more, and to consider next steps. This first three day café looks likely to spark several others in other regions in New Zealand, with an intention that the final outcome be a vision of partnership between the Maori and non-Maori people of the land.

The World Café has also proven itself as a tool for town planning in Norway. The head of culture for a suburb of Oslo made use of the café as a way to get input and involvement from citizens involved in culture for a plan for the cultural activities of the future. They were used to people being rather passive at town meetings, and so the World Café was brought in as a way to fully engage people.

The café kicked off with a simple exercise that everyone had to join in: everyone had to draw a simple picture to express what they wanted to achieve with culture in their community. From here they began sharing their ideas, writing down their comments, insights and questions on the tablecloth. Weaving in and out between groups, they gathered new ideas or solutions to

elaborate on. Each table had members of the cultural department helping to gather the main ideas that would later be used in the formal cultural plan.

The set-up and structure of the café meant that everyone became deeply involved in thinking together around the issues, challenges and possibilities of culture in the future of the town. Ideas that could work for many sectors had been shared. The informal creation of relations and the creation of a sense of wholeness in the group was a very important side-benefit. At the end of the meeting, the main learning for the organizers was that it is much more important to find ways to engage the energy and commitment of the people who are involved, than it is to produce a piece of paper with the formal plan.

Our third example is the Financial Planning Association – a membership association of financial planners in the US. They have been making use of café as a way to build and bridge their new organization after a merger of two independent groups. During the first year, they hosted around 15 cafes, described as falling into three overarching categories:

Member cafes were cafés for members that mostly focused on bringing members together for networking. The questions asked were very broad and simply aimed to generate stimulating conversation and new insights together.

Event-driven cafes were cafes integrated as part of existing events for the different constituencies of the association. These enabled people to participate in technically specific conversations, learning from each other in the process. The goals of most of these were personal and business specific notes that the participants took for themselves.

Purpose driven cafes were convened with a very specific purpose in mind and some kind of expected outcome, such as reaching consensus on a major decision, or to plan out specific workgroup activities.

Commentary

The World Café is a strong tool to ignite and engage a larger group of people through good meaningful questions and inviting safe space. The process of bringing the diverse perspectives and ideas together can really give a group a sense of their own intelligence and insight that is larger than the sum of the parts.

One can use the World Café with as little as an hour, or convene a gathering over several days. If it is part of a longer gathering it is often used in combination with other tools. The divergence and breadth of ideas often generated through a Café are helpful to follow with an “Open Space” process, where participants have to step in and take responsibility for specific areas of an issue, joining with others with a shared commitment to further an area. The Café can also offer a useful alternative to “report backs” if people have been in working in “taskforces” or “committees”. Rather than having each group stand in front of plenary to speak to words on a flipchart, a Café can be created where people from different groups move between the tables and capture the key insights.

The aspect of meaningful questions is absolutely essential for a successful Café. Questions that may matter to the organisers may not be as compelling to participants. Where a designer of a World Café process is not sure of the questions that will ignite a group, he or she can simply have an initial question which seeds further questions, eg. “What question, if answered, would make the greatest difference to the future of the situation we’re exploring here?”

Resources

Brown, Juanita and David Isaacs. *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures through Conversations that Matter*
<http://www.theworldcafe.com>

ADDITIONAL TOOLS

The dialogue universe seems endless. In addition to the ten tools we selected to cover in depth and exemplify by cases, we have, through experience and research, come across a wide variety of other approaches. We've included this section as a brief overview of some of these additional tools which it was beyond the scope of this project to cover in depth but yet deserve mention.

Bohmian dialogue

"What is the source of all this trouble? I'm saying that the source is basically in thought. Many people would think that such a statement is crazy, because thought is the one thing we have with which to solve our problems. That's part of our tradition. Yet it looks as if the thing we use to solve our problems with is the source of our problems. It's like going to the doctor and having him make you ill. In fact, in 20% of medical cases we do apparently have that going on. But in the case of thought, it's far over 20%." – David Bohm

David Bohm (1917-1992) was a well-known quantum physicist, who made significant contributions to theoretical physics, particularly in quantum mechanics and relativity theory. The connection from physics to dialogue may at first seem unclear. However, Bohm's understanding of physics was deeply aligned with his view of the nature of reality, the nature of thought and the meaning of dialogue, and the connections between them. Throughout his life, he was actively involved in politics and philosophy, with one of his key inspirations being the Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti.

We include David Bohm's approach to dialogue in this collection because it is a method unique in its own right. It's important to recognise however that Bohmian dialogue is far more than a method. It's a philosophy and a worldview, which we can only introduce very briefly here, and Bohm is one of the most quoted people in this field.

Bohm believed that thought shapes our reality, and that dialogue shapes thought and thought processes. He used to emphasise that dialogue comes from the roots "dia" ("through") and logos ("meaning") and so to him the word "dialogue" signified "meaning flowing through us". He saw dialogue as a process of direct face-to-face encounter by which people could participate in a *common* pool of meaning – a kind of "shared mind" or "collective intelligence". It was not a process by which one person would try to convince everyone else of his/her idea, but rather where the participants would engage in *creating* a common understanding. To him, thought was one big process, and it didn't really make sense to break it up into "my thought" and "your thought".

You could say Bohm's approach to dialogue was his form of activism. He observed many of the crises faced by the world, and attributed them to a dominant worldview of fragmentation rather than wholeness. He saw a breakdown of communication and relationships, and he believed that the key problem was an incoherence of thought, and an inability to see how our own thinking behaves, and how the process of thought creates problems even more than it solves them. The overriding intention with his approach to dialogue was thus to understand consciousness, to explore day-to-day relationship and communication, and to overcome fragmentation.

"Dialogue is really aimed at going into the whole thought process and changing the way the thought process occurs collectively. We haven't really paid much attention to thought as a process. We have engaged in thoughts, put we have only paid attention to the content, not to the process." – David Bohm

In a Bohmian dialogue, 15-40 people convene in a circle. This range of group size is specified as a number that is not too large for depth and intimacy but large enough to allow

subcultures to form and become visible. The groups generally meet more than once, for about two hours at a time, regularly over an extended period of time.

There is no pre-set agenda. The idea is that the absence of an agenda allows for meaning to flow freely and undirected. The group decides when they meet what they would like to talk about and how they would like to proceed. It's important to emphasise here that the fact that there is no *objective* or intended outcome for the dialogue, does not mean there is no *reason* for it. As the group stays with the process over time, the deeper meanings are revealed. The dialogue leads to increased coherence, creativity, and fellowship.

This process of undirected inquiry often leads to frustration and discomfort. The groups are encouraged to work through the anxiety, and to allow it to draw them creatively into new areas. While emotion is not in focus, it is considered useful. Frustration, chaos, and emotion can all help to create meaning if the group doesn't try to move away from them. Friction among subcultures allows participants to surface their assumptions – to see their own thoughts and those of others.

The most important practice of Bohmian dialogue is *suspension*. Participants try to suspend their assumptions, judgments, reactions, impulses, emotions. Suspension is not the same as repressing them, postponing them, or blindly following them. It means attending to them, noticing them, and observing them without judging them as right/wrong. Your thoughts, physical sensations, and emotions are exposed so they can be seen by yourself and others. The group becomes your mirror, mirroring back the content of thought and the underlying structures. The listeners reflect back the assumptions they think are behind what is being said. As the thought process becomes observed, it changes.

A facilitator is useful in the beginning of a Bohmian dialogue to hold the group through this process. The facilitator would usually start by talking about dialogue and explaining the meaning of the word, and the principles and practices of this particular approach. The facilitator is however not seen as a neutral outsider, but rather participates in the group as an individual. She should ideally work herself out of a job as soon as possible, once the group has established a dialogue practice.

Bohmian dialogue is clearly very different from how we normally function. We generally pay attention to the content of our thoughts – our ideas, opinions, questions, insights - but not the process of forming them. We usually find it very difficult to let go of judgments or ideas because we identify deeply with them, we hold on to and defend them. If we view thought as a larger system that moves through us and around us, we may be able to take a step back and to see how what is going on within each of us is a reflection of the dialogue group and how what is going on in the dialogue group is a reflection of the larger society.

Bohm, David. *On Dialogue*

Bohm, David, Donald Factor, and Peter Garrett (1991) "Dialogue: A Proposal"

<http://www.laetusinpraesens.org>

Citizen Councils

Citizen Councils are experiments in democracy. Their purpose is to define through dialogue what the People of a community, city, or nation as a whole would *really* want if they were to carefully think about it and talk it over with each other.

There are a variety of different related forms, which we are roughly grouping under the overall header "citizen councils". These include "citizen consensus councils", "citizen deliberation councils", "wisdom councils", "citizen juries", "consensus conferences", "citizen assemblies", and "planning cells". They differ in the number of participants, the selection process, the mandate, the meeting time and frequency, whether they are permanent or temporary, their level of expertise, the media participation, etc.

The common thread of the Citizen Council is the act of collecting a small group of citizens (usually 12-24) who together comprise a “microcosm” of their community or society. These are not elected representatives in the political sense. They speak for themselves as individual citizens, but they embody the diverse perspectives and capacities of their wider group. Because of this composition, their decisions are likely to be similar to the decisions the wider group would have come up with if able to engage in a similar dialogue at a large scale. If their process is made visible to that wider group as it unfolds, they can also be stimulating similar conversations to happen informally across an extended area.

The members of the Citizen Council come together face-to-face to engage in a facilitated dialogue or deliberation around one or more issues concerning the population from which it was selected. The dialogue approach needs to be one that enables diverse members to really hear each other, to open their minds and expand their understanding, and to engage each other in seeking creative solutions. The dialogue may be a few days or may be a longer period of time. It usually results in a final statement released to the larger population and to the authorities. In order to come up with such an agreement, the members have to explore their diversity, go deeper to the point of common ground, and help each other to see the whole picture.

One of the most famous examples of a Citizen Council was the MacLeans experiment in Canada. In 1991, Canada’s leading newsweekly Maclean’s brought together 12 Canadians at a resort north of Toronto. They held firm divergent beliefs, reflecting the main differences in public opinion in the deeply divided country. But they were also all interested in listening to each other’s points of view. For three days they engaged in a facilitated dialogue, all the while being recorded on television. At the end of the process, they published a four-page consensus vision for their country.

<http://co-intelligence.org>

<http://www.wisedemocracy.org>

Atlee, Tom. The Tao of Democracy

Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice are part of life, though they are often not explicitly named. A Community of Practice is an organisational form that assists with knowledge sharing, learning and change. It is generally a self-organising group of people who have come together to share knowledge on a particular field of practice.

The process of explicitly naming and cultivating Communities of Practice is becoming increasingly widespread in both corporate, government, and civil society settings worldwide. This development is a response to increasing complexity and the shift to a knowledge society. The assumption here is that knowledge can no longer be packaged, externalised, and put in databases and remain relevant over time. We need to be able to draw on living, tacit, contextual knowledge, which primarily exists within people and can only be volunteered, not conscripted.

Communities of Practice are designed to be able to transmit knowledge voluntarily on a “pull” basis (as and when needed for a specific problem or situation) rather than on a “push” basis (where the expert decides what others need to know and presents it to them in a one-way communication). This process requires strong and trustful relationships, because it relies on “know-who” in order to transmit “know-how”. Communities of Practice employ a number of different dialogue tools in order to build these relationships and enable learning among their members.

The paradox of this organisational form is that it often fails if it is over-managed, but does need to be cultivated to be sustained. It needs to be supported, yet be left to create its own

boundaries and identity to be successful. After all, relationships are largely determined by chemistry and by building trust over time.

Wenger, Etienne. *Communities of Practice*
<http://www.etiennewenger.com>

Deep Ecology

Deep Ecology is both a philosophy and a movement. The term was coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess to contrast with the kind of environmentalism that is motivated by purely human interests. The Deep Ecology philosophy is premised on the assumption that nonhuman life on Earth has intrinsic worth beyond its usefulness for human purposes, and that the current level of human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive. This philosophy has inspired an array of experiential and dialogic practices, primarily developed by John Seed and Joanna Macy, intended to help “decondition” people from centuries of putting human interests above all others. Joanna calls this work “the Work that Reconnects”.

The Work that Reconnects aims to help people experience their innate connections with each other and the web of life, so that they may become motivated to play their part in creating a sustainable civilization. Participants experience and share their innermost responses to the present condition of our world, reframe their pain for the world as evidence of their interconnectedness, and build relationships of mutual support and collaboration. They also gain concepts, exercises, and methods which help to make visible the power they have to take part in the healing of the world.

This work came mainly out of the 1970's in North America where it brought together thousands of people - antinuclear and environmental activists, psychologists, artists, and spiritual practitioners. One of the most famous exercises is called “The Council of All Beings”. Here, participants take on the role of different living beings and engage from the perspective of that being in a dialogue on what is happening to their world.

Deep Ecology is really a different worldview. We include it here because it challenges and widens our conception of what dialogue can be, to include dialogue with the non-human world, as well as dialogue with our past and future. We also find that the structured exercises it offers can shift participants out of their comfort zones and into a state of openness, in which further dialogue can then take place.

Macy and Brown's “*Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect our Lives, Our World,*” provides an up-to-date description of the theory behind the Work that Reconnects, some sixty exercises, both new and old, and guides to designing and facilitating workshops.

<http://www.deepecology.org>
<http://www.joannamacy.net>

Dynamic Facilitation and Choice-Creating

Breakthrough. The most exciting and uplifting experience a group trying to solve a problem can have, is when a new option becomes available which no one had thought of before. Something that creates synergy between the different options the group has been disagreeing about. Something that overrides or somehow makes previous concerns irrelevant. This is what Dynamic Facilitation tries to make happen by creating a space called “Choice-Creation”.

Choice-Creation brings together the openness and transformative approach of dialogue with the deliberative approach of trying to actually reach specific conclusions to specific problems. The facilitator plays an active role, helping participants to determine an issue they really care about, and to say openly, clearly, and respectfully what is on their minds about it. Throughout

this process the facilitator is working with four flipcharts at the same time – lists of Solutions, Problems, Data and Concerns. As group conclusions emerge, a Decisions flipchart is added. The facilitator is constantly following the natural dynamic flow and spontaneity of the conversation, rather than trying to manage an agenda.

Dynamic facilitation was developed by Jim Rough in the early 1980's. According to Jim, it is particularly valuable in situations where people face important, complex, strategic, or seemingly impossible-to-solve issues, when there is a conflict, or when people seek to build teamwork or community.

<http://www.ToBE.net>

<http://www.SocietysBreakthrough.com>

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a form of group meeting used primarily in the qualitative research field – in academic and market research. It usually consists of a relatively small group of 6-12 people. Often a focus group is brought together early in an exploratory study, and the conversation can be used to help develop questionnaires or other surveys for more quantitative research. The benefit of a focus group as opposed to a survey is that participants have a chance to interact, bouncing ideas off each other and reacting to each other's comments. This helps to get more conscious answers from participants, creates possibility for new ideas to be generated, and also provides information about the relationships and dynamics of the group. Most importantly, a focus group helps to answer “*why...*” questions whereas surveys can primarily answer “*what...*” questions.

The focus group is particularly useful when an organisation wants to start up a new project, and it is unclear how the community will respond. What will their key concerns be? What are the obstacles that might get in the way of the success of this project? What are the forces that might help it succeed? What are the reasons behind people's preferences? This is generally more of a consultative process than a meeting of stakeholders who will actually be involved in acting together to implement the project.

A Focus Group is not necessarily a dialogic process but it can be. The other tools described in this section such as Circle and World Café can be used creatively within a focus group session.

Flowgame

The flowgame was created in Denmark in the late 1990s by a group of friends and fellow facilitators, who had come together to design a game that would support each of them in furthering their own work and learning. The members of this first group were Toke Moeller, Monica Nissen, Finn Voldtofte, Jan Hein Nielsen and Ouafa Rian. The game has since been through several iterations, and continues to evolve.

The purpose of the Flowgame is to bring “flow” to an area of the lives of the people playing. Each player brings a question or a personal intent to the game, which s/he wishes to develop clarity and insight around. The game is played over a period of one to three days with 4-6 players and a host around a gameboard.

The game draws inspiration from the four directions of the “medicine wheel”, a concept drawn from Native American cultures, in which each cardinal direction holds a perspective for personal and authentic leadership. Whichever the question or intent that one brings to the game, it will be viewed from these perspectives during the course of the game. The following description is taken from the Flowgame briefing materials:

The North - *The innovative perspective: Your courage to find new paths and break new ground in your life and work, to move ahead when called for.*

The East - *The deep vision and perspective, the long view: To clarify your passion, vision, energy - to keep the overview and find coherence and connectivity to the world surrounding you.*

The South - *The perspective of the community: To open the good relations, to be in rhythm with others, team spirit, synergy, synchronicity.*

The West - *The perspective of action: Getting things done making it happen, being methodical, being practical and doing it in a sustainable way for you and the greater whole.*

A pile of cards lies in each of the four directions on the gameboard. Each card poses a meaningful question, enabling joint reflection and sharing of knowledge and experiences. Depending on the way the die falls, as players are sailing through the four rivers on the gameboard, a player will pick a card, and reflect with fellow players around a question drawn in one of the four perspectives. The end of the game is when someone has sailed through all the four rivers, and thus had his or her question illuminated through shared reflection and inquiry from many different angles. It is quite normal for the time to run out before people have actually sailed through the full scope of the game.

The Flowgame is a fun, interactive way of dealing with deep and meaningful issues and questions as an individual, but also as a team. After the success of the Flowgame focusing more on the personal leadership of individuals, the game has been adapted to be able to deal with more collective questions, of teams or groupings within organizations. Additional questions relating to the organisational sphere will then be added, specific to each particular organization or grouping.

The Flowgame is facilitated by a Flowgame host, and cannot as yet be run by someone who has not been trained for this. For more on the Flowgame, or if you would like to play a game, contact Marianne [Marianne@kufunda.org].

Graphic Facilitation and Information Design

A picture is worth 1000 words. A graphic facilitator is skilled at visualising what people are saying during a dialogue. When a graphic facilitator is present, a wall will be covered with white paper at the beginning of a dialogue process. At the end of the workshop that paper will colorfully tell the whole story of the process, with words, mindmaps, symbols and images. Rich pictures can capture the complexity of the discussions and the meeting in simple overview.

An information designer will listen to what people are saying throughout a process and turn it into diagrams, tables, and models. S/he will continually be reflecting back to participants their own knowledge in a different form for them to react to.

Graphic facilitation and information design are not necessarily dialogue processes in and of themselves, but they are tools that can play a major role in the quality and success of a dialogic process. They help to make the group more aware of itself and of the patterns that are emerging in the conversation.

<http://www.groveconsulting.com>

<http://www.biggerpicture.dk>

Learning Journeys

John le Carre has said that “the desk is a dangerous place from which to view the world”. Learning journeys are about getting out from behind the desk, out of the comfort of the home, the conference room or the hotel, to explore and experience the world first-hand. Learning journeys are physical journeys from one place to another. They are also mental journeys, challenging participants’ preconceived notions and assumptions about current reality and possibility. Learning journeys as such, once again, are only dialogue methods in the very broadest sense of the word – engaging in a dialogue with reality. But the key distinction between a real learning journey and a typical “field trip” or “study tour” is created by introducing dialogue methods.

In a learning journey, when a group visits an organisation or community, they are invited to sit down one on one or in small groups in empathetic dialogue with local stakeholders to understand their reality. Before a visit, they clarify their own intention and questions, and they often receive training in how to “suspend judgment” and listen not only with an open mind, but also with an open heart and open will. After a visit they hear each other’s perspectives and through conversation come to a deeper understanding and a more whole picture of what they have experienced together. They become aware of what others saw that they themselves may have been blind to, and discover the value of broadening our understanding of what it means to see.

Listening Projects and Dialogue Interviewing

Many of us are actually not used to being genuinely listened to. The most common form of listening is the kind where we are constantly judging what the speaker is saying, or waiting for an opportunity to say what we ourselves want to say. When you create an opportunity for



really just asking questions, listening with an open mind, and connecting to what another person is saying, you can actually help that person to uncover a knowledge they didn’t even know they had. Through an open-ended conversation delving deeply into the interviewee’s life experience, knowledge, needs and concerns, the issues are brought to life in their mind and heart. They themselves realise things they hadn’t seen before, about how they feel and what they can do about it.

This kind of interviewing and listening can be relevant in many situations. It may be a way to mobilise people to participate in a particular project, to develop a network, or simply to awaken them to act as individuals. As an example, “Listening Projects” are a specific form of community organising, used since the early 1980s, in which trained interviewers go door-to-door asking citizens powerful questions about local issues. The interviews will usually last about one

hour. Once the interviewees become convinced that the intentions of the interviewer are genuine, that this person is sincerely there to listen to them and not to judge them, they will open up and share their perspectives. The Project generates change not by telling people what to do, but really just by asking questions and listening.

<http://www.listeningproject.info>

<http://www.ottoscharmer.com>

Quaker Meetings

The Quakers are a Christian group, more formally known as the "Society of Friends". The group was founded in 17th Century England, when many were challenging established beliefs and the institutionalisation of the Church. Friends emphasise the personal relationship with God and believe that if they wait silently, there will be times when God speaks to them directly in the heart. They hold regular "business meetings", quite unlike any other business meetings you might have experienced, and their model has inspired many secular groups as well.

The meeting is an exercise in attentiveness, and in listening to the promptings of the Spirit. Whatever the topic, the overriding intention is to discern the will of God, and the entire meeting is seen as worship. The Quakers prepare to come to the meeting in an open state of mind and willingness to listen attentively. They strive to open themselves to what others are saying, suspend their prejudices, and always consider the possibility that their own strong convictions may be wrong.

People who attend their first Quaker meeting are always struck by the silences. The meeting begins and ends with silence. They observe silence in between individual contributions. The silence allows for reflection, and act as a brake to avoid any one individual seizing control or dominating. Each person normally only speaks once on a subject unless responding to questions with factual information. Having spoken once to the issue, they trust that if further valid points occur to them, someone else will raise them.

They speak honestly and frankly, but do not have arguments or debates. When there are differences they are resolved through conversation. The facilitator continually identifies areas of agreement and disagreement to push the dialogue further.

Quakers also work by consensus rather than majority decisions. Their perspective is that a prophetic voice is often lonely, and so if a deeply felt concern or dissenting perspective continues to come back, they will listen to it. All the ideas and solutions belong to the group, not to individuals. The names of the people who speak ideas are not reported. The goal is "unity, not unanimity."

<http://www.quaker.org>

Socratic Dialogue

A Socratic Dialogue is a search for truth. This approach of course draws its origins and name from the life of Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher. It usually takes place in quite a small group, for example 6 people.

The most important rule in a Socratic Dialogue is to "think for yourself". The dialogue usually starts with a philosophical question, that is, a fundamental question that can be answered by thinking about it. Participants are invited to suspend their judgments, approaching this question with an open mind. They strive for consensus, not because it is necessarily achievable but because the desire for consensus helps to deepen the investigation and to listen deeply to all points of view. They allow their underlying assumptions to surface, unravel, and be examined.

Key to a Socratic Dialogue is that, while the question is philosophical, it is always applied to shared concrete experience, and the group remains in contact with this experience throughout. Participants bring in specific examples, against which what is being said can be tested. General insights are drawn out from this in-depth understanding of concrete examples.

Story Dialogue

As with the circle, it is clear that human beings have always used stories to communicate. Before we had writing, stories were used to convey information and wisdom across generations because they are easier to remember than isolated facts or concepts. We are in a sense, “hardwired” for stories. Yet, we increasingly tend to disassociate the concepts we are trying to convey from personal stories that illustrate them.

The “Story Dialogue” technique was developed by Ron Labonte and Joan Featherstone when working in community development and health in Canada. They saw it as a way to bridge the gulf between practice and theory, and to recognise the expertise that people have in their own lives, and which is best communicated through stories. It uses stories to draw out important themes and issues for a community, moving from personalised experience to generalised knowledge.

In Story Dialogue, individuals are invited to write and tell their stories around a generative theme – a theme that holds energy and possibility for the group. As a person shares their story, others listen intently, sometimes taking notes. The storytelling is followed by a reflection circle where each person shares how the storyteller’s story is also their story, and how it is different. A structured dialogue ensues guided by the questions: “what” (what was the story), “why” (why did events in the story happen as they did), “now what” (what are our insights) and “so what” (what are we going to do about it). The group closes by creating “insight cards”, writing down each insight on a colored card and grouping these into themes.

<http://www.evaluationtrust.org/tools/story.html>

Theatre of the Oppressed

During the 1950’s in Brazil, theatre director Augusto Boal started asking questions about why theatre had to be in the form of “monologue”. Why did the audience have to always be passively consuming the performance? He started experimenting with interactive theatre, creating instead a “dialogue” between the audience and the stage. His assumption was that dialogue is the common, healthy dynamic between all humans, and that oppression is the result of the absence of dialogue and the dominance of monologue.

Over the past 50 years, the “Theatre of the Oppressed” (TO) has developed into a large system of diverse games and interactive theatre techniques, being used in communities across the world. TO is primarily created as an instrument to enable the “oppressed” to concretely transform their society, by transforming monologue into dialogue. All the TO techniques pose dilemmas and challenges to participants, related to the core social problems and power structures of their particular communities and society at large. The techniques help to move out of the head, and more into the body. This enables people to meet across diversity of cultures and levels of education, and it also allows to access more unconscious dynamics. The TO workshops, now run not only by Boal but by hundreds of facilitators, are a training ground for action not only in theatre but in life.

The most well-known form of TO is called “Forum Theatre”. In Forum Theatre a dilemma is posed to the group in the form of a theatrical scene, which usually has a negative outcome. Participants are asked to step into the play and take on the role of one of the actors to try to change the outcome. They are invited to imagine new possibilities and solutions, and to actively try to make them happen in the moment. As a result of the group problem solving, highly interactive imagining, physical involvement, trust, fun, and vigorous interpersonal dynamics, the participants learn how they are a part of perpetuating their own problems and how they can be the source of their own liberation.

Boal, Augusto. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*
<http://www.theatreoftheoppressed.org>

The 21st Century Town Meeting

How do you engage 5000 citizens actively in one town meeting, and enable them each to give substantive input to public decision-makers? This is what happens in the 21st Century Town Meetings of *AmericaSpeaks*. Updating the traditional New England town meeting to address the needs of today's democracy, *AmericaSpeaks* restores the citizen's voice. At the gatherings, facilitated deliberations happen at tables of 10-12 participants. Technology then transforms these discussions into synthesized recommendations. Each table submits their ideas through wireless computers, and the entire group votes on final recommendations. Results are compiled into a report in real-time for participants to take home at the end of the meeting, immediately identifying priorities and recommendations. Since the organization's founding in 1995, *AmericaSpeaks* methodologies have engaged over 65,000 people in over 50 large-scale forums in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Meetings have addressed local, state and national decisions on issues ranging from Social Security reform to the development of municipal budgets and regional plans.

<http://www.americaspeaks.org>

PART III: ASSESSMENT

ASSESSMENT

Having explored through this diverse set of tools, you may be excited about some that you want to experiment with, perhaps nervous or apprehensive about others, or overwhelmed by the variety. How do you decide what method to use in a given situation? How do you perceive whether what is needed is a Future Search, Open Space, Deep Democracy, a Change Lab, or just a contemplative walk in the park?

The intention of this section is to give some pointers on how to navigate the variety of options offered in the preceding pages. We confess to a certain wariness in writing this piece. The reality is that there are no universal recipes, and there is an infinity of different contextual situations. While there are most certainly good and bad process choices for each case, there is never only one ideal method that will work.

Experienced facilitators and dialogue conveners will be able to ask explorative questions to understand the particularities of a situation, and work with the options posed by the different methods. Often, they will develop a customised process which is not fixed until it is past, because they will continually be responding to what is happening in the group. On the other hand, a facilitator with such a high level of experiential knowledge, skills, sensitivity and creativity is not always available. For these situations, World Café, Open Space, Circle, and Appreciative Inquiry in particular are a big gift. These processes are easily applied by less experienced facilitators and can still make a world of difference. In general, one of the most important things to consider is that the facilitator should be comfortable with the approach chosen. You are better off with a grounded and confident facilitator applying a simple methodology well, than with a sophisticated methodology applied poorly.

The variety of dialogue methods available to us today have emerged in different situations but in response to quite similar needs and discoveries. They are part of a wider shift that is happening as complexity and diversity increase and people become more aware of their interdependence, and hence their need to hear each other, to understand, and to collaborate. We noticed in our research that most of them in defining themselves contrast themselves to the mechanistic paradigm of organising – the boardroom, the classroom, the bureaucracy, the traditional conference model with speakers and audiences. They generally don't explain how they are better than or different from other genuinely dialogic methods. While bureaucracies and expert-driven conference models are surely alive and well, we find that there is broadly an increasing awareness of more participative forms. It is misleading to present the choice as being only between the "traditional" or "mechanistic" and one specific dialogic approach. Here, our intention then is rather to make some comparisons within the dialogic field.

Assessing the Methods

In comparing and assessing the methods, we've tried to break some of the different possible situations down into two matrices. The first matrix covers different possible broad **purposes** you are trying to achieve. The second covers the broader **context**, who the participants are, and whether the process requires a facilitator specifically trained for this approach. We have then listed the ten methods which have been profiled in depth here and put an "x" underneath each situational factor if we think it applies to the *pure form* of that method. We have for now not included the methods which are only briefly described in the "additional tools" section.

It's important to recognise that this matrix approach is a bit brutal and has clear limitations. This type of analysis isn't the way a facilitator would decide on what process to use in a given situation. That person would rather go to the "foundations for a successful dialogue process" – assessing what is the purpose and the need and who are the participants, and then designing content, process, and physical requirements based on that. However, this rough picture may still help someone who's trying to get an overview and to distinguish between the different applications at a more general level.

There's a story and a conversation behind every "x" we have placed in these matrices. This is subjective on our part, and in going through it, we became aware that the originators, practitioners, and advocates of some of these methods might well feel that theirs matches all of these purposes and situations. We've tried to be a bit more selective than that, but of course it always depends on how you are using the method to fit with a particular purpose. This is a level of detail which is beyond the scope of this assignment, and really where the facilitator's own tacit knowledge from experience and intuition comes in.

The matrix would obviously be useless if we put an x in every box, and so we have chosen not to do that. That doesn't mean it would be *wrong*. Each of the processes *can* basically be used in most if not all of these situations, but it would require a creative adaptation or sensitivity on the part of the facilitator, and most likely involve combinations with other methods. For example, a Change Lab as it is currently designed assumes implicitly that the participants are leaders from their fields meeting on an equal footing. When the Change Lab participants reflect serious power differentials or diversity of social class, they might need to draw on the principles or practices of Deep Democracy or the School for Peace in order to level the playing field, but they would still continue with the Change Lab as their overarching process.

The Purpose Matrix

As mentioned earlier, being clear on purpose is key to a successful dialogue. Here, we have outlined 11 different possible purposes a process can have:

- Generating awareness
- Problem-solving
- Building relationship
- Sharing knowledge and ideas
- Innovation
- Shared vision
- Capacity-building
- Personal/ leadership development
- Dealing with conflict
- Strategy/Action planning
- Decision-making

We have then tried to assess which tools work particularly well for each purpose. A process will usually have a combination of these purposes and be more specific, but some will be in focus. The large bold X's are the purpose for which we feel this process is best suited, while the smaller x's are additional strengths of the approach.

	Generating awareness	Problem-solving	Building relationship	Sharing knowledge and ideas	Innovation	Shared vision	Capacity-building	Personal development/ leadership	Dealing with conflict	Strategy/ Action planning	Decision-making
APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY			X	X	X	X		X		X	X
CHANGE LAB	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
CIRCLE	X		X	X		X		X			
DEEP DEMOCRACY	X					X	X	X	X		X
FUTURE SEARCH	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
OPEN SPACE		X	X	X	X		X	X		X	
SCENARIO PLANNING	X	X				X				X	X
SCHOOL FOR PEACE	X		X						X		
SUSTAINED DIALOGUE	X		X	X		X		X	X		
WORLD CAFE			X	X	X	X		X		X	

1. The Purpose Matrix

This matrix may be useful not only in assessing what methods work for a given purpose, but perhaps also to provide inspiration in *articulating* the intentions and objectives of a dialogue.

In looking at the purpose matrix, you will notice that the Change Lab for example has a large number of x's because it meets a large number of purposes, but it is also an intense and high-investment approach. If only some of these purposes are required, you may well be better off with a more simple approach. Similarly, Future Search has a large number of x's, but is a very structured approach, emphasising strategy planning. To understand these matrices, it is important to reflect back to the applications and commentary sections of the descriptions of the specific method.

The Context Matrix

In this table we considered a few of the situational factors that might vary across methods, including contextual factors, the nature of, and requirements for, participants, as well as the facilitator's level of training. The factors include:

High complexity <- -> Low complexity in the context

By complexity, we mean that cause and effect are far apart in space and time in relation to the issue being discussed, there are divergent opinions and interests related to the issue, the context is constantly changing, and old solutions no longer work (no simple recipes are available). It is worth noting that, as mentioned in the introduction, the overall emergence and evolution of these approaches is really in large part a response to increasing complexity, so in fact, all the approaches are intended and specifically designed to be applicable in situations of high complexity. You will notice in the matrix, that we see five of them as really *only* relevant in such situations, while the rest can also be useful in situations of lower complexity.

Conflictual <- -> Peaceful context

In defining conflict, we were looking at whether the issue or group was emotionally charged, and whether different, entrenched positions seem incompatible. Is it difficult for people to "agree to disagree"? Are there sub-groups who have conflicts with each other beyond a meeting of individuals, perhaps related to a larger societal conflict? This could include situations where aggression, anger, and attack are taking place, but it wouldn't have to be that explicit.

All the approaches may be found useful in conflictual situations if the focus is just on finding common ground despite the conflict, being able to move forward without getting drawn into negativity and stalemate. But if the intention is to go directly into the conflict and resolve it, to release underlying tensions and relationships, and to negotiate a way forward acknowledging the differences, there is a smaller set of approaches that are relevant. These are the ones we have chosen to "x". In the deeper version, where emotions need to be surfaced and the group is going into its more unconscious processes, we would limit this list even further to Circle, Deep Democracy, Sustained Dialogue and the School for Peace.

Small group <- -> Large group

We picked the number 30 as a useful breaking point between small and large groups. Our understanding is that this is where a critical mass of diversity exists, but where the whole group also starts to be constraining and the need emerges to alternate between small groups and the whole. For some of the processes, that number may not exactly be accurate. Scenario Planning for example could be done with a larger group than 30 though not too much larger. For more specific numbers, see each process description.

Microcosm/ Multi-stakeholder <- -> Peer-focused

Several of the processes are specifically designed to "get the whole system in the room", while others are less dependent on this, and can work within a more homogeneous group. Under "microcosm" we have ticked only the processes that explicitly are designed for a group that is seen as a reflection of the larger system, though other processes might also be useful for such groups.

Diversity of power and social class

Power dynamics may bring specific requirements in. Can this process work across levels of power and social class? Often participants will be very aware of other forms of diversity such as culture, gender, race, and age, but will not necessarily realise the diversity of power and how power dynamics and hierarchy affect the group. Some of the approaches are explicitly conscious of this impact and include ways of dealing with it.

Generational and cultural diversity

We have picked generational and cultural diversity, but this category could also include gender differences, sectoral differences, and other forms of diversity of thought. Generational and cultural diversity often overlap with diversity of power and social class but this isn't always the case. Note that for this category and also for the power category we have only ticked the processes that are particularly good for this kind of diversity. Dialogue is always about bridging differences.

Facilitator Training

This final column looks at whether a facilitator needs to be specifically trained for this process. Note that Circle, Open Space, World Café, and Appreciative Inquiry are the easiest for beginner facilitators to use. We have also not ticked Future Search because we felt a person with strong facilitation skills does not necessarily need a Future Search specific training, but they do need to be a strong facilitator.

	CONTEXT				PARTICIPANTS						FACILITATOR
	High complexity	Low complexity	Conflictual	Peaceful	Small group (<30)	Large group (60-70)	Microcosm/ multi-stakeholder	Peer group	Diversity of power and class	Cultural and generational diversity	Needs specific training
APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	
CHANGE LAB	X		X		X		X			X	X
CIRCLE	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	
DEEP DEMOCRACY	X	X	X		X				X	X	X
FUTURE SEARCH	X			X		X (60-70)	X			X	
OPEN SPACE	X	X		X	X	X		X		X	
SCENARIO PLANNING	X		X	X	X		X	X			X
SCHOOL FOR PEACE	X		X		X		X		X	X	X
SUSTAINED DIALOGUE	X		X		X				X	X	X
WORLD CAFE	X	X		X	X	X		X		X	

2. The Context Matrix

Assessing a Facilitator

Choosing the right facilitator is as, or in some cases more, important than choosing the dialogue method. As with the methods, however, your choice of facilitator will depend on the situation. In thinking about this, we developed four spectrums, reflecting different types of facilitators:

“One method by the book” ←-----→ *“Mix-and-match”*

Some facilitators choose to become experts in a particular method and do it by the book, while others will never tire of discovering new methods and will draw on a broad repertoire in a “mix-and-match” type of approach. The benefit of a facilitator who is deeply experienced with one method is that you know what you get. If you know what you want is an Appreciative Inquiry conference, you are better off with someone who sees him/herself specifically as an AI facilitator. The “mix-and-match” type will likely not be able to stick with one approach because they will constantly see possibilities of combining. The benefit of the combining is that you may get a more customised process that fits your need and your group like a glove.

Two old adages are relevant here. When you meet a single method facilitator, remember that *“if the only tool you have is a hammer, the whole world looks like a nail”*. But maybe you are not a nail. The facilitator should be able to explain what the situations are in which their method doesn’t work. On the other hand, when you meet a mix and match facilitator, remember the saying, *“know the rules before you break them”*. A lot of these methods have an internal consistency and logic – there is a reason why they are designed as they are. A facilitator who enjoys combining needs to be very clear on why s/he is doing it rather than using the methods in their pure form, and should be able to develop a process with its own internal consistency, logic, rhythm and flow.

“Directive and structured” ←-----→ *“Going with the flow”*

Some facilitators will co-design an agenda, usually with the client or group coordinator, and then guide the participants through that process. A Future Search is an example of a process that is quite structured. The group moves from one phase and exercise to the next, and there is a time limit on each step. The facilitator needs to help the group move through this process in this order.

Other facilitators will literally go with the flow and allow the process to unfold. The idea here is that no one knows in advance what exactly needs to happen for a certain group, certainly not an external facilitator. Such a facilitator will come in and will respond to the group’s needs, offering methods and approaches as they go along that are relevant in the moment. An example in terms of the methods in this category would be Sustained Dialogue, where there is a natural direction groups tend to go in, but the facilitator is drawing on a variety of approaches and needs to help the group to uncover what it needs to uncover. Again, this approach may be the most appropriate because it is the most adapted to your specific needs, but it requires a high degree of trust in the facilitator, and a willingness on the part of participants to engage in an open-ended process.

“Knowledgeable on content” ←-----→ *“All that matters is process knowledge”*

A common debate among facilitators is around whether a facilitator needs to know anything about the content the group is discussing. For example, if a facilitator is hired to support a dialogue around hiv/AIDS, do they need to know anything about who the players are in this field, what the key inter-related issues are, what the politics around it are, and what the statistics are? Or is it enough that they know how to facilitate a process that enables the participants to process their own information and come to their own answers? Some facilitators like to know something about the content so that they can help the group find patterns and draw out conclusions, while others believe neutrality and objectivity on the part of the facilitator are fundamental and that deliberate lack of knowledge of the issue in fact

helps in this regard. Which type of facilitator you go for will depend on whether you feel your group needs help in processing information, or whether they have that covered and just need help with process, preferring for the facilitator not to get too involved in the content.

“Societal knowledge” ←-----→ *“Psychological knowledge”*

The issues at the center of a dialogue can be located at different levels. Some are deeply psychological issues. The relationships within a group may be related to participants past traumas or current insecurities. Sometimes a facilitator may find him/herself in a situation that borders on therapy. Some facilitators have a very clear boundary here emphasizing that facilitation is not counseling or therapy, and will take the conversation back to the core issues the group is dealing with. Others see these psychological factors as deeply intertwined with the group’s ability to solve everyday problems, and will go into them to try and resolve them.

These are two very different sets of skills. Often a facilitator with a deeper psychological knowledge may not be as well-versed with societal, political, economic issues and vice versa. What kind of facilitator you choose depends on whether you feel this group needs to go into its group unconscious or whether it needs to focus on more conscious, rational, or practical issues outside of themselves. If a facilitator with a deep understanding of psychology comes in, the group is likely to go into that space sometimes even if they don’t want to. If a facilitator without it comes, they will be restricted from going into it even if they do want to.

Because of the nature of dialogue, all the processes can lead to people going through a fundamental questioning of their core beliefs, which can be unsettling. Deep Democracy is the most psychologically oriented approach here, but the School for Peace approach also benefits from facilitators who have some psychological awareness. The Circle and Sustained Dialogue can also be processes where participants open up to a point of significant vulnerability, but in these and the other approaches, therapeutic skill is not necessarily required.

“Teamworker” ←-----→ *“Solo”*

Some facilitators prefer to work “Solo” because they will then have the freedom to improvise and follow their intuition without having to check first with partners, which they fear slows down the process. Solo facilitators sometimes describe their work as an artform, and focus on the interplay between them and the group as opposed to wanting to work with a facilitation team.

At the other end of this spectrum are facilitators who see they have some limitations, and prefer to build a team with other facilitators where they can complement each other. This teamwork approach can provide a balance between some of the other spectrums here – for example combining a facilitation team where one is more knowledgeable on process, the other on content, where one is more knowledgeable on societal issues and the other on psychological dynamics, or where one is good at seeing the overall flow of where things are going and the other brings in an expertise in a particular technique. Among Sustained Dialogue practitioners, the prevailing wisdom is that the best moderating teams are “insider/outsider” teams. The insider would be familiar with the content, culture, and personality dynamics of the group, while the outsider brings in process knowledge, and the ability to be objective and ask stupid questions or “play dumb”.¹

General qualities

We have outlined a number of common differences in facilitators, and pointed out that there is no one perfect facilitator for all situations. Still, there are a few general qualities that we think are important for every facilitator to have. These include:

¹ Thanks to Teddy Nemeroff for pointing this additional spectrum out to us in his feedback to Version 1.0.

Strong listening skills. All facilitators need to be able to listen. They need to listen to and hear the intention behind the dialogue in advance, and be able to listen to and hear participants during the process. This enables the facilitator to be flexible to design an appropriate process, and during the process to mirror back to participants what is going on and to help the group become more aware of itself. Strong listening skills depend partly on the facilitator's ability to let go of her own agenda.

Personal awareness. A really strong facilitator need to be able to understand what is going on within herself when she is with a group, as much as what is going on in the group. This is quite a profound meta-skill of facilitation, which is particularly important in less structured, more open-ended processes, and especially the more psychologically oriented processes. The facilitator is essentially holding the group, and needs to avoid projecting her own issues and insecurities onto the group. Personal awareness also relates to confidence, humility, the ability to be honest about one's own limitations (what one is and isn't capable of), and the willingness to not control or "over-facilitate", and to hand over a process to participants when they are ready.

Asking good questions. As mentioned earlier in this report, asking good questions is in our field an art form. The right questions will wake participants up, "light their matches", link in to what they care deeply about, and make visible their interdependence in finding the answers. They will surface new insights they hadn't thought of before in understanding the issue in focus. A simple phrasing of a question can determine whether people feel hopeless and despairing or curious, energised, strong and excited.

A holistic approach. Being able to assess which method to use in a given situation, or whether one's preferred method is applicable, requires a facilitator to understand the particular context. Taking a holistic approach is also about being able to see patterns and help the group make connections as they work, and recognising that multiple intelligences are at work. The more the whole person can be invited in to a dialogue the more successful it will be, and the more equitably people will be able to engage.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

We have greatly enjoyed this process, and are left deeply impressed with all the work we have found going on in this field. We look forward to continuing the journey, and to experimenting with the new knowledge we have gained.

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