THE COOPERATIVE CULTURE HANDBOOK

A SOCIAL CHANGE MANUAL TO DISMANTLE TOXIC CULTURE & BUILD CONNECTION

26 Keys for Groups, Facilitators, Leaders, and Other Change Catalysts

YANA LUDWIG & KAREN GIMNIG

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✦ denotes favorite general use exercises.

Acknowledgments

From Both of Us

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From Yana

I'm first and foremost deeply grateful to all of the students, clients, and conference organizers who have given me the chance to do this work for the past 15 years. You've taught me a tremendous amount about humanity, and given me the chance to sharpen my thinking, open my heart, and hone these messages. I get to do what I love because y'all keep showing up with me.

Secondly, I want to acknowledge the symbiotic relationship I have with the Foundation for Intentional Community, which is once again publishing a book with my name on it. We've had a long-term relationship with a lot of different phases, and the FIC's work has served, inspired, and positively challenged hundreds of thousands of people for years. I'm grateful to be part of this organization.

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all kept us steadily engaged. Ultimately, I'm grateful for Karen's friendship and our shared dedication to having happier, more effective groups. It's rare to find a geek who meets me.

From Karen

My first thanks go to my children. Their firm hold on who they are and what they need led them to reject conventional parenting, dragging me into my first steps away from the hierarchy of mainstream culture. We laughed, cried, and learned together. Without them, I might never have begun the journey that has led me to this book.

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My mother who grounds me, encourages me, and feeds me when I'm too busy working to cook for myself.

Finally, to Yana, who reached out her hand and led me into authorship. At every stage she has exemplified the cooperative culture we write about. I'm grateful for her generous sharing of wisdom and experience, her celebration of our differences, her intelligence, and her passion. Through her eyes I've seen parts of the world I didn't know I was missing and a clear vision for a future we all need. We have written, laughed, and discussed our way to a book and an ease of friendship rarely found and deeply treasured.

Whatever we might think, we can't live in isolation. Our relationships are living, dynamic aspects of our lives that require care and maintenance. Relationships don't look after themselves.
—Barry Winbolt

Introduction

Humans need connection like we need air and water. It is in connection that we find belonging and wholeness. In 21st-century North America we rarely get enough of it. In the absence of connection, we reach for comfort in "comfort food" (that harms our health), stuff (that harms our planet), power (that harms each other), and thrills (that harm ourselves) or we numb ourselves with drugs or screens that lead to addiction (that harm everyone).

We believe two toxic and dominant aspects of North American culture are the source of a great deal of disconnection and pain. Hyper individualism and competition are so deeply rooted we rarely even notice them, much less question or challenge their impact on our lives. Like toxic waste, you can't see it, yet toxic culture silently permeates our relationships and warps our society.

This book is about all of that: noticing this individualism and competition in our behaviors, policies, structures, and beliefs, getting curious about their impact and then doing the work, piece by piece, to dismantle the toxic culture and build connection in its place.

In our groups, toxic culture causes intractable conflict, ineffective meetings, hurt feelings, apathy, and frustration, and ultimately leads to a lot of failed missions. This is a problem bigger than any one group failing. We believe groups, particularly passionate, mission-driven groups, are our best hope for saving our world. Their impact is twofold. First, they are a powerful training ground for the skills of culture shift. Shared commitment empowers change as groups work through the challenges of collaboration. Members of those groups carry those skills back out into the world. The second piece, of course, is the group's mission itself, often for healing that is desperately needed.

The signs of toxic culture in our world are everywhere: high suicide rates, interpersonal and systemic violence, failures of social services, unmet basic needs, and depression and addiction are the painful results of a culture that is not serving us individually or as communities. The climate and economic crises are global consequences of individualism and competition.

We can't afford to wait for large scale government or corporate change to solve these problems. We need the work of organizations who take on a mission of addressing even one small piece of healing. It is for these groups that we have written this book: for worker-owned coops, for residential intentional communities, for charities and faith groups, for teams that build technical solutions, and for activists that call attention to what is broken. We celebrate your work and your passion and mourn anything that stands in your way.

For too many groups the things that we have seen get in the way are unconscious vestiges of the toxic culture[1] groups are fighting against. This is where we hope to help.

We hope this book will help you notice the impacts of our competitive, individualistic upbringing and to identify the ways we continue to enact that culture. We hope that you discover that, with intention, we can kick that culture to the curb and adopt a new way of being that invites and enables the connection we so desperately need. We call this new way cooperative culture, and we invite you to join us on the journey as we grow into it.

There are two ways we hope this book is particularly powerful for groups. We hope the ideas and exercises in this book help your group achieve its mission. The world needs the work you do and it is a loss to everyone when a group falls apart because cooperation is hard. Just as important, we hope this book supports your group as each and all of you grow through the work you do together. As you become more cooperative, you bring social justice a bit closer to us all.

We thought a lot about you and your journey as we were writing, and especially as we were structuring the book. We concluded (more than once) that as we invite you to journey with us, each of you will find your own path, starting with how you read this book. If you like to start at the beginning and read straight through, we've tried to put things in a useful order. If you like to skim, we hope we've provided enough titles and subtitles to help you find your way to the bits that are richest for you. For busy facilitators or meeting planners who need something to use tomorrow, the exercises are usable with very little on-ramping.

If you plan to find your own adventure, we do want to point to a couple of sections to look over before you begin, as they may save you some frustration.

- "The Structure of This Book" on page 17 will give you the lay of the land, a guide for getting the most out of each section.
- The "Discernment" section on page 11 will help you fine tune your work and avoid some common pitfalls. It includes guidance on accessibility needs, balancing priorities, conflict, and more.

This work matters far beyond the immediate benefits to groups and individuals. For those who are interested in our bigger picture motivations for this book and the impact we hope it can have in the world, the "Vision" and "Social and Ecological Context" sections are a great read.

Last, we hope that the ideas and activities in this book will be rich and useful for you and we also know that some of them won't be right for a particular person or group at a particular moment, or maybe ever. We invite you to give things an honest try, apply some discernment to sort that which does not work for you from that which is challenging precisely because it *is* working, and then feel free to simply let go of the things that don't fit or adapt them until they do. We're eager to hear from you about that, both for the benefit of our own practice and because we love to learn about differences and how different people experience things.

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1. Some of these cultures go by names such as White Supremacy, Patriarchy, Kyriarchy, and Capitalism, and their cousins, racism, heterosexism, classism, and ableism, among others.

A Vision for a Robust, Functional, and Humane Culture

This book is offered to the world in service to a new way of relating, one that supports true social, economic, and ecological resilience.

We envision a world where cooperation and collaboration are the norm, not the exception. In this world we balance compassion and understanding with discernment and effective action, guided by the motivation of collective wellbeing. In this world, our individual needs, interests, and skills are honored and valued and put into service for collective and planetary health.

We envision a world in which we distribute power equitably, embracing skillful, compassionate leadership and useful hierarchies while rejecting oppressive and non-consensual ones. In this world, material and emotional resources are shared with grace.

We envision a world where we feel safe enough to show up authentically, without fear of reprisal or judgment, and advocate for ourselves and our real needs, knowing we will be met. We embrace the vulnerability of speaking truth, and when we hurt one another, we use our skills to recover, building stronger relationships through the process of learning together.

We envision a world in which we consciously embrace our interdependence. We find our security in relationships and community systems rather than economic systems that serve the few at the expense of the many. We depend on mutual support and aid.

We envision a world in which we embrace differences as a source of strength, where differences are met with curiosity and delight, and where our sense of belonging expands over time to embrace larger and larger segments of the world.

The Social and Ecological Context

Disconnection from each other stems in part from a profound dis-integration, both physical and psychological, in our lives. Our home is in one place, work in another. Our kids go to school in one part of town, we entertain ourselves in another part, and our spiritual community or social group meets in yet another. "Car culture" makes this possible. In the US, automobiles are symbols of independence and individuality, and the "freedom" they give us comes at a great cost in resources *and* connection.

For many people in parts of the world that are organized more like traditional villages, life and culture are less fragmented and more tightly arranged in the physical plane. This more localized way of life is better for the planet. One of the many things that drives Yana's work in the world is this need to re-localize.

Our physical dis-integration has a psychological parallel, because different spaces require us to be different persons. Sometimes it's dramatic, like the well-documented need for people of color and recent immigrants to do what is called *code switching:* literally speaking, sounding, and looking different in different spaces to be able to survive in white-dominant, mainstream American contexts. But nearly everyone has to do a more subtle version of this in our daily lives, adjusting to the different values and norms of the spaces we move through. We often have to alter things like the volume of our voices, how much we swear, how we dress, how familiar or formal we are, how passionate we allow ourselves to get about the things we care about, and what things are OK to talk about.

This also lives in our bodies. Science tells us that the physical and psychological experiences are more than parallel, they are interactive. As Deb Dana describes in her book, *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy*, our constant scanning of our environments for danger and safety, particularly the danger of disconnection and the safety of belonging, results in unconscious physiological responses—changes in heart rate and breathing, hormones, and even the activation of muscles in the ear.

Living, as nearly all of us do, in a constant state of recalibration, hiding out, and strategizing (both consciously and unconsciously) is exhausting.

This book describes how toxic culture feeds dis-integration and how a new culture can cure it. In particular, we are looking at the ways this deeply damaging culture shows up in groups, teams, and communities. We believe these relational spaces are particularly powerful opportunities for essential culture shift. Our interactions with others are powerful mirrors that reveal our unmet needs and least effective habits. At their best, groups are also the ideal environment for shifting those things, offering support and feedback in a way that does not threaten our belonging. The growth work of each individual supports and reinforces the work of others and the mission of the group.

We've mapped a journey from mainstream North American culture to the cooperative culture we need and broken it down into 26 distinct but closely related Culture

Keys. We explore not only the cultural expression we believe would be healthiest for humans to embody (Cooperative Culture), but also the old norms this would replace (Mainstream Culture). We also look at some of the pitfalls that can occur when people and groups simply react against mainstream culture, at times taking things too far in the opposite direction (Counter Culture).

This handbook is a guide to moving from a dominant (and *dominating*) culture toward a sustainable, cooperative culture characterized by collaboration, skillful sharing, authenticity, and mutual aid. We hope to offer a path toward a discerning balance between objective reality and subjective experiences, and between group needs and individual needs.

This kind of cultural shift is lifelong work. Changing long-held competitive habits to a more cooperative way of being is not going to happen overnight. Many of the shifts are simple. Few are easy. Even the areas where we feel most accomplished generally leave yet more work to do. Old programming will emerge again and again in spite of our best intentions to leave it behind. We counsel patience and persistence. But more than our counsel, we hope that the increasingly compassionate and passionate people you will surround yourselves with, and the increased effectiveness of your group endeavors, will generate their own motivation to keep going.

The core challenge in the kind of transition we are describing is also rooted in our biology. In interviews and workshops, Yana is frequently asked two questions about human nature, which are really the same question. One framing is, "Don't you think we are really just competitive by nature?" and the other is, "Well, we are really social creatures, aren't we?"

The answer to both of these is: yes.

Humans journeyed through multiple evolutionary stages to become who we are today. In one, our "lizard brains" developed, focused on individual survival. Had we not been rugged individualists during this period, none of us would be here today. That part of our brain is still in there.

We also went through a later period when safety was in numbers. During that period, our social nature developed, and with it, new brain structure. Survival in this period was definitely about being a good team player.

Thus, we came to have dual natures, and the biological truth of us is that we are both individualists and social animals. Every social group on the planet, throughout time, has then added a third layer: culture. And cultures vary around the world. Some emphasize the more communal and social parts of our human nature, and others our more individualistic nature. Culture is taught to us in our families, our schools, and our media. The culture we are born into determines a lot about how our dual biological nature gets expressed.

North American mainstream culture falls strongly at the individualistic end of the spectrum, and we will spend a lot of time in this book unpacking that culture and looking at the benefits of swinging the pendulum back, not to another extreme, but to land somewhere more balanced where both sides of our nature get a chance for expression. While we believe we are advocating for balance, it's probably going to feel like we are all about cooperation, because the current state of culture that surrounds

most of us is so hyper-individualistic. At this moment in history, a focus on the social side of our nature is what's needed to bring us to center, and to move to a more resilient and ecologically sustainable way of life.

Our world is rapidly changing. Cooperation and collaboration are becoming matters of survival once again, both for solving huge society-wide problems, and because workplaces increasingly value teamwork. As we were in the last stages of writing, two examples of cooperation happened in the US. The first was triggered by the health crisis of Covid-19 with a short-term proliferation of mutual aid groups. We suspect that the energy of that shared experience may have fed into the second example: the sudden acceleration of the longstanding work of Black Lives Matter and other racial justice groups.

These small spontaneous groups and widespread social justice organizing spaces are excellent places to practice our cooperative skills so that we can use them when future crises hit and when larger organizations are ready for change. Small groups are also a space where our unconscious competitive habits are revealed to us in relative safety.

There is a lot of intention for cooperation in the world today. Unfortunately, good urges alone don't facilitate effective change; for that, we need skills and a clear understanding about where we are actually trying to go. We need a North Star to guide our social relationships, and the vast majority of us don't have one. This isn't surprising, and it isn't our fault: very few opportunities exist in mainstream culture to learn anything about real cooperation.

A final relevant piece is Yana's work as an ecovillage educator. One model that has been particularly resonant for her comes from the Gaia Education curriculum developed by the Global Ecovillage Network. It discusses a now well-documented phenomenon from around the world and across cultures: in order to make real progress on sustainable systems development, most groups end up having to do work around all four "dimensions" depicted in the mandala: worldview, social, economic, and ecological. While what we normally think of as "culture" really lives at the intersection of our worldview and social influences, you will hear echoes of all four of these dimensions in the different segments of this book.

Thanks for picking this book up and being willing to go on a culture change journey with us. As you enter these pages, we wish you courage, curiosity, and creativity. You'll need them all.

Who We Are and Why We Wrote this Book

The Cooperative Culture Handbook sprung from another book Yana published in 2017 (under the name Ma'ikwe Ludwig) called *Together Resilient: Building Community in the Age of Climate Disruption*. *Together Resilient* is an exploration of locally self-determined and self-governed responses to the climate crisis, covering everything from residential intentional communities to car co-ops and local currencies.

As Yana was writing, the section on group dynamics and culture kept getting longer to the point that it would have been completely out of balance with the rest of the book had she carried on. After a conversation with her publisher and editor, it was decided that she'd write a second book that expanded on her work in cooperative culture development. That handbook would be useful for individual study, as a group study guide, or as a leader's and facilitator's manual for people with responsibility to move groups along a journey of culture shift and increasingly functional processes. Several writing partners and three years later, the magic finally grounded when Yana invited Karen in.

Yana and Karen come to this work from decidedly different places, and the only real intersection between where they work is in the cohousing world. Yana was originally a sustainability activist. The main motivation for her to start learning consensus, facilitation, and conflict resolution skills was watching group after group fail (and the world thus lose the benefits of whatever work they would have done) .

Yana has also lived cooperatively since 1996. There is a fair bit of diversity among intentional communities, and her happy place within that world tends to be the more communal end of the spectrum: ecovillages and income-sharing groups (aka communes), where an alternative culture has formed that is palpably different from mainstream US culture. Her curiosity about articulating those differences and finding ways to foster their development is what brings her here. It also brought her to the solidarity economies movement and to her more recent work with public banking, socialist organizing, and worker-owned cooperatives.

Along the way, the works of community process consultant Laird Schaub, indigenous philosopher Dr. Viola Cordova, and numerous racial and economic justice advocates have fed into her development and influenced her thinking. Yana also resonates deeply with Integral Spiral Dynamics.[2] The idea of cultural evolution following certain predictable patterns on the way to more just and inclusive societies has helped her make sense of a changing world.

Karen's background included a lot of moving around and seeking belonging in new places. She discovered that finding a group that allowed her to join as a member was not at all the same as finding a space of connection and belonging. Even groups where some people seemed to experience belonging often included many others who

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2. A good introductory text is *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality*, Ken Wilber. 2000 Shambhala Press.

did not. She began to be curious about the key elements of creating spaces that are reliable sources of connection and cooperation for the people involved. It became clear that the first essential element is intention. The group needs to bring together people who value, prioritize, and are willing to work for a culture of connection and belonging.

With that intention, there are many structures and teachings that can lead to cooperative, effective, and fulfilling spaces for living and working together. Karen continues to explore, study, and add tools to her toolbox. Her favorites so far include Imago Relationships Theory, cohousing, consensus, Sociocracy or Dynamic Governance, Agile,[3] and Polyvagal Theory.

In the course of writing this book, both Yana and Karen leaned into a deep curiosity for what we can learn from each other. This book is an example of the rich and fulfilling work that comes from engaging our differences. Karen loves the way Yana's face lights up when we discover a place of disagreement. Most of the time we find that our core values are very much aligned and it is our differing life experiences that lead to different approaches or recommendations. Yana has been grateful on numerous occasions for Karen's combination of clear thinking and willingness to stretch into the new. We're both learning a lot, and that's just the way we like it.

One example of that came in the early framing of the book. We share it as an example of working well with diversity of thinking, and how that shows up in our respective work with groups. Karen tends to think first in terms of *skills*, and Yana much more in terms of *doorways*.

For Karen the competitive culture most of us were raised in launched us into adulthood lacking essential skills needed for cooperative culture. Actively teaching and learning those skills equips groups to build the culture they intend. The skills include many aspects of communication and consciousness as described in the 26 Keys and 52 Exercises of this book.

Looking at skills also normalizes the struggle of attempting collaboration. By recognizing that our (and others') impact is less about our intention and more about the habits and coping mechanisms we have learned in a competitive culture, we make space for safely exploring better ways of being and provide understanding for our mistakes.

Yana also teaches skills, but the really juicy stuff for her comes from finding the right doorway to deeper conversations about cultural patterns. So rather than having a standard way she gets "in" to conversations about things like power, equity, systems change, and oppression, she works with groups based on their presenting problems (to borrow a term from the therapy world) and trusts she will find the pathway to have bigger picture and deeper foundational conversations at the right time.

As we explored our perspectives, it didn't take long to see that both approaches needed to be in the book. The exercises build skills, and the discussions in and around them provide infinite doorways for the rich topics of culture change. We think this is a great example for you, our readers, of there being a variety of ways to engage the material that is here. Make it work for you!

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3. Agile is a structure of teamwork used for project management and software development.

Discernment

If there is a single theme that threads through all of the "what to do" and "how to change" elements of this book, it is discernment. Discernment is so deeply embedded in our thinking that we didn't realize we hadn't explicitly described it until our editor pointed it out.

The concept of discernment is tied to the huge complexity of human relationships. As we point out over and over in this book, the struggles we experience in our groups do not have simple, easy answers. It is often in reaching for an easy answer or wanting a solution to work in a predictable way that we get into our most painful tangles. We are with you in wishing that adopting a particular process, experiencing a workshop, or writing a policy would eliminate the pain of conflict and the dysfunction of oppression dynamics in our groups. If that were so, this would be a much shorter book!

Instead, we imagine our clients and readers speaking this truth: If this was easy we'd have done it already! If we are to achieve the vision we hold for high functioning groups, we have to be willing to juggle many elements of human relationships at the same time. We have to enter a messy space where there are no right answers or reliable outcomes.

That messy space calls for discernment: the ability to weigh many factors and choose the best bet from the options before us. It means careful weighing paired with action and critical self examination blended with awareness of our group and the broader context. Like so much that we are writing about, discernment isn't easy and it doesn't provide a guaranteed result.

In the end, discernment requires us to show up, vulnerable and fully engaged, to sort, critique, listen, breathe, question, and contemplate. We weigh individual perspectives and reference our group's purpose as the ultimate arbiter of group decisions. Then with humility and confidence we choose a path forward and see what happens.

Below are some specific themes of discernment that apply throughout the book.

Balancing Personal and Group Work

Personal growth work and group process work go hand in hand, but you can't substitute one for the other. Some groups err on the side of thinking that the heavy lifting is all in the personal domain, glossing over group dynamics. These groups are often more spiritually focused. A stereotypical example might be a group in which the solution to any problem is to return to the meditation cushion.

Other groups ignore that piece entirely and think the solution to strife is to talk about things or create another policy. Yet the glossing over of individual contributions to group dynamics is no more functional than a strict focus on individual growth. The stereotype here is a group in which the response to any conflict is to make a new policy—often at the cost of a LOT of meeting time.

In our experience, the healthiest groups are ones that don't shy away from hard

conversations but also foster an environment that is safe enough for people to do the vulnerable work of personal growth. We find it useful to think of the group as a lens that shows me what I most need to work on personally. The exercises in this book intend to provide movement between individual work and group work.

We believe that what you get out of this book will be as much about what you do with it as about what we put in it. Effective culture change is interactive and intentional (group). It requires shifts in thinking and in feeling (personal). It requires *work*. The work of each individual shifts the culture of the group, and the work of the group shifts the understanding of each individual. Thus, the book is designed to support culture change for both individuals and groups.

Choose your group carefully, because it will be a major influence on who you become. Then let the collective magic do its thing and shape you into someone new. A note of caution however: telling others how they should be changed by the group is not useful. The ideas and reflections shared in this book are best applied to oneself. Others in your groups will—or won't—learn along with you as you explore these exercises together. But people rarely learn positive lessons from being badgered.

Working closely with groups (and even more so living in groups) can become a powerful catalyst for growth. Over time, if you let it, being part of a group will change you. As you change, your influence on the group will also change that group. Ideally, this is an iterative process. We believe that the most intense pain experienced in groups comes not from the conflict itself, but from resisting the opportunity for growth that conflict provides. If you can enter into your group expecting it to be challenging and willing to embrace that challenge when it comes (rather than resisting it), you will maximize the growth potential for yourself and the transformative potential of the group.

Working with Resistance

Culture includes our most deeply held beliefs and learned coping mechanisms. This book is primarily about naming these deep parts and inviting them to change. It's normal to feel resistance. Sometimes it's a sign that you are into the really good stuff for you. Sometimes it means that section isn't for you at this time. It's up to you to discern where to focus and what to let go for now.

We imagine that one likely source of resistance will be in the sections we call Counter Culture. These are places where individuals have noticed the harm of mainstream culture and done the hard work of shifting away from it only to pick up this book and read that there may be more work to do—and that even, perhaps, some of the patterns you've developed in hard-won personal work might also not be the final stop on your culture journey. Know that you are in good company. We all have more growing to do. We hope this book serves as an invitation to work that feels rich and fruitful for you at this time and that you will give yourself and us grace to set aside pieces that we may have gotten wrong or described badly, or that simply aren't a fit for you.

The Temptation to Fix Others

One of the most common questions we receive from our clients is, "How do we get the members who won't come to your workshop to do this work?"—often accompanied by the lament, "The people who need it the most are the ones who won't come!"

We acknowledge that most groups have a person or two (or sometimes more) who regard this sort of work as a waste of time, or to put it more bluntly, "touchy-feely bullshit." These are often people who are very dedicated to the project, hard workers who are vital to the group. We tend to agree that life would be easier for others if these folks were more open to the type of personal work we are suggesting in this book, AND we want to caution you that it is generally not useful to pressure them to do it. Making this sort of work "mandatory" may (or may not) get more people in the room, but it will almost certainly bring resentment and decreased trust and safety into the room with them.

We hope the concepts and exercises in this book are helpful to you as groups. After all, the whole reason we wrote it is to help groups function better together. However, we believe the values described here are most effective when applied first to oneself. Certainly you can invite others to join you in it. You can even request that another person help you meet your own need by participating in an exercise.

The point at which trouble becomes likely is where judgment of others arrives. Statements like "You are causing problems. Your behavior is not OK. You need to learn . . . You need to do this work . . ." are likely to yield defensiveness and reactivity. This is true even if they are never spoken aloud. Judgments have a way of being received no matter how careful their keeper is to not say the words. The result is often more rigidity and resistance to the kinds of shifts we are suggesting. The line between invitation and judgment can be a tricky one to navigate, and yet it's extremely important. Be very careful if your goal is to change someone else's behavior. That is dangerous territory!

> ### Personal relationships vs systemic power
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> Please note that we are not talking here of social justice advocacy. This is a note about unpleasant (or even bad) behavior by a member of your group. Prejudice (such as racial bias) and oppression (racism) are different in that they include the systemic power to actually harm someone. Demanding change in the face of systemic oppression is something we wholeheartedly support!

Change is vulnerable work for all of us. If a person isn't ready to do that work now, odds are that at least part of the reason is that they don't feel enough safety in the group. While you can't change them, you likely can increase the safety in the group by doing your own work.

We also want to emphasize the multiple benefits this will provide to you, regardless of whether anyone else shows up with you. First, it will give you a sense of reality

on how hard this is, which can lead to more compassion with others as they do their work or choose not to. Asking people to do something you have not yet done yourself rarely goes well. Second, being a model is a good thing. (This is especially true when your efforts make you easier for others to live or work with, and to trust!)

When a subgroup of people starts shifting their culture and it goes well, we have often seen it have a magnetic effect on others in the group. They may very well like what they see and want what you have. Finally, doing your own work is likely to shift your perspective. You may find you are less bothered by other people's choices or that you experience more gratitude for their contributions. It's amazing how much happier we can become through changing ourselves.

We encourage you not to fret if not everyone is immediately on board. Instead, hop in, do the work you value, and let it organically influence the group and draw others in.

Balancing Mission Work and Relationship Work

Groups often describe a dilemma of choosing between mission work and relationship work. We believe this is a false dilemma. Not only is it possible to do both at once, *it may be impossible to do either one without the other*. For groups that attempt a focus on mission, we find that the growth that is needed generally makes itself known. On the other hand, groups that focus only on growth tend to be short lived as people lose interest without the sense of achievement that comes from mission fulfillment. We find that a lot of pain and frustration can be avoided by investing in some growth and culture shift work early on interwoven with mission work.

More than anything else, as we wrote this book, we were thinking of how groups can work together to create a cooperative culture that supports their missions. The 26 Culture Keys include exercises that groups can use to explore together, to build skills, to increase consciousness, and to grow as a group. Many can be used for the planning and decision-making that is essential to mission.

While some of the exercises are specific to a particular aspect of culture change, the majority are not. In addition to direct work on culture, they can be used to forward the work in the world that you came together to do. When your group has a decision to make or a problem to solve, using one of the exercises in this book can support the group in doing the work effectively while simultaneously building the skills needed for collaborative work and a cooperative culture. Thus, you can use these exercises to achieve two aims at once: change your culture for the better and get stuff done.

In other words, one of the goals of this book is to add to your facilitator, organizer, and leadership tool boxes.

Conflict

Although conflict is one of the most common complaints of group life, methods for working productively with conflict are rarely a focus of organizational trainings. The practice of engaging with conflict (and doing it well) is essential if groups are going to last for more than a few months and do work that is both productive and nurturing.

How and when to engage with conflict is a challenging but essential area of discernment. In general, we suggest erring on the side of early and often, using the tools offered here, particularly Imago Dialogue (page 182) and Exercise 24.1: Six Common Elements of Conflict Resolution. Certainly there are moments to finish a meeting or have a cooling off period before engaging conflict. But be careful not to allow these useful practices to morph into the damaging default of "shoving it under the rug." It's difficult to overstate the ongoing damage that unaddressed conflict can do to a group over years. We have seen groups with smoldering conflicts that are literally decades old and are sucking the life out of the group. We hope this book helps head off that possibility for your groups.

Thus the discernment we recommend is less about whether to work with conflict than about how and when to approach it. It's a process that often feels risky, because it is. We need to be especially careful that those who have experienced trauma in the past are not re-traumatized by our work with conflict. We note that the coping mechanisms that allow people to survive trauma can often be triggers that create conflict for others in the community. Thus conflict and prior trauma are inextricably linked. This is the reason conflict work has both tremendous healing potential and inherent danger.

These are intense spaces, often painful, and the potential for more hurt is matched only by the opportunity for growth. We believe that it is usually a risk worth taking, if you have (or can hire) the skills to do it well.

Difference and Accessibility

Every group is different and is made up of a variety of individuals. While we hope that the exercises in this book will be broadly useful, we also note that it is important to pay attention to the specific group and individuals you are working with. Discernment is needed in determining when and how to adapt activities to meet the needs of all. That may sometimes mean avoiding an activity altogether. A piece of that discernment includes talking to members of your group who may have different needs and asking their preferences in a way that doesn't put them on the spot or lead to them feeling like an inconvenience.

In particular, note the following:
- Mobility: not everyone can stand, sit on the floor, move around the room, etc.
- Hearing and Seeing: not everyone has full ("typical") vision and hearing.
- Cultural Differences: comfort with eye contact, raised voices, dance and singing, etc. all vary from culture to culture.
- Touch: your group will almost certainly include a wide variety of comfort levels with touch, so handshakes, hugs, and casual touch have to be calibrated appropriately.
- Resourcefulness: ability to show up to meetings and other group activities because of child care, work obligations, mental energy to engage, etc.
- The "Woo" Factor: every group has more or less comfort with what sometimes gets called "woo woo" or "touchy-feely stuff"—the more spiritual, new agey, or soft aspects of this work.

In terms of these physical and cultural differences, the general guidance we offer is that we'd like to see you use these tools to challenge societal hierarchies that limit your group's diversity. In moments where people, especially those in typically dominant cultural groups or learning styles, feel uncomfortable, a little discomfort can be a valuable thing. On the other hand, if any exercise here would shut down marginalized and oppressed voices in your group, we recommend making sensible and compassionate alterations to the exercises so they are welcome mats rather than closed doors.

We offer "Accessibility Notes" in the body of the book to some of the exercises for addressing mobility and touch differences. Note that people who are unable to use language (verbal and written) may need support that is beyond the scope of this book. We recommend working with those persons directly, or with their caregivers to determine how best to include them. See also Online Meetings notes in Appendix 2, which themselves can sometimes be an answer to accessibility challenges.

The Structure of this Book

One of the themes of this book is embracing differences and we wrote it with the expectation that many different people will read and use it, each in their own way. Some will use it to guide personal growth toward being a better partner or group member. Others will use it to guide and support groups as they address challenges. Some of you will pick it up and read it cover to cover. Others will open to a page at random and let fate decide the menu of the day. The clients and students who work with us may use it largely at our suggestion as we help them discern the group's particular needs. Whatever your approach, our hope is that this is a book that you will pick up over and over again. This is, after all, more of a workbook than a philosophical tome.

There are 26 sections of the book, each with the following parts:

Culture Key. We hope to guide you to our current best understanding of the balanced cultural expression we want to nurture: Cooperative Culture. In each Key, we have isolated one distinct aspect of the overall consciousness and culture shift we are promoting. Within each Key, we approach the cooperative culture traits we strive for by looking first at the more common traits of mainstream culture and then at common overcorrections to that culture before describing the cooperative culture we hope to be building. In some cases, the overcorrection could be described as stereotypical "counter culture." Other ways to think about this are that we are describing three distinct cultural patterns or even cultural archetypes. Because we are dealing with archetypes here, it is important to note that no individual person or organization purely embodies any of these.

For the sake of consistency and clarity, each of these sections has three parts to it:

Mainstream Culture: the current dominant culture in the US. It is characterized by competition, hyper-individualism, oppressive hierarchies, and a discouragement of authentic emotional sharing. Its core patterns come from middle-class and white family structures and norms.

Counter Culture: for lack of a better term, we are using this phrase that was popularized by activism in the '60s and '70s in reaction to the abusive nature of mainstream culture. It shows up currently in social justice groups and intentional communities characterized by an elevation of subjectivity, a desire for flat power dynamics and inclusion, and an "anything goes" attitude. We do not intend to indict well-meaning Boomers, but to use the term as shorthand for the culture we have identified as a common stage for groups moving away from mainstream culture. Our editor, Allison Tom, suggests this way of thinking about it: "A kind of knee-jerk, not-careful thinking, 'I reject x, so I embrace not x.'" We think that's a pretty good summary.

Cooperative Culture: the emerging culture we advocate for that is resilient and cooperative. It is characterized by consciousness that balances rationality and discernment with emotional literacy, and efficiency with compassionate, relational systems. It operates with flexible, consensual social structures.

Self-Check. We want this book to change you. We want you to take it personally . . . in the best possible way. It is here to encourage self-reflection, practice, and conversation. A part of that process is consideration of how you are relating to the material here, not in a self-judgmental way, but in a discerning and compassionate way. Thus, we offer a brief guide for self-checking in each section.

Dialogue Prompts. This is a space for reflection and perhaps deeper processing. These prompts can be used in a variety of ways. We believe using the Imago Dialogue structure (See overview on pages 182–184 and detailed description in Exercises 1.1, 2.1 and 3.1) for processing a new idea or awareness is a powerful opportunity to increase individual growth, connection within a group, and broader understanding of the topic at hand. When possible, pairing off and using the prompts for Dialogue is highly recommended. You can add connection with your partner by including common ground (Something I think we might have in common is . . .) or an appreciation (Something I appreciate about you is . . .) to the end of your Dialogue.

If a partner isn't available, or you prefer to work in writing or alone, using these prompts for journaling is also effective. For those who value reflection highly, you could both journal and dialogue with them.

Exercises. Because humans learn better by doing, exploring, and discussing than by reading alone, we offer exercises that can be used to more deeply explore each Culture Key. These exercises are adaptable. We encourage you to try them as written and to get creative. Most of the exercises are designed for groups, though some can be done individually. More importantly, most of the exercises can be applied broadly and used for many types of topics and meetings.

> A (✦) in front of an exercise indicates our favorite general-use exercises that we recommend facilitators add to their toolboxes. (See more about these in Appendix 6.)

We hope facilitators will turn often to the exercises as they design meetings for their communities and teams. See Appendices 6 and 7 for more guidance on how to select an exercise for the current needs of your group. We hope readers will be creative with the exercises and adapt them in ways we have never considered. We'd love to hear back from you about your experiences.

These sections can be used either piecemeal or in conjunction with one another. In some cases you might just read the Culture Key piece, or use one of the exercises without saying anything about culture change. If time allows, you might want to read the Culture Key as a group, discuss, move on to one or both exercises, and finish with Dialogue Prompts. Note that the time needed to do everything offered for a Key will vary but will probably be more like a half-day workshop than a one-hour meeting. Please do not feel pressured to do it all in a short period. Culture change takes time. We've taken years to gather the skills in this book (and are continuing to grow and refine them). We are grateful to you for joining us in this life long work!

Finally, we encourage your group to find your best ways to get into the work you need to get into. While we like the order we chose for the cultural pieces and particularly the exercises, there is nothing sacrosanct about that, and we encourage you to choose where to start based on your group's needs and interests.

Imago Dialogue Process

Imago has been a core practice for Karen for a number of years, and we are highlighting it here in its own section to provide some context for this thread that runs through the book.

As clinicians who were attempting what was for both of them a second marriage, Harville Hendrix, PhD and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD had both professional and personal reasons for getting interested in what might make couple relationships work. Their interest began a worldwide movement of Imago Relationship Therapy and is based in a simple structure they've named the Imago Dialogue. They launched the structure into the world with their first book, *Getting the Love You Want*.

Karen stumbled into Imago Dialogue as she and her then-husband were working on their marriage. She quickly became interested in how this tool for couples could apply to all kinds of other relationships and group dynamics in particular. She completed the Imago Professional Facilitator Certification course, and began using the elements of Imago Dialogue in all of her work with groups and organizations. While the full potential for application far exceeds the scope of this book, the use of the Dialogue is a key recommendation for developing collaborative culture in any community or organization.

The Dialogue Process is presented in two ways. First the three core elements of Dialogue are presented as Exercises 1.1, 2.1, and 3.1. By focusing on each one individually, readers can master the particular nuances of each piece, and, in fact, each piece is useful on its own. Pulling all three together in a two person conversation is a powerful formula for connection. It's useful for any moment when more connection is wanted and is a great option for addressing conflict. Pulling the pieces together, the structure for the full Dialogue is presented in Appendix 4 for your reference.[4]

As you will see, the structure itself is quite simple. The implementation can be complex. In these exercises, and throughout the book, please note that the goal is always greater connection. We believe that following the structure we provide will in most cases maximize the opportunity for connection and we recommend giving it a solid attempt as written. However, each person is an individual and there is no "one-size-fits-all" for relationships. In the end, Imago Dialogue is about using deep listening and presence to create a sense of connection with your partner. It is an invitational practice, not a strict dogma. If adapting it for your culture or the comfort of your partner is what connects the two of you, do that.

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4. For more information, refer to Harville and Helen's books: *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*, *Giving the Love That Heals: A Guide for Parents and Others*.

Launch!

If you've read this far, we think you are ready for the Keys. If you plan to work each Key in detail as you read, you might want to look over the appendices at the end of the book before you start. They contain bits that might be useful for your particular circumstances and some reference pieces you may want to refer to as you read.

Before you turn this next page, take a deep breath, center yourself. If you are like us, this might be a time to grab a journal, a favorite pen, and a cup of tea and head for your favorite cozy chair. We hope the next pages hold challenge and excitement, curiosity and inspiration, new perspectives and affirmations. Thanks for joining us. We're glad you are here!

Bridge: *And Grace Be a Phoenix*

By Yana Ludwig

There was once a time when I hurt someone, and I knew it.
There was once a time when I couldn't explain why something hurt.
There was once a time when I ended a relationship rather than talk about it.
There was once a time when someone ended a relationship with me, and I didn't
    know why.

There was once a time when small things compounded and I didn't speak of them,
    and they grew so large I could no longer remember why I was there.
There was once a time when I thought I did everything right, and it still didn't work.
There was once a time when I did everything wrong, and someone forgave me.

There was that one time of grace, and I learned something about myself in that mo-
    ment.
And ever since I have tried to find the grace, and the worst hurt of all is watching
    myself fail.
I come to this moment with moments upon moments twisted around each other.
And so when you say, "Let's work this out," I fear that I won't be able, that I won't
    be willing, that I won't be graceful.

But still, I am showing up. With you. Here.

26 Keys
of
Culture Change

Key #1: Skillful Hearing

Mainstream Culture

Studies show we are poor and inefficient listeners,[5] which makes this a great place to start a journey of shifting how we relate to each other. Cooperation depends on our ability to attend to another person and really "get them," understanding their needs and perspectives. Our mainstream culture mostly doesn't practice this. Yana often says, "If you can't accurately hear, you can't accurately care."

A lot of well-intentioned attempts to care go awry because we never actually understood what the other person wanted or needed. Our poor listening may be because culturally we value speaking more than listening. We've been taught to hero-worship those who speak, particularly those who are most articulate (the "great orators" as well as the people in our groups who tend to offer nice speeches). This can be true regardless of the value of the content they bring or how much their speech matches their actions or contributions.

We are rarely taught anything about the power of listening.

Not listening is also a great defense mechanism when someone is saying something we don't want to hear or that doesn't fit easily with our current worldview. The phenomenon of words being spoken in our presence without our actually understanding what is said leads to a lot of inaccurate hearing; in other words, the communication of an idea from one person to another depends not only on the clarity of the speaker, but on the skill and intention of the listener.

Counter Culture

In response to the wider culture's overvaluing of strong and abundant speech, sometimes people develop patterns of speaking less themselves. We can become passive watchers of life because we don't want to participate in speech-as-domination. This is a kind of unhealthy passivity. Silencing ourselves (and even discouraging others from speaking) leads to power imbalances in the world and deprives groups of good ideas. This can happen out of fear, boredom, or not wanting to rock the boat. It can also be an attempt to avoid rejection when someone has been criticized for being too vocal in the past.

Cooperative Culture

We want to work to build our skills in compassionate communication in both speaking and listening. Listening is how we meet each other where we are. This culture shift means continuing to place high value on skilled speech while placing *equal* value on skilled hearing.

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5. One such study is here: https://extension2.missouri.edu/cm150#.

A maxim of consensus decision-making is that "Everyone has a piece of the truth." That implies that we have a dual responsibility: to speak our piece *and* actively listen for all the many other pieces to be shared in the room. Later sections of this book will look at elements of speaking compassionately, but here we are focused on listening.

We titled this section "Skillful Hearing" because fully receiving another goes beyond taking in the content of what is being said; it includes also listening for the humanity in the speaker and deepening our sense of what it reveals *about them*. This means stepping into the world of another and suspending response, correction, and advice.

That idea that "You can't accurately care if you can't accurately hear" means that we often think we are doing a caring thing for someone, but we haven't done the work of truly understanding what it is that they need. If we want to show up well as friends, co-workers, and community-mates, it's not enough to listen: we need to make sure we are actually hearing the real stuff.

The right medium helps clear communication

We regularly hear from groups, "We were having a conversation on email when it suddenly melted down." We've learned over the years that *where* and *how* you are talking about topics can make a big difference in how well they go. We had our own version of this as we were writing this book together. We were trying to figure out the titles for two of the appendices when we realized that chat wasn't serving us, so we hopped on zoom where we had screen sharing, voice inflection and the ability to simply head off misunderstandings a lot faster.

Our general advice: 1) Don't do anything high stakes or emotionally charged in a format without voice inflection and the ability to interrupt someone's (sometimes escalating) misunderstandings. That means no chat, no email, no texts for those topics. 2) On the other hand, sometimes the slow and deliberate space of email can really help things *not* escalate, so if it is indeed being productive, feel free to stick with it, and your more visual learners who benefit from being able to see the words will thank you. This is also useful when the communication is largely sharing cognitive content. 3) Pay attention to what's working and switch communications medium if it starts to feel off. Make sure you communicate to the full group that the switch is happening so no one is left behind in the process.

Self-Check

Do I tend to be the great orator of my groups, or more of a listener? Am I able to repeat back what they said *to their satisfaction*? And when others are speaking, is my attention on their communication, or am I too busy thinking about my response to be fully present with them?

Dialogue Prompts

- A way that I am skilled in hearing others is . . .
- A challenge for me in hearing others is . . .
- Something I can do to build that skill is . . .
- If I do that, I think I will feel . . . .
- Something I think we might have in common is . . .
- Something I appreciate about you is . . .

✦ Exercise 1.1: Mirroring (Imago Dialogue)[6]

Select a sender and a receiver. You will stay in these roles for a full cycle of the exercise and then switch roles and repeat the exercise. Sender speaks to a prompt or to the agreed topic, chunking their message in short sends. After each short send, the receiver:

- Mirrors back what was said: "What I heard you say is . . ."
- Checks for understanding: "Did I get you?"
- Invites deeper sharing: "Is there more?"

Continue this sequence until there is no more or as time allows. This is the first step of the Imago Dialogue structure described on page 182. When learning this dialogue structure, it is useful to practice mirroring first and then add validation (Exercise 2.1) and empathy (Exercise 3.1). Refer to page 183 for a summary of the flow, which may be helpful as you practice this exercise.

Use the prompts below or the Dialogue Prompts at the end of each Key to practice this structure. One person remains in sender role for all of the prompts. The receiver mirrors each prompt (or chunk) using the steps above.

Prompts

- I value our community/team because . . .
- Something that challenges me in our work together is . . .
- Something I think we might have in common is . . .
- Something I appreciate about you is . . .

We recommend practicing mirroring word for word as much as possible. This isn't a memory test and your best is always good enough. However, the intention to repeat back with the same words the sender used is often experienced by the sender as deeply respectful and touching. Mirroring using intentionally different words (re-phrasing) can have varied results. For some senders it will feel that you are trying to improve on their speech, which can feel critical. Re-phrasing increases the likelihood of putting yourself into the message rather than honoring the intent of the sender. In some cases a sender may prefer a re-phrase. If you are going to attempt this, name it and check specifically, "Was my re-phrasing OK with you?" The goal is a sense of connection between sender and receiver. If both feel connected and the sender feels deeply heard, congratulations, you got it.

This exercise is challenging for most people the first time they do it. We believe this is because we have not given a lot of exercise to the part of our brain that takes in information as someone is speaking. The maxim, "Use it or lose it" definitely applies to neurology. Doing this exercise frequently will build that part of your brain, making you a better listener not only when you are using the mirroring structure, but in every meeting or conversation you have. This is one of the reasons we have

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6. Imago Dialogue is the creation of Harville Hendrix, PhD and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD, published in their book *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*.

provided Dialogue Prompts for each section of this handbook. Furthermore, Karen has observed that when groups use a mirroring exercise at the start of a meeting, the activation of the listening part of the brain results in better listening throughout the meeting.

✦ Exercise 1.2 Temperature Checks

Skillful hearing includes double checking what you think you are hearing from a group, or getting a read when you aren't sure where folks are. A Temperature Check is a fast, visual way to get a read on which way the wind is blowing on a particular topic or what people want to do next. It is like a fast, non-binding vote that can help the facilitator get feedback from the group about where to focus next. There are a lot of ways to do this, some of which we like more than others.

Structure A: Level Checks (Yana's favorite)

Ask people to raise their arms to indicate how excited or on board they are about something. All the way up (arm fully extended above your head like a raised hand) indicates full excitement or buy in, all the way down by your side means no excitement or buy in at all. Arm extended directly out in front of you means neutral or conflicted. Positions in between indicate their relative levels of support.

Structure B: Consensus Scale (Karen's favorite)

Using fingers on a hand, people indicate their position on a 5 point scale:

5. Love it!
4. Like it.
3. I can support it.
2. I can't support, but won't oppose it.
1. I oppose it.

Structure C: Color Cards

Using red, yellow and green cards, group members indicate whether they support (green), oppose (red) or are neutral about (yellow) the proposal at hand.

We know that many groups use this method and we generally don't argue with success. In our own practice, we find the logistical effort of making and handing out colored cards is better spent elsewhere and we worry that the intensity and violence suggested by the color red may cause people to be uncomfortable expressing their objections.

Key #2. Individual and Collective Responsibility

Mainstream Culture

Our mainstream culture plays a big game around blame. We can see this when something rises to the level of a court case and we are advised to admit nothing that might cast a bad light on ourselves. This institutional practice reflects a preoccupation with naming the person to blame in everyday interactions. It is understandable in a culture and economy where people are often just struggling to survive. Shifting blame to others is a survival tool. When every suggestion we make for change is presented and/or received as blame, the resulting resistance to change becomes insurmountable. We tend to write off or dismiss anything that even suggests shifting responsibility our way.

Bridging with kids

This pattern is passed on to children when adults in positions of authority ask, "Who started it?" or "Who did it?," and then mandate apologies based on an assessment of blame. Children naturally approach things very differently. Karen once led a modified Bridging Circle (Exercise 6.1) for a group of boys who were in conflict at a park day. By holding structure, she provided space for them to express their own needs. By the end some of the boys had said, "Yes, we did that and we shouldn't have." But no one apologized, no one asked who started it, no one assigned any punishment, and all the boys went off to play happily together. Their mothers were happily astonished, expressing that when similar conflicts had occurred before and parents had engaged in conventional ways, the boys had stomped away, left the park day, and remained angry with each other.

Counter Culture

A number of personal growth paths embrace the idea that each of us "creates our own reality" as an antidote to giving away too much of our power in the mainstream culture. While there are certainly benefits to reclaiming your personal power (and for most of us, this is probably an underused tool), it is possible to take this too far. When we bump into the tangible realities of oppression, ecological and economic limits, other people's free will, and a host of other things, we find we can't control everything through individual consciousness shifts. This approach is an example of overowning responsibility for our lives and the world around us.

A strong element of victim-blaming also runs through many of these programs: if you create your own reality, then everything that happens to you is your own fault. This is especially insidious when the "fix" is upping your commitment of money,

time, energy, and belief with more personal growth courses to get better at creating your own reality.

That victim-blaming also has a tendency to make very real oppression dynamics invisible and even harder to address (as in asking women "what were you wearing?" when they have been sexually assaulted; it simply places too much responsibility on the individual and too little on the culture). It's a form of toxic individualism that can set justice movements back significantly.

Cooperative Culture

In reality, things are rarely just one person's fault, and even if they are, determining fault is unlikely to increase connection or solve problems. Our daily lives are a blend of our personal efforts and the social and economic circumstances we find ourselves in. In the shift to cooperative culture, we want to deepen our awareness and discernment about this balance of personal and collective responsibility. Being able to name the nuances and patterns of both aspects paves the way for effective response or correction of the thing that went wrong.

The healthy balance point is recognizing that both personal and collective responsibility are real and important. We need to get good at discerning what is what and acting on the things we can control individually while also advocating for change in the collective (whether that "collective" is at the scale of our immediate families, our communities, or our nations).

Perhaps the piece we miss most is getting really good at integrating the perspectives of others. Even when we get good at listening (see Key #1), we can miss important elements by dismissing ideas that are uncomfortable, such as those that seem to be directing blame toward us. Getting curious about what makes sense about a person's perspective moves us toward the balance we are seeking in this Key.

Self-Check

Am I good at seeing all the factors that contribute to a situation? Am I comfortable naming them in a group? Do I take action on the pieces I am able to control? Do I feel resentment when my needs are not met and/or when I'm making an effort to meet the needs of others? Am I able to remain in connection with community members when the community is not able to meet my needs? Am I able to integrate new ideas, even when they place responsibility on me?

Dialogue Prompts

- One situation in which I am likely to look for blame or fault is . . .
- When I do that, what usually happens is . . .
- And then I feel . . .
- Another way I could approach that situation is . . .
- If I did that, what I think might happen is . . .
- And then I would feel . . .
- An appreciation I have for you in this time together is . . .

Exercise 2.1 Validation (Imago Dialogue)[7]

Validation is the second section of the Imago Dialogue process, described in Appendix 4. While it can be used on its own, it is particularly effective after you mirror, check, and invite more. (See Exercise 1.1 Mirroring.)

Validation is an act of sense-making. It is describing to another person the sense that they are making without regard to whether you agree with them. It is the opposite of dismissing someone's viewpoint.

The sentence stem for validation is, "You make sense to me because . . ."

For example: "I hear you saying that you don't want to purchase new equipment because we don't have the budget for it. *You make sense to me because the new equipment does cost a lot of money.*" Note that this does not say whether you agree about the budget, only that it makes sense to be concerned about the budget because it is a large expense that is being considered.

This discernment, between being accurately heard and being agreed with, is one of the most important skills for building healthy group process and especially consensus process.

Effective validation:

- Stays within the world view of the speaker.
- Avoids telling your own story.
- Is short, usually a single sentence. (Sometimes more than one validation may be given for the same speaker or speech, but each one will be short.)

When the content being validated is about the behavior of the person doing the validating, ownership validations are particularly powerful. For example, "I hear you saying that when I don't clean up my dishes it is because I don't care about our community. *You make sense to me because I did leave my dishes on the counter last week.*" Acknowledging the part of the story that you did actually do is hugely validating to the speaker and does not mean that you agree with their conclusions. Your opportunity to explain yourself may come when it is your turn to speak, and will depend on the person's willingness to hear your side.

Sometimes validation is framed within the worldview. For example, "I hear you saying that anyone with a driver's license would know that parking in a fire lane endangers the people in the building and that when I park there it means that I am unconcerned about people's safety. *You make sense to me because for someone who believes that parking there endangers people in the building it would make perfect sense that someone parking there wasn't concerned for people's safety.*" Note that there is plenty of room for you to say later that you do not believe parking in that particular space poses an actual danger, while validating that within the worldview of the speaker, the logic holds.

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7. Imago Dialogue is the creation of Harville Hendrix, PhD and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD, published in their book *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples.*

Practice

In dyads, use the prompts below (alternatively the Dialogue Prompts for any Key can be used).

Prompts:

- Something that has frustrated me lately is . . .
- It matters to me because . . .

After each prompt, mirror, check, invite.
- What I hear you saying is . . .
- Did I get you?
- Is there more?

After both prompts summarize and validate.
- (optional) In summary, what I hear you saying is . . . . Did I get you?
- You make sense to me because . . . "

As an added learning tool, check with your partner to see if they feel validated. Discuss what might be more validating to them.

See page 182 for an outline of the full Imago Dialogue which adds empathy to this exercise. It is possible to learn or practice validation and empathy together. Empathy is described in detail in Exercise 3.1.

Exercise 2.2: Mine/Not Mine[8]

Use this exercise to help you unpack a conflict or tension you are experiencing. Draw a line down the center of a clean sheet of paper. At the top, write in the first column, "What is mine?" and in the second column, "What is not mine?"

In the "mine" column, write down everything you can think of about the situation that you feel you have contributed to, or that you can take some responsibility for. In the "not mine" column, write down everything you can think of about the situation that you genuinely feel is others' to manage or take responsibility for. (Note that some things will show up in both columns, and if this is the case, get more specific—what specific pieces are yours and not yours to manage?)
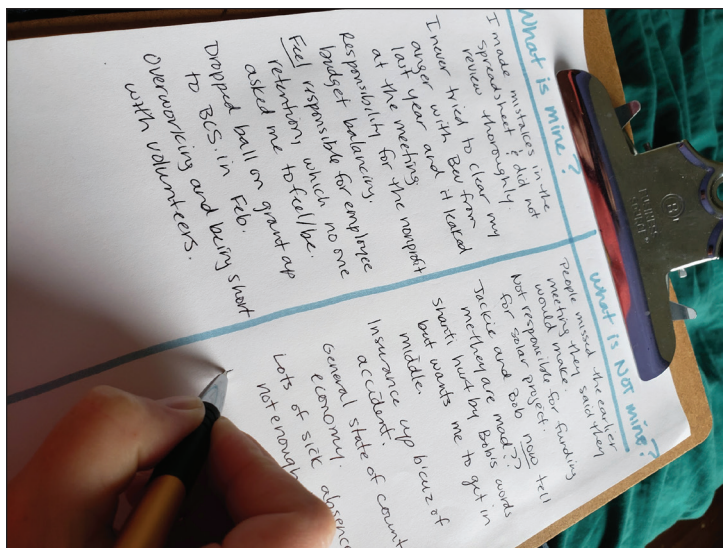
Photo Credit: Yana Ludwig

Spend as long as it takes to do a full inventory of the situation at hand.

After you are done writing, take some time to first consider the items in the "not mine" column. For each piece in this column, take a moment to acknowledge it, and give yourself permission to let go of any sense that you need to do anything with it or about it. It is not yours. After you have completed this step, it can be very helpful to get outside and take a walk for at least 10 minutes, or at least stand up and "shake it out" of your body for a few seconds.

Then take some time to consider the items in the "mine" column. For each item, consider what you want to do with it. Can you own it? Work to shift it? Apologize for it? Are there things on the list that you can recognize as healthy responses to the situation, and give yourself credit for self-care?

Optional: Ask a trusted friend to process this with you in one of the following ways:

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8. Yana was introduced to a version of this exercise in the context of a training from the Matrix Leadership Institute in Boulder, CO.

- Use the Dialogue structure (page 182) to share and deepen your thinking. Ask your friend to be the receiver and simply hold your thoughts.
- Invite a friend to "fact check" or "bias check" your conclusions. What are they seeing that you aren't? Are there things missing? Using the Dialogue structure to receive their feedback may help you take it in more deeply.

Key #3. Speak the Authentic

Mainstream Culture

Within a competitive and individualistic culture, communication is often a tool used to gain power and manipulate outcomes. This shows up blatantly in advertising and politics where communication is used for influencing behavior, increasing sales, and winning elections. The ethics in these arenas have become so loose that people regularly accept hyperbole and implicit (or even explicit) falsehoods without question.

Unfortunately, this sort of manipulation through language is not limited to these areas. More subtle versions of this play out interpersonally in our working teams, communities, faith groups, and any place people gather. Sometimes it shows up as aggression or put-downs. Verbal abuse is a version of manipulative communication, as is gaslighting. Regardless of how it plays out, the gist of this pattern is using speech as a control mechanism.

Because this phenomenon often goes unnoticed, it is important to watch for signs that it could be happening. Two that we've seen frequently are:

- The conversation ends abruptly without a feeling of connection or buy-in.
- In response to forceful or adamant speech, group members stop arguing despite holding strong disagreement with what is being said.

Counter Culture

People who notice the harmful effects of aggressive communication often seek to avoid it by people-pleasing. We often mask what we really feel in an effort to keep the peace. Sometimes a victim of verbal abuse dynamics may use people-pleasing as a survival mechanism. Speech here is basically placation and doesn't result in increased alignment or effective action. This is true even when it may be providing genuine safety for the person doing it.

People pleasing is not necessarily just being too nice. Often it looks like active avoidance: agreeing with people just to get out of the situation or shutting down and not challenging the person. (Note that when this happens, the person may never even know someone disagreed with them). Counter culture is often deeply conflict avoidant, much to the detriment of their long term viability as a group.

Cooperative Culture

In a new culture, we are striving for communication that is both authentic speech and open-minded (and -hearted) listening. Saying what is authentic is a vulnerable thing to do. It exposes our real truth, and leaves us open to someone coming from a competitive mindset using our words against us at a later time. It is also one of the core skills of functional cooperative culture because we can only meet each others' real needs if we know what those needs are, and that requires authenticity. The emotional

realm is a rich source of information about needs and opportunity for alignment. In a culture that undervalues feelings, naming them can be a gamechanger for any group.

Therapists Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks have a particularly evocative term for this: telling the microscopic truth. In their book, *Conscious Loving*, they urge us to describe our actual body sensations and name what they were tied to, such as, "When you asked me if I could do that for you, I felt my belly tighten up and my shoulders creep up. I felt anxiety." Most of our communication is several steps removed from this direct sensation communication. Practicing this for a while can help us to reconnect with what authenticity means.

Self-Check

Am I transparent in my speech? Do I name my needs, wants, and feelings clearly? Do I sometimes feel vulnerable knowing that my words could be used against me? If so, are there patterns to when that shows up? Am I aware of my body and what it might be able to tell me about this situation?

Dialogue Prompts

- I am most likely to speak authentically when . . .
- Speaking authentically is most difficult for me when . . .
- In those situations I tend to . . .
- This works for me in that . . .
- What doesn't work about this is . . .
- A way I could be more authentic in that situation is . . .
- If I did that I think I would feel . . .
- An appreciation I have for you at this time is . . .

Exercise 3.1: Empathy (Imago Dialogue)[9]

This exercise accesses the limbic or mammalian part of the brain where feelings live rather than the cortex which holds language and logic. By limiting the number of words and avoiding explanations, both partners can dip into what Karen calls the "heart space." Good empathy is less about words than energy and presence. The words serve only to bring awareness. The power of empathy is in the shared experience of being together in the emotion. For this reason, correctly guessing the emotion is not important. The guess is really an invitation for the sender to explore. What comes up for them in response is the key.

Share a story using the mirroring structure learned on pg 27.

After mirroring the full story, the receiver adds the following:

"I imagine you might be feeling . . . "

"Is that what you are feeling?"

"Are there other feelings?"

Mirror other feelings.

For this exercise, fewer words is better. The goal is one word that describes an emotion.

Examples of emotion words:

Feelings List

(Note: This list is a "starter" list. It is not intended to be comprehensive or to limit the use of other feeling words. You may not need it, but if you get stuck, look here.)

interested	concerned, enthusiastic, passionate, attentive, excited, fascinated, inspired, stimulated
joyful	cheerful, ecstatic, elated, jubilant, merry, happy, upbeat, glad, jovial, pleased
surprised	astonished, bewildered, shocked, startled, stunned, astounded
afraid	anxious, apprehensive, frightened, nervous, scared, suspicious, timid, rattled, petrified, startled
angry	annoyed, bitter, enraged, exasperated, furious, indignant, irate, irritated, resentful, sullen, cross
sad	bitter, melancholy, mournful, pessimistic, somber, sorry, blue, despairing, distressed, doleful, gloomy, depressed
disgusted	appalled, outraged, revolted, scandalized, overwrought, loathing
ashamed	contrite, distraught, distressed, guilty, humiliated, regretful, chagrined, flustered, mortified

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9. Imago Dialogue is the creation of Harville Hendrix, PhD and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD, published in their book *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*.

✦ Exercise 3.2: Spectrums

Spectrum exercises are the fastest way to get a lot of data from a group of people and for everyone to be able to see that data for themselves. We find that they invite authenticity, probably because they avoid the patterns of domination infused in our verbal expression and don't require people to be able to fully articulate their positions, which is challenging for many people in group settings. They also give people direct and immediate feedback about where they stand (literally) in relation to others in their group. Finally, they are the one format we know of that simultaneously meets the needs of aural, visual, and kinesthetic learners, and almost everyone enjoys doing them. Spectrums can be used to explore people's positions on a particular topic, or as a tool to get to know each other in more general ways.

Accessibility Note

When doing these exercises live, as described below, you MUST check for mobility challenges with this, and adapt as necessary to make sure everyone can participate. A beach ball or chair can be good "stand-ins" for someone who can't stand for very long, and someone can be assigned to move the stand-in for them.

Description A

Place Agree/Disagree signs at either end of the room, and ask people to picture a line along the floor running between the two signs. This is your spectrum. Read a series of statements and/or post them as slides. Members of the group stand on the spectrum between the signs indicating their level of agreement with each statement. Examples of statements that could be used for exploring this Culture Key include:

- I feel safe to speak authentically in our group.
- Our group generally speaks authentically.
- Feelings are shared in our group.
- Some members dominate in our group.
- Some members withhold in our group.
- Our group shares power equally among all members.
- I have all the power I want or need in this group.
- All members have all the power they want or need in the group.
- Our power dynamics are similar to the mainstream culture in that they are determined in part by race, gender, ability, and wealth.

Follow with a discussion. It is possible to discuss each point during the exercise and/or to discuss the full experience at the end of the exercise.

Description B

Designate one side of the room as one answer to a question or position on a topic, and the other side of the room a different or opposing one, and ask people to imagine a line between them. Then ask people to get up and place themselves where they fall on that line.

Once people are positioned, suggested discussion prompts include:
- For all participants:
  - What do you notice?
  - What surprises you?
  - Why are you standing where you are?
  - How do you see this dynamic playing out in the group?
  - Are there patterns you've noticed that this spectrum explains?

- For those standing at the extremes:
  - How does it feel to be holding down one end of this spectrum? (Facilitation tip: you can use your body to help interrupt the isolation this person may be feeling by going and standing next to them while asking this question.)
  - What do you feel is the good thing about where you are standing?
  - What do you project on folks at the other end*?

*Note that this last prompt needs to be done with lightness and invitation, because you are asking people to externalize an often judgement-laden thought, and recognize it as a projection. Yana often ends up modeling this, saying what would be otherwise inflammatory things such as, "The folks over there are just lazy," or "They take forever to make up their minds about everything!" The point is to encourage people to own the "bad thoughts" we almost all have. When we are able to see that neither end of the spectrum is more right than the other, we can avoid the pitfalls of judgement.

Basic Spectrums

Here's a set of basic spectrums that you can play with as a group. Note that none of these poles are "right" and both have strength and value.

In decision-making:
Slow to decide ⟵——————————————⟶ Quick to decide
Slow to change mind ⟵——————————⟶ Quick to change mind
Decisions must make logical sense/be factual ⟵—⟶ Decisions must feel right

In conflict:
I hold a grudge ⟵————————————————⟶ I let things go
I work on "stuff" privately ⟵——————⟶ I enroll others in process

In groups, I generally:
Show up as a planner ⟵———————————⟶ Show up as a doer
Value loyalty ⟵——————————————⟶ Value authenticity
Give mostly physical work ⟵————⟶ Give mostly intellectual work
Value connection ⟵————————————⟶ Value accomplishment
Want to move fast ⟵————————————⟶ Want to move slow
Rules/structure-oriented ⟵——————⟶ Relationally-oriented

Examples of operation topic spectrums:
Larger garden ⟵—————————————————⟶ Larger play area
Borrow $ to build now ⟵———————⟶ Save $ to build later
New computers ⟵—————————————————⟶ New furniture

Variations:

1) Moving Spectrums. While people usually stay where they initially placed themselves on the spectrum, you can explicitly invite people to move in response to other people's statements. The latter gives people real-time feedback on how their words are affecting other people's perspectives. It also gives people permission to change.

2) Grid or Two-Dimensional Spectrums. This variation has two axes to it, so that you end up with four quadrants that people can place themselves in. (Note: you need a pretty big room to pull this one off!) It is a good idea to ask one question, let people settle in, and then ask the second question, rather than give them both at once. Some examples of labels for the second axis that you would add to a first question include:

   a) How long people have been in the group. This is often revealing of patterns that can show how well the group is orienting newer folks into the mix.

   b) How important this topic or issue is.

   c) Level of discretionary income each person has—for budget conversations.

3) Online version: You can do spectrums online with a combination of Zoom (or similar platform) and Google Slides or Miro. Create slides ahead of time in a Google presentation with spectrums. Have enough dots also prepared so that everyone gets a dot. Give everyone "edit" permission, and demonstrate for them clicking, dragging, and dropping a dot into position. Dots can also be color-coded to gather even more information, such as the length of time people have been part of the group or any other intersecting factor you think may be interesting. Small squares with initials can also be used. Hint: Practicing with a light or fun topic is useful the first time you use this, especially if members of your group are less comfortable with tech.

An online spectrum exercise, from one of Yana's workshops on starting an intentional community:
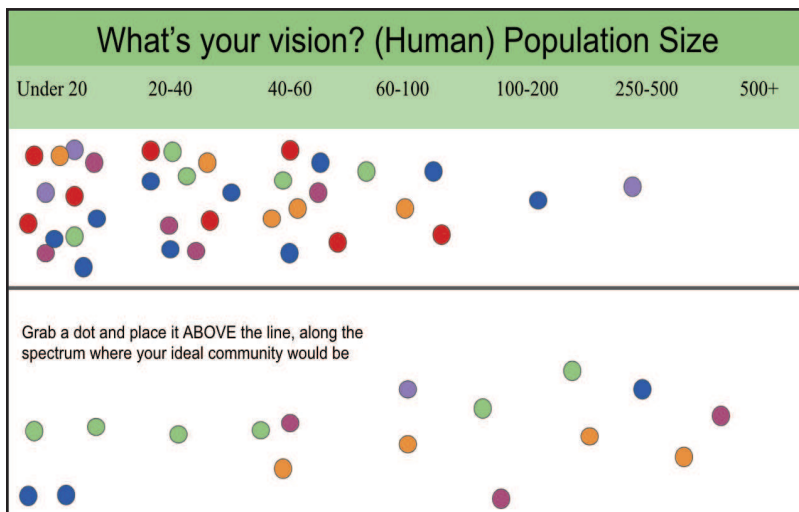
Facilitative note on spectrums of any style: One of the most interesting moments in a spectrum exercise is when someone resists the instructions. They don't like the either/or feeling of the set-up, or want to stand in multiple places at once, or simply don't like the ends you chose. We like this kind of rebellion! It's a sign of trust and a pathway to empowerment for the individual in this moment if the facilitator (and group in general) respond well. As a facilitator, remember that everything that happens during a spectrum exercise is **data** in some form or another. Welcome this kind of resistance and get curious: some of the most useful information on a spectrum is revealed in these moments.

Spectrums in action

Karen once did a spectrum exercise with a group needing to make decisions with imperfect information. The room had two columns and she placed "Very comfortable with uncertainty" on one column and "Very uncomfortable with uncertainty" on the other. Most group members placed themselves nearer the ends of the spectrum. One woman wrapped her arms around the "uncomfortable" column and held on tight. It was a striking visual. As the group moved forward with decision-making they were able to have empathy for the anxiety some felt moving forward, and the frustration of others when good group process slowed things down.

Key #4. Common Ground Within Differences

Mainstream Culture

Becoming an effective competitor is the primary focus of our educational system in North America. We are graded, judged, and accepted or rejected on the basis of how we are different from (and better or worse than) others; in short, on how competitive we are. As adults, this often becomes a matter of economic survival, with cooperation seeming naive at best, and threatening to our economic security at worst.

Because being "better" than another requires that we be different, competing often means turning our back on our common interests. Hyper-competitiveness is a profoundly lonely place to live, where those with different needs or narratives must be squashed at all costs.

Counter Culture

Having felt the sting of competitive dynamics, many of us become afraid to even acknowledge genuine differences for fear we will be seen as the oppressor or as a bad person. Working with differences is hard and uncomfortable. It often requires us to re-think unconscious beliefs. When we aren't up for that, we often avoid creating offense in our response to differences by simply avoiding the differences themselves. We tell ourselves that what is needed is to treat everyone the same.

Loyalty to the image that everyone is cared for (or at the least has the chance to speak up and be heard if they do not feel cared for) sometimes results in its opposite. People outside of the group's norm are made (or make themselves) invisible and their needs go unmet.

Cooperative Culture

There are two different levels of differences that we need to look at here, and which one seems like the bigger deal probably depends largely on how much privilege we have in our lives. For some of us, differences in identities (and the histories and current oppressions attached to those identities) are a constant negotiation to have our daily lives be functional. For others, differences at the level of beliefs, needs, preferences, and behaviors probably feel like the place where a lot of negotiation and rubbing up against each other happens. Both matter and both can be very challenging in their own ways.

In both cases, treating people differently based on their real needs is required to have functional and caring relationships with people with different needs and histories (which, as it turns out, is everyone). We open doors for people using walkers, and enunciate more clearly if someone's English isn't as strong. We change what we are cooking based on a friend's allergies, and resist the urge to play with a Black friend's hair because the implication of that friendly play is very different for Black people.

These adjustments can be challenging. They take communication and care to "get right" . . . and these aren't even the hard ones.

The really hard stuff touches the things we probably learned not to talk about (i.e., money, politics, and faith) and the things it never occurred to us to talk about (i.e., the beliefs we don't even realize we're holding, values we've never thought to question, and biases we do not see in ourselves). When we get really good at talking about these things, we land in the territory of identity work, the space where dominant groups (white, male, financially secure, able bodied, neurotypical, cisgender, and straight people) have simply dismissed the existence of all others. Opening that up won't be easy, but it will be valuable. It puts us in the space of introspection and discernment where we begin to figure out how I can keep being me as I change my behavior to be fully and cooperatively with you as you keep being you.

Thus, one key to doing cooperation well is the practice of seeking common ground, particularly common goals. This can feel hard when common ground is less than 100%, as it almost always is. We tend to view collaborative thinking as selling out in some way.

In reality it is the opposite of selling out: it is bringing more and more people and needs into the conversation. The common ground we struggle to discover through differences is some of the richest fruit of cooperative culture. It is here that we discover what is true for the many, the common experience of being human, the keys to surviving as a population of billions on one small planet.

Coalitions are the future of organizing

Coalition-building is the inter-organizational version of this same dynamic, where we reject working with potential allies and miss out on mutual benefits. We spend far too much time in our interest silos, and not enough building real, diverse movements. Much potential progress has been thwarted by our inability to recognize and act on common cause, and have often failed to build cooperative power because of this. We often fail to look at immediately apparent differences (whether those are identities of our constituents, tactics, or histories) to recognize core mutual interests. This is another place where discernment is important: if we are not actually working at cross-purposes, we can work together to move things in a similarly, mutually beneficial direction without having to wipe out the very real differences between groups.

We don't have to be fully aligned on everything to see each other as people worthy of supporting. This is *both* not competitive and not denying our differences. Collaboration means focusing on the things we have in common so that we can work within our mutual interest. When we collaborate with allies, we let go of some degree of analysis and judgment about whether others are doing things the right way, using the right language, and involved for the right reasons. We have often confused tactical choices with aligned vision and progress in the right direction. We could instead work with genuine diversity and find strength in common cause.

Self-Check

When hearing another person's proposal or idea, do I focus more on the differences from, or similarities with, my perspectives? Am I able to see the way that an idea supports shared values, even when the approach or strategy is very different from mine?

Dialogue Prompts

- When a divergent or unexpected idea is expressed to me, what I most often feel in my body is . . .
- My most likely first thoughts are . . .
- And I feel . . .
- This expresses the competitive elements of my upbringing in that . . .
- My best collaborative self might tell myself that . . .
- If I did that, I think I would feel . . .
- Something about you that I think is different than me is . . .
- I really appreciate that because . . .

OR

- I'm good at finding common ground when . . .
- Finding common ground is challenging for me when . . .
- When I resist common ground, a story I tell myself is . . .
- A different story I could tell myself is . . .
- The story that works best for me is . . .
- When I tell myself that story, I feel . . .
- I think a piece of common ground between us might be . . .
- Something I appreciate about you is . . .

Exercise 4.1: Attitude Cards

Materials:

Set of Attitude cards for each group of 3–8 people. Each attitude card is an attitude cliché written on half sheets of paper:
1. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.
2. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.
3. A friend in need is a friend indeed.
4. A jack of all trades is a master of none.
5. A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.
6. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.
7. All for one, and one for all.
8. Ask me no questions, I'll tell you no lies.
9. Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt.
10. Don't poke the bear.
11. Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.
12. Good fences make good neighbors.
13. I'd rather be a hammer than a nail.
14. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.
15. Know which side your bread is buttered on.
16. Don't go to bed angry.
17. One bad apple spoils the barrel.
18. Paddle your own canoe.
19. Rules are made to be broken.
20. Sometimes you are the hydrant, sometimes you are the dog.

Activity:

As a group, sort the cards into three categories: expressing mainstream culture, expressing counter culture, and expressing cooperative culture.

Note: there is no answer key presented here because there are no right or wrong answers. The value of this exercise is in the discussion and thought process. Note the extent to which clichés mean different things to different people.

Discussion:

(Note, for a larger group it may be useful to discuss in pairs with mirroring.)

• The most difficult cliché to place was . . .
• The easiest to place was . . .
• Something that shifted in my thinking . . .
• Something that surprises me . . .
• A way competition seeps into our culture is . . .

✦ Exercise 4.2: Milling

Milling is a great opening exercise for a meeting or conference, and can also be used to get people connecting one-on-one with multiple people in a short period of time. It is kinesthetic and high energy. It is also a great format for inviting people to tell their personal stories as it relates to the topic at hand.

Create a short list (three works well) of questions that either form a sequence or are interrelated in some interesting ways. Have everyone get up and find a partner, then give them the first question and a short period of time (usually in the range of 2–4 minutes) for both to answer it. Once that is done, have them find a new partner, and do the second question. Then do one more round with a third partner and third question.

One example of a series of questions good for an icebreaker/opener milling session:

What originally brought you to this group?
What has kept you involved in this group?
If you could change or add one thing to what we are doing together, what would it be?

This type of sequence can also be a good starting point for something like visioning or annual planning. It gets people socially connected, thoughtful, and creative all at once.

Another example, this one is more about an issue that a social change group or coalition of groups might be working on:

Share a story about how (X topic) has affected you and people you are close to.
Share a story of a time that you felt free from the pressures of (X topic).
What's at stake for you in working to change (X topic)?

This sequence would be good to use for political work, or for groups who have recognized an internal problem they want to change.

Accessibility Notes

1) Mobility. If several members of your group are unable to move around this may not be the best choice. If only one or two are, be sure that they are included in the milling. If they are comfortable, you may mention to the group to be sure to include them. Sometimes it is sufficient for the facilitator to model pairing with someone who isn't able to move around.

2) Hearing. This exercise can get pretty loud with a big group. Encourage folks with hearing challenges to head out to the quieter hallway (if you have one) or to go to the edges of the room. If people are outside the main room, you have to remember to get them or go out to where they are with prompts for the next steps. This can definitely be challenging and awkward, so think it through ahead of time.

Key #5. Good Enough for Now

Mainstream Culture

Competitive culture tells us it is essential to be better than others, or even the best. This can be internalized as perfectionism. Besides being exhausting, perfectionism is a close sibling to shame. Attempting perfection activates shame and makes it very difficult for people to ease into the kind of humility required to address oppression dynamics. If imperfection means failure, having your mistakes (and the impacts of them) pointed out is going to be incredibly painful. This is one of the reasons that perfectionism shows up on lists of white supremacist culture traits: it keeps us from being willing to look at how our actions are damaging to other people.[10]

Our desire to avoid shame and seek belonging leads us to deflect important feedback, often at the cost of our own growth, making our groups ineffective and, at worst, locking in cultural patterns of violence.

Counter Culture

The opposite approach, a sort of "anything goes" attitude without regard to the impact on the people around us doesn't work either. It can be fine for deliberately unlearning perfectionism (say, by letting yourself enjoy making "bad art"), but our groups need us to be concerned about the quality of our work and behavior.

This can come from a false equation of shame with guilt. Where shame means "I am bad," guilt means "I did something bad." Both are powerful, but in totally different ways. In shame we tend to blame, rationalize, or hide out. In guilt, the discomfort we feel motivates meaningful change.[11] When we don't understand the difference we may opt to avoid both by simply ignoring mistakes or the things we or others have done that are hurtful. Whether in regard to our own work or someone else's, failure to acknowledge and address what doesn't work creates cycles of frustration and resentment and misses the opportunity for improvement.

Cooperative Culture

The sweet spot seems to be adopting a "good enough for now" attitude. This attitude allows us to move forward in a state of openness to outcomes and impacts, but doesn't let us off the hook for recalibration later if it becomes apparent that something is no longer good enough. It holds the door open with an invitation to grow and evolve. (This requires that groups are willing to revisit "good enough for now" decisions over time.) It also frees the group up to move more quickly with a decision

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10. *White Supremacy Culture* by Tema Okun, www.dismantlingracism.org.

11. *Daring Greatly* by Brene Brown, pp. 71–72.

that is a bit less binding and high stakes. The full phrase, "good enough for now, safe enough to try" is a core mantra in Dynamic Governance (aka Sociocracy) and it is a terrific summation of the energy we are trying to hold in this culture piece.

We especially like this when you are also holding the unspoken corollary: safe enough to try implies an element of risk for the sake of growth and learning.

Self-Check

Do I feel shame when I make mistakes? Is it important to me to be better than others? Do I invite and welcome feedback? Am I able to make changes in response to feedback without feeling shame or punishing people for giving me the feedback?

Dialogue Prompts

- A part of my life where I try to be perfect is . . .
- I do that because . . .
- A place where I adopt "anything goes" is . . .
- I do that because . . .
- What this teaches me about myself is . . .
- A growth edge for me in this area is . . .
- I will know that I've grown when . . .
- An appreciation I have for you at this time is . . .

Exercise 5.1: You Are Amazing[12]

This is an opportunity to remind ourselves and each other that we are amazing even as we are not perfect. Adopting an attitude of affirmation can make everyone feel good. Some of Karen's clients have commented, "We should do this every meeting!"

Note: This is not recommended when group members are expressly unhappy with each other and would struggle to be authentic. While there is an element of adopting what we're saying even if we aren't quite there yet, when people have strong negative feelings it is better to choose an activity that works better for that moment.

Instructions

Stand up.
Face one other person.
Make eye contact.
Say to them "You Are Amazing!" with feeling!
Hug/touch if you want to and it is comfortable for both.
Repeat with as many people as you can in 5 minutes.

Accessibility Note

Mobility. If several members of your group are unable to move around this may not be the best choice. If only one or two are, be sure that they are included. If they are comfortable you may mention to the group to be sure to include them. Sometimes it is sufficient for the facilitator to model pairing with someone who isn't able to move around.

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12. Based on the work of Imago Relationships founders Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt.

✦ Exercise 5.2: Rounds

Rounds are a basic tool of facilitation because they are easily adaptable and also help with many of the Culture Keys. We include them with this Key in particular because the practice of calling on everyone in turn tends to balance extremes like perfectionism and invite alternative views.

- Rounds can be used for check-ins, generating ideas, considering proposals, getting feedback, deliberating pros and cons, etc.
- Most of the time you will be sitting in a circle.
- The facilitator simply recognizes each person in turn around the circle.
- If a facilitator is participating, it is best to start the round across from the facilitator so s/he is neither first nor last in the round.
- If you are doing several rounds in the same meeting you can start the round in different places.
- If you are not in a circle, for example in an online meeting, the facilitator needs to make sure everyone gets a chance to speak. This may look like writing down an order and calling on each person in order, or simply doing careful tracking of who has spoken and inviting the folks who have not yet gone.

Key #6. Understanding *and* Effective Action

Mainstream Culture

A culture can be thought of as a collection of methods for meeting our human needs. In competitive culture, a common strategy for meeting needs is gaining advantage over others. That is a necessity for meeting both economic and emotional needs in mainstream culture. While it might be effective for the individual, if you bring this pattern into a group setting where you are trying to cooperate, it will almost always undermine the group's ability to be effective because it doesn't build (and in fact, often undermines) understanding and cohesion.

Counter Culture

After living for some time in competitive culture and being hurt by it, we can come to groups seeking healing and genuine care as an emotional balm and to heal from that trauma. Groups sometimes form to specifically meet those needs, and we think that's great. The strategy employed by these groups might be described as giving and receiving the healthy attention each person needs, a highly effective strategy if the goal is healing the wounds of a competitive culture in which individuals were not seen.

The place it goes wrong is when the group isn't well suited for the needs of an individual, or that person comes into a group seeking healing and that is not the group's mission, or it isn't able to meet those needs. In this case, the individual's requests or efforts to meet their own needs can derail the group by putting too much focus on filling those emotional gaps left by our culture and sometimes our birth families rather than the mission of the group. Sometimes this seems to be happening when a group that is comfortable with majority culture is uncomfortable with needs of marginalized people. Sorting out what needs to meet will require delving into the complex intersection of culture and values.

The pattern of over-investment in individual needs is fueled by individualism in its own way, centering on our personal needs and pulling group energy toward us to meet them. In really extreme cases, groups can come to feel held hostage by someone's constant neediness or emotional meltdowns when they aren't getting what they want.

Cooperative Culture

One of the things that characterizes groups that really feel good for their members and are sustainable in the long run is a balance between seeking understanding (What are people's real needs? What makes us tick?) and being effective at actually getting stuff done. They are often deeply invested in the individuals in the group, while seeing the group as a whole doing something that both directly benefits their members

and has a bigger mission. Ideally the strategies that accomplish the mission are the same strategies that meet the needs of members so that the needs of members are being met *through* actions or activities that fulfill the mission, or through the benefits of fulfilling mutual passions.

While it's possible to pay attention to needs and connection at the same time that operations are moving forward, it doesn't always happen that way. Most groups will need opportunities to focus on one of these aspects at a time. The two exercises in this section are examples of structured ways to do that. Using a Bridging Circle first for seeking understanding is a great foundation for the operational work of a Solution Circle.

When done in conjunction with understanding, meeting collective goals generates energy which can also be used to meet individual needs and interests. Being effective is a battery pack for groups; being ineffective is a drain. Effectiveness is often about finding a functional way to live your passion.

Self-Check

Do the things that meet my needs in this group also support the mission of the group? Do I ask for things that detract or distract from that mission?

Dialogue Prompts

- A time our group has focused too much on "getting it done" . . .
- The result was . . .
- And I felt . . .
- A time our group has focused too much on understanding . . .
- The result was . . .
- And I felt . . .
- I (will) know that our group has good balance when I see . . .
- When that happens I (will) feel . . .
- Something I appreciate about you is . . .

Exercise 6.1: Bridging Circles[13]

Bridging Circles are intended to increase understanding of both the group and of self. In the balance between understanding and productivity or solutions, Bridging Circles focus on understanding. The purpose of a Bridging Circle is not to find a solution or solve a problem, though sometimes ideas for solutions do naturally appear. More likely, the depth of understanding shared in this format serves as a foundation for better solutions with more group commitment in a later conversation intended to generate solutions.

Bridging Circle Structure

- Establish a time frame, 60–120 minutes.
- Select a single topic which will be used for all three rounds.
- Gathering and Instructions:
  - Explain structure.
  - Speak to the center of the circle—no cross talk (see Glossary).
  - Speak for yourself—no "Master Talk" (see Glossary).
  - Maintain attitude of pre-validation.
  - Assign timer, generally the person to the right of the facilitator.

- Round 1:
  - 1–2 minutes for each member in order.
  - Facilitator mirrors each member.
  - Facilitator summarizes at end of round (optional).

- Round 2:
  - 1–2 minutes for each member in order (elaborating or building on Round 1).
  - Facilitator mirrors each member.
  - Facilitator summarizes at end of round (optional).

- Round 3:
  - 1–2 minutes for each member in any order.
  - Each speaker mirrors the one before.
  - Facilitator tracks order of requests.

- Conclusion:
  - 5 minutes before end of session.
  - Facilitator gives summary of views and positions

  AND/OR

  - Each member shares one word or one sentence.

Role of the Facilitator:

- Create a safe space.
- Ensure everyone is mirrored.

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13. Bridging Circles were originally named "Communologue" and developed by the Peace Project of Imago Relationships.

- Essence mirror is OK.
- Manage time.
- Allow silence, and restart conversation if needed.
- Encourage all points of view and honor differences.

Structure Details

Set-Up:
- Need 4–10 participants. Be prepared to break larger groups into multiple circles with a facilitator for each.
- Plan for enough time and for everyone to be present the whole time.
  - If a participant must leave during the session, be sure to announce this at the beginning. Slipping out "quietly" will decrease safety.
- Arrange your space.
  - Choose a location where the group will not be interrupted or unintentionally observed.
  - Place chairs in a circle.
  - Locate participants close together—proximity increases engagement and safety.
  - Keep people all on the same level (for example, avoid pairing a low couch with higher stackable chairs).
- Have a timer (usually a smartphone) available and pre-programmed for intervals if needed.
- Choose a topic prompt, or plan time to choose one together.

Setting Time Limits:
- In order to end the Bridging Circle on time, adjust the time allotted for each round as needed.
- Set the speaker time limit round by round. Depending on how much time speakers use in each round, you can adjust time allotments for later rounds.
- Choose time limits according to the number of people, the time available, and the depth of the topic.
- If the time allowed is too short to do the topic well, you have a few options:
  - Encourage the group to plan for a longer session.
  - Break into smaller groups (as few as 4) to give each person adequate sharing time within the circle.
- As a starting point Karen often uses the following time limits:
  - Round 1: 2 minutes.
  - Round 2: 1.5 minutes.
  - Round 3: 1 minute.

Timer:
- In most cases it is best to ask another person to keep the time and provide them with a timer. This allows the facilitator to focus on good mirroring and holding to the structure.
- Use a timer that allows the speaker to know when the end of their time will come.

- Use a stepped timer with a shorter tone 20 seconds before the end of the round—there are many apps for this. Karen uses Timeglass.

OR

- Use a visual timer and make it visible to the group—most smartphones have this feature.
- Be careful in enforcement of time.
  - Do not allow speakers to take more than their share of the time.
  - Do follow the energy and allow a few seconds to complete an important thought.

Mirroring:
- It is essential that each person be mirrored accurately each time they speak.
- Generally the facilitator mirrors the first two rounds and in the third round each speaker mirrors the previous speaker.
- As groups become skilled in mirroring, the facilitator may mirror less. The essential piece is that each speaker is mirrored well.

Rounds:
  In Rounds 1 and 2, start with the person to the facilitator's left (if the facilitator is not participating) or across from the facilitator (if the facilitator is also a participant). There is power associated with speaking order. Using a standard system prevents participants from manipulating that power to their advantage.

Passing:
- Passing is allowed.
- A participant who passes will not get another turn in that round.
  - This is because passing can be used to gain a power position at the end of the round.
  - Groups that are well grounded in collaboration may find it works to allow participants to pass and take their turn at the end of the round. If you try this, be watchful for signs of competitive behavior (such as someone seeming to always pass in order to get in the last word).

Summary:
- Pull together themes that have come up in the round, identify common ground, note dissenting ideas. Capture energy. Leaving out something that was mentioned but didn't seem to have energy is OK. Be sure to include any idea that had energy for anyone, even if it was only one person.
- Summary at the end of the round is optional because it can be both positive and negative in its impact on the group.
  - Positive:
    - Focuses the conversation for the next round.
    - Reminds group of points that carry energy, especially if they were minority opinions.
    - Is a way to give participants a chance to catch their breath between rounds.
    - Highlights common ground.

- Negative:
  - ▪ Can disrupt the energy of the round.
  - ▪ Can unintentionally leave out a point that was important to a participant, leaving that person feeling unheard.
  - ▪ Can shift focus away from the group and onto the facilitator.
  - ▪ Requires cognitive energy from the facilitator that may be needed for mirroring or holding structure.
- When the facilitator is also a participant, there is a great potential for perceived bias in summaries. Generally it is best not to summarize when the facilitator is participating in the conversation.

Conclusion:
- The end of the Bridging Circle is a transition that needs to be marked. Be sure to reserve time for a good conclusion.
- Conclusions should be short—if you allow too much speaking time, participants may bring up new topics, which is not helpful at this point.
  - In general Karen does not use a timer for the conclusion round but limits to "one word" or "one sentence."
- Possible prompts for a conclusion round:
  - As we close our circle, one word about what I am taking with me . . .
  - As we close our circle, I am feeling . . . (can limit to one word or not)
  - Something that was important for me in our circle is . . .
  - An appreciation I have for the group is . . .

Note-Taking:

- Ask participants not to take notes. Note-taking distracts from the conversation and reduces the sense of safety.
- Facilitator may take *very limited* notes to assist with mirroring and summary.
- If the group feels it is important to capture what has been shared, it's OK to take a few minutes at the end to record ideas. A Spiraled Round (Exercise 21.2) with a notetaker is one good option. If this is planned, be sure to allow time for it.
- Keep in mind that writing things down tends to make them feel more permanent. One of the benefits of a Bridging Circle is that it supports people in shifting their perspectives. This shift often continues after the circle closes.

Sample Topics: For this Culture Key, the following prompts can be used for your bridging circle:
- For our group the balance between understanding and operations is . . .
- We know we are lacking understanding when . . .
- We know we are lacking productivity when . . .

Exercise 6.2: Solution Circles[14]

In the balance between understanding and productivity, Solution Circles are designed to find solutions that build productivity. In general, a Solution Circle will not be successful when understanding is lacking or reactivity is high. Doing a Bridging Circle first allows participants to get a sense of each other's positions and to feel heard.

The overall structure and setup is the same as a Bridging Circle (above), including the role of the facilitator and mirroring. In this exercise mirroring can be done by the facilitator or by group members depending on the skill of the group.

Solution Circle Structure

- Establish time frame, 60–90 minutes.
- Gathering and Instructions—same as Bridging Circle (Exercise 6.1)
  - Share structure of rounds as described below.
- Round 1, Objectives: "My goal with this topic is . . ."
  - 1–2 minutes for each member in order.
  - Each member is mirrored.
  - Facilitator summarizes at end of round (optional).
- Round 2, Perspectives: "My understanding of the facts related to this topic . . ."
  - 1–2 minutes for each member in order.
  - Each member is mirrored.
  - Facilitator summarizes at end of round (optional).
- Round 3, Compatibility: "I see common ground in that . . ." OR "A new perspective I heard is . . ."
  - 1–2 minutes for each member in order.
  - Each member is mirrored.
  - Facilitator summarizes at end of round (optional).
- Round 4, Action: "In my view, the next concrete step would be . . ."
  - 1–2 minutes for each member in order (elaborating or building on Round 1).
  - Each member is mirrored.
  - Facilitator summarizes at end of round (optional).
- Conclusion:
  - Initiate 5 minutes before end of session.
  - Facilitator gives summary of ideas and solutions

  AND/OR

  - Each member shares one word or one sentence.

This process may be followed by the group's usual (and consented to) proposal or decision process.

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14. Karen learned about Bridging Circles and Solutions Circles as part of Imago Professional Facilitator Training. There they are called "Communologue" (Community + Dialogue) and "Communolution" (Community + Solution).

Key #7. Emergent Stories

Mainstream Culture

Storytelling is core to human nature, dating from the early development of humans when culture was passed down orally. Modern cultures vary widely in how this part of our nature gets expressed.

Under late-stage capitalism, storytelling is often used for marketing and control. Branding and sales, including the selling of ourselves, is very much about the power of narrative to change behavior, including purchasing behavior. We also see storytelling weaponized in the forms of nationalism and xenophobia.

Our storytelling nature is also linked to the human tendency to project things onto others. When we are not transparent with each other, we respond to the unknowns by creating stories to fill in the gaps (sometimes adding an assumption of bad intentions into the mix). It's a way of relieving our distress at not knowing. These stories come from our own minds and thus are more closely related to our own experiences and motivations than the person we are telling the story about. When we externalize a narrative, psychologists call this projection, and it can create a world of hurt in our groups.

Counter Culture

Stories have the power to bond people, which can be harmful when the bonds don't reflect truly shared values and mission. The tendency of internet groups to gather around a story that supports a common belief (called confirmation bias) is an example of bonding stories in action and can often lead to being more insular in our worldviews. The most extreme case is a cult where people are coercively indoctrinated in a story that separates members from the rest of humanity, creating an intense "us versus them" dynamic that makes people afraid to leave and go out into the scary world and more vulnerable to abuse within the group itself.

Telling ourselves bonding stories can sometimes be deeply harmful when those stories deny other people's realities. The story of the good white liberal, for instance, has done tremendous damage to social justice efforts. Because many people believe we live in a post-racial world, where we "don't see color," the realities of people whose lives are lived outside of that story has been made harder.

Getting along and keeping the peace are often valued so highly that people with different needs and identities get shut down by stories that exclude them. This may mean they can't ask for what they want, or that when they do speak their needs clearly, they get labelled difficult, angry or (especially ironic in this book) uncooperative. Sometimes when people leave groups without explanation, it is because this need to squelch differences meant they could never genuinely get into the group or get their needs met inside it.

Cooperative Culture

There are healthy applications of the bonding power of stories. Marginalized people share their experiences with each other and gain empowerment through not being alone. Culture change results when we co-create stories of new possibilities. Emergent stories that bubble up from genuine needs and new perspectives can be powerful tools for social change. Stories allow us to see, and thus create, a new world that we otherwise could not see, touch, or taste. These stories are often more recognized than planned, and creating environments that welcome and nurture them facilitates the kinds of bonding and culture change that groups need to be effective together.

We can't build a future we can't picture

In 2013, Yana did a TEDx talk about her then-home, Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Missouri. The goal was to offer a vision for what is possible, and to counteract the mainstream cultural narrative that sustainable living would mean deprivation and suffering. Yana believes that people have a very hard time moving toward a different future when they are not able to picture it, and they have no meaningful narrative to attach to it. Storytelling that uses modern technology to share video and pictures of radical projects is an important tool in social change work. That talk is called "Sustainable is Possible! (And it doesn't suck . . .)" and was part of the Carleton College 2013 TEDx event. You will find it under Yana's old name, Ma'ikwe Ludwig.

Self-Check

Do I tell stories that build the sense of connection in my group? Does my group have stories that help us connect to our identity? Do I avoid stories that may result in others feeling put down or "less than" someone else?

Dialogue Prompts

- A story that is part of my childhood family is . . .
- When I tell it, I feel . . .
- What it tells me about my family is . . .
- The story impacts me or my family in that . . .
- My experience of sharing this story with you is . . .
- Thank you for . . .

OR

- A story that is part of our group history is . . .
- When I tell it, I feel . . .
- What it tells me about our group is . . .
- The story impacts me or our group in that . . .
- My experience of sharing this story with you is . . .
- Thank you for . . .

Exercise 7.1: Heart Shares

Heart Shares are a variation on Rounds (Exercise 5.2) that are mostly focused on the emotional connection between people and/or emotional content. They are used in times of mourning or major changes that are affecting people emotionally. The mood is relatively quiet and introspective.

We've included this exercise here because emotions and story are very closely tied together. When we invite people to share from the heart, what often comes out are pieces of the meaningful stories we tell ourselves about our own lives and the world around us.

Preparation

Often there is some kind of "talking object" that each person holds as they speak. You can go around in a circle, or have people speak as they feel moved. In the latter case, there should be a small table or cloth in the center where the talking object lives when no one is speaking. It can also be a good idea to have a small altar of sorts in the center. A bowl with flowers, a candle, or some sort of symbolic object can be placed on the altar. You want to create a peaceful vibe with your altar construction.

Activity

A facilitator begins by describing the activity and setting expectations. Clarity around a couple of points is useful: This is a space for sharing, including emotional content. This is not a space for discussion or problem solving; it's about hearing and receiving. Unless the group is very large and you have limited time, there is usually no timekeeping, and the meeting or session time is generally more open-ended than a business meeting. It is also particularly important to not have cross-talk (see Glossary), though the facilitator can decide if allowing for clarifying questions at the end of someone's saying their piece will be OK.

In cases where someone shares something particularly difficult and they are very emotional, the facilitator may decide to break that norm and either offer some comfort or a hug, or open the floor for others to do that. Mirroring (Exercise 1.1) can also be an effective means of support. Note, however, that getting consent from the person before applying any special treatment is even more critical than usual in this format.

Closing

It is generally useful to formally close the time together in some way. It could be a moment of silence or a group hug (if group members are comfortable with touch). You can ask each person to share one word of closing, make eye contact around the circle, or simply take a few deep breaths together.

✦ Exercise 7.2: Silence

> Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
> On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.
> — **Arundhati Roy**

In a world that values speech and where many people are addicted to constant background noise, silence can be terrifying or soothing, boring or enlightening, familiar or foreign depending on your past experience and your personality. We believe it's worth practicing as a group and that the potential for it to be collaborative, creative, emotionally regulating, and energizing is profound. And when we talk about the benefits of emergent stories, it is important to acknowledge that sometimes things that are emerging are, at first, very hard to hear without pausing the frenzied energy of our old patterns and stories.

If you've used silence and are comfortable, you probably don't need us to tell you how to get started. For those who don't, here's a way to start:

Start with a short period of silence, 30 seconds or a minute. Use a timer, perhaps even a timer that is visible to all. Gradually extend the period of silence until you find what works best for your group, which may vary day to day or from one activity to another.

If some members of the group struggle with silence, you might consider providing "fidgets." Stress balls, finger labyrinths, and small stuffed animals are some examples. If you do this, encourage them to fidget quietly and unobtrusively so as to not break the silence for the rest of the group.

Uses for silence:
- When creativity is needed, prior to interactive brainstorming.
- To change gears from one topic to another.
- To center a group at the beginning of a meeting, or re-center when something unsettling has happened.
- To allow the possibility of breakthrough when the group is stuck or seeming to go around in circles without making progress.
- To give the facilitator a moment to gather their thoughts.
- To see what emerges!

Key #8: We

Mainstream Culture

The United States is home to the most individualistic culture in the world.[15] In polling data, Americans consistently say that pursuit of one's own life goals is more important than taking care of everyone.[16] This hyper-individualism has disastrous consequences for our organizations and the environment. It was an unfortunate factor in the US response to Coronavirus in 2020, delaying the sharing of medically-grounded information and causing many people to resist wearing masks and staying home to slow the spread.

Paradoxically, all this individualism is not even good for the individual. According to the World Health Organization, the US has some of the worst mental health outcomes of any country in the world, with almost half of Americans reporting a mental health issue at some point in their lives. Almost 19% of US adults report some degree of mental health struggle at any given time, and it is worst among young people.[17]

Somehow, all of this focus on "Me" is backfiring.

Counter Culture

A lot of us understand the negative impact of hyper-individualism, but aren't sure how to counteract it. Some people try leaning into groups for a sense of belonging. As a result, groups often define themselves in very "us versus them" ways. The "us" part of this feels great as it feeds our need for belonging and helps us feel seen for what we actually believe and value. The problem is the "versus them" part, which can lead to the kind of hyper in-group dynamic that allows cults to flourish and damages our healthy sense of who we are as individuals. In this type of group, being "us" means being against "them" and subsuming individual identity under the group identity. Selflessness takes an ugly turn into meaning you are not allowed to think or act for yourself.

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15. The Hofstede Indices measures cultural factors; the US scores as the most individualistic in the world on the scale of individualism and communalism. See www.clearlycultural.com.

16. PEW Research Center found in 2011 that, "Nearly six-in-ten (58%) Americans believe that it is more important for people to be free to pursue their goals without interference from the state; just 35% say it is more important for the state to play an active role in society so as to guarantee that nobody is in need."

17. According to the National Institutes of Health (via nih.gov): In 2017, there were an estimated 46.6 million adults aged 18 or older in the United States with AMI. This number represented 18.9% of all U.S. adults. Young adults aged 18–25 years had the highest prevalence of AMI (25.8%) compared to adults aged 26–49 years (22.2%) and aged 50 and older (13.8%).

Cooperative Culture

The key here is balance: both your needs and the group's needs are important. We are seeking a synergistic relationship between these two things rather than an adversarial one. Here, community is seen as good for the self, rather than being an imposition on the self. Getting everyone's needs met includes me getting mine met, but is not centered around just me.

Valuing something larger than yourself does feel good, and when that thing brings genuine value to the world, it *is* good. Being a part of groups where your own personal life mission is closely aligned with the group's mission is one key to making that work. That presupposes that we have a healthy enough ego and sense of self to be clear about what our life work is. That strength of self is an inoculant against cult-like behavior and also means we have something real to bring to our groups when we find them.

Self-Check

Are there times that I feel isolated, or fully responsible for what is happening in the world? When I struggle or feel my mental health deteriorating, am I able to reach out for support? Do I value something that is larger than myself?

Dialogue Prompts

- A time I named my needs in a group was . . .
- Doing that, I felt . . .
- The result was . . .
- A time I had a need in a group and did not name it was . . .
- I didn't name it because . . .
- Not naming it, I felt . . .
- The result was . . .
- What this tells me about myself in a group is . . .
- A growth opportunity for me in this regard is . . .
- An appreciation I have for you is . . .

Exercise 8.1: Body Awareness and Differences

One of the offshoots of individualism is discomfort with people who are different than we are. We can use increased body awareness to help us start to unpack where this resistance most strongly lives inside us. Here's a simple exercise to practice regularly on your own.

Pay attention to your body sensations when someone who is noticeably different from you comes into the room, or is walking down the street toward you. Do differences evoke discomfort or anxiety for you? Do this practice often enough that you can discern patterns. When you've identified which differences cause you the most discomfort, try seeking out writing by people in that group and starting to slowly humanize them. Try to see the world through their eyes. If you have a particularly strong reaction to some group of people, use this self-check to point you toward the anti-oppression work you most need to embrace.

Please note that this advice is NOT to ask people who are different to do a bunch of hard emotional and intellectual labor educating you for free, nor is it to ask them anything about their identity without getting consent first. In the modern era of the internet, there are plenty of resources out there for you to self-educate.

✦ Exercise 8.2: Centering

Centering helps everyone get into the room energetically, emotionally, and spiritually as their whole selves (me) in connection with the group (we). There are many ways to accomplish centering: breathing exercises, reading a poem, tai chi, to name a few. Scripts designed for centering can be effective, as can poems or other readings.

Tip: The leading of centering is a great thing to pass around the group, letting different people express their creativity and take on centering.

A Simple Centering for Secular Groups

Have someone read these instructions out loud, pausing for 5–10 seconds between each prompt. Have some kind of pleasant bell or chime to start and end the exercise with.

We are going to take a few minutes to just arrive in the room together.

I will start and end this exercise with a bell/chime, so you don't have to worry about keeping track of time or thinking about what we are doing.

Find a comfortable position that you can stay in for a few minutes.

(Ring the bell and wait for the sound to die out.)

Close your eyes or just lower your gaze to the floor, and take a few deep breaths at your own pace.

Feel the chair or floor beneath you, and notice how it contacts your body.

Notice any thoughts going through your head and do your best to just observe them.

Notice how your body feels and any aches or pains you have, and stretch or wiggle a little if you want to.

Listen to any sounds you can hear in the room or outside.

Return again to taking a few deep breaths, and just feeling your body.

(Ring the bell and once again let the sound fully die out before thanking people and moving on to the next thing.)

Centering for a specific group

Centering can be particularly powerful when tailored to the group or circumstance. One group with a strongly developed understanding of shared values and beliefs used this centering.

Centering[18]

If you're willing to, close your eyes or just look down, whatever is more comfortable for you.

And just connect with your breath, remembering that our breath is our greatest asset because when we breathe deeply, our nervous system gets the message that it is safe.

It also helps us connect to our source and our deep creativity.

And just take a moment and notice your inner landscape, recognising that it is never about getting rid of anything, it is about growing your container large enough so you can choose how you want to respond.

You can be intentional. Just be quiet for a moment and allow yourself to take a little travel through that inner landscape, working on growing your container so that it can hold all that is on the inside and on the outside.

And recognising when we get quiet, the very air around us changes, reminding us of the power of our impact.

And just knowing that each and every one of you has the capacity to impact not only what is happening in this meeting, but since we believe in universal connectivity, everything that is happening around the globe.

So, recognising both that awesome honor and that awesome responsibility.

And feeling that deep sense of gratitude for the luxury we have to meet like this, for having a community.

And recognising that each one of your voices is vitally important for the future of this organisation, recognising your magnificence so that you can bring forth that special expression that can help us grow.

I'm going to count from 5 to 1, and when I reach the number 1, you can all open your eyes. And if we have time, we can all just express one feeling that we have in this moment. So that we can all be brought into the space. 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1.

I invite each person to just express one feeling you are having in this moment so everyone's voice can come into the space to create this circle.

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18. Maya Kollman, Master Trainer, Imago Relationships Worldwide.

Key #9: Mutual Aid

Mainstream Culture

The way we relate to the systems we find ourselves in reveals a lot about our basic worldviews. Comfort with receiving governmental assistance ourselves often goes with support for extending similar aid to others. Conversely, those who pride themselves on being "self-sufficient" generally fail to notice or name the privilege that allows them to thrive without visible outside support or the extent to which their lifestyle depends upon the low-wage labor of others. People who enjoy government services like parks and police protection often object to taxation. Large homes are often cleaned and landscaped by people paid less than a living wage.

These examples of "I've got mine" on a societal level reveal the unconscious belief that systems are there to serve me (and people like me). It externalizes our cultural biases about who is deserving of support and how much support should be given. It labels direct aid as "charity," requires "means testing" for social services because it maintains social hierarchies and control, and considers all income as "earned," ignoring the ways the deck is stacked to benefit some at the expense of others.

Counter Culture

In response, many people adopt practices of giving, assigning high moral value to generosity in any form. Taken to an extreme this can become martyrdom, held up in far too many places as righteous behavior. While it definitely doesn't repeat the mistake of taking too much for me and not caring about others, giving without any regard to self-care is unsustainable and just as imbalanced as "I've got mine." It is particularly toxic when someone does things "for" others without being asked and then uses that as a power play in our groups, asserting that they should get their way because they "give so much."

Cooperative Culture

The framework of mutual aid turns each of these pieces on their heads. We define all people as compassionate and capable providers. We see every one of us as having something valuable to give and as being worthy of our support. We, in fact, expect to provide for others, and credit the people around us with being willing and able to provide in turn. In this kind of model, everyone brings their different gifts and resources to the table and receives support without shame when it is offered.

Mutual aid embodies the phrase, "we are in this together" in a decidedly material way. It also rejects mainstream judgement about ability and worthiness in favor of adapting our systems of value to a range of gifts and contributions.

A related phenomenon is important to note here: the systems we operate within

shape us. Spend time in another culture, and you will start adopting some of its practices and attitudes. The reverse is also true: we can affect systems that we are a part of (though obviously scale matters as far as how much we can affect them as a single person). Systems change me, and I change them. This is mutual influence to go along with mutual aid.

Self-Check

What is my first thought when I see someone I know is in need? As I live or work in a group am I more or less inclined to do things for others and receive what they do for me? Are my needs generally met or not? And if not, is that because of an identity that is not valued culturally? Who am I willing to accept help from? What do I assume about those who need help more often?

Dialogue Prompts

- I tend to provide for others when . . .
- When I do that, I feel . . .
- I tend to receive from others when . . .
- When that happens, I feel . . .
- A different story I could tell myself about giving and receiving is . . .
- Telling myself that story, I feel . . .

Exercise 9.1: Ally Mapping

Ally mapping applies Key #9: Mutual Aid at the organizational level, connecting groups that can help each other achieve their goals.

1. Take your group's mission statement or general sense of purpose, and make a list of the specific kinds of activities you need to engage in in order to make progress toward mission-fulfillment.
2. For each activity, name as many groups as you can within a reasonable distance of you (or if you are online, those operating in a sphere similar to yours) who are doing the same kinds of activities. Include groups who may be doing those same activities for different reasons than yours (so long as those reasons are not at direct cross-purposes with yours).
3. Choose 3 of those groups to reach out to. Think through a specific ask for each group, and how working together will strengthen both groups' presence and influence in the world.
4. Do the outreach and invite a conversation about potential collaborations.

Exercise 9.2: Privilege Walk[19]

There are many versions of this activity, and once you understand the basic format, you can adapt it to suit your particular needs. All Walks aim to uncover discrepancies in power and privilege in our culture and how those have played out in individuals' lives. Some focus on a single issue like race or sexuality. The version we are reprinting here is more general.

This exercise can be done with groups that already know each other very well as a lead-in to doing serious work on oppression and privilege dynamics. Yana has also used it in workshops on oppression with folks who have just met in the workshop. Some care should be taken to get the right list of questions for your purpose. More vulnerable questions are probably best reserved for groups doing serious work together already. Reading up on privilege dynamics in general prior to heading into this work is also recommended, and this can be paired with bringing in an outside facilitator to help the conversation go well.[20]

You may also want to consider what type of support more marginalized people may need for doing this work well. The Walk is often revelatory for people with more (invisible to them) privilege (white, straight, cis-gender, able-bodied, middle- and upper-class men) but can be triggering for people who are not in those categories. Set up solid support, and expect the conversations afterward to be hard for some folks.[21] Time: 15–20 minutes for the Privilege Walk, 45–60 minutes for the debrief.

Materials

- A wide open space, e.g., a classroom with all chairs and tables pushed back, an auditorium, or a gymnasium.
- Chairs to form a circle for the debrief.
- Optional: Painter's tape to make an initial line for participants to start on.

Procedures

- Invite participants to line up in a straight line across the middle of the room with plenty of space to move forward and backward as the exercise proceeds.
- Optional: Invite participants to hold hands or place one hand on the shoulder of the person to their left or right depending on space constraints. Important: Make sure to ask participants if they are comfortable touching and being touched by others. If some are not, do not make them or make a big deal out of it.
- Read the following to participants: "I will read statements aloud. Please move if a statement applies to you. If you do not feel comfortable acknowledging a

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19. This activity was developed by Rebecca Layne and Ryan Chiu for Dr. Arthur Romano's Conflict Resolution Pedagogy class at George Mason's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution.

20. While Yana does some of this work, often with a partner from the marginalized group being focused on if she is not herself part of that group, another great resource for this is www.AORTA.coop.

21. The rest of this section is a lightly edited version of what appears here: https://peacelearner. org/2016/03/14/privilege-walk-lesson-plan/.

statement that applies to you, simply do not move when it is read. No one else will know whether it applies to you."

- Begin reading statements aloud in a clear voice, pausing slightly after each one while people move. The pause can be as long or as short as desired as appropriate.
- When you have finished the statements, ask participants to take note of where they are in the room in relation to others.
- Have everyone gather into a circle for debriefing and discussion.

Privilege Walk Statements

1. If you are right-handed, take one step forward.
2. If English is your first language, take one step forward.
3. If one or both of your parents have a college degree, take one step forward.
4. If you can find Band-Aids at mainstream stores designed to blend in with or match your skin tone, take one step forward.
5. If you rely, or have relied, primarily on public transportation, take one step back.
6. If you have attended schools with people you felt were like yourself, take one step forward.
7. If you constantly feel unsafe walking alone at night, take one step back.
8. If your household employs help as servants, gardeners, etc., take one step forward.
9. If you are able to move through the world without fear of sexual assault, take one step forward.
10. If you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school, take one step forward.
11. If you often felt that your parents were too busy to spend time with you, take one step back.
12. If you were ever made fun of or bullied for something you could not change or was beyond your control, take one step back.
13. If your family has ever left your homeland or entered another country not of your own free will, take one step back.
14. If you would never think twice about calling the police when trouble occurs, take one step forward.
15. If your family owns a computer, take one step forward.
16. If you have ever been able to play a significant role in a project or activity because of a talent you gained previously, take one step forward.
17. If you can show affection for your romantic partner in public without fear of ridicule or violence, take one step forward.
18. If you ever had to skip a meal or were hungry because there was not enough money to buy food, take one step back.
19. If you feel respected for your academic performance, take one step forward.
20. If you have a physically visible disability, take one step back.

21. If you have an invisible illness or disability, take one step back.
22. If you were ever discouraged from an activity because of race, class, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation, take one step back.
23. If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to fit in more, take one step back.
24. If you have ever been profiled by someone else using stereotypes, take one step back.
25. If you feel good about how your identities are portrayed by the media, take one step forward.
26. If you were ever accepted for something you applied to because of your association with a friend or family member, take one step forward.
27. If your family has health insurance take one step forward.
28. If you have ever been spoken over because you could not articulate your thoughts fast enough, take one step back.
29. If someone has ever spoken for you when you did not want them to do so, take one step back.
30. If there was ever substance abuse in your household, take one step back.
31. If you come from a single-parent household, take one step back.
32. If you live in an area with crime and drug activity, take one step back.
33. If someone in your household lived or lives with mental illness, take one step back.
34. If you have been a victim of sexual harassment, take one step back.
35. If you were ever uncomfortable about a joke related to your race, religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation but felt unsafe to confront the situation, take one step back.
36. If you are never asked to speak on behalf of a group of people who share an identity with you, take one step forward.
37. If you can make mistakes and not have people attribute your behavior to flaws in your racial, gender, or ability group, take one step forward.
38. If you have always assumed you'll go to college, take one step forward.
39. If you have more than fifty books in your household, take one step forward.
40. If your parents told you that you can be anything you want to be, take one step forward.

Debrief

During and after the Privilege Walk, participants might experience an array of intense feelings no matter their position in the front or the back. While the point of the Privilege Walk is indeed to promote understanding and acknowledgment of privileges and marginalization, it would be detrimental to end the activity with potentially traumatic or destructive emotions.

The point of the debrief session is twofold. First, help participants realize what exactly they were feeling and muster the courage to articulate it to each participant's acceptable level. This process will relieve possible negative emotions, preventing

possible damage. Second, as negative emotions are relieved, the debrief will help participants realize that both privileges and marginalization are integral to the person's being. Instead of casting off either privilege or marginalization, participants can learn how to reconcile with themselves, and through the utilization of newfound knowledge of the self, have a better relationship with themselves and others around them.

1. What did it feel like being in the front of the group? In the back? In the middle? (At the end of the exercise, participants were asked to observe where they were in the room. This is a common question to use to lead into the discussion and allows people to reflect on what happened before starting to work with those ideas in more abstract ways.)

2. What were some factors that you have never thought of before? (This asks participants to reflect in a broader sense about the experiences they might not think about in the way they were presented in this activity. It opens up a space to begin to discuss their perceptions of aspects of themselves and others that they might have never discussed before.)

3. If you broke contact with the person beside you, how did you feel in that moment? (This question focuses on the concrete experience of separation that can happen during the activity. For some students, a physical aspect like this can be quite powerful. The privilege walk can be done without physical contact, but this extra piece adds another layer of experience and provides an opening for very rich responses.)

4. What question made you think most? If you could add a question, what would it be? (The first part of this question asks participants to reflect more on the activity and the thoughts behind it. The second part of this question is very important for creating knowledge. Participants might suggest a question we did not. Asking participants how they would change the activity and then working to incorporate those changes is an important part of collaborative learning.)

5. What do you wish people knew about one of the identities, situations, or disadvantages that caused you to take a step back? (This question invites sharing about the ways participants experience marginalization. It is a good question to ensure that this part of the conversation is had. That being said, it is also important to not expect or push certain participants to speak, since that would be further marginalizing them and could cause them to feel unsafe. It is not a marginalized person's job to educate others on their marginality.)

6. How can your understanding of your privileges or marginalizations improve your existing relationships with yourself and others? (This question is based on the idea that knowledge and awareness of the self can always be used to improve how one lives with oneself and those existing within one's life. It also invites participants to think about ways that this understanding can create positive change. This is not only for the most privileged participants but also for marginalized participants to understand those in their group who may experience other marginalizations. This can bring the discussion from the first question, which asks about how they are standing apart, to this last question, which asks how they can work to stand together.)

Variations on the walk

A variation Yana has used is to pull out questions from the standard list that focus on a specific identity (such as class background or gender) and do those questions first, then pause for a debrief. You can either do that debrief while people are in place, or give everyone a card to write their names on and place it on the floor where they ended up for that phase. Then after some discussion, return and do the rest of the questions. This is an interesting way to isolate one axis of power for a conversation and then recognize that privilege and power are never one-dimensional. The second round of conversation can focus then on the concept of intersectionality.

We also encourage groups to make up your own version of the questions. You may have many different aspects of societal hierarchies you want to explore, and the Privilege Walk template offers us a terrific tool to get into those explorations.

Key #10. Security Is Social

Mainstream Culture

Security is a universal need. What isn't universal is the rigid definition of it that our wider culture has adopted. People's need for security is tinged with a certain amount of desperation. We tell ourselves that we need to limit (or eliminate) the possibility of bad things happening, and that desperation for control drives whole industries. The story of capitalism points to a single source of security: material wealth in the form of lots of stuff and a big bank account, ignoring the human and environmental harm that is inflicted by attaining it (which, ironically, makes us objectively *less* secure).

To make this story make sense, the culture and the economic system that props it up go on to commodify all things: food, property, health, even life itself.

> ## The movement exploring mortality
>
> One of the deep, underlying forces that our culture is built upon is a profound fear of death. A growing number of people in the US (many of whom are part of the death doula movement, and/or organizing Death Cafes[22]) tie our desperate need for security and anxiety about the unknown to the denial of death as an impending reality for us all. Writer and physician Atul Guwande says, "The only way death is acceptable, is because we, as human beings, live for something bigger than ourselves." In a book about getting better at living and acting for something larger than ourselves, we would be remiss to not point to this potentially deeper personal work: coming to terms with our mortality and what that can teach us about showing up for a new culture, and reconsidering just what security is all about.

Counter Culture

In reaction to this, some people reject security entirely. They claim the very concept is worthless. At the most extreme, they may glorify or romanticise poverty and struggle, and fully reject material needs. In this way of thinking, "security is for wimps." Like all denial of needs, this story leads to disconnection and pain for individuals and for groups.

Cooperative Culture

A gentler and more sustainable version of security is to see it as coming from the strength of social relationships. Rather than having a big enough bank account to buy support if you need it, you invest in building relationships with the people around

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22. The purpose of Death Cafes is "to increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives." Find more information at: www.deathcafe.com.

you so that they will be there for you when you are in need. Rather than struggling to be wealthy enough to rent a car when yours breaks down, you can rely on being able to borrow a friend's car when yours is in the shop. And rather than chasing a big pay-check that may well be attached to a job you hate, you can invest time in trust-building with folks with aligned values. In the end, as fallible as people are, they are more reli-able than numbers in a bank account or words on a deed. Furthermore, they have the capacity to meet an essential need that money simply cannot: the need for connection.

At deeper levels of cooperative organizing, you can significantly reduce your need for material gain by being a part of systems of sharing. Car share programs, commu-nity living with plenty of shared resources, and Community Supported Agriculture (where people share in both the risks and the bounty) are all examples of tangible systems that increase our security through social organizing rather than having to climb the ladder and going it alone. This re-framing of security also makes you far more immune to things like market crashes, which can suddenly wipe out all of that "security" you've spent years accumulating.[23]

Don't forget politics

Politics matter. Much of what we are talking about in this book, includ-ing cooperative systems of the kind we are describing, would be far easier within a different regulatory and support framework. As much as many of us find politics distasteful, good policy can make good culture a lot easier to embody, and bad policy has killed more than one cooper-ative urge. Some of us involved with this cooperative culture transition are going to need to enter politics if we really want the world we are envisioning to manifest.

Yana waded into politics during 2019 and 2020 (while writing this book) and ran for the US Senate to represent Wyoming. While she lost the primary, she came in second of six candidates. While spending 14 months in a competitive dynamic wasn't much fun at times, she opened up a number of conversations that don't normally happen in politics by bringing her cooperative culture framework with her and insisting that we talk about how our economy is structured, what it means to develop policies based on love and care, and the importance of having ecolog-ically responsible federal policies. Even when we lose these races, we can see the attempt as a contribution to culture change.

Self-Check

Is the idea of a house, a car or a bank account shared with others more exciting or terrifying? How often do I ask people for tangible help or to borrow something? Am I comfortable doing that? When I have something that can meet a need for someone else (or vice versa), am I more interested in meeting the need or completing a transaction?

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23. This kind of cooperative systems organizing was the focus of *Together Resilient: Building Commu-nity in the Age of Climate Disruption*, the companion book to this one.

Dialogue Prompts

- Growing up, I was taught that security is . . .
- A way I still exhibit this belief is . . .
- This works for me when . . .
- The cost of this is . . .
- Something that would be different if I relied more fully on relationships for security is . . .
- Then I would feel . . .
- Saying this to you now, I feel . . .
- I appreciate you in this conversation in that . . .

OR

- Something I don't have enough of in my life is . . .
- This is important to me because . . .
- When I think about it, I feel . . .
- The reason I don't have enough is . . .
- A way community could help me get more of it is . . .
- Asking for that feels vulnerable because . . .
- Something I could ask for is . . .
- When I ask for that, I will feel . . .

Exercise 10.1: Contemplate Text or Art

Many aspects of culture shift can be engaged through reading powerful writing, or engaging with art. This activity describes two options for deep engagement using a quote that relates to this Key in particular. We encourage you to adapt the activity with different pieces of text or art to work through other concepts.

Recommended text:

> "If we are looking for insurance against want and oppression, we will find it only in our neighbors' prosperity and goodwill and, beyond that, in the good health of our worldly places, our homelands. If we were sincerely looking for a place of safety, for real security and success, then we would begin to turn to our communities—and not the communities simply of our human neighbors but also of the water, earth, and air, the plants and animals, all the creatures with whom our local life is shared."[24]

Response Structure A: Discussion

Contemplate, journal, or discuss with some friends:

- How is this different from how you have thought of security?
- What would it mean for your life if security were seen as being grounded in your neighbors and your relationship to the land?
- List 5 things that the mainstream culture tells us we need in order to be secure. Do you have these things? What is your actual experience with trying to get or maintain those things?
- List 5 things that are more in line with Berry's approach to security. How would having those things affect you?

Response Structure B: Dwelling in the Word[25]

1. Read the text once out loud, then rest in silence and contemplation.
2. Have a different person read the text out loud then rest in silence again. Group members respond with one word or phrase that struck them.
3. Have a different person read the text out loud a third time, then rest in silence, then group members respond with longer thoughts.

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24. "Racism and the Economy" in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry*.

25. We're borrowing the "Dwelling in the Word" structure from a religious practice of that name.

✦ Exercise 10.2: Cardstorming

Cardstorming takes a brainstorm to the next level. It is kinesthetic and ends with the group taking significant ownership over the organization of their material. Yana has used it for a wide range of situations, including project planning, visioning, and large public forums on charged topics (such as police violence in communities). Like everything, it goes best when there is a background of shared purpose, but whether that purpose is at the level of living together, or coming together as diverse constituents to address a county-wide need doesn't matter. It is in this Key because it strengthens the sense of a community being in it together and building security and shared understanding collectively.

Do a brainstorm on a topic, and scribe it up on a flipchart. Leave a little space between each item, and make sure to just have one item per line. Once you are done, cut the scribing into strips of paper, with one item on each strip. (For very large lists, have someone queued up to quietly do the cutting as sheets are filled up as it can take a fair bit of time to do.) Throw the papers on the floor, and give the group these really simple instructions: "Organize it." It is important to not be directive about how they will do this or what kind of framework they will use. Debating that and coming to agreement spontaneously is part of the power of the exercise, and you will wick away some of the group's power if you get too directive with this.

Once the group starts forming clusters of strips, the facilitator can get involved and help the group come up with headings for each cluster. One of the advantages to this exercise is helping people take in and digest more easily the work the group did in the session. Brainstorms often leave people feeling a bit overwhelmed at the end with a list of many, many things. Having 7–10 clusters to remember is much easier.
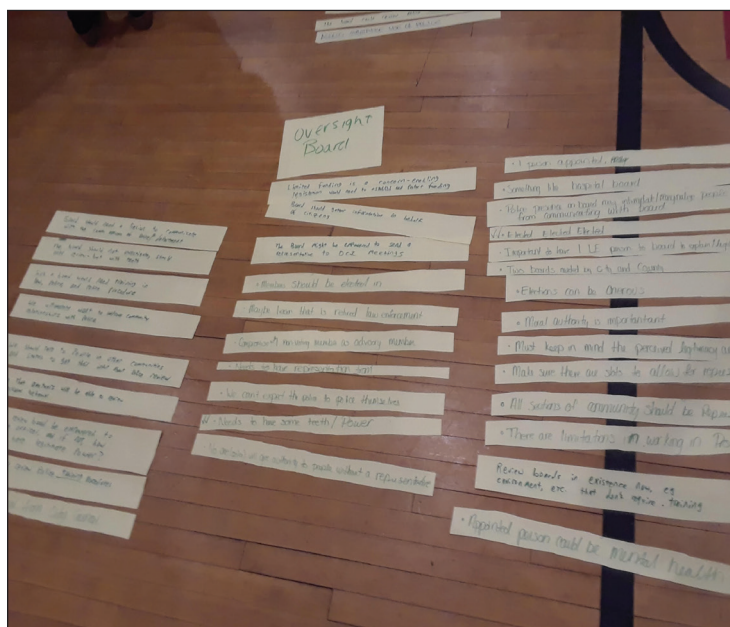
Example of a cluster from a county-wide meeting on responses to police violence in January 2019. Photo credit: Yana Ludwig
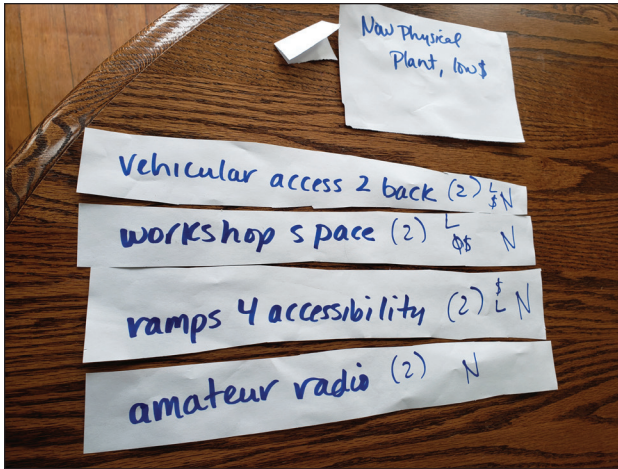
Cluster from a land planning session.
Photo credit: Yana Ludwig

Having the group do the organizing also saves the facilitator considerable time between sessions, because the group has already done that work. Finally, it reduces the likelihood of getting pushback from the group on the organization when the work comes back for further consideration at a later meeting.

Accessibility Note

The beauty of this exercise is that it allows people with different skills and abilities the chance to participate as it works for them in the different phases. And people often get creative. One older woman in one of Yana's workshops who couldn't get down on the floor to sort used her cane to move strips of paper around. We suggest paying attention to anyone looking left out asking if they'd like help participating.

Key #11. Differences Are Good

Mainstream Culture

One of the core operating principles of mainstream culture is that differences are a threat. As the world has gotten smaller and more diverse groups of humans intermingle, defensiveness around differences is causing increasing problems in society.

We continue to instill it in our youngest children. In kindergarten, we stood boys in one line and girls in another. Many of us were handed a piece of paper with 3 apples and an orange and told to cross out the one that doesn't belong, training us to eliminate the differences we encounter. We choose to hang out primarily with people who look like us, fail to include diverse perspectives in textbooks, and tend to vote against our values in favor of voting the way we think our peers will vote.

Among the most frightening examples of this trend are the recent resurgence of white supremacist violence in our culture and the consistently high rates of murder of trans women of color.

Those dynamics have echoes in our meetings and group culture. We fail to say something that differs from the norm for fear of rejection. When someone does offer something different from what we offered, our response is to feel that we are being contradicted or belittled as individuals rather than that someone simply has a different take than ours. We risk dismissing creativity and diversity because it is uncomfortable.

Counter Culture

The counter culture actually replicates a lot of this, though in more nuanced ways. We establish our groups based on values that are more comfortable and nurturing for us, but then defend those values with the same rigidity displayed by mainstream culture. We often feel a threat to the group when differences within it are articulated. An extreme case is groups that define the rest of the world as "other," and enforce sameness within all members. More commonly, group members experience nervousness when someone new shows up with different ways of speaking, or with different needs the group has never been asked to meet before.

In response, we may insist that someone either stuff their needs, "code switch" (meaning change their language and behavior patterns in order to be accepted), or suppress some needs. This often happens automatically and unconsciously with even the person doing the switching not always realizing they are doing it.

This is one of the ways that the intentional communities movement (which Yana has been deeply invested in for over two decades) has stayed very white. If white people in a community are not willing to endure some discomfort as different ways of speaking, relating, and looking come into our communities, we will never become

racially diverse. "Not seeing color" is a way of trying to avoid this discomfort, rather than making changes to truly welcome people of different races as they are.

Sometimes even longtime members of a group show up with differences due to life changes, such as the birth of the first baby in the group or the first person to experience a chronic illness or mental health crisis. These differences can threaten the comfortable norms of a group, even when they arise within the existing membership of that group.

Cooperative Culture

Retraining ourselves to lean into differences as positive, rather than threatening, is a core skill of real cooperative culture. It helps to think of different ideas as adding to the creativity and innovation of a group, rather than taking something away.

This is also a pathway to deeper diversity in our groups, and thus a major social justice issue. Most cultural differences bring not only challenges to stretch but also a broader perspective and skill set. Finding ways to welcome poor people into our groups, for instance, can mean having someone involved who knows how to survive on less when an economic downturn hits. When we resist differences because we don't want to stretch, we also weaken our groups in the long run by rejecting the new assets people can bring with them as part of that package.

This plays out differently in different situations. In general, traits that are likely to bring genuine diversity into groups include the willingness on the part of the current or dominant group to question their own assumptions, and a practice of curiosity to understand what is real for the newcomers. Curiosity is both a mindset[26] and a skill. Choosing to be curious, particularly when judgment is more natural, builds the curiosity muscle needed to find common ground and welcome in new energy and diversity.

Self-Check

When someone new comes to our group, am I more curious or protective? When I enter a new group am I more likely to sit with people who look like me? When a new idea surprises me, do I lean in with curiosity or become rigid?

Dialogue Prompts

- In childhood, the first time I remember noticing that someone was different from me was . . .
- My response at that time was . . .
- The usual response around me at that time was . . .
- As an adult the differences I'm most likely to notice are . . .
- A strategy that I use to eliminate differences is . . .

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26. Much of the work in this book relates to mindset shift. Changing the way we think or what we expect can dramatically impact how we behave and what we experience. To explore this further, we recommend reading *The Upside of Stress* by Kelly McGonigal, PhD.

- When I do that, I feel . . .
- A strategy I use to engage around difference is . . .
- When I do that I feel . . .

OR

- When something doesn't make sense to me, I usually . . .
- When I do that I often feel . . .
- When I dismiss a new idea, the result is often . . .
- A way I could be more curious might be . . .
- If I did that, the result might be . . .
- And I would feel . . .

Exercise 11.1: The 8-Minute Life Story

1. Choose a particular identity the group sees benefit in exploring. This works well with race, class, gender identity, (dis)ability, and basic childhood experiences such as growing up in rural, suburban, or urban environments.

2. Ask each person to prepare an 8-minute* version of their life story as told through the lens of that chosen filter. For instance, "Tell your life story through the lens of race. You will have up to 8 minutes to share your story."

3. Sit in a circle and invite each person to tell their story. There is no cross-talk (see Glossary) during stories. If there is enough time, you can leave a couple minutes for questions after each person speaks, or not. If you are not doing questions, ask for a pause in silence for 30 seconds or so after each person. Because this activity is a vulnerable one for many people, let people go as they feel ready, rather than in any kind of predetermined order.

4. Once everyone has told their story, open the floor for comments on themes and differences people heard.

Note: Yana originally designed this as a precursor for anti-racism training for a nonprofit organization, but has since used it at conferences as a stand-alone on race, class, and gender. It can probably be used for a variety of purposes, but be clear when you present it what the context is.

*For bigger groups, you may need to designate a somewhat shorter time, but don't go below 5 minutes. Longer than 8 minutes tends to encourage rambling. You can also choose to schedule two sessions for this. The upside to not everyone going in the same round is that fewer people will be distracted with their own impending story.

Exercise 11.2: The Seven Steps To Differentiation and Connection[27]

Stand across from someone. Make eye contact. Speak each line, giving space and eye contact between each.

I Acknowledge
your otherness.

I Accept
your otherness.

I Affirm
your otherness.

I Appreciate
your otherness.

I Admire
your otherness.

I Advocate
your otherness.

I Adore
your otherness.

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27. Source: The Door to Wonder by Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt.

Key #12: Consensus With Healthy Boundaries

Mainstream Culture

Many group decisions in the US are made either by direct vote, or by electing (via a vote) someone who then gets to decide or gets a vote on the real decisions. Most of the rest are made by a single authority figure (a judge, owner, or manager).

In all of these cases, it is likely that some individuals do not get what they want or need, often with little or no opportunity to make their case or offer alternative options. Owners or majority voters power over others without any requirement to take minority needs into account. People get their way by organizing themselves with like-minded others—political parties, cliques, and factions. We learn in school that this is fair, either because of ownership rights (in the case of a business owner), or because "everyone gets a vote," and clinging to that story of fairness denies the reality of unheard voices and unmet needs. It's a way of creating winners and losers, often with the losers feeling the outcome is anything but fair or just. Furthermore, these processes favor only the most obvious solutions and strategies, discouraging creativity and compromise.

Counter Culture

For people tired of those dynamics, consensus (in theory at least) sounds pretty good. It aligns with values of hearing everyone, avoiding power trips, and meeting the needs of all. Unfortunately, simply adopting the structure does not assure these results. When bad consensus practice leads to failure, the fact that many of us went into it wearing rose-colored glasses makes those failures even more painful and frustrating. It's one thing to fail to do right by each other through a system that was never really designed for equal participation; it's quite another when the system that fails is one that has fired our imaginations for a better world.

In an effort to never leave anyone out, consensus groups often strive for completely flat power relations . . . and devolve into an ineffective powerlessness. Completely flat power relations are a good urge that becomes bad implementation without discernment. Our efforts to value everyone equally in every conversation often leave us without a clear center. The result is that we are unable to make meaningful decisions and fulfill our mission. And when things start to unravel, often the competitive dynamics reassert themselves and further undermine our efforts to be fair and inclusive.

Cooperative Culture

A successful change in culture requires consensus *with discernment*. This means that we listen and try to take everyone into account, but the power is centered in the

values embedded in the group mission, rather than in a collective of individual operators. For some groups, this is the hardest and most vulnerable thing we have ever tried to do.

Discernment of mission and expertise is much easier when we can trust that people are in the group first and foremost to fulfill our mission. Thus having some kind of membership process for groups is very important. Then we can use the mission as an impartial arbiter to tell us if someone is really a good fit or not.

Learning from Occupy

One of the best known spaces in recent memory where consensus was tried and fell pretty flat was the Occupy movement. Yana got to work a couple times with Occupy groups that were struggling, and what she saw was that the practice of allowing anyone into every decision, with no healthy boundaries, caused a lot of pain and frustration. There was no required training in the groups she worked with, and anyone who showed up on a given day was able to participate in decision-making, even if they had none of the background. (Some Occupy groups did better than others with this, especially a little later on, but it is nonetheless a good example of why the lack of discernment hurts good process.)

It also allowed people who were not really part of the movement to come in and disrupt the process regularly. We strongly recommend having at least some bar that people need to meet to be able to participate. This can be consistency of showing up, training, demonstrating a real commitment to the work of the group, a formal membership process, or some combination of those criteria.

One way to discern whether a prospective member is a good fit is to ask ourselves whether the needs they are expressing fall within or outside of the group's purpose. If you know and regularly reference the group's purpose, answering that question becomes a real possibility, and it is hugely beneficial to the group in the long run to do so. This allows you to decide membership based on whether you have a match of needs and mission, rather than passing judgment on the value of the person or the legitimacy of the needs themselves.

We must take into account the varying knowledge and experience of group members, explicitly *not* valuing everyone's voice equally in all things. The person who has worked in an area for many years probably knows more than the person who just read an article online: valuing their input equally for the sake of an abstract notion of fairness undercuts the group's effectiveness. While this may feel unfair in the moment, being in a group is ideally a long-term relationship, and over time different group members will carry the influence of expertise in turn.

Discernment comes into play in another way: As we begin to adopt cooperative culture it can be challenging to know the difference between following a collaborative *structure*, such as Sociocracy, or Agile, and actually *acting in a collaborative way*. One indicator is the extent to which people feel disempowered or sense that they are not

being heard. If someone believes they are being run over, odds are there is work to do. It may be that the group needs to change something about how it is operating. (A particular case of this is when a marginalized person points to marginalizing behaviors the group is not seeing, and those comments are dismissed by the group.) It may also be that the individual needs to change how they are showing up or do some personal work around their reactions. Probably what will be most effective is a combination of personal and group work.

Self-Check

(For people in groups that use consensus): Do I block consensus based on my own wants or on the shared values of the group? When I talk about consensus, do I focus more on the inclusion it brings us, or the length of meetings to reach decisions?

(For all): Am I able to distinguish my needs from the needs of the group? Do I express both, with clarity about which is which?

Dialogue Prompts

- I know our collaborative process is working really well when I see or hear . . .
- One example is . . .
- When power starts to feel out of balance, what I feel in my body is . . .
- My emotional response is . . .
- My instinctive response is to . . .
- Something else I could do would be . . .
- I think the group is best served when I . . .

OR

- In group decision-making, I feel most vulnerable when . . .
- My vulnerability serves the group well in that . . .
- My vulnerability is good for me in that . . .
- Vulnerability doesn't work for me when . . .
- Afterwards I most often feel . . .
- A suggestion I have for myself with working on group decisions is . . .
- Telling you all of this, I'm feeling . . .
- Something I appreciate about you is . . .

Exercise 12.1: What Touches Us?

This exercise is particularly useful when a group is dividing into sides and gathering lots of data and logical arguments in support of each side. When this happens it is useful to connect to the emotional part of the brain, or what Karen calls the "Heart Space."

Introduction Script (adapt to fit your group and situation):

Our group has been looking at the cognitive or logical side of this topic. In mainstream culture it would be usual at this point for each of us to be mentally drafting our most compelling argument to win debate points for our side. For the next few minutes I invite you to set all of that aside (it will still be there if we need it later) and pay attention to the limbic part of your brain where most of our decisions are made.

If you are comfortable, close your eyes, imagine our project—*(fill in the details of the change being proposed or similar).* In that space, notice how your body feels, because our bodies are often the first places our emotions show up. Where in your body do you experience tightness or release, lightness or discomfort? What are the feelings that go with that? Notice your passion, or fear, or sadness, or joy, or excitement, or pain, whatever you are feeling as you imagine—*(fill in as appropriate).* What touches you?

We are going to move into a time of sharing and hearing one another. *(Describe process below.)*

Structure

Round—Call on each person in turn to share.

"What touches me is . . ."

Facilitator invites the group to mirror or reflect.

A member (or members) of the group mirror(s) each person. (Facilitator may have to allow silence for this to happen.)

Depending on the needs of the group this activity may be followed by more processing (paired mirroring, small group, a response round), by a proposal and decision process, or simply a closing round with participants responding to the prompt, "Leaving this meeting I'm . . ."

✦ Exercise 12.2: Contracting

"Contracting," as used in the therapy world, is the art and practice of getting consent for a path forward. In the most formal and legal sense, a contract is a written agreement. Sometimes a written agreement will make sense in community as well, but it's important to note that the value is not the image of an agreement (i.e., a signature), but the actual agreement or consent that the signature is assumed to represent.

At the other end of the scale are informal, often very small agreements, which can be just as powerful. In the midst of a workday, you might say to someone nearby, "I'd like to use this tool now, does that work for you?" Or relationally, "I want to be sure I heard you, would it be OK if I mirrored it back?" These "mini-contracts" can reveal places where there is a lack of alignment while maintaining the agency of each individual. Adopting a practice of seeking consent is a powerful shift in culture.

Practice: Facilitate a short meeting. At each step, consciously ask the group for consent to do what you are doing. This may feel a bit like "Mother May I?" at first. It becomes more natural with time.

After the meeting, request feedback from the group. Were you successful in contracting? How did it feel to others? Were there points when they didn't feel they had agency to request something different?

Some examples of what this shift looks like in a meeting:

Common	Contracting
It's 5:00, we are going to begin now.	I see it's 5:00, are we ready to get started?
You all received the agenda. The first item is . . .	Has everyone seen the agenda? Do we need to make any changes?
We're going to do a round on this topic.	I think a round would be useful here, does that work for everyone?
We're running out of time so the last item will be held over for the next meeting.	I'm tracking the time and see that we're running out. Would it be OK to hold the last item over to next time?

Notes

- In high-functioning groups, objections will be rare and useful. If the whole meeting is getting bogged down by constant objections, you may need to do some work on areas of culture shift around trust and safety or facilitation training.
- In time you will get good at discerning how much and how often contracting is useful.
- Exercise 14.1: Micro-consent is a more personal example of contracting.

Key #13: Hierarchy Lite

Mainstream Culture

We are all very familiar (though often deeply uncomfortable) with the notion that some people or groups of people are better than others; many people see this as just inherently true. Wealth is seen as a reward for the inherent goodness of the wealthy. Racial hierarchies abound in many people's ways of thinking, and questions about whether men or women are inherently better at some things are accepted as reasonable perspectives and debates to be having, *because hierarchies themselves are seen as inherently right and good*.

Beyond birth-entitlement, we also accept "earned" hierarchies (which may or may not be truly earned, but are often at least in part a result of social privilege). One of our primary measures of success in North America is summed up in the concept of "climbing the corporate ladder." The idea is that rising above others is a measure of success.

Hierarchy starts young

Hierarchy training comes early as we enroll our children in schools where teachers function as benevolent dictators. Children are directed most of the day with little if any opportunity to express their own needs or ideas about how to meet them. When there is a problem between children, the usual approach is to appeal to an adult who will declare the solution, often one that is unsatisfactory to all the children involved. By high school we begin to include children in the selection of hierarchy as they vote on class presidents, prom queens and kings, and perhaps team captains. Young adults emerge from these systems with a clear sense of how to wield authority and very little skill in consensus-building.

Counter Culture

On the other hand, many people have rebelled against this and completely thrown hierarchy out as an organizing model. Often group culture defines hierarchy as always inherently evil, with a resulting resistance to management or delegation of any kind. In some groups, any leadership energy is interpreted as a power grab, and a sign of bad intent.

Another common counter culture phenomenon is denial that the mainstream culture's hierarchies still exist. Thinking we live in a post-racial or post-sexist time is almost as damaging as believing we should keep those hierarchies around forever, because it ignores the ongoing damage of those hierarchies and disempowers those who are working against them.

Cooperative Culture

The shift we suggest here is from hierarchy being a "natural good" to it being a useful tool when used with discernment. "Hierarchy lite," as Yana often frames it, is hierarchy as a useful tool that should be deliberately and consensually used when it is helpful to keep things organized and moving along. This version of hierarchy is always created to meet a particular need for structure, efficiency, and accountability, and it is frequently temporary.

For instance, you may have a project in the works that needs a manager. Instead of having someone permanently in authority, you might create a short-term managerial position that dissolves once that project is over. This allows you to choose the perfect person for that particular application, rather than having a permanent manager of all things related to an area, who may not be the best person for each project that area is handling.

> ### Collaborative leadership models
>
> A number of worker-owned cooperatives Yana has worked with have a dynamic, shared leadership model. Instead of one manager, there is a management team. If a co-op is small enough, everyone might be on this team. Often job descriptions are more fluid, and responsibility for some aspects of making the business work is passed around regularly. This can spread the less pleasant work out over time, and also lead to a much more robust leadership team, with more people having direct experience with more aspects of the work.
>
> The Sustainable Economies Law Center has a fun variation on this where each responsibility is printed onto a card, and they literally pass the cards around. Check out their Worker Self-Directed Nonprofit model for this and other innovations in the spirit of hierarchy lite: www.theselc.org.

One important element of this sort of hierarchy, particularly if the position lasts more than a short time period, is a system of review. The group should pause from time to time to give feedback to the manager (or other role) and in some cases consider replacing them, either because there is a better option for the role at that time or because the current manager needs to step down.

This model is more agile and specific. It emerges and dies back organically. And most importantly, it keeps the power to grant (and rescind) people's managerial responsibility firmly with the full group. It also ensures that no one person stays in authority for long enough for power lines to harden and become inflexible.

Self-Check

Does our group delegate tasks based on skill or expertise? Do we change leadership regularly? Do we review roles, give strong feedback, and make changes when warranted? When I'm in spaces with traditional hierarchies, am I more comfortable at the top, middle or bottom of the hierarchy?

Dialogue Prompts

- When someone else is in charge I feel . . .
- When I am in charge I feel . . .
- When no one is in charge I feel . . .
- Leadership works well for me when . . .
- Then I feel . . .

OR

- What is working well in our group around hierarchy is . . .
- What is not working well in our group around hierarchy is . . .
- What I can do to make this work better is . . .
- Ideas for systemic changes that might help our group are . . .
- Saying this to you I feel . . .
- Something I appreciate about you is . . .

Exercise 13.1: Feedback Sequence for Leaders

Regular feedback is essential in groups for ongoing self-improvement of the individual members and the group itself. For leaders it serves two additional purposes. First, it checks for alignment between the impact of leadership and the mission of the group. Second, and particularly relevant to this Culture Key, it confirms or corrects the delegation of hierarchy lite. If there has been a miscue about which decisions belong to the leader, feedback can reveal them.

Structure

0. Self-reflection.
1. Listen to the feedback, and reflect it.
2. Attend to your own emotional reactivity.
3. Ask, "How are they right?" or use Validation (Exercise 2.1).
4. Share any ways that the feedback giver may not have had complete information about the situation.
5. If needed, repair damage or change behavior.
6. Move on.

Breaking down the steps in more detail

0. Self-reflection.
   This is step 0 because good leaders are constantly doing self-reflection and course correction. If we are paying attention to how people are responding to us, and being willing to get curious about those responses, we can go a long way to heading off most negative feedback. Body awareness helps immensely with this. If you notice yourself tensing up in someone's presence, or notice that you feel nervous interacting with someone, it's best to pause and ask yourself why. Whether the answer is self-feedback, feedback for them, or just being able to recognize style and needs differences, it is all helpful from the perspective of conscious leadership.

1. Listen to the feedback, and mirror it.
   While it is fine to ask for boundaries around when you receive feedback, you may not always get what you want. Sometimes someone will be willing to set things up at a good time for you and will have their thoughts well gathered and be able to communicate them clearly. And sometimes you are going to get feedback in a very raw form. However you get it, it is best to always start with mirroring it back to them to make sure that you have understood accurately what they are trying to give you. (See Exercise 1.1 Mirroring). Doing this will likely reduce the amount of reactivity you are feeling and hearing it back from you may also help them refine or clarify their thoughts.

2. Attend to your own emotional reactivity.
   This is an almost universally skipped step in the feedback sequence. There are several ways to do this and the best choice will vary from person to person and

from one situation to another.
- Take a deep breath.
- Get re-grounded in your body and gather your immediate thoughts (which some people will be able to do in some cases in just a minute or two).
- Take some time (a day, a week, whatever you need) for processing any deeper reactivity.

However you do it, it is essential for you to get through that initial round of reactivity so you will be able to respond appropriately. "Clapping back" may be tempting (and frequently modeled around us), but it does not lead to deepened relationship, real understanding, or good leadership.

This is a step when getting support from a neutral or "in your corner" friend is appropriate. The goal should be helping you work through what the reaction is about, and the defensiveness that will block you from being able to take in the truth of what is being offered you. The Imago Dialogue (page 182) is a great tool for this. First ask your friend to receive—you may be surprised at what you tell yourself! If it feels useful you can switch to receiver role to hear your friend's perspective.

Cross-cultural dynamics

There is an important caveat when the feedback is about race, gender, etc: do not run to your Black friend, or the one woman who usually agrees with you, or whoever is part of that group asking for support as your "in my corner" person. Don't ask marginalized people to comfort you or to contradict what another marginalized person said. And always get consent first if you are going to ask for their take on it.

We further want you to be mindful about not invoking "my time in the Peace Corps in Guatemala" or "my transgender nephew" or the like as a way to deflect the realities of people of color and other marginalized people. That kind of "information" is not what we mean on step 4.

Part of becoming more relational culturally is to engage with the truth of the people you are in relationship with within your groups and social circles, even if their truth challenges your assumptions about the world. We want leaders to hold themselves to higher standards around this, being a model for anti-oppression work within your groups.

---

3. Ask, "How are they right?"
   (Exercise 2.1 Validation and Exercise 2.2 Mine, Not Mine are alternative exercises for this same work.)
   If you've gotten support from a friend to manage your reactivity, you may want to continue engaging them to help you see clearly how the feedback has a grain (or large nugget) of truth in it. Some people prefer doing this on their own. As

long as what you are doing is effective, it's fine to do this according to your own preferences and style of personal growth and self-reflection.

The end point of this step may be any of the following or any combination of them:

- Identify a couple of minor but impactful course corrections. Small solutions sometimes solve big problems.
- Recognize that you are not a good leader for this person given their needs.
- Do a major life reboot as you take in the negative impact you are having on someone(s) around you or on the group's mission.
- Prepare a request of the feedback giver, being willing to accept their answer even if it is to decline your request.

Whatever comes out of this, this is the time to re-engage with the person and share what you are seeing.

4. Share any ways that the feedback giver may not have had complete information about the situation.
Note: The sequence here is really important: only after steps 2 and 3 have been completed do you move on to step 4.

It is wise to begin this step by asking the person, "Would you be willing to hear some new information about this?" Often people in leadership roles are holding a lot more balls than people with more discrete involvement in a project are aware of. There may also be life limitations or circumstances for you that affect your ability to be the best leader for this person, and if you can share those with vulnerability and humility, that can also be healing.
There may be nothing on this step to share, but because relationships are a two-way street, it is important to be real and share if there is something.

5. If needed, repair damage or change behavior.
Apologies and owning up to things don't change anything on their own. The pieces of truth you identify in step 3 need a response from you in terms or reparation and changes. This step should be negotiated between the two of you. It's not something you do in a vacuum. Either suggesting or requesting suggestions is appropriate. (See Exercise 14.2 The Art of True Apology for how to implement a good apology.)

6. Move on.
This can be the hardest step for some of us. If we have really owned up to something that we can see was hurtful or damaging to an individual, or is undermining our group's mission work, it can be easy for some of us to stop trusting ourselves or to become overly cautious and afraid to act further.
While some newfound self-awareness is a good thing, abandoning the work completely is a form of counter-productive self-absorption. If the work was important for the world in the first place, you need to get back in there after step 5, and relearn how to show up.

Note

Although this exercise focuses on receiving feedback, we wanted to include a suggested format for giving it as well. In the ideal world, feedback would occur between a skilled giver and a skilled receiver. Most of the time this will not be the case. The best you can do is bring as much skill, and useful structure, to the role you have in that particular feedback session.

Suggested format for giving feedback:

What I feel in my body when you are . . . is . . .

What I like about your work/leadership . . .

A suggestion I have . . . OR

Something that would make your leadership more effective for me . . .

Exercise 13.2: Cooperative Culture Leadership Qualities Exercise

Hierarchy lite works best with good leadership. It's handy if people arrive with strong skills, but in any case, the group's resilience will be enhanced by helping people grow these skills. Recognizing strengths and weaknesses, as this exercise will help you do, is a great start. This exercise includes a partial list of traits that cooperative leaders often have. Feel free to add more!

Worksheet—We recommend that each individual fills this out including their individual perspective for Part 3. Follow the writing with group discussion.

Part 1: WHO?

Contemplate who in your life has embodied each of these traits. List them below. Consider: Were they in any kind of formal leadership role? If not, how did their presence affect the people around them? Were they leaders in an informal way? If they were in a formal role, how did these traits help them be effective?

Accessibility	Fairness/Justice	Courage
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Curiosity	Commitment/ Determination	Directness
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Compassion/ Understanding	Honesty/Integrity	Vision
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Part 2: ME

Consider: Which of these traits do you have most strongly? Which do you struggle with? If you've ever been in a leadership role, how did it go? Can you see ways that you could strengthen your own leadership?

List the traits above ordering from the one you feel strongest in at the top to the weakest at the bottom.

Strongest   *Notes*

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

Weakest

Part 3 (for groups): WE

How are these traits rewarded/recognized or punished/de-valued in our group? What is our vision of what we want from our leaders? Do we even value the concept of leadership at all? List the traits in the two columns below. A trait may fit in more than one of the columns. Discuss as a group.

Rewarded/Recognized   Punished/De-valued

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

This last piece can lead to a powerful group discussion of what you, collectively, want from your leaders. There are often unspoken and contradictory beliefs about leadership in our groups. Being deliberate, discerning, and transparent about leadership expectations is an important trait in healthy groups.

Key #14. Share Emotions Well

Mainstream Culture

We all know the script, deployed upon bumping into an acquaintance:
"Hi, how are you?"
"Fine, thanks. And you?"
This script has developed as an efficient and comfortably distant greeting that lacks authentic sharing of emotions. We are expected to follow this script regardless of whether our favorite uncle just died, we are having a truly horrible day at work, or the sun came out for the first time in a long while. It is one of many examples of cultural norms where open sharing of emotions is discouraged. This comes out of the competitive nature of our culture, where sharing more intimate and real details is vulnerable, potentially coming back to us later in a weaponized form when someone uses it against us.

Counter Culture

We've all encountered someone who regularly responds with such a waterfall of stories and emotions the recipient feels overwhelmed. This kind of over-sharing without discernment about the right place and time lacks sensitivity to the needs of the receiver. The result is rarely empathy. Increased distancing is more likely as people pull away from someone whose sharing is overwhelming, or worse, growing resentment if they feel compelled to stay and listen.

Cooperative Culture

Sharing well means paying attention to your own needs as well as those of others. It means sharing authentically as much or as little as fits in the space. One useful practice is asking for permission to share. Something like, "Actually I'm having a really great/terrible day, is now a good time to tell you about it?" can make a huge difference. A culture in which everyone feels safe to ask this question, and to answer it authentically in turn, will result in appropriate sharing and an ability to hold one another in good times and bad.

This general approach to sharing also applies to meetings. Cooperative culture depends on welcoming each individual with their emotions and their emotional intelligence. It is important to establish norms in which it is OK to say "I'm not sure why, but this proposal doesn't feel right," or to check in for a meeting with the news "I'm having a really rough day and feeling pretty distracted." How much the group explores those feelings will depend on the circumstances and the needs of the group at that time.

Self-Check

When I unexpectedly bump into someone I know, do I give authentic information about how I am doing? Do I share an amount that is appropriate to the situation? Do I ask whether there is capacity for more and gracefully accept the response? Do I let them know if they are sharing more than I am willing to receive?

Angry and hysterical women?

Paying more attention to oversharing can be tricky for women, and especially women of color. There are long-standing patterns of *any* emotional sharing being interpreted as anything from hysteria (which was once a medical diagnosis resulting in a hysterectomy—note the linguistic connection) to aggression (particularly among women of color, no matter how calm they are, when they are saying anything the listener doesn't want to hear). Be wary of interpreting reasonable sharing of emotional content as manipulative. Also recognize that there may be times when someone has some pent up charge to what they were saying because they are used to needing to amp up their communication in order to be heard.

Dialogue Prompts

- In my home growing up, the sharing of emotions was . . .
- As a result, my approach to sharing emotions now is . . .
- That works well for me in that . . .
- That does not work for me in that . . .
- A stretch for me would be . . .
- I think that if I did that, my relationships would be different in that . . .

OR

- Today I'm feeling . . .
- The easy part for me to share is . . .
- A more challenging piece that is still appropriate might be . . .
- What makes it hard for me to share that is . . .
- I appreciate you because . . .

Exercise 14.1: Micro-Consent Practice

Consent is an essential element of appropriate sharing. Some people are very skilled at reading others and may be able to navigate consent non-verbally, particularly with people they know well. Most of us will need the words, especially as we are getting to know someone, and using them will help us gain non-verbal skills as well.

This exercise has two roles: the Consent Seeker and the Consent Giver or Denier.

Start standing across from your partner, and practice micro-consent, using this format:

Consent Seeker: Ask a question, one that begins with something like, "Can I . . . ?" or "Will you . . . ?" Once you have asked the question, sit in patient silence until the Consent Giver or Denier answers.

Consent Giver or Denier: Checks in with themselves about the request, and answers however they want to, giving consent or denying it.

Both: Do or don't do the thing.

Consent Seeker: Thank them (whether they said yes or no).

Repeat for 3 minutes with different requests. Examples of things you might ask for consent to do: touch their shoulder, look at them, sit next to each other, ask them a (non-charged) question.

Switch roles and repeat the exercise.

Debrief afterward. What came up? What was hard? What was easy? What was surprising? Leave enough time for this debrief so that if something hard came up, you have time to stay present with each other to explore that respectfully.

Note

This is NOT an opportunity to give someone feedback, or to test their boundaries. The point is to get better at asking for something cleanly and without expectation of outcomes, to become more aware of what we do and don't want, and to practice saying a clear yes or no. Depending on your relationship with the person, you should try to exercise good discernment about what level of intimacy in the asks is appropriate and will help you build connection and relationship. We recommend always starting with easier and less invasive asks no matter what your relationship is.

Exercise 14.2: The Art of True Apology

Mainstream culture doesn't teach anything particularly useful around apologies, and in fact what passes for an apology a lot of the time ("I'm sorry that you feel bad") is almost always more deflection than owning and repairing damage in our relationships. These five steps are essential for a really complete apology. Done well, this can open the door to genuine healing.

Note: This is recommended for times when something was genuinely damaging to a relationship. We don't expect you to trot out a full, lengthy apology for a small mistake. Remember that one of the core principles of cooperative culture is discernment! You also want to use this primarily in places in your life where there is a relationship you have some investment in. If you don't, something this elaborate can be pretty awkward.

Structure

1. Own what you did or said, or didn't do or say.
2. Recognize the impact your act had on the other person.
3. Express sincere regret and apology.
4. Offer to make amends in a manner that helps rebalance the relationship.
5. Invite the person's feedback.

Example of the art of true apology

Between members of a car co-op:
(Steps 1–2) Ali, Martin just told me that when I got the car back really late on Thursday without calling you, you ended up missing your doctor's appointment that had been scheduled for three weeks.

(Steps 2–3) I'm really sorry! I know you've been super stressed about your health and really needed to talk to your doctor, and I imagine you were probably pretty angry, and probably wasted a bunch of time getting ready for an appointment you didn't make. I was really sloppy about the time, and I see that had major consequences for you.

(Step 4) I've thought of a few things I can offer to try to make it up to you. Can I make the calls for you to get you another appointment? I know that doctor charges a missed appointment fee, and I think I should cover that for you. I thought of a few things I could offer, and wonder if one of these might be helpful to you? I could drive you to the appointment, babysit your children while you're there or weed your garden?" And I'm really, really sorry.

(Step 5) Would some of those ideas work for you?

Tips

Think about the setting for the apology; try to set it up in a way that will express care for the other person, and will feel like a moment that is different from daily life.

Make them tea, clean up the kitchen before they arrive, make sure you won't be disturbed, etc.

Do not include excuses or transferring blame to someone else. Background is OK, especially if it includes an insight into something you've learned from the situation about yourself.

Whatever you are offering for relationship repair needs to feel *to both of you* like real repair. If the person doesn't like your idea, it is your job to do the work and be OK with that. This kind of out-of-sync idea generation for what constitutes repair happens often when people are more out of alignment culturally, and may actually uncover ways that you have deeper work to do on your relationship.

Do not expect immediate reciprocation, or even acceptance. If you need some kind of follow-up, set up a time later to receive that. However, if the person reciprocates, or even gives you feedback, do your best to be gracious in receiving it (even if it isn't done perfectly). Remember that you only have access to some of the information about the situation, and if you missed something in your own contemplations, you want to hear about that (particularly if it relates to the impact on them that you might not have fully understood).

Finally, don't expect comfort from the other person. What you "get" out of the apology is an internal return to integrity, and the possibility of relationship repair. No one is obligated to offer you anything in return.

Key #15. Share Resources Well

Mainstream Culture

A surprising amount of American law exists simply to protect property rights and wealth. This makes sense in light of societal values and goals. Owning your own home is a classic sign of success. It never occurs to us that *access* to things could be achieved by anything other than ownership. This is a manifestation of the individualism that is so pervasive in our culture that most of us don't think to question it.

Thus, we are obsessed with *owning* everything we need or want. The value of individual ownership was amplified by a misleading, but famous economic study articulating the "tragedy of the commons," which describes the way common property may be misused or exhausted without systems that ensure equitable distribution. We see a lot of that play out in companies polluting our collective environment without taking responsibility for that, and sometimes find ourselves as individuals needing to take more than we give because we are not paid enough to survive without doing so.

Our mainstream culture embodies a lot of the downfalls that *The Tragedy of the Commons* described. The push for personal ownership is in part an attempt to not have to deal with our perception of other people abusing the commons: if I am in sole control, I'm the only one who gets to decide how this thing will be used.

Counter Culture

The opposite extreme is sharing everything without customs or rules for equitable shared use, a practice of "anything goes." "Anything goes" leads to nothing going well for any of us. Unfortunately, we have seen real examples of this in counter culture spaces where people feel very nervous about being seen as controlling others. Rather than working through differences, everyone simply takes what they need when they need it and no one can count on shared resources still being there when someone else needs them. This isn't secure for anyone.

Cooperative Culture

Fortunately for us, *The Tragedy of the Commons* was challenged by Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrum[28] not too long after it came out. Ostrum added significant nuance to our understanding by finding a lot of examples where sharing did go well and resources were not depleted, and documenting what made it work. People are actually capable of sharing well with each other, within certain parameters. Capitalism encourages disregard for the commons, but that indifference is neither necessary

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28. See Ostrum's work on her eight principles for managing a commons, in *Governing the Commons* (1990).

nor inevitable. The key to sharing resources well is clear agreements, boundaries, and accountability.

Sharing supports stronger relationships, and a sense of interdependence. Frequently a borrowed tool comes with great advice about how to use it. The interaction around the sharing is the kind of touchpoint that leads to increased knowing of one another, slowly building intimacy and safety and inviting vulnerability.

> ### Calm kitty
>
> Karen once borrowed a cat carrier; it arrived with anti-anxiety cat spray she hadn't known existed, and led to a much calmer cat. This sort of expressed generosity increases trust and builds social capital that will be needed when there are disagreements later on.

Sharing resources well is the cultural element that offers the most potential gain in terms of ecological sustainability. This is most easily seen in the context of ecovillages and income-sharing intentional communities that emphasize the sharing of common spaces, cars, food buying, and meal preparation, and alternate energy equipment, among other things. The social skills needed for and built by sharing open the door for significant reduction in consumption of both energy and stuff, and at a cost of markedly less money and time.[29]

> ### Race, class and sharing
>
> As with much of the content in this book, there are important social justice considerations around sharing. It's easier to share when you have things in common with the group members. Differences like race and class bring up a lot of feelings around sharing property. Noticing who you are comfortable asking to borrow from or lending something to can reveal unchallenged biases. It can also be a lot easier to lend stuff out when you have a lot or have the money to replace things if something gets broken or lost. On the other hand, people with fewer resources are often much more used to sharing as a survival technique. In short: it's complicated. Sometimes you may have to have sticky, hard conversations about race and class in order to create sharing systems that truly work, or to understand why someone isn't interested in participating.

Self-Check

Am I attached to objects that I own? Do I feel uncomfortable borrowing or lending? Do I worry more about loss if someone misuses shared things than I think about

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29. See *Together Resilient: Building Community in the Age of Climate Disruption* for a much more complete description of this phenomenon, and lots of examples of more discrete systems of resource sharing, from car shares to co-working spaces, local currencies to neighborhood gardens. See also Yana's 2013 TEDx talk: *Sustainable is Possible! (And it doesn't suck).*

the gain of more available resources? Do I have a bunch of stuff that I rarely use, particularly the same stuff my neighbor has and rarely uses? Does sharing happen most within subsets of the group, and if so, can I discern where the lines are between people who will and won't share with each other?

Dialogue Prompts

Repeat this set of prompts for stuff, time, and money separately:
- When I think of needing to use a shared resource, my first thought is . . .
- I think I learned to think this way when . . .
- This relates to my feelings about borrowing and lending in that . . .
- What feels vulnerable or challenging about this is . . .
- What feels good about it is. . .
- Something I think we might have in common is . . .

Exercise 15.1: Inventory of Sharing Potential

Often our sharing of resources is limited by lack of awareness or by systems that make sharing more difficult than it needs to be.

Instructions

1. Make a list of resources that are commonly owned by your team or community, but rarely used or under-used.
2. For each item determine why it is underused.
    a. People don't know about it.
    b. It's physically hard to access (locked up, on a high shelf, etc.).
    c. It's systemically hard to access the thing (sign-up, it moves around, etc.).
    d. There are too many of the thing, either commonly or privately owned.
    e. The person or people who manage the thing are unpleasant to deal with.
    f. The cost of using the thing is too high (cleaning, fees, etc.).
    g. It's not really needed by our group.
    h. Other.
3. Pick 3–5 things from your list and consider solutions that would result in more sharing, or better use of shared space. Consider in particular if another team or connected community might benefit from using it.
4. Pick 1–3 solutions to act on.

✦ Exercise 15.2: Fishbowl

Fishbowls are a bit of an odd duck facilitation format, rarely used but very useful in some particular circumstances. They are used when everyone needs to hear or witness a conversation, but having everyone participating in the conversation would be counterproductive. A fishbowl is essentially a witnessed subgroup "meeting."

How it works: Have most of the group in chairs in a big circle, and then set up a small circle inside that, facing inward. Invite key players into the center of the circle to have a focused, uninterrupted conversation, while the rest of the group just listens. The facilitator is still active in helping keep the conversation on track if needed, but many fishbowls are more self-facilitated because the small numbers lend themselves to a more organic conversation.

You will almost always want to set this up ahead of time, where the people who will be in the center know it is coming. Some people love being in a fishbowl and others dread it. Be kind to your more introverted group members and make sure they have advance warning and have said yes.

Variation: You can have this be a fixed group or have an "open" chair that people can move into as they are so moved. Generally with an open seat, the facilitator will protect the initial group having time to do a solid round of conversation and only then open up the seat for someone else who has something to contribute to add themselves in.

Some examples of how you can use a fishbowl:
- A handful of people have the real **expertise** on a topic, and if they agree to a solution, the most important things will be well taken into account and the rest of the group can more easily agree. This use of a fishbowl can also serve an educational purpose, bringing the rest of the group along with the expertise. Make sure to give everyone a chance to ask questions once the fishbowl portion of the meeting is done.
- A committee/subgroup/board are **balancing really complex stuff**, and having the group listen to that balancing act can help everyone build some empathy for how challenging the task is and build trust that the subgroup is capable of really taking everyone into account. This is especially useful if that subgroup has already worked through stuff and would feel frustrated by everyone else in the group raising things they've already thought through and figured out a good answer to. It can save a lot of time for everyone to just eavesdrop on the process. Again, questions should be welcome after the fishbowl is over
- **Debriefing** something that happened in the group where a few people were involved first-hand (they would be the people to start with in the center) but others have also been affected. This is especially useful if there are rumors proliferating.
- **Conflict resolution** is the other application, but it comes with some warnings. First, this MUST be 100% consensual on all parties' parts, and set up ahead of time. (See the sidebar for an example of this not being done well.) Second, you have to have a really good reason for doing this, such as when the conflict

is centered on a few people but has been affecting a much bigger portion of the group.

> ## Fishbowl gone awry
>
> Yana once made a bad call around a fishbowl for a group she was working for. Several group members had recently been in a facilitation training with her and were eager to see this one in action. They made the request, she said yes, but instead of taking the time to set it up well, they winged it.
>
> The situation was a hybrid of conflict work and debriefing. Unfortunately, this situation violated the "must be fully consensual" rule for conflict work, and it turned out that a couple folks felt peer-pressured into doing it, but didn't really want to. The added layer of vulnerability and lack of consent meant that we seemed to make some good progress in the moment, but in the weeks right after the retreat, the hard feelings rebounded; things had not actually gotten better. Take this as a cautionary tale: consent and pre-planning are really, really important for this format!

Key #16. Conscious Power

Mainstream Culture

In traditional culture, power is assigned to roles, and that power is claimed and implemented by the person(s) occupying the role. Often people aspire to a more powerful role and reach it by capitalizing on the failure or misfortune of another. Examples include being a King, Head of House, CEO, President, or Leader. People familiar with social justice work will probably have noted that these kinds of roles are traditionally (and still more often than not) filled by wealthy white men.

Traditional power roles often come with a false narrative that they are earned. More often, they are the result of privilege and the education, connections, and favoritism that come with it. While privileged or anointed leaders can certainly be responsible and even kind, they rarely have a full understanding of how their actions impact others with less privilege.

Counter Culture

As the domination associated with power roles has become less accepted in society, groups have turned away from hierarchical structures and attempted to organize themselves in structures that give equal power to all. Unfortunately, deciding to have equal power for all does not make it so.

Generally, power continues to be exercised in unconscious ways, what might be called denied power. Systems appear to share power, while cultural norms and learned behaviors continue to give more power to some individuals and less to others on the basis of race, gender, wealth, intelligence, personality type, and more. This is often denied power in the sense that those who possess it are not comfortable claiming it even as they benefit from it and often actively wield it. When someone notices the power dynamic and attempts to address it, those wielding power tend to get defensive, reaching for anything from polite denial to violent crackdowns.

Cooperative Culture

Power differences in groups and organizations are unavoidable and often useful. Power in and of itself is not actually a bad thing. We *need* to exercise power in order to be effective and get anything done. Organizing is the collectivizing of power and is the core mechanism for social change.

So the goal is not to indiscriminately eliminate differences in power, but to be conscious of where power is held, what impact it has, and whether the power difference is helping or hurting the group. When the elevated power is related to expertise, trust, skill, or capacity it can often be very useful for the group, particularly when it is balanced by other people holding elevated power in different aspects of the organization.

Power is most harmful when it can't be talked about. "Speaking truth to power"

is an attempt to make it transparent and alter an unjust balance in power. When that speech is met with curiosity and a willingness to hear the impacts one's use of power is having on others, change becomes possible more quickly and peaceably.

Key components in any healthy power conversation will include identifying and articulating power differences, and giving and receiving feedback related to power differentials and potential abuses. Ultimately our goal is shared power, and we will never get there if we can't have these conversations.

The unintentional bulldozer

The authors have seen this example more often than not in struggling consensus groups: There is at least one person in the group who frequently dominates decision-making. They may even be passionate about consensus, have read at least one book about consensus, and quote its tenets. Their intention may be solidly around including all voices and equal power.

This person also speaks more than others. Decisions of the group almost always align with this person's beliefs, wants, or needs. They often overestimate their ability to act in alignment with other group members' wants, needs, and perspective. They are generally well educated, well spoken, and hard working, also almost always white, older, and wealthier than the median of the group. Others in the group sense that they are being run over or bulldozed by these leaders and neither the leader nor the person experiencing the situation as "bulldozing" really understands why. The patterns of behavior are so familiar, and so normal for us, that some folks in the group may not even see it. It's important to note here that the behaviors that maintain this dynamic belong not only to the leader in question, but also to the group that responds to that leader in a way that maintains the mainstream power culture despite a choice to use a consensus structure.

Self-Check

Am I aware of power differences in the group? Am I aware of areas in which I have more and less power? Do I accept and use power when it is useful to the group, and do I do it transparently? Do I point out power differences when I see them and note whether they are useful or harmful?

Dialogue Prompts

- A way I have more power than others in my community or team is . . .
- A way I have less power than others is . . .
- A situation where I think our group fails to notice power differences is . . .
- The result tends to be . . .
- If the group became conscious of the difference, what might change is . . .
- Something I could do to increase consciousness is . . .
- Something I think we might have in common is . . .

Exercise 16.1: 101 Ways to Get Power in a Group

There are obvious ways to get power. There are also subtle or nearly invisible ways. The reality that what is invisible to one person is often obvious to someone else adds complexity to power dynamics. Leaving aside, for the moment, questions of good and bad, this exercise works with a list of 101 ways to get power in a group. *(Note: this list is incomplete.)*

Instructions

Step 1: Read through the list and note the ways you get power in groups. (This can be done as a general exercise, or specifically related to one group you are a part of.)

Step 2: Read through it a second time, thinking about ways that *others* get power that you find irritating, offensive, or problematic. Mark them in a different color or with a different symbol.

Step 3: Use the questions at the end for journaling or group discussion.

1. Through election or appointment.
2. Being a founder of the group.
3. Being socially savvy in the group's culture.
4. Being articulate in the group's language.
5. Kindness and service to others in the group.
6. By reputation.
7. Being emotionally stable.
8. Being emotionally unstable.
9. Being willing to speak up.
10. Not caring about the impact your words and actions have on others.
11. Caring about the impact your words and actions have on others.
12. Having good insight into human nature, or your particular group.
13. Working hard on group goals.
14. Knowing your strengths and finding a niche where you can use them.
15. Being well informed about a topic.
16. Not being well informed about a topic, and asking to be caught up.
17. Being friends with powerful people.
18. Being friends with rabble rousers.
19. Being willing to help others out.
20. Being socially engaged and connected to others.
21. Withdrawing emotionally when distressed.
22. Getting vulnerable when distressed.
23. Expressing emotional charge tied to specific requests.
24. Being charismatic.
25. Caretaking others.
26. Being mean or harsh when others are suffering.
27. Encouraging growth and honesty in others.
28. Being honest and trustworthy.
29. Having good judgment.

30. Not giving up when things get hard.
31. Giving up when things get hard.
32. Repeating yourself a lot.
33. Having healthy boundaries with others.
34. Having unhealthy boundaries with others.
35. Being physically or verbally intimidating.
36. Long-term commitment to the group or its goals.
37. Having abundant energy.
38. Sharing your excitement and getting others excited.
39. Sounding like you know what you are talking about.
40. Genuinely knowing what you are talking about.
41. Being confused or going stupid.
42. Having a lot of strong opinions.
43. Rarely having an opinion.
44. Being competent.
45. Being fun.
46. Nitpicking.
47. Being grounded.
48. Carrying yourself with authority.
49. Being attractive according to group standards.
50. Having resources you are willing to use to support group goals.
51. Having resources you are willing to withhold to get your way.
52. Saying anything that comes to mind without editing.
53. Carefully choosing your words.
54. Fitting a similar demographic profile to most people in the group.
55. Being part of a noticeably different demographic profile from most people in the group.
56. Talking a lot in the group.
57. Needing to be drawn out in order to share your perspective.
58. Holding grudges that are publicly known.
59. Being flexible and able to let things go.
60. Hiding how you really feel about things.
61. Expressing how you really feel about things.
62. Not resolving conflicts.
63. Encouraging your friends to dislike the people you dislike.
64. Gossiping.
65. Being seductive.
66. Being mysterious.
67. Being gracious.
68. Being quick to judge.
69. Being a skilled bridger of different perspectives.
70. Playing people off each other.
71. Facilitating meetings.
72. Setting group agendas.

73. Having an unspoken agenda.
74. Controlling communications.
75. Writing communications.
76. Being a good listener.
77. Being a poor listener.
78. Being a teacher within the group.
79. Withholding what you know, especially if paired with judging the outcome harshly.
80. Being easy to get along with.
81. Being difficult to get along with.
82. Being sensitive to group energy.
83. Being insensitive to group energy.
84. Having your speed of thought and action match the group's culture.
85. Not having your speed of thought and action match the group's culture.
86. Exhibiting patience.
87. Exhibiting impatience.
88. Following group protocol before acting.
89. Not following group protocol before acting.
90. Asking for what you need or want.
91. Not asking for what you need or want and blaming others when those needs aren't met.
92. Threatening to leave the group.
93. Digging heels in about staying in the group past the point of helpfulness.
94. Being willing to do a wide range of work to benefit the group.
95. Not being willing to do a wide range of work to benefit the group.
96. Being late.
97. Consistently being on time.
98. Not showing up for commitments.
99. Consistently showing up for commitments.
100. Telling people what they want to hear.
101. Speaking for other people, especially when it means not owning your own feelings.

Questions for contemplation or discussion

1. Can you think of other ways to get power in a group?
2. Is there any overlap between what you do and what bothers you when other people do it?
3. Do you think your answers are different in different contexts? Do you have a sense of what those differences are about?
4. Are there healthy ways you can think of to address the ones you find most problematic?
5. How and on whose behalf do I use the power I have?
6. How is power used in our group to get things done?
7. How is power used in our group to prevent things from happening?

Some additional notes for facilitators of group discussions on this topic

As you hold the container for this conversation, it's useful to track and draw attention to some common patterns. Often increasing perception is a solution in itself. Below are some patterns we see often and would encourage you to highlight as they arrive in your conversations.

1. There are really two core questions about power in a group: How do you get your power? And how (and on whose behalf) do you use your power? Any thorough conversation about power needs to include both of those pieces, because there can be abuse on both fronts and there can also be responsible expressions on both fronts.

2. It is also important to unpack it if someone feels like they are using their power well and others don't. It's often this gap between self-perception and what others perceive that gets us into trouble.

3. Behaviors that draw people to you tend to amass power; however, behaviors that cause people to want to avoid you can also increase your power. Why? Because people often alter their behavior (including speech patterns, what they are willing to talk to a person about, and whole proposals) based on not wanting to deal with someone. Being anti-social and difficult are potent ways to wield power. Someone who presents as socially difficult can actually be wielding considerable power within a group, and indeed for some people, *it's the only way they have a voice*.

4. Covert or "sideways" power expressions are often indicators that folks aren't able to find more direct ways of having influence by following the (usually unspoken) rules. While sometimes this is a matter of someone's personality (the "contrarian" or "rebel" embraced as an identity) it can also be a sign that the group is only functioning well for people who play by the rules or who are existing in a privileged state where their easy ways of interacting closely match the culture of the group.

5. Power is not only the ability to get things done, but it is also the ability to *prevent* things from getting done. Power dynamics involving someone who prevents group movement are often a lot harder to talk about than the ones involving people who are more overtly using power.

Exercise 16.2 Chart Speakers

One common power imbalance is the order and length of speech in meetings. The first, last, and most frequent speakers often have greater influence than others, as do those who speak the longest.[30] The simplest way to address this imbalance is simply to notice and name it. There are several methods of varying complexity for tracking or charting speaking turns. In each structure below, it is useful to note speaking roles like facilitator or timekeeper and perhaps separate or eliminate tallies for speech related to those roles. We note that collecting and sharing the data may be all that is needed to resolve the problem.

Structure A: Tally

Have one person use a list of participants to tally each time someone speaks.

Structure B: Timer

Using a list of participants and a timer, record the amount of time each person speaks, totaling each person at the end. This can be charted as a percentage of total speaking time and reported in a graph.

Structure C: Chart

Write participants' names in a circle around the outside of your paper. Each time someone speaks, draw a line from the previous speaker to the current speaker. Share the visual representation of patterns. For an additional view, you can mark the first and last speaker on each topic with a star or similar.

Structure D: Yarn

In a "real time" demonstration similar to charting, during the meeting pass a ball of yarn from speaker to speaker. Each person holds the yarn and tosses the ball to the next, creating a web of yarn that charts the patterns.

It can be good to do this for several meetings, since we all have meetings where we have more and less to say and a single meeting may not give you an accurate read on people's talk time and frequency. It is also harder for people to argue that it is based on one exceptional meeting.

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30. In this exercise we are focusing particularly on speech as a way to have power. We note that while this may be the most common (and easily addressed), there are many others. See Exercise 16.1: 101 Ways to Get Power in a Group for a broader look at power dynamics.

Key #17: Beyond Narcissism

Mainstream Culture

The United States has the highest rates of diagnosed narcissism in the world. Much of that comes from the constant push to be "the best." This becomes a self-per-petuating cycle as people who are successful at something may have less need to care about others as a practical daily reality. They can use money to meet their needs, while others have to rely on relationships. Economic success buys the right to callousness and many people working toward economic security emulate the behaviors of people who have already "made it." Existing without any significant giving and receiving is a profoundly isolating way to live.

Counter Culture

There is also another cause of narcissism.[31] Living in a mainstream culture that fails to meet the needs of many, each individual has little choice but to focus on their own needs; this often means expecting groups to meet our emotional needs. We hope for some balm on our wounds from the wider culture, and a place where it is safe to work through trauma and grow.

Those urges are utterly understandable and sometimes this works beautifully in groups. However, when someone insists on intense emotional caretaking from groups, narcissism can again manifest and draw a lot of energy from our groups.

Cooperative Culture

When we recognize that our value is neither tied to achievement nor to our ability to attract attention, then we can deepen into emotional security and bring who we really are to the table, needs and all. When we are able to find ways to get our various needs met in appropriate places of mutual aid (see Key #9), the groups we are part of can play their right roles in that: no more, no less. Finding that balance results in groups that are both more functional and more caring.

In an interdependent, collaborative world, we learn to check our egos by building our capacity to both give and receive with grace. (Everyone has an ego; the challenge is to keep it in balance with our awareness of the group and the group's needs.) We act because it is the right thing to do and we are able to do it, not because we get anything from that action. In this way we de-center our individual needs and center the group's.

In particular we recommend that group members actively practice asking for things (see Key #25). Borrow a tool, request a ride. The best way to create a culture in which it is OK to ask is to start asking, and graciously accepting any answer. The corollary

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31. This phenomenon is explored in painful detail in Ken Wilber's book, *Boomeritis*.

is that when asked, it is important to answer authentically, even when the answer is "no." When you tell me "no," it lets me know that I can ask another time and not fear that you will martyr yourself. Giving and receiving things that we can comfortably share builds connection and trust while making the best use of resources. When you tell me "no" it also gives me a real time self-check: was my ego OK with that?

> ### Shared meals are terrific practice
>
> Intentional communities often practice this skill through common meals. In this practice, one or two community members cook for the whole community. Although the cooking duty is passed around with all taking turns, there is a strong sense of cooks giving and others receiving a meal each time it happens. Communities sometimes miss this aspect of common meals and switch to potlucks, which can be easier to organize. While some of the social benefits do carry over, the cultural impacts are fundamentally different. Learning to give and receive in a structured meal program begins to create the shift that leads to broader culture change.

Self-Check

When there is an accomplishment in my community or team, do I celebrate the success of the group, or do I seek to assign credit to individuals (myself or others)? Is recognition for my work more or less important than the task completed for the group? Do I have spaces in my life where I can go to get my needs met, and there is mutual consent for that?

Dialogue Prompts

- A time I remember being recognized for my contribution was . . .
- When I was recognized, I felt . . .
- The healthy part of my response was . . .
- A way in which my ego may have been too much the focus was . . .
- A time I remember having a strong sense of group accomplishment was . . .
- My part of that was . . .
- Sharing the credit with the group as a whole felt . . .
- A growth edge for me in relation to ego and group credit is . . .

Exercise 17.1: The Gold[32]

Part of using ego appropriately is to become aware of how our personality traits impact others. Often we think of traits as good or bad. This is rarely an accurate assessment. Generally each trait has both positive and negative impacts depending on how we use it. This exercise will help you notice both and better use your traits for the good of the group and yourself.

Step 1:

Identify a trait within yourself that you think of as negative. It may be something that you have heard from others as feedback, an internal story you have about yourself, or a trait that you recognize in others when you find them annoying and have to confess you have it too.

Step 2:

Looking again at the trait you have identified, consider this: Each negative trait has a positive side, which we'll call "The Gold." For example, someone who is judgmental is likely also discerning. Someone who is passive might also be patient.

Take a few minutes to explore for yourself what might be The Gold of the trait you are working on, writing down your thoughts. Then share with the group, inviting (if you wish), the group's perspective on how the unpleasant trait you have named is also a strength you bring to the group. Reflect on how you can maximize the strength and minimize the negative impact of this part of you.

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32. Sourced from Imago Relationships professional certification courses.

Exercise 17.2: Stories I'm Telling Myself

Consider that our memories are not video recordings. However certain we may be of what we know, from a neurological perspective memory is a construct built on our past experiences, our observations, and our interpretation. To put it another way, a memory is simply "a story I'm telling myself."

Preparation

Create topic cards relevant to your shared work or mission. Examples: marketing, conflict, meetings, sustainability, affordability, diversity, consensus, etc.

Affordability

_____

_____

_____

_____

Arrange participants into groups of 4–6 and give each group a set of topic cards, which they pass out so that each member of the group has a different card.

Activity Instructions:

On your card write a strong belief you hold on this topic as though your belief is the only possible truth. Go around the circle several times, telling a different story each time. (Note: it is best for the facilitator to reveal the prompt for each round one at a time so that participants stretch a little more each time to think of another story.)

Round 1: The story I'm telling myself is [insert the statement you wrote on your card].

Round 2: Another story I could tell myself is . . .

Round 3: Another story I could tell myself is . . .

Round 4: Another story I could tell myself is . . .

Round 5: The story that will serve me best is . . .

Write this story on your card.

Example:

Round 1	The story I'm telling myself is that there is absolutely no way for us to make this project affordable.
Round 2	Another story I could tell myself is that we could at least look for ways to be affordable.
Round 3	Another story I could tell myself is that other communities have faced this same problem and found solutions. Maybe we could too.
Round 4	Another story I could tell myself is that if some of us are willing to pay more, we could make the project affordable for others who have less.
Round 5	The story that will serve me best is that we could ask other communities what they have done.

Additional versions

- In a meeting with strongly divergent perspectives, do a round where each person begins their turn with the words "The story I'm telling myself is . . ."
- In conflict work or when giving feedback or saying anything that may be uncomfortable for the recipient to hear, preface your statement or complaint with "The story I'm telling myself . . ." This leaves room for the recipient's story while fully claiming your own.

Caution: This sort of framing has sometimes been used to dismiss people in marginalized groups (e.g., someone saying to a woman of color describing her oppression, "That's just a story you are telling yourself."). Thus, this is not an appropriate exercise to use for unpacking oppression dynamics. Like most of the work in this book, it is best applied to self.

Key #18. Relationship

Mainstream Culture

"Time is money," they say, and sadly, in mainstream culture, it isn't just time. Everything is measured and valued in economic terms with costs and benefits defined and compared for a determination of worth. We aren't convinced this works all that well for business; we know it's an outright mess in relationships. We say relationships have been commodified when people begin to tally what they are getting and what they are giving. This tallying influences behavior as people attempt to buy favor or favors with their words and actions. When our thoughts about how to engage with a partner, neighbor or coworker revolve around what we will get out of that engagement, or what that person is worth to us, we've lost our way in terms of connection.

This leads to conflict and some really bad decisions in part because we are really bad at tallying. Whether it's a couple doing dishes or a community maintaining common property, people generally overestimate their own contributions (which they see easily) and underestimate the contributions of others (which are less visible). This leaves almost everyone feeling like they are getting a bad deal. The other extreme is tied to low self-worth and assumes everyone else is contributing more. This results in anxiety and insecurity. Both ignore the most important values in relationships, which have nothing to do with who is giving or receiving the most.

Counter Culture

The opposite of trying to get more than you give is making sure that you give more than anyone else. The logic here is, "The more I give, the more I am worth." This ties self worth to productivity in an unhealthy way and tends to create martyrs. Martyrs invest to the point of self sacrifice, expecting that this will be rewarded with belonging and loyalty from their group. Those rewards are rarely delivered, despite the fact that most groups depend on a small percentage of people putting in a great deal of extra effort.

When this is temporary, it can work just fine. When the energy around it involves guilt-tripping or shaming others, or when it creates lasting power imbalances, it's a problem.

It's also a problem if the people doing all that extra work are building it on top of unacknowledged privilege that other group members don't have. If the reason they are able to work for the group an extra 20 hours each week is that they are, say, retired with a nice big savings account while others are raising kids and working three crappy jobs just to survive, telling the rest of the group how they are doing more than their fair share is disingenuous and harmful to relationships, even while it is true.

Cooperative Culture

The ideal is an ethical relationship in which we are able to see and relate to each other as full human beings with a range of needs, feelings, and gifts, and where an ebb and flow of giving and receiving happens over time. The focus is on the relationship. The measure of value is the sense of connection and belonging.

Connection can be experienced in any engagement, whether you are giving, receiving, or neither. It's the good feeling you get when you help a child up from a tumble or when a neighbor notices your stress level and brings you dinner. It happens when it's clear that you matter to someone, that you know each other; it happens when you feel the interdependence of relying on each other. We may tell ourselves that the giving and receiving balances over time, and on a cosmic level, it probably does, but even this is a vestige of our commodifying culture. When we fully embody this Culture Key, we stop tallying altogether because what matters is whether we feel connected.

We think connection happens best when all the Culture Keys are working well. This means that we do believe there needs to be strong discernment around things like sharing (Key #15), communication of needs (Key #25) and feelings (Key #14), and more. In other words, it's a complex system, and paying attention to connection rather than other dynamics in relationship will depend on doing some of those other dynamics well.

When relationship is not going well, we feel disconnected. This is when conflict appears, both as an indicator and as a result of disconnection. In this way, conflict is a very good thing. It points us to places where we can become more cooperative, perhaps healing old wounds or shifting unhealthy behaviors. Having tools for working with conflict in a way that balances compassion with discernment can help us to disentangle from competitive dynamics and rewire our relationships for cooperation and the connection we are seeking.

Beware privilege blinders

It is easier to avoid tallying when you are similar to the people you're with. When you have socioeconomic differences, privileged people might primarily see themselves as givers who are being gracious and kind. They might not be able to see themselves as able to receive from marginalized people unless it's in the form of some kind of cultural appropriation, such as receiving "ancient wisdom" from Black or Indigenous cultures, or romanticizing and emulating "ghetto" aesthetics or attitudes.

Self-Check

Do I "keep score" of favors done or received? Do I pay more attention to connection than favor? When/if I do more than my share, does it create resentment (in me or others) or ugly power dynamics? Is my self worth tied to my productivity? Do I experience connection from both giving and receiving from members of my group?

Dialogue Prompts

- When I think of conflict, what I feel in my body is . . .
- My instinct is to . . .
- What works about this approach is . . .
- What doesn't work is . . .
- One thing that would help me learn and grow through conflict is . . .
- If I/we did that I think I would feel . . .

OR

- When conflict arises in our group, we tend to . . .
- That works for us in that . . .
- What doesn't work is . . .
- Something I could do to change that pattern is . . .
- If I did that, the group would probably . . .
- And I would feel . . .

Exercise 18.1: A Brief Exploration of How I Am in Conflict

> Conflict is growth trying to happen.
> —Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt

Spend some time answering these questions about yourself. If you are doing these exercises with a partner or group, pair up and share the most interesting answers with another person. If that person knows you well, consider asking them what they would have said about you on these questions. Sharing these answers with a group or a partner can help them better understand your needs and patterns around conflict.

1a) When I am in conflict with others, I tend to_____.
1b) This helps me in this way
1c) This doesn't help me in this way

2) Remembering a time that a conflict resolved well, it seemed that the key(s) was/were . . .

3a) I think the hardest thing for other people about me probably is . . .
3b) When I'm around someone who also does or is like this, the hardest thing for me about that is . . .

4a) Something I do well that helps my relationships thrive is . . .
4b) When I am around someone who does this I tend to feel . . .

5) The worst thing my friends (can) do when I am in conflict with someone else is . . .

6) The best thing my friends (can) do when I am in conflict with someone else is . . .

Exercise 18.2: Appreciation Dialogue[33]

This is a special case of the Dialogue and is a structure for deeply receiving the appreciation of another. We were likely taught to dismiss or diminish compliments and appreciations. This exercise is about being fully present for the information about how we impact others for good in the same way we would hope to be open to concerns or other kinds of feedback from others.

Sender:

Something I appreciate about you is . . .

Receiver:

What I heard you say is that something you appreciate about me is . . .
Did I get you?
Is there more? *[Yes, as the receiver of an appreciation, you are asking for more, open to more depth and more connection. This will likely feel strange.]*

Sender: *Offers more detail or additional appreciations.*

Receiver:

What I heard you say is that something you appreciate about me is . . .
Did I get you?
Is there more?

Repeat steps above until there is no more.

Receiver:

Summarizes.
Did I get you?

Sender:

Yes OR The thing I want you to hear is . . .

Receiver:

[Validation] What you are saying makes sense to me because I do/am . . .
[Empathy] I imagine that when I do that you might feel . . .
Is that what you feel?
Are there other feelings?

You can then reverse roles, but this is not necessary. Appreciations are offerings, not quid pro quo. Often, letting the appreciation settle and sink in is the ideal next step.

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33. Based on the work of Imago Relationships founders Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt.

Key #19. Interdependence

Mainstream Culture

Swami Satchidananda,[34] a spiritual teacher from India, used to say, "The problem with Americans is that you think you have to do everything on your own." Americans glorify independence and individuality. In this paradigm, we feel deep shame if we can't live up to the standard of independence, and needing anything from others is seen as a character flaw. Given the demands of modern life, this is a set-up for failure for all but the most privileged. The result is social isolation, which in turn contributes to high rates of suicide and addiction and economic struggles.

> ### Independence means fewer cuddles
>
> As Karen was sitting on the beach writing this section she noticed the contrast between herself and a nearby group of friends. Karen had arrived independently prepared for the cool of sunset with her own warm clothes and hot tea. The group of friends were not so prepared, dressed in shorts and carrying only a couple of blankets between them. They kept warm by interdependently cuddling closer together under their few blankets, sharing their body heat. Their laughter and playfulness made it clear that interdependence had the bigger payoff, even though Karen experienced less discomfort from the cold.

There are several particularly vulnerable entities with our hyper-independence. One is young people who may reach "adulthood" (that arbitrary line drawn on your 18th birthday) and suddenly be expected to be far more independent and competent than they are ready for. The second is poor people who generally have a lifetime of disadvantage, yet are somehow expected to fix their challenges on their own, rather than all of us seeing the systemic context they are caught in.

The third is the environment. The North American obsession with driving our cars everywhere, individually packaged everything and private ownership all add up to huge ecological impacts based on our lifestyle. This Key draws a direct line from the social to the ecological dimensions of our lives.

Counter Culture

One response to the hyper-independence of mainstream culture is a hyper-dependence, sometimes paired with excessive caretaking. People may find roles that

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34. It's important for us to note that, while Satchidananda brought a lot of wisdom to the US from India, he was also accused of sexual abuse in 1991. Sexual abuse is unfortunately common in cases when sole leaders have a lot of power, and while he was never convicted of anything, we don't want to gloss over this.

feel meaningful and that seem to offer belonging by making themselves fixers of others' problems and becoming entangled in dynamics that are not healthy. (This is sometimes called "codependence" or "enmeshment.") This becomes problematic when the implicit bargain of caretaking in exchange for belonging and reward is broken—often this happens to women who find themselves without sustenance or a meaningful role at the end of a marriage or the end of their childrens' stage of dependence.

Cooperative Culture

The solution is modeled for us in the natural world where every being, every element, is part of an ecosystem with a unique role to play. No one of those elements could thrive without the others. Harm to any is a threat to all the others. This interdependence is the reality for functional human systems as well.

Ecologists talk about niches in an ecosystem: each organism fits uniquely into an ecological community. Niches develop through an evolutionary process—organisms grow together over many generations to fulfill certain symbiotic (mutually beneficial) roles in each other's lives. Similarly, over time, healthy human social systems develop as people grow together to fulfill certain symbiotic roles in each other's lives. Building a healthy social system requires that we get to know each other and find value in each other's contributions. We must adapt, build new skills, and find new interests that shape who we become in relation to each other and the needs of the whole, interrelated system.

Interdependence means we each have an important niche, and we all are better resourced when everyone shares what we have. This is particularly powerful when we stop keeping track of how much each is contributing or receiving (or whether it's "fair") and put our energy toward meeting the needs of a group in a way that works for everyone.

As we look at our world and our place in it, we see more and more that independence is an illusion. It is essential for us to get good at interdependence, depending on each other in a way that benefits all.

Self-Check

How does owning a car affect my sense of independence? Do I pay more attention to the common good than to what is "fair"? Do I see myself and others as valued members of the team and recognize a wide range of contributions? Can I name the niche I have in each group I am part of? Am I willing to depend on resources which I do not independently control?

Dialogue Prompts

- A time I did something for someone else that meant a lot to them and cost me little was . . .
- As I did it, I felt . . .
- A time someone did something that benefitted me (and perhaps others) and paid the full cost was . . .
- I felt . . .
- As I think about these stories, a pattern I notice is . . .
- I'm learning about myself . . .
- The value I would like to exhibit in the culture we are creating is . . .

Interdependence and challenging conversations

One tangible example comes from cohousing communities. As they are being built, they generally can choose whether to share electricity out of a single pool, paid with community funds, or to follow the more common housing model where electricity is metered per household and each pays based on their own use. The advantage of the single pool is that you save the cost of individual meters, both at installation and in monthly fees to the power company: overall the community will pay less for power if they share it as a group. Many give up these savings for fear that an individual might end up paying "more than their share." They prefer knowing for sure that they aren't subsidizing anyone else over savings for all, even though the potential cost is an insignificant percentage of their overall budget. This is classic competitive culture, each looking out for themselves, and ending up with less as a result.

The alternative is to depend on each other and to accept a certain level of vulnerability. Yes, some households use more power than others. Yes, those choices will impact everyone sharing the pool of energy. Yes, there may be some challenging conversations about that and about individual needs and group needs, with group values around sustainability thrown in. We believe not only that those things are worth the benefit of the savings, but that those challenging conversations are an essential space for building our social ecosystem.

Exercise 19.1: Octopus Exercise[35]

This exercise is an opportunity to experience interdependence physically and spiritually as well as mentally.

Time: 30 minutes total.
5 minutes: Intro.
10–15 minutes: Activity.
10 minutes: Processing.

Introduction

(Describe for group.)

An octopus is an extremely intelligent animal with a unique nervous system. In addition to the octopus' central brain, each tentacle has its own brain. To function, the nine brains must work together, much like an interdependent group of humans. Each brain has its own personality and controls the movement of its tentacle. In this exercise, each person will be an arm of the octopus.

(Optional: In this exercise we will focus on autonomic and nonverbal communication, so I invite you not to use words during this exercise.)

Stand in a circle of 6–8 people. Each person extends their right hand into the circle., palm down. Close your fingers around the thumb of the hand to your right to create a "thumb circle."

Photo Credit: Karen Gimnig

Start by looking into each other's eyes and just sense each other. What if you shared the same blood with each other? What if you shared the same food, the same skin?

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35. The exercise was created by John Buck and refined by Healing Our World (healingourworld. net).

And even if you had a dispute with someone else—you can't get away. You totally depend on each other for your survival. Now just engage, play, experiment . . . see what it feels like . . . play around . . . .

(After about 5 minutes, if not engaging much or moving around, invite each thumb circle group to build a shelter.)

(Reading the energy of the room, determine when the time is right to end the exercise.)

Find a way to release your octopus.

Processing

How was that? What did you experience?

Accessibility Note

This exercise involves touching hands and may not be appropriate for a group with members who are uncomfortable with touch. When Karen did this exercise in a group with a person using a wheelchair, they participated from their chair and others stood. As always, the best practice is to check with individuals and respect their preferences.

Exercise 19.2: A Worldview Walk

Interdependence also applies to our relationship with the physical plane. The way we think of the world around us is incredibly impactful in terms of how we experience our daily lives. The chart below is based on the work of Dr. Viola Cordova, the first Indigenous woman to get a PhD in Western philosophy. Comparing worldviews and addressing biases built into the world of academia were two focuses of her work as she was bridging those worlds.[36] Here are three contrasts between the Western worldview and the particular Indigenous worldview Dr. Cordova describes in relation to the planet:

A Western Worldview	An Indigenous Worldview
"Mother Earth" is a nice metaphor.	"Mother Earth" is literal truth: we come from Her body, and She is always present and supporting us.
The earth is a ball we walk on top of.	The earth is an egg; the yolk is the firm ground, we live inside the white, and the shell is the edge of the atmosphere.
The earth is an inert store of resources, available for our use.	The earth is a living, breathing being.

Activity

This can be done individually or as a group with each person walking alone and then coming back together to share about the experience.

Instructions

Study the chart for a few minutes, then take a walk outside for at least 15 minutes, and "try on" an Indigenous worldview. Do this in silence and notice any ways you feel different, if things look different to you, or if any thoughts arise about the implications of this worldview shift.

Journal or discuss your experience:
• Something I noticed . . .
• Something I felt . . .
• Something I thought . . .
Repeat this regularly in different environments. Let it change you.

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36. See *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V.F. Cordova* for more of her excellent work. Dr. Cordova was a member of the Jicarilla Apache tribe. Yana originally developed this for her Rethinking Sustainability and Encountering Climate Change workshops.

Accessibility Note

If some members of your group are not able to walk, be sure to do this activity in an area where it is possible to sit outside with a broad view—a deck or patio overlooking a varied space, for example—or is wheelchair or walker accessible.

Key #20. Empathize With Circumstances

Mainstream Culture

Capitalism teaches us to look for "opportunities" for financial gain, often at the expense of others. If the housing market falls, we have the opportunity to get a great deal on a house. A co-worker's illness is our opportunity to impress the boss. Corporate owners paying meat packers minimum wage allows us to buy cheap hamburgers.

> ### Kartrina wrecked New Orleans . . .
> ### then vulture capitalism did it again
>
> A dramatic example of this happened during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. A number of companies swooped in with business plans for rebuilding the devastated city with profit as the goal. They turned what had been vibrant communities into places dependent on privatized (and generally more expensive) services. New Orleans shifted from being a city with a vibrant public sector, commons, and strong mutual aid energy to one where people can meet their needs only by buying from these companies. Many people now can't afford to live in the city where they were born.

This is capitalizing on other people's suffering, and generally considered "smart business" despite the material harm it does to others.

When we aren't trying to benefit from a situation, mainstream culture teaches us to protect ourselves from collateral harm. If I spill someone's drink, often my first response is, "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to!" Notice how this turns the focus to me. My concern is less about the mess than that I will be judged harshly.

Counter Culture

Another common response is to disconnect. We offer "thoughts and prayers," which allow us to stay at an emotional and material distance from the suffering of others while feeling like we are good people because we "care." Disconnection also manifests when we make excuses for not helping, often based on quite authentic fear that our help will be received as insulting or negative in some way. We choose to protect ourselves from possible rejection rather than address the real injury we are witnessing. Disconnection isn't opportunistic like the mainstream capitalist response, but it also doesn't help people.

Disconnection and opportunism both serve the emotional and material needs of the people watching rather than the emotional and material needs of the people suffering the losses.

Cooperative Culture

Empathy centers energy on the person who is impacted by the event. It means showing up *with* someone, and if action is going to be taken it will be based on what that person needs and wants, not for the benefit of others or to give an emotional boost to the observer. In the case of the spilled drink, empathy would be discerning the needs of people impacted and doing all you can to help, which may be anything from rescuing a now-wet cell phone, to grabbing some towels, to standing aside so the person can mop up their own lap. In response to a disaster, empathy discovers the need and responds to it. Tipping generously shows empathy for underpaid food workers. Sometimes there is actually nothing that can be done in the moment and in current context and what is needed is to remain present within the pain of the situation; this is also empathy.

Whether the injury is tiny or huge, physical or emotional, empathy leads to the stronger, higher trust relationships needed in a cooperative space.

> ### The discomfort of crossing class lines
>
> While waiting in a grocery line, Karen became aware that the customer in front of her was having trouble paying for her groceries. The woman was taking items out of the bags one by one, clearly trying to decide what she could do without, as the checker removed those items from the total. It occurred to Karen immediately that she could help by offering to pay for the groceries, but she didn't feel confident about how to do it.
>
> What amount would be enough? Would the woman be insulted or ashamed? What if I've misunderstood the situation? Do I give the money to the woman or the cashier? It was easier and more comfortable for Karen to ignore the painful situation despite the fact that she could easily afford to help. After several minutes, she gathered her courage and leaned into the vulnerability of trying to help without knowing the outcome. The woman tearfully accepted the $20 bill. The cashier was relieved, and the groceries went back in the bag.
>
> Karen's takeaway was that empathy isn't always easy, particularly when it means crossing class separation barriers and stepping into a situation that is outside one's experience. The good news is that it's so worth it, and practice helps.

Self-Check

When something goes wrong for someone else, am I able to be present with them? Do I help as I am able to? Can I stay present when I can't help or can't help enough? Is my focus on the needs and wishes of the other, or on my own needs to do something, to feel generous, or to remain separate from the situation?

Dialogue Prompts

- Helping others is easy for me when . . .
- When I can help and don't, it might be because . . .
- A way in which my culture taught me not to help is . . .
- A time when helping was uncomfortable and I did anyway was . . .
- In that moment I felt . . .
- My vulnerability was . . .
- What I learned about myself was . . .
- Something I appreciate about myself in this conversation is . . .

Exercise 20.1: Compassion Exercise[37]

Compassion goes hand in hand with empathy. This exercise can help bring you back to a place of centeredness and reel in projections you may be placing on another person. It can also be used to build group cohesion or as part of a daily spiritual practice.

Instructions

Choose another person to be the focus of this exercise. It may be a member of your community, someone you know, or a stranger you have seen. Do all 5 steps about the same person. With attention on the person, repeat each of the following lines to yourself, pausing for about 5 seconds between each one to let it sink in.

- Just like me, this person is seeking some happiness for their life.
- Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in their life.
- Just like me, this person has known sadness, loneliness, and despair.
- Just like me, this person is trying to get their needs met.
- Just like me, this person is learning about life.

Note: Yana typically does three rounds, prompting people to start with someone easier and work their way up to a person they are in active conflict with or have a lot of judgment about. If folks have trouble coming up with someone for that third round, she suggests picking a politician they don't like, and that usually does the trick.

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37. Original exercise from Harry Palmer, in *ReSurfacing: Techniques for Exploring Consciousness* (updated with gender-neutral pronouns, and facilitator instructions).

Exercise 20.2: Media and Poverty Analysis

The media has tremendous power to influence and reinforce mainstream cultural beliefs. Starting to engage in more media-literate reading of articles is a great way to loosen the grip of competitive, oppressive culture on your mind. Find three recent articles in the mainstream press that talk in some way about poverty or poor people. Articles about social services, charity, and budget planning for people on low incomes are good ones to look at.

Read through the articles, and ask yourself the following questions:

- Who does this article say or imply is responsible for poverty?
- Are there any overtones in how the article is written that convey judgment or condescension toward the people they are talking about?
- Are there assumptions being made about marital status, education, work ethic, or poor people's history? How nuanced are they? Can you think of people in your life whose lives contradict those assumptions?
- Were any poor people interviewed for the article, or is it told from the perspective of "experts" or policy makers only?
- If pictures are included with the article, what messages do the pictures seem to be trying to convey?
- Do you feel more or less connected to poor people after reading these articles? What aspects of the article built or undermined your empathy?
- What have you learned by doing this exercise?

Repeat with articles about other groups. Marginalized racial groups, young people, elders, sex workers, people with disabilities, incarcerated people, people struggling with addictions, and immigrants are all groups that frequently have very biased press written about them.

Key #21. Skills Used to Empower

Mainstream Culture

We place extreme value on what we know and what we are able to do, and that "value" is translated into economic power. These skills are rewarded in school through grades and in the workplace through salary structures. We are encouraged to use our knowledge and skills to gain status, power, and wealth, to "climb the corporate ladder." Keeping others down to claim more for ourselves is a zero-sum game where one person's gain must come from another's loss.

While most of our readers will readily see how this plays out blatantly in the corporate world, it's easy to miss the subtle and unintentional ways it sneaks into communities and social change groups. A master gardener may claim management of the garden intending to use their skills for the good of all, but end up using their expertise as a way to dismiss the tastes and preferences of others. A skilled accountant may combine financial expertise with a conservative value around savings that isn't shared by others and forces an increase in dues. Someone with deep knowledge in your group's focus area may also bring with them an outdated theory of change and impose it on the group because the group trusts them to have good statistics or understanding of the history of the topic. When knowledge is unconsciously employed as power, others often feel unheard and run over.

Counter Culture

As groups shift away from submission to expertise or power, they can land at the other end of the spectrum where no individual credit is given and skills and knowledge are treated as community property. This results in an expectation that all skills should be shared indiscriminately, which is really just a different type of extraction of labor. If you are a painter you can be called upon to paint all the houses. A facilitator may be expected to run every meeting. This doesn't work either as it takes advantage of the most skilled, and may discourage others from increasing their skills or participating at all.

Cooperative Culture

Ideally, we use our skills to empower others, with strong discernment about value exchange and who we are empowering. It may make more sense for the master gardener to share the pros and cons of various crops and then leave the decision about what to plant to the group. A painter may help with supply lists and organizing the work and then lead a team that does the actual painting. A facilitator may facilitate some meetings and have the option to participate without that responsibility the rest of the time.

In all of these examples, skills could be being passed on through on the job mentoring from the person with expertise. This empowers other people and shifts the dynamic away from any hoarding of power. In meetings, we also want to be able to call on someone's expertise to help us make good decisions without also extending too much power to that person in other areas. No one person will always be the expert, and so having good discernment about who to turn to for what is going to strike the healthiest balance for everyone.

Self-Check

When I am using my expertise, do others engage with me (rather than just going along)? When I am using my particular skills, are others gaining those skills? Does the amount of skilled work I'm doing match my capacity? When someone asks me to volunteer my expertise, do I feel flattered? Put upon? Used? Excited?

Dialogue Prompts

- A skill that I have that is useful in my team or community is . . .
- A way in which that skill could dominate . . .
- A time I wish others relied on that skill less . . .
- A way I use that skill to empower others is . . .
- Something I appreciate about you is . . .

✦ Exercise 21.1: Pluses and Deltas

One powerful space for discernment is looking back at a meeting. Did we hear the things we most needed to hear? Were people able and willing to express their excitement, ideas, and boundaries?

Making meeting evaluation a routine part of meetings will point to the areas where your group can continue to grow your skills and shift to a more cooperative culture. There are a couple of key elements to an effective meeting evaluation practice. First, it is vital that both positive and negative feedback be given. Often within the culture of the group, one dominates the other and it is useful for a facilitator to encourage the piece that's missing. Feedback will likely focus around facilitation, but should also include other factors such as the behavior of members, the physical space, and group norms. Second, feedback should become matter of fact, and not just saved for moments when someone has pent up frustrations. Regular practice helps make it less intimidating, so we recommend that it be done at the end of each meeting.

One simple format used by many groups is called "Pluses and Deltas." This is generally done with a white board or similar, making two columns. The Plus (+) column is for things that went well.The Delta (Δ) column is for things that can be improved for future meetings. (Delta refers to a letter of the Greek alphabet used to designate change in mathematical models.)

Depending on the size and dynamics of the group, you can use rounds or simply invite people to volunteer responses. If one side of the chart is routinely being neglected, asking for one side first and then the other can be useful.

✦ Exercise 21.2: Spiraled Rounds

One practice that helps groups utilize the knowledge in a group without putting too much focus on any one individual is Spiraled Rounds. By limiting contributions to one item at a time, Spiraled Rounds encourage more balanced contributions.

Spiraled Rounds are a variation on Exercise 5.2: Rounds. Use Spiraled Rounds to reduce domination by one or two enthusiastic voices, and to make sure less-vocal people get credit for their good thinking on a topic. This format also encourages people to practice discernment by asking them to prioritize their input.

Instructions

1. Spiraled Rounds start with a little bit of time for people to write down their personal brainstorms on the topic, and then to prioritize their lists before you start the rounds.
2. Call on each person in turn as in a standard round:
   a. People can pass if they have nothing new to add.
   b. Ask people to contribute *just one thing* to the conversation during each round.
   c. Have a good scribe record the ideas, ideally in a place that is visible to all. Try to avoid recording the same idea more than once.

3. Start a second round, asking people to only add things which have not been said by others.
4. Continue with rounds until everything has been said. In each subsequent round, more people will pass as their lists are complete (thus the circle gets tighter and goes more quickly each time, and ends up looking like a spiral if you were to "map" it).

Spiraled rounds for report-backs

Karen likes to use Spiraled Rounds for reporting back to the large group after small group exercises. The more common approach is to have one member from each group report. This can result in ideas being left out, particularly if they were shared quietly or if the "reporter" did not agree with them. It can also result in the same idea being reported over and over again if it was common to multiple groups. Spiraled Rounds avoid both of these problems while bringing all the ideas and all voices into the full group efficiently.

Key #22. Beneficial Creativity

Mainstream Culture

Creativity is most directly valued in mainstream culture in a product-for-sale model that only some professionals get to do. Children tend to be identified very young as being artistic or musical, and those who aren't are often discouraged from any expression in creative realms. No matter how much we all benefit from having some people who are producing amazing art, limiting creativity to only those who are identified as talented results in most of us losing access to part of ourselves. When this happens in groups, we operate with significantly reduced potential. We also flatten creativity to mean just "art" in some formal sense.

Counter Culture

Vestiges of this "specialness" paradigm carry over into the other extreme, where art is simply a self-indulgent toy for people whose creativity is expressed largely in isolation. This is the stereotypical tortured but not "successful" artist. This model still preserves the notion that art is to be judged, and that creativity is a narrowly expressed thing.

Cooperative Culture

Creativity has many different expressions, and can be both a simple source of joy and connection without judgment (see the sidebar with an example) and a huge benefit to our communities.

> ### Song circles
>
> Song circles are a lovely example of cooperative culture in action: creative, egalitarian, and actively engaging each other. Yana lived for a number of years in an ecovillage with a regular song circle. They had everyone bring a song to share to teach the rest of the group, or to lead one the group had learned earlier. They simply took turns, going around the circle and leading. Everyone walked away knowing more and feeling better connected to the group. Raising our voices together is an ancient form of community building, and one we love to see a modern rendition of.

Reclaiming creativity as a fundamental right is essential at this time of rapid social change and ecological collapse. So much of the near future will not be able to follow well-worn paths if we are to survive and thrive. Creativity and ingenuity need to be applied in an all-hands-on-deck manner in every endeavor. It also needs to be broadened

to fuel innovation in a wide range of industries. Creativity is needed to answer many critical questions at this time, including:

"How do we live a quality post-fossil fuel life?"

"How do we create communities where elders can age in place?"

"How do we share resources as they become more scarce?"

"How do we organize truly inclusive community and activist spaces?"

Welcoming intuition is closely related to reclaiming creativity. Be cautious of holding too tightly to cognitive data and squashing the more inspired and body-centered urges that arise in our groups. Listen for "gut feelings" of both caution and excitement.

Self-Check

When I have an urge to draw, build or move, do I grab a pencil or hammer or get up out of my chair? Am I aware of my body sensations during meetings and gatherings, and am I able to pause to ask them what they are trying to tell me? When others express unclear reservations, do I get curious or dismissive?

Dialogue Prompts

- Growing up, what I was told about my artistic or creative abilities was . . .
- Hearing that, I felt . . .
- The result of that for my life as an adult has been . . .
- Something I think we might have in common is . . .
- Something I appreciate about you is . . .

OR

- A way I have seen others show up creatively in community is . . .
- A way I show up creatively in community (or would like to) is . . .
- What can be hard for me about showing up creatively is . . .
- When I do it anyway, I experience . . .
- When I don't do it, I experience . . .

Exercise 22.1: 3DT[38]

This is a kinesthetic and intuitive tool for accessing more information about what is happening for you, and allowing you to work through something without endless thinking. For people who are more body-centered, this can be a powerful way to express emotions and learn more about yourself in the process.

3DT stands for Dance, Talk, Dance, Talk, Dance, Talk, and that is literally what you do. With your attention on a situation, stand or sit until you feel yourself wanting to move . . . move until you feel done, then let words arise and speak until you feel done . . . repeat two more times. This is best done with as little editing or rational thought as possible. It doesn't have to "make sense" or be linear and what you say doesn't have to have an obvious connection to where you started. What matters here is the authenticity of what is present and real in the moment.

Afterward, you can think about it and analyze it. You can do this on your own, or with the witness of a group. If you are doing it with witnesses, you can choose whether to invite reflections from the group or not.

One of the more fascinating aspects of the exercise for Yana, who uses it regularly in her own life, is being able to make more intuitive connections between things by noticing (afterward) how the process seemed to have evolved in a certain direction through the three rounds. The benefit of this exercise (in addition to simply getting off your butt for a few minutes) is literally moving through something to get to a new place. When the mind alone isn't leading to a breakthrough, a good 3DT might.

Accessibility Note

For participants who are not able to stand to dance, use language that welcomes movement on any scale . . . hands, for instance, can do a lot of expressing by themselves!

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38. From the InterPlay materials by Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter.

Exercise 22.2: Collective Creativity Inventory

Survey the members of your community or organization with these (or similar) questions:

- What was the last really creative or artistic project you were involved with? Would you do it again?
- Tell us about a creative moment in your life, when you solved a problem, or contributed or did something unexpected or unique?
- What practices, hobbies, or skills do you have that include movement?
- What practices, hobbies, or skills do you have that are creative?
- What practices, hobbies, or skills do you have that are artistic?
- How would you like to have more creativity or art in your life?
- During what kinds of activities do you feel most creative and alive?
- How do you think our group would benefit from more creative engagement with each other?

Share the results with everyone. This can sometimes foster a field of deeper creative engagement with each other and spark ideas for what you could be doing collectively. Use the results of that survey to include these elements in your meetings, workshops, gatherings, and retreats. Yoga, Tai Chi, Music, group or individual art all make excellent opening and closing exercises. They are also useful for exploring values and big decisions as well as creating a sense of community and connection.

Key #23: Good Intent and Good Impact

Mainstream Culture

One of the most toxic aspects of mainstream culture is the constant assigning of bad intent to other people's actions. Social media has made this significantly worse (or perhaps has simply allowed people a way to externalize what has been going on in our heads for millenia). We now get to see some truly awful manifestations of xenophobic negative generalities of whole groups of people on full display, for instance.

Counter Culture

In reaction to this, a lot of people turn into bad-behavior apologists. The generally good advice to assume good intent (a common phrase in the consensus and conflict resolution worlds) often gets interpreted to mean that we should ignore genuinely bad behavior, saying things like, "I'm sure they didn't mean it!" Some versions of gaslighting are examples of this kind of apologia: that really abusive thing couldn't possibly have happened.

Cooperative Culture

One of the most interesting and important contributions that social justice work has made to group dynamics work is the call to draw an essential distinction between intent on the one hand and impact of behaviors on the other.

Balancing an assumption of good intent with good discernment about the impact of behaviors walks the line we need to walk in order to create a truly just and fair world. If we can address issues at the level of behavior (when you do this thing) and impact (the impact I experience is), we have a much better shot at actually getting things to change. Assignment of bad intent clouds the issue more than it elucidates, and the reality is that very few people are doing the irritating or damaging thing explicitly to hurt us or derail the group. No one likes being painted as evil. When we sense we are being attacked, we shut down our ability to hear and therefore work through the conflict.

Assuming that they have a story that makes sense to them, and getting curious about what that might be, begins to shift the pattern. (See Exercise 2.1: Validation) At the same time, understanding that you get to have boundaries with others' behavior is the core of being able to separate intent from impact. Sometimes understanding the actual intent makes the behavior easier to tolerate. Sometimes it doesn't. Regardless of what a person meant, their behavior has tangible effects on the people around them. If we engage from a place of curiosity rather than an assumption of bad intent, it becomes much easier for people to receive feedback and take requests for change seriously.

Similarly, learning to receive feedback with an understanding that it is the impact, not our intentions, being called out opens the door for us to be able to much more readily hear what we need to hear in order to change. This is particularly important when receiving feedback from people who experience our behavior as racist or sexist. When a marginalized person tells us that we have committed a microaggression, it is vital to honor their experience of our impact and avoid making excuses about our intent.

Self-Check

When I dislike the behavior of someone else, am I able to identify the behavior and its impact on me without making assumptions about intent? When my behavior is received badly by someone else, am I able to take responsibility for my impact even when it is not what I intended? Have I read any social justice writings about impact versus intention?

Dialogue Prompts

- When I feel hurt, a story I often tell myself is . . .
- Another story I could tell myself is . . .
- What I most want is . . .
- The story that would help that to happen is . . .
- If I told myself that story, my response to being hurt would be . . .
- And I would feel . . .

Exercise 23.1: Impacts Telephone Game

Materials

Blank Paper and pen/pencils.

Instructions

Everyone sits in a circle or around a table together, and starts with a blank sheet of paper. Each person writes a positive intention they might have in their community at the top of their sheet. Examples: Cheer someone up. Make the community more comfortable. Save money.

Once everyone has written something, they pass their paper to the person on their left. Each person looks at the intention written on the paper they now have, and writes an action they might take to achieve that intention. They then fold the top of the paper back so that only the action is visible, and not the intention.

Once again, everyone passes their paper to the left. Each person now reads the action they have just been handed (without peeking at the original intent), and then writes all the possible impacts they can imagine that action having on members of the community or group.

One last time, everyone passes their paper to the left. Reading the action and impacts, people then circle the impact they think is most likely in their community. Once they've made a selection, everyone can unfold the top of the paper to reveal the original intention. Go around the circle and read out loud the full sequence from intention to action to most likely consequence and talk about the disconnects.

Discussion

- Something I noticed . . .
- Something that surprised me . . .
- What feels familiar about this . . .
- What this tells me about our group . . .
- What I learned about me . . .

Exercise 23.2: Right Distance Mapping

Yana has a theory that we can get along with just about anyone, as long as we are at the "right distance." With some people, right distance is in your bed; with others, it is the other side of the world. Fortunately, with most people, it is neither extreme. You may be able to live in community with some people, even if you don't particularly like them, but being on a committee together just doesn't work. Some folks you can be cordial to when you meet them on the street, but being in a regular social circle together would cause more rubbing against each other than it is worth.

While there are a lot of factors that feed into right distance, most of us, with a little self-awareness and contemplation, probably do have a sense of right distance with each person without having to analyze every little piece. In fact, the following exercise is best done with a healthy dose of unanalyzed intuition.

Materials

Blank paper, three different colors of pens or thin-tipped markers.

Instructions

1. Use the first color to make a "map" by drawing a series of concentric circles on a piece of paper. The number of circles is up to you, but 5–8 seems to be pretty good in terms of useful gradations. More than that may lead to a more fine sorting of distances, but also tends to induce too much thinking and not enough intuiting. Label the circles, starting with the center one, which might be labeled something like "intimate partner" or "closest friend" and the furthest out one which might say "no contact" or "acquaintance I see once a year or so." Make labels that fit how your mind and relational field work.

2. Use your second color to map current relationships. Make a list of 10–12 people in your life. Place each on the circle where they are right now.

3. Using your best sense of what the right distance would be with them, compared to where they currently are, use the third color to put them where you think the right distance would be. Note where you aren't sure how to place someone. What are the questions? What comes up that needs more thought or clarification?

4. Align your life: Now consider the current distance you have in each relationship compared to what your discernment has told you about right distance. Are there places that need adjustment? Would you like to invite someone closer, or make a change to increase the distance with someone else? Make a plan to move your reality into alignment with your right distance map (always recognizing where consent is needed).

Photo Credit: Karen Gimnig

Key #24. Becoming Whole

Mainstream Culture

There's a common phrase: "being stuck in your head." Hyper-intellectualizing can cause us to cut ourselves off so thoroughly from empathy and care that cherry-picking data to support our perspective becomes common, despite the consequences this may have for real people in our lives.

This lack of integration shows up very starkly in meetings. Typical meeting culture (which derives from middle-class, white, middle-American culture) is very head-heavy. If someone has an emotional response, they are often shut down. If someone says that something doesn't quite "feel right," that intuitive knowing is typically disregarded, unless the person gets good at translating their non-rational input into very rational-seeming sound bites.

The dis-integration of head and heart is bad for us in a whole host of ways. We all have emotions and intuition. Insisting that they stay out of the room means we are all operating at partial capacity. There are also people in every group whose strength is leading with an understanding of the world (and our groups) that is more emotional and intuitive than cognitive. These are the people who often simply stop participating in meetings (either literally never showing up or simply not saying much).

Counter Culture

Ditching logic completely is another kind of disintegration, where the emotion *du jour* can sometimes run the room without regard to long-term consequences. Some groups find themselves caught in a sea of emotionality trying to do the good thing of bringing legitimacy back to people's subjective experiences and genuine feelings. That's a great urge, but taken too far, we can find ourselves not just welcoming non-rational input, but acting from irrationality.

Cooperative Culture

Ideally, we can hold both intellectual and intuitive or emotional knowledge. Some pieces of data, some facts, some legal requirements, for instance, absolutely need to be taken into account in order to make good decisions. Learning to set those as initial non-negotiables and then work the emotional territory in a savvy and compassionate way within those parameters is a key collective skill for well-integrated decision-making.

It is also important to note that there are cultures that are much better integrated in this way than mainstream American culture, and in a multicultural country, we need to be open to bringing other cultures' strengths into our groups. If we want to be a truly diverse movement, organization, or workplace, we need to actually create places where diversity thrives.

Self-Check

Am I conscious of and curious about what other people may be feeling? Do I hold facts and intuition at the same time? Do I devalue someone's feelings because it's not expressed in an "appropriate" way? Do I have words for my own feelings? How do I respond when someone brings emotions or intuition into the room?

Dialogue Prompts

- My strength is more cognitive/intuitive.
- When team members make cognitive arguments I tend to feel . . .
- When team members share intuitive input I tend to feel . . .
- A way I could challenge myself to integrate both is . . .
- If I did that, I think I would feel . . .
- And the result for our group would be . . .

Exercise 24.1: Six Common Elements of Conflict Resolution

Conflict is a natural outgrowth of being in relationship with others (romantic or otherwise). All of us do things that bug other people, and it is easy to slide from irritation into conflict. Our competitive training makes it easier to walk away from the relationship or go into full-on blame-seeking mode. A better option is to have real conflict tools.

An effective and complete conflict resolution process has **six common elements**,[39] which are designed to balance cognition, intuition, and emotions. You can use this list as a checklist both for current, alive conflicts, and for understanding what might have been missed that made old conflicts unresolvable. At each step it is important to get consent if you are involving another person directly.

1. **Authenticity.** Emotions do not equal logic and they shouldn't have to. What you feel is what you feel, and being able to own and acknowledge whatever that is can be a key to having things go well. It's important to understand that we are not talking here about unfiltered dumping on each other: connecting with and being able to express your emotions is needed to build understanding, but aggression is counter-productive and will reduce the likelihood of actually getting anything resolved.

2. Encouragement to **self-honesty and discernment.** When each person is encouraged to get clear about any roles they may be playing in the dynamic, as well as what they truly need to communicate, the whole thing goes better. Self-honesty is also related to our capacity for compassion with other imperfect beings, which almost always helps. If I can get honest about my own messy self and the ways I sometimes mess up, it can help me to be more compassionate about the ways others are similarly a mess.

3. Sharing **the story** of the trigger(s). What happened? What started your reaction? Sometimes conflict feels really "out of nowhere" to some people involved; the story helps connect the dots. We all have unhealed trauma in our systems, whether small or large. Most conflicts are either being driven by unhealed and unacknowledged trauma, or are made more difficult by the vulnerabilities that continue to live in us.

4. **What's at stake?** Why is this important enough to you that you are upset? In our experience, this is the least common element in conflict systems, and often the most potent. Something *matters* to someone, or there wouldn't be a conflict. If someone seems to be blowing something out of proportion, it may well be because there isn't awareness of what's at stake for them.

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39. Yana distilled this model from three primary sources: Marshall Rosenberg's widely practiced Nonviolent Communication (more recently rebranded as Compassionate Communication), Laird Schaub's work on conflict systems for meetings, and Dominic Barter's Restorative Circles work which stems from the larger Restorative Justice movement. All three of these models bring something unique into conflict work, and, in Yana's experience as a professional working with a lot of groups, all three seemed to be missing some key element or elements. Integrating these has led to a more complete and balanced system.

5. **Reflection and checking for mutual understanding.** Classic tools such as reflective listening or mirroring are really useful. The tools for Dialogue in this handbook are partly intended to help build skills for this step of this process.
6. **Pro-active options:** a request, an offer, a commitment to process, etc. The point of this step is restoration of relationship. This works best if it is concrete and measurable. It can be deeply disheartening to do all of this work, get to a better place with someone, and then later be unsure if anything tangible has happened to really change the dynamics or heal the damage the conflict created.

You can use this six-step model in multiple ways.

It can be a great diagnostic checklist if you've been trying to resolve something and it has stagnated on you or even escalated. Was one of these steps skipped? This is also a great way to use this for couples. Often one person in the partnership has been doing three steps, and the other partner four steps, and both believe that they are making a really good effort, but neither has the full package.

You can use it with an active conflict. Arrange for someone to be present who is a neutral party and can help keep you on track. Walk through the steps in order, checking for understanding each other as you go.

Use this as a guide for your own personal growth work. If you are good at some pieces, and not so good at others, lean in to learning the new steps so you can have them more readily accessible when you are in an active conflict.

Note: Notice that nowhere in this process are we trying to determine "the truth" of what happened. Truth-seeking and blame-seeking are two of the characteristics of our punitive legal system which rarely lead to actual healing. We often get stuck in trying to determine the truth when stories about what happened and how they were experienced are really different. Get into the story enough to understand why someone is reacting the way they are, but be wary of getting caught up in trying to determine what "actually" happened: it tends to be a black hole of energy and to not really lead anywhere good. A good test is: can you see how they are having the response they are having given that this is what they believe happened? Reach for compassion, not truth-seeking.

✦ Exercise 24.2: Imagery or Metaphor

There are many variations on this theme, and facilitators are advised to be creative. One basic format is a round in which team members are invited to think about the topic at hand in a less logical, more creative way.

Examples:
- Check in: If I were an animal, I would be . . .
- If this problem were a weather pattern, it would be
- If the solution to this problem were a kitchen tool, it would be . . .
- If I were to express my goal as a color . . .
- Consider the proposal. Move your whole body into a position that expresses your response.

You can also go looking online for one of the many creative visualizations that have been developed. There are too many variations to list here, but we want to point to these as other options to engage creatively together . . . and it's a pretty fun and interesting rabbit hole to go down if you have some time!

Key #25: Ask With Vulnerability

Mainstream Culture

From personal lives, to workplaces, to communities, one of the places our relationships go off the rails is in asking for what we want and need. For the most part, we simply don't do it. Perhaps we've been taught that our needs don't matter. Certainly there is a way that our culture has defined neediness as shameful. Asking reveals my neediness, which is a highly vulnerable thing to do.

Wants and needs

In groups, the words "wants" and "needs" have an interplay that can be a double edged sword. We often ask ourselves to distinguish between wants and needs as a healthy process for prioritizing some things over others. There are two ways this goes awry.

First, wants and needs, and the interplay between them are really complex. Most wants relate to needs in some way. What is a want for one person may be a need for someone else. Even within needs, some things are more needed than others. The language of "wants and needs" leads us to force things into two categories when a spectrum or even matrix of priorities is a much better representation of reality.

Secondly, the words "wants" and "needs" tend to be weaponized. When one member uses them to dismiss the perspective of another with a statement like "That's a want, not a need!" (or the more passive question "Is that a want or a need?") it doesn't serve the goal of prioritizing projects or resources.

If this language is helping you prioritize your need for a new stove over your want for a pottery wheel, that works. If it's leading you to dismiss someone else's need for a pottery wheel (that they use to earn their living or for mental health maintenance), it doesn't. The line between them can be slippery. As we've said so often on these pages, discernment is required. Use the language that helps you discern your group's best priorities.

One way to avoid that vulnerability is to ignore our needs. That tends to mean that not only do we get less of what we need, but also that others with the same needs go without, and that none of us perform as well as we might in our mission. Thus whole teams become less effective and the world gets less of what we are building.

The other way we avoid having to ask is by attempting to get the thing in some roundabout way. Perhaps we claim that someone else needs it, or "others" in general

need it, or it is essential to our group's mission in some way. This approach tends to make it hard for others to actually understand what is needed and find solutions.

Worse, they may smell a rat. Likely they don't know exactly what is going on, but something doesn't ring true about how the issue is being framed. The result is that people who would happily invest in meeting a need (even a selfish one) for a community member or teammate get resistant and defensive in the face of something that just feels off. This spirals quickly as any of the players can feel unseen and unheard. Bruised feelings and a sense of disconnection feed on each other in a space that lacks the authenticity and vulnerability needed for relationship.

Counter Culture

Coming out of the mainstream experience of unmet needs and dismissed wants, it's easy to go to the other extreme and expect a group to attend to every need (see Key #17). This manifests as entitlement, which dodges vulnerability in a different way. While it exposes my need, it demands that the group do something. Either I get my need met or I get to wallow in righteous indignation when the group fails me. Either way, my ego is protected.

This doesn't work for relationships because it denies the rest of the group the agency to weigh factors and decide. Often the ask is framed in guilt-tripping or shaming which makes things worse. As a result, even if I get what I want, it tends to be laced with frustration and resentment rather than the good feelings of caretaking and generosity associated with meeting needs for one another in healthy relationships.

Cooperative Culture

Asking with vulnerability means exposing our need or want to the group without knowing how it will be received or whether the group will do anything about it. Like most vulnerabilities, this can be scary. The higher the stakes for me, the more exposed I will feel when I name it.

Often we don't even realize ahead of time how much it matters. It isn't until we share it, or perhaps when we get resistance, that a clenched gut or a flood of anger reveals to us how much we were expecting from the group. This is the beauty of cooperative culture. Right in that vulnerable, exposed, icky-feeling moment (if we can hold on and let ourselves be held, and if the group can hang in there with us and has the skills to hold us) growth and healing can be profound.

For us this is sacred space, powerful and intense, and desperately needed in a broken world.

We aren't saying it's easy, and we certainly aren't saying you won't get hurt. That is the unfortunate reality of vulnerability: you can't do it without *actually being vulnerable*. We'll say that another way: Building vulnerability into your life isn't so much about accepting the possibility of getting hurt, it's about embracing the certainty that you will get hurt and being willing to do the work of recovery.

Exposing our needs in a group is as vulnerable as it gets. Needs often come from past wounds not yet fully healed. Exposing those raw, sensitive bits to a group is hard. It takes discernment to know when, with whom, and how much to expose. When

Karen is working with groups on vulnerability, she suggests this: "If you feel an uncomfortable stretch, you are probably in the space of growth and connection. If you want to run screaming from the room, don't go there." With that discernment, asking for what you need or want as authentically as possible will result in many good things: needs met for you and others, growth and healing, increased trust and connection, creative problem solving, and success in mission.

The essential counterpart to asking with vulnerability is responding with authenticity and being willing to say "no." (See Key #17)

Harking all the way back to Key #1 (Skillful Hearing); Yana's mantra, "You can't accurately care if you can't accurately hear," presupposes that we have spoken our authentic needs. The vulnerability we are describing here is actually integral to many of the earlier lessons in this book.

Trauma and vulnerability

Within every group, there will be a wide gap between people who have experienced little trauma in their lives and people who have experienced a lot of trauma. Yana has learned a tremendous amount in the past few years about how a lot of what she thought she knew about the healing potential of community might actually not be true for some people for whom the intimacy and vulnerability is simply too overwhelming. So as with all things in this book, we encourage you to exercise deep care and caution about forcing anyone into work that they are not both willing and capable of doing at this time.

Here's a deeply thought provoking article about this phenomenon in Communities magazine by Matt Stannard: https://www.ic.org/does-community-heal-trauma-or-reproduce-it-challenges-for-abuse-survivors-living-in-community/.

Self-Check

Do I say "no" and remain connected when asked for something I cannot easily give? Am I clear when I am giving that I am doing so simply because it is good for the group and I can, without ulterior motives? Am I willing to risk vulnerability in order to get my needs met? On the other hand, am I willing to take care of myself when past trauma makes it damaging for me to get too vulnerable?

Dialogue Prompts

- Something that I like others to do for me is . . .
- Something that is hard for me to ask for is . . .
- It is hard because . . .
- When I think about asking I feel . . .
- Growing up, I learned to feel that way because . . .
- As an adult, the culture I would like to adopt around asking for things is . . .
- In that culture I would feel . . .

Exercise 25.1: Stretching into Receiving

This is an individual exercise that can be done by a group with each person making their own list and then sharing insights as a group afterward.

Instructions

1. Make a list of things you can easily ask for in your group.
2. Make a list of things that are hard or impossible to ask for, but that would make your life easier and could be available.
3. Now think about your lists from the potential giver's standpoint. Rate each item on both lists from 1–5 based on the difficulty that the person giving the thing would experience if they said "yes." 1: Super easy. (Example: "Give me the egg cartons you would normally throw away.") 5: Quite costly. (Example: "Drive me 200 miles to visit my sick mother.")
4. Consider what makes things more or less difficult to ask for.
5. Choose one thing from each list to ask for this week. (If it makes it easier you can say it is an exercise.)

Exercise 25.2: Ritual

Here's a definition of ritual:[40] A sequence of activities involving gestures, words, actions, or objects, performed in a sequestered place and according to a set sequence. Rituals may be prescribed by the traditions of a community.

In this definition, ritual is tied to community, and involves intentionality, but it is not necessarily solemn.

Ritual is an embodied, deliberate set of actions that allow a different part of ourselves to come to the forefront. This can be a deeper emotional connection, an intuitive upwelling, or simply bringing awareness to your body when it's engaged in ways beyond just being the carrying case for your brain. Good ritual results in people slowing down, breathing a little deeper, and feeling more grounded.

There are three forms of ritual that we encourage groups to consider using.

1. Intention-filled routines.
   These are standardized elements of your meetings and lives together that provide a shared sense of continuity and meaning. These are routines that build culture. Many residential groups circle up before meals to sing, or have a moment of silence and offer appreciations at meetings, or welcome guests in a standard way. We recommend taking time to check in at the start of a business meeting to see each other as humans with real and full lives.

2. Seasonal or annual rituals.
   These create a sense of long-term continuity for your groups. They might be tied to a holiday or an annual retreat. We've seen everything from formalized, sacred-space rituals associated with the changing seasons, to annual snowball fights, to deep check-ins that take half a day and start a community's annual retreat, to an annual telling of a group's founding story.

3. Occasional or one-off rituals.
   These are designed and used to mark some moment and for a specific purpose. One-off rituals can be incredibly powerful for groups, especially at transition moments. These are usually designed to fit the situation. You are looking for actions or objects that represent important elements of the moment you are in, and something that will offer an emotional or creative shift for the group. (See the sidebar for an example.)

Often you have someone(s) in the group who is experienced with ritual, or at least excited about it. (And a quick online search can yield good resources for guiding ritual design if everyone is new to this.) Put those folks in charge of ritual design, but make sure you get everyone's consent if they are going to be asked to participate.

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40. From Wikipedia.

> ### Ritual for marking a new era of community
>
> This comes from one of Yana's former groups, the Zialua Ecovillage in Albuquerque, NM. It was created spontaneously during a meeting where the community had made significant changes to our purpose and direction and we were all left feeling a little lost, even though the changes had strong support. Someone suggested a simple ritual, we took a few minutes to coordinate it, and then proceeded right into doing it.
>
> Someone in the group read aloud the old mission statement, and then we had a moment of silence to honor the old, followed by everyone saying in unison, "This is done." Then we all walked in silence out of one door of the building, collected together outside, and someone read aloud the new mission statement, we had a moment of silence to let it sink in, and then we said in unison, "It is begun." Then, we began playing musical instruments and generally hootin' and hollerin'. We joyfully re-entered another door to the building, and continued playing music and noise-making until it died down.
>
> That was the end of our transitional meeting and everyone left feeling lighter and energized. Many rituals are much more complex than this, but this is a solid example of using the form of ritual to accomplish a "meeting goal" and build some shared sense of culture and bonding.

Accessibility Note

Be thoughtful of the people who will attend your ritual. If movement is difficult, be sure there is an option that works without movement. If hearing is challenging be careful of combining music and speech or spreading out too far outside for example. Ritual is an excellent place to be creative and that same creativity will guide you as you consider ways to include all members of your group.

Key #26: Find the Aligned Way

Mainstream Culture

Most of us were taught that there are right and wrong answers to things and that our job is to find and articulate the one right way. Everyone who disagrees with our notion of what is "right" is labeled either an enemy or a barrier to be overcome. In this cultural framework, meetings become a space where a weird sort of heroics can play out: a good meeting is when I come in with the right answer, sway everyone to my point of view, and win the vote! It's an ego-driven practice that has a tendency to run roughshod over our more thoughtful neighbors, co-workers, and companions.

Counter Culture

In rejecting this harsh "dog eat dog" dynamic, our groups can sometimes devolve into the opposite, which is nearly as problematic. The idea that "all ideas are equally valid" can dumb down our purpose-driven spaces by ignoring both data and real wisdom earned by experience. This isn't a moral judgment about the goodness of the person generating the idea; it is a question of the value of alignment of purpose with ideas, and some things are simply a better fit.

Cooperative Culture

There are times when one person *is* the most learned, experienced, or insightful in informing that decision, and that's OK. So, too, some ideas just genuinely ARE better than others (better thought-through, more data-driven, more exciting or interesting for the group to pursue, or more aligned with the group purpose). Recognizing this fact does not mean that you necessarily have a power imbalance problem. (If one person is always deemed the wisest . . . then you might!)

Practicing the heart skills of Keys #1 (Hearing) and #25 (Asking) can help to counteract Counter Culture tendency to elevate all ideas to the same plane; when we really speak how things are landing for us, and really hear those impacts, it is easier to draw clean distinctions between the value of ideas.

In a functional cooperative space, we have space for multiple good answers, and a thoughtful consideration of what is best aligned with our mission and most likely to be effective. The core of this shift is to both widen back from the competitive urge that places one person's needs or ideas above others, and insert some playfulness and grace into the space. We can find answers that are good enough, grounded in reality, and best aligned with the group sense of what serves the collective mission. This is one aspect of culture where discernment should be in healthy operation.

> ## Walking away from misalignment
>
> Discerning a lack of alignment can be life-changing, as Karen experienced as a founding member of a cohousing community. Like most forming communities, that group was faced with two competing values: affordability and comfort. While affordability was explicitly named as a group value, the desire for comfort was implicit: expressed often as group members spoke of amenities both in their private homes and in the common house. One representative comment went something like this: "This is the last home I'm ever going to live in. I want it to be nice."
>
> As criteria for design decisions were discussed, Karen was increasingly aware that she was the only one mentioning affordability. She saw that the others (who were older than she was, mostly married and all with more accumulated financial resources) wanted to live in a way that was inconsistent with her chosen career path. (Consulting for cohousing communities, ironically, does not produce enough income to easily buy a home in cohousing.) After three years of working toward living in that community, Karen came to the painful conclusion that while the group would build a lovely cohousing community, it would never be *hers*. Instead she would seek a community that better aligned with her values and needs.

Self-Check

Do I find myself defending just one idea? Am I good at making space for differing viewpoints? Am I able to integrate multiple ideas into a single proposal? Do I get more excited about the expansive brainstorming phase (Bubbles in Exercise 26.2 below) or the converging, decision-making (Boxes) phase? Am I OK letting other people shine when it isn't my favorite part of the process?

Dialogue Prompts

- One way I experience "'splaining" in our group is . . .
- When that happens, we usually . . .
- And I feel . . .
- Another way to approach this situation might be to . . .
- What's challenging about that is . . .
- What I appreciate about you is . . .

Exercise 26.1: 'Splainin' and De-'Splainin'

Make room for different perspectives.

Be conscious of assuming that your beliefs are absolute truth. We call this "'splain-ing," a more generalized version of the phrase "mansplaining." In the Imago commu-nity it is also called "Master Talk."

Karen remembers her third grade teacher telling her never to start a sentence with "I think" or "I believe," but to claim it as truth. The problem with this is that any given thought is likely only one of many possible perspectives. Assertively speaking your own idea as truth discourages others from offering alternate views. Using phrases like "I believe," "In my experience," or "My idea is . . ." creates space for all ideas.

Activity

1. In a small group, think of something you strongly believe about your group or your mission as a group. "'Splain" it to the group. Play it up. Treat it like the-ater. Be as arrogant and over the top as you can manage to be. When you are done, do a body check. How did it feel to get totally into the role of the 'splain-er? Where was your attention? On yourself or the person you were trying to persuade?

   Then take a deep breath, and gather your thoughts for a moment. Re-phrase it to be inclusive of other views by saying, "I believe" or "What makes sense to me is . . . ." Ask for feedback on whether others would feel safe offering an al-ternate viewpoint. Then do another body check: Notice and share how you felt "de-'splaining" your belief. Where was your attention this time?

   Take turns doing the exercise and then debrief it with your group.

2. In a meeting or as you go through your day, pay attention to how others are presenting their opinions. Look for examples of 'splaining. Note, perhaps in a journal, how you felt in the presence of 'splaining, how others seemed to re-spond, and how the idea might have been shared in a more collaborative way. Note the language used as well as tone, body language, etc.

3. As you go through your day, pay attention to your own speech patterns. Look for 'splaining statements like "It's obvious that . . . ," "Everyone knows that . . . ," "The right way is . . . ." Also look for times when you share an idea and others do not directly respond or contribute. Ask yourself whether you made space for others in your language, tone, and body. Consider if you assume competence from some people and not others.

Exercise 26.2: Bubbles and Boxes

Bubbles and Boxes[41] has become Yana's shorthand for a core principle for making consensus work well: get input before you start creating proposals. When we start with proposals, we immediately start arguing about that proposal, which quite likely didn't actually take into account all of the things that needed to be considered.

Bubbles are essentially factors, needs, wants, or pieces of information that should be taken into account in order to have a good proposal. Boxes are proposals. Think of this as gathering all the bubbles up so you know what kind of box you need to hold them.

We often jump from a couple of Bubbles (either our own or just a small handful of people's thoughts) and then come to the group with a Box already constructed. This puts people on the defensive because their thinking isn't included and this is an invalidating experience. You then usually spend a lot of time talking about the shape of the box and what's missing, and how the Box needs to change shape, and revising the Box . . . sometimes multiple times.

It is far more efficient, and easier on your relationships, to simply gather together all the Bubbles before moving on to Box construction.

Consensus is the place where a lot of what we have been talking about in this handbook comes together. Getting the cultural elements right is essential to having a really good consensus process. But you will also really benefit from some tools to make it easier. The variety of formats in this book are intended to help you create more inclusive meetings, to learn how to hear each other more deeply and accurately, and to have more fun in the process.

Bubbles and Boxes is another trick we have in our pockets: getting the sequencing right heads off a whole lot of tension and premature, bad proposal-making. This one isn't really being presented as an exercise in the same way many formats in this book have been. It is more a container to put the formats into. Here's the sequence we recommend:

Bubbles and Boxes: A Sequence

1. Introduce the topic or problem that needs to be solved.
2. Pick a format you like to gather an initial round of Bubbles (input that needs to be taken into account for a good proposal).
3. Then pick another format you like that is pretty different to do a second round of Bubble gathering.
4. Share with the group the list of factors you've gathered, and ask if anything is missing. If not, close the Bubbles phase and decide who will make the Box (generate a proposal).
5. Have the proposer(s) bring it back to the full group, along with the master list of Bubbles they were working from.

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41. There is a short video on our website at www.ic.org/cc-resources where Yana runs through the original presentation on Bubbles and Boxes. We strongly recommend viewing the video in order to have the best understanding of this section.

6. Check the proposal against the Bubbles. If there wasn't a way the proposer(s) could figure out how to get a Bubble in, talk about that (especially with the person who had brought that Bubble).
7. Make adjustments as needed, and pass the proposal.
8. Implement the proposal.
9. Evaluate and adjust as needed.

Notes

While it is possible to go through this full sequence in a couple of hours as a full group, it generally works best and is most inclusive when you break the Bubble gathering phase up so that people are at least able to sleep on it. Residential groups may take a few months to get through this process, while work situations might need you to move through it much more quickly. Regardless of the context, allowing thoughts to percolate overnight increases inclusion: not everyone thinks quickly on their feet and sleep and dreaming sometimes produces much more interesting results if allowed to be a part of the process. Likewise, offering different ways to participate includes more people.

Now It's Your Turn

Transitioning from competitive, individualistic culture to sustainable, cooperative culture is a lifelong journey. Yana began contemplating this topic 20 years before this handbook was born and she still regularly catches herself defaulting to competitive dynamics in an unhealthy way. Karen likewise finds herself drawn to familiar power dynamics that clearly do not serve her values and reaches often for the practices described here for correction. We are all on this journey together. The goal is not to finish the culture shift, but to make steady progress. We believe that with a little effort progress is almost certain. We are making the world a better place!

We believe that groups are the fundamental unit of social change. It is through collaborative teams of people that we will make progress on social, economic, and ecological justice. Every time a member of the group takes time for discernment, learns a new skill, or works through a shift in culture, we are one step closer to the healing our world needs.

So consider yourself at the start of a fascinating, infuriating, and often deeply fulfilling process for life. We want you to know that we are incredibly grateful to you for showing up for this transformation with us. A lot depends on our making this transition together: our economic abundance, social stability, and ecological vibrancy all hinge on our moving toward something more cooperative, compassionate, and mutually empowering.

Thank you for your work for all of us.

Yana and Karen

Afterward: A Highly Cooperative Project

Reflecting on how this project was birthed and grew into the book you now hold, we are clear that it could never have happened in a mainstream culture context. In that context, this would have been Yana's book. It was her project, one she conceived of in her previous book, using a publisher with whom she had a long-standing relationship, and drawing on her experience of community work which is much longer than Karen's.

If we were keeping score, Yana is undeniably the senior author on this project. But keeping score simply isn't Yana (Key #18). To the extent that she was ever senior on this project, it is that she set the tone from the very beginning that prevented overall hierarchy (Key #13). There were moments when Karen tried to step back in deference to Yana's "seniority" and Yana corrected that, kindly and invitingly, and re-established our cooperative culture.

We could probably write a second book describing how the various Keys were demonstrated in our work together. It we could pick a moment when the partnership began, it might be when Karen heard (Key #1) and empathized with (Key #3) Yana's thoughts about being a Senator. It got off the ground by depending on Yana's past experience with book writing (Key #21). We spent a lot of time talking about the goals each of us held for the project and the benefits each expected (Key #4) and along the way found so many differences (Key #11), which really excited Yana especially. As our lives and capacity for work on the project ebbed and flowed there were times when one of us was working hard and the other hardly working on the project (Key #15). There were times when we bared our needs and trusted the other to hold the space (Key #25), and many more when we played and laughed our way into creative solutions (Key #22).

There are many more examples, and probably more than we realize. The beauty of doing this work, is that even as you are constantly discovering new areas of needed self work, others become so innate they are effortless and unconscious. As we finish this project we offer it to you as a testament of what can be gained through cooperation. We have grown our persons and our friendship through this project. We have learned new ways of doing things, created new exercises, thought about our work and our lives in new ways. We have experienced profound connection that we will both build on and remember fondly for years to come. And we completed our mission. We wish the same for all of you, our readers and co-creators of a culture that feeds us all.

Appendix 1:
Chart: Mainstream, Cooperative, and Counter Culture

The following chart summarizes the 26 Culture Keys. We encourage you to make a copy of the chart pages (or print them from our website at www.ic.org/cc-resources) and spend some time contemplating how you most frequently show up on each line of the chart. Yana likes to do this by making dots on the chart with a marker. In all honesty, sometimes it is actually lines or other shapes when she finds herself embodying multiple places on one line very regularly.

To track your progress, you can even date it and put it away, fill it out again in a year, and then get your first one out to see how different your answers are. Self-assessment is good for us, and being able to chart our progress is an important practice for self-affirmation.

You may notice when you are looking at the chart that the culture columns are in a different order than they are listed as we describe the Keys in the text. There is a reason for this. We see Mainstream Culture at one end of a spectrum and Counter Culture at the other. In most cases, Cooperative Culture is a mix of the best things of the two, and in that way is "in between" them more than it is further out on the spectrum in either direction. Put another way, we think the pendulum can swing way too far from Mainstream Culture and land us in the pitfalls of Counter Culture. We'd like to see that pendulum rest in between in the non-reactive space of true collaboration. Having it in the center feels right.

Comparing Mainstream, Cooperative, and Counter Cultures

Key #	Mainstream Culture	Cooperative Culture	Counter Culture
1	Don't Bother Hearing	Skillful Hearing	Silencing Ourselves
2	Blame & Disown Responsibility	Individual & Collective Responsibility	Overown Personal Responsibility
3	Speak to Control	Speak the Authentic	Speak to Placate
4	Judge Differences	Common Ground Within Differences	Gloss Over Differences
5	Perfectionism	Good Enough for Now	Anything Goes
6	Dominationt	Understanding & Effective Action	Getting Along
7	Manipulation Stories	Emergent Stories	Bonding Stories
8	Me	We	Us vs Them
9	I've Got Mine	Mutual Aid	Purity Tests
10	Security Is Money	Security Is Social	Security Is Worthless
11	Differences Threaten Me	Differences Are Good	Differences Threaten the Group
12	Majority, Manager, or Owner Rules	Consensus With Healthy Boundaries	Consensus With No Boundaries

Key #	Mainstream Culture	Cooperative Culture	Counter Culture
13	Hierarchy Is Good	Hierarchy Lite	Hierarchy Is Evil
14	Never Share Emotions	Share Emotions Well	Overshare Emotions
15	Mine, All Mine	Share Resources Well	Share Resources Without Boundaries
16	Power Over	Conscious Power	Power Avoidance
17	I'm the Best Narcissist	Beyond Narcissism	I'm the Neediest Narcissist
18	Commodification	Relationship	Martyrdom
19	Independence	Interdependence	Codependence
20	Capitalize on Circumstances	Empathize With Circumstances	Pity Circumstances
21	Skills Used to Win	Skills Used to Empower	Skills Given Without Discernment
22	Commodified Creativity	Beneficial Creativity	Self-Absorbed Creativity
23	Assign Bad Intent	Good Intent & Good Impact	Excuse Bad Impact
24	Stuck in Our Heads	Becoming Whole	Drowning in Emotions
25	Never Ask	Ask With Vulnerability	Ask With Entitlement
26	One Right Way	Find the Aligned Way	All the Ways

Appendix 2:
Suggestions for Types of Users

Individuals

We encourage you to see this as a personal study and exploration manual. Whether you are going through this systematically and doing exercises as you go, or reaching for particular sections based on need, we've designed it so that you can productively use the book as a self-work handbook.

As an individual you might read a section and then use the Dialogue Prompts as a journaling exercise. You might read a Culture Key with curiosity about where you fit at this time, and follow up with a time of meditation. You might pick up this book when you are frustrated with another group member, or with the group as a whole, find a section that relates to your frustration, and use it to expand your understanding of why we do the things we do.

You and a partner might pair up and work one section at a time. Read each Culture Key and use the Dialogue structure to process it together, either using the Dialogue Prompts provided in each section or leaning into whatever comes up for you.

We want to note here that we suspect that simply reading the book will have limited benefit. We think this kind of growth requires application. If you are part of a group that is willing to do the work with you, that is great. If not, your work on your own will benefit every group you join. Working both with a group and on your own may be the best idea of all.

Facilitators

We intend this handbook to offer a variety of ways to get at topics, as an example of what creative facilitation can look like. We have deliberately included exercises that work well for a range of learning types (aural, visual, and kinesthetic), and enough variety of formats that we hope you now have access to a rich "facilitator's toolkit."

We hope that facilitators and process professionals find this book especially useful. We invite you to join us in using that role to foster and even to introduce a different kind of culture in your groups. Regularly mixing up formats is key to inclusion within our groups (both in terms of learning styles—aural, visual, and kinesthetic—but also ethnic, class, and gendered cultures). You now have 52 ways to do that.

The Culture Keys describe the vision of cooperative culture, a destination, and a reference point for the journey, a sort of "North Star." We encourage you to study and contemplate on your own, using the more individual exercises and journaling to internalize these concepts. As you do, we believe you will begin to recognize the patterns of effective cooperation and the patterns of frustration in the groups you work with, increasing your effectiveness and thus the group's success.

Yana talks a lot in her facilitation trainings about the importance of road mapping: having a clear sense of where you are when you start a process and where you are heading. Having a clear road map in your mind can help guide the hundreds of small decisions you will be making—either in planning for sessions with a group, or on the fly as things shift and new directions and needs emerge. In this way you will discover a coherence to your work that makes answers to "What do we do now?" come more easily and, over time, results in more satisfying and coherent progress as a group.

We also encourage you to get familiar with the exercises in this book, most of which are facilitation tools one or both of us use regularly in our own practices. The more tools you have in your tool box, the more effective you will become at holding space for groups and for culture change. There are two charts in Appendices A and B that will help you select the best exercises for your needs.

Study Groups

We encourage the formation of study groups. There are 26 sections in this book, which conveniently means you can meet every other week for a year and slowly work your way through a full experience of the book as a group. You need not have an existing group to do that, and in fact, unless your group is quite unusual, it is unlikely you will get everyone in your group to agree to that kind of intensive study.

So some study groups may have folks from multiple local groups or individuals coming together to learn and bring what they know home. We like this kind of year-long exploration because doing it that way means that you will be moving slowly enough to be able to integrate things as you go along, while also meeting regularly enough to get the deep-dive experience and keep momentum going.

Online Meetings

As we were writing this book, the frequency and necessity of online meetings increased greatly with the arrival of Covid-19. Whether this is good or bad (and we think it's both), we're pretty sure online meetings are here to stay. Online can be a huge win for people who find it hard to leave home, or conversely who frequently travel from home and want to stay engaged. Downsides include the lack of physical connection—touches and hugs for those who enjoy touch, sharing energy and body language, the physical proximity that results in one-to-one or small group casual exchanges around meetings, as well as facilitators missing a lot of body language that can help them "read the room" to know how things are really going. These things are best mitigated by getting together in person whenever you can, and encouraging people to get more skilled at naming it out loud (or using a chat function) when they are uncomfortable or something is not working for them.

The other aspect of online meetings is that they tend to reveal or magnify whatever flaws exist in your in-person meetings. This can be mitigated through thoughtful meeting structure and taking advantage of the things that can be done more easily online. Most of the exercises in this book can be adapted for online use with a little creativity and a bit of tech training for the group.

Below are a few strategies we both use to help:
- Breakout rooms. Pair and small group processing is even more important when it isn't happening casually before and after meetings. Paired mirroring, and small group discussion in breakout rooms that then can be reported back in a round or spiral round, build connection and break up long meetings.
- Google Docs or similar for shared note taking. Even a laptop screen is generally big enough for a video conference window next to a document window. Setting it up this way allows everyone to see the notes being taken in real time and corrections or additions can be made if needed. This is one place where online can be better—relieving the full burden of note taking from any one individual.
- Google Slides or a whiteboard program like Miro or Jamboard can be great for group interactions. Each person can have their own dot or even small photo to move around for spectrums or similar activities. (See an example of this on page XX.)
- Renaming can be used to share moods or track preferences. Emojis can be used for added fun. Karen has used eye emojis for observers and a topical emoji for those most invested in a topic as an example.
- Chat can be useful for quick check-ins and questions during a presentation. One strategy is to have everyone write in the chat at once, but wait to hit enter (or post the chat) all together. This can give everyone time to think and respond before seeing others' ideas.

Be mindful that "camera ready" is different for people of different genders, neurodivergent people often have a very different relationship to what's on a screen than neurotypical people, and that peeking inside someone's home can reveal class differences that can be challenging for folks with less class privilege. As much as having cameras on is great for those who are more visual, people may have good reasons for leaving theirs off. Try to operate with awareness and sensitivity about these issues.

Overall the things that work in in-person meetings are generally even more important online. Pay attention to energy and power dynamics. Use strategies to be sure everyone is being heard. Change up the format frequently. Last but not least, be sure to take regular breaks and get everyone out of their chairs.

Finally, we will note that the move toward online meetings has had profound implications for the disability community. "Disability" covers a lot of territory, and one person's increased access (i.e., an online meeting for a group that used to meet in a place hard to get to in a wheelchair) can mean another's decreased access (the same online meeting for folks who are not neurotypical and find interacting with screens to be much harder than being in a room with folks). As we move forward, we want to share these thoughts from our editor, Allison:

> "As for online access, my greatest fear is that when the 'rest of the world' no longer needs online access, those of us who do will be left behind once again. I keep hearing people say 'I can't wait until our meetings are in person again,' and every time I feel dread. So far, I don't see any efforts to provide

simultaneous access in person and online, and that will be where the majority will erase the minority."

We hope as we transition to whatever the post-Covid world looks like around meeting culture that the disability community is not left out of the conversation. We know there are problematic aspects to simultaneous meetings like Allison is suggesting, and that this means there will be no simple answers. Our mantra throughout this book applies here as well: you are just going to have to have the hard conversations.

Appendix 3:
Types of Groups

Becoming more aware of not only *what* your group is doing (the content of agendas and discussions) but *how* they are doing it (group process and cultural norms) will help any group move toward more functional and enjoyable meetings and working practices. Generally speaking, what passes for good meetings in the wider culture is pretty bad. What follows are some pointers for different specific types of groups we were thinking about as we were writing.

Residential Communities

Living together is the most intense version of attempting cooperation, and tends to mean an accelerated journey through the kind of culture change we are describing here. Community is a bit like getting married (because you will have to be emotionally involved with people), owning a small business (because you need to be doing budgets, deal with legal issues, etc.), running a nonprofit (because there are mission-driven aspects to community, often with far less of a budget than you'd like to make it all work), and doing a very intense personal growth course . . . all at the same time and with the same group of people. It's the most complex environment we know of, with an abundance of chances for things to get messy.

Communities also vary a lot in how clear they are about their mission and shared values, and getting that clarity makes a huge amount of difference in how functional you can be. More than in any other space we are writing for, the pitfalls of getting caught in the sea of emotions are very real here. Knowing your mission can help you discern between needs it is reasonable for your group to meet and those it is not.

Any work that strengthens your relational field as a community is foundational, and the Dialogue work here is meant to directly support that. Living in a high-stakes environment means that misunderstandings can proliferate if you don't stay pretty vigilant about really listening and understanding each other.

Worker-Owned Cooperatives

Co-ops need to combine cooperative, high-stakes relational conversations with equally high-stakes money and management issues. Issues around hierarchy and equity (both socially and economically) are going to be critically important to handle well and thoughtfully. Co-ops tend to have pretty clear missions, but are sometimes spotty on how their own internal operations are manifesting in alignment with that mission. And the co-op model itself is a significant step toward an egalitarian world, so learning how to live it is going to be a high priority in operations.

We suggest focusing particularly on those places where we discuss discernment in balance with relationship. Conversations like pay equity will bring up not only

financial anxieties for people, but a host of social justice issues that are both bigger than your co-op and woven into the fabric of all social relationships, including yours. And pay is a place where oppression gets expressed very concretely. If you have not already done work around oppression dynamics, we recommend spending time there early in your culture transition journey.

Agile Teams

Teams using Agile for project management or software development often have the extra challenge of trying to adopt a collaborative culture within an organization that remains highly competitive. Time may not be available in the usual workflow for many of the exercises listed here. Generally, a good place to start is in the facilitation of retrospectives. All of the general use (✦) exercises will be useful there. Feedback exercises are also highly useful within the Agile framework. In time, all the Keys will show up in various ways. Even if your group doesn't have time for all of the exercises, being able to identify patterns is hugely helpful as is having some shared language with which to talk about them.

Social Change Groups

Addressing oppression dynamics is very front and center—rightfully so—for many groups focused on justice and social change. These often need to be dealt with explicitly in order to embody the changes you want in the world. Without that embodiment, the work tends to feel shallow and confused. When social change groups are actively doing their anti-oppression work internally, their external presentation is much more coherent and meaningful; in short, you only really know what you are talking about if you have actually done the work.

We recommend balancing out that work with practical skills-building such as conflict resolution, and thinking through how your decision-making systems do or don't support your mission fulfilment. Getting a solid handle on how culture is upheld by economic and social structures will also sharpen your analysis for your work, and group discussion of the Culture Keys is a great way to make sure everyone is on board and aligned in their understanding.

Faith Groups

Cooperative culture creates spaces that we experience as sacred. We believe that the goal of connection and the importance of relationship align with the teachings of many faiths. Karen, raised in the Christian church, particularly finds resonance between her understanding of Jesus' teachings and the themes of this book.

Many spiritual groups appropriately place strong emphasis on personal growth and spiritual development; the downside of this is sometimes neglecting the group dynamics part of the equation. We think there are many tools here that will help faith groups do both kinds of work in alignment with their own integrity. Thus we hope that this book will both support your faith journey and your organizational function as a group working together toward a mission of faith.

Appendix 4:
Imago Dialogue Summary Structure[42]

The description below is a summary of the process that combines exercises 1.1, 2.1, and 3.1. They are presented separately because doing each one well will take some learning and practice. Once you've mastered them, it can be very effective to use them together in the Imago Dialogue Structure.

Getting Ready

An essential element of Dialogue is consent. If you would like to dialogue with someone, it is best to ask if that person is willing to dialogue and if this is a good time. In committed relationships there may be an agreement that if now is not a good time, another will be offered. In less intimate settings, it is important to respect another person's unwillingness to dialogue even though this can be painful and frustrating.

Once you have two people who are willing to dialogue, you will want to find a physical space that is conducive to conversation. Usually some level of privacy is useful. Sit facing each other, with easy eye contact, and, if touch between you is comfortable, within reach for touch.

Next you will need to identify a sender and a receiver.

Sender: speaks, tells their story, shares ideas, feelings, and experiences.

Receiver: listens, sets aside (for now) own ideas and opinions and enters the sender's world, reflects back and checks for understanding.

Often these roles are alternated, doing the process once with one sender and then with the other person as sender. In each sequence, however, it is important to be clear about the roles, and to stay in the role you have chosen. When using a series of prompts it is recommended to stay in the same roles for the full sequence and then switch, rather than switching roles after each prompt.

The Process

The process suggests particular language and we encourage you to work with these particular prompts as you are learning the Dialogue process. You may later find variants that are useful to you. With 30 years of experience working with the structure, Imago professionals have found these particular words to be the most reliable for creating a safe space for connection.

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42. Imago Dialogue is the creation of Harville Hendrix, PhD and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD, founders of the Imago Relationships movement.

Consent

Sender

    I would like to talk about . . . . Are you available for that conversation?

[If not, it will be important to choose another time and not just jump in. In the worst case, you may need to accept that the other person is not willing to have the conversation.]

Step 1: Mirror (See Exercise 1.1)

Sender

    Shares the thing they would like to talk about a couple of sentences at a time.

Receiver

    What I heard you say is . . .

    Did I get you?

Sender

    Yes, you got me. OR

    What I would really like you to hear is . . . *(receiver mirrors this piece)*

Receiver

    Is there more?

Sender

    Share "more." It may be more information, the next part of the story, reflection on values or meaning, or even changing your mind about what you have already said.

Repeat steps above until sender is complete.

Summary

Receiver

    In summary, what I'm hearing you say is . . .

    Did I get you?

Sender

    Yes, you got me. OR

    A piece I would really like you to hear is . . .

Receiver mirrors the additional piece.

Step 2: Validation

Receiver

    What you are saying makes sense to me because . . .

(*Note that this is not agreement. The receiver is simply making logical sense of the sender's thoughts and perspectives. One valuable result of this is that the sender feels valued and respected rather than dismissed or placated.*)

Step 3: Empathy

Receiver

    I imagine you might be feeling . . . (*use a single emotion word like sad, relieved, furious,*

etc.). Is that what you are feeling?
Sender
Yes, that's what I'm feeling. OR
No, what I'm feeling is . . . *(receiver mirrors)*
Receiver
Are there other feelings?
Sender
I'm also feeling . . . *(receiver mirrors)* OR
No.

Appreciation

Sender
Thank you for having this dialogue with me.
Receiver
Thank you for having this dialogue with me.

In some cases the Dialogue will end with a hug or other touch. Sometimes the pair will agree to switch roles and let the other person send. The whole process may repeat for several cycles. Sends can be as brief as a minute or two or as long as an hour or more depending on the topic and the needs of the people involved.

There are many opportunities to use dialogue in the work this book is about. It can be used for working through conflict or sharing appreciations. It can help a sender work through something they are chewing on intellectually or spiritually. Dialogue will tend to slow down and deepen any conversation, and can be used any time that is desirable. It can be a sort of "safe place" to go when things begin to feel too intense or disconnected.

More explicitly, using the Dialogue structure, especially the mirroring step, is recommended for use with the "Dialogue Prompts" in each of the 26 sections.

A Sample Dialogue

Consent
Sam: Maria, I would like to dialogue with you about something you said at dinner the other night. Are you available for that?
Maria: Sure. I have some time. What would you like me to hear?

Mirror
S: It's about what you said about expanding our garden. I'm really excited about that idea, but worried too.
M: What I hear you saying is that you would like to talk about what I said about expanding our garden. You're really excited about that idea. Did I get you?
S: Yes, you got most of it. I want you to hear that I'm excited and I'm worried too.
M: So you're excited, and you are worried too. Did I get you?
S: Yes. You got me.

M: Is there more?

S: I'm excited because I agree that we could grow more variety with a bigger garden and I'd love to add raspberries and some squash that we haven't had room for. We could even grow . . .

M: (Slightly raises her hand) Hold on, let me get that much. I hear you say that you are excited because we could grow more variety and you'd love to add raspberries and squash. Did I get you?

S: Yes. And we could grow pumpkins for Halloween.

M: And we could grow pumpkins for Halloween.

S: Yes.

M: Is there more?

S: What I'm worried about is that the kids use that area for their wading pool in the summer and I don't think they will like it if we turn it into garden.

M: I hear you say that you are worried because the kids use that area for their wading pool and you don't think they will like it if we turn it into garden. Did I get you?

S: You got me.

M: Is there more?

S: No, that's all.

Summary

M: So in summary, you are excited about my idea to expand the garden and grow more variety, even pumpkins, but you are worried because the kids use that area for their wading pool. Did I get you?

S: Yes. and I think the kids would be really sad.

M: And the kids would be really sad.

S: Yes.

Validation and Empathy

M: What you are saying makes a lot of sense to me because we could grow more variety, but it really is the best place for the kids' wading pool. I imagine you might be feeling sad. Is that what you are feeling?

S: (pauses to pay attention to feelings) A little sad, mostly I'm disappointed.

M: You're feeling a little sad and mostly disappointed. Did I get you?

S: (nods)

M: Are there more feelings?

S: I'm a little anxious too.

M: Anxious.

Appreciation

S: Thanks for listening to me.

M: Thanks for sharing with me.

Appendix 5:
Using Mirroring in Meetings

There are many ways to use mirroring (Exercise 1.1) in meetings to increase connection, safety, and trust, often while also making progress toward consensus decisions. While this list is not exhaustive, it does give a sense of the range of possibilities.

Purpose	Description	Sample set of prompts
Icebreaker	5-minute paired mirror exercise. Choose one or two light, simple prompts. Ask the group to stand up, find a partner, and send and mirror the prompts in 2 minutes each way.	Something I love about spring . . . My favorite garden vegetable is . . .
Trust-building Learning/practicing mirroring	20-minute paired mirror exercise. If this is the first time the group is mirroring, add at least 10 minutes for instructions. Ask the group to arrange themselves in pairs with chairs facing each other. (For online meetings, breakout rooms work just fine.) Use four prompts: Something positive, Something that is a stretch or a challenge, Common ground, and Appreciation. 10 minutes each way.	What I'm looking forward to about living in community . . . What I think will be hard for me about living in community . . . Something I think we might have in common . . . Something I appreciate about you . . .

Purpose	Description	Sample set of prompts
Deeper processing	Longer paired mirror. The length can vary depending on the topic, the time available, the skill level, and the willingness of the group to go deep. (This is not a good first mirroring exercise.) Draft a sequence of prompts that deeply explores a topic relevant to the group. Encourage the group to look for "more" at the "Is there more?" stage. Validation and empathy can also be used here if the group has those skills.	In my family growing up the approach to money was . . . The part of that that I still carry with me is . . . This works well for me in that . . . This can be challenging for me in that . . . When I get triggered around money it is usually because . . . When that happens I tend to . . . What helps me be my best self when I'm triggered is . . . Something I appreciate about you is . . .
Clarification	Facilitator (or attentive other) mirrors to clarify or confirm what is being said by a member of the group.	I want to make sure I got that . . . I'm not sure I understood, may I put it in my own words? These weren't your words . . . did I get you?
Respond to quiet emotion	Whatever the emotion, responding by mirroring can be powerful. In the case of quiet or calmly passionate emotion, it is wise to ask permission to mirror, as mirroring draws the attention of the group in a way that may not be welcome. In this case Karen recommends erring on the side of giving space.	

Purpose	Description	Sample set of prompts
Respond to emotion that is loud or claims the attention of the group	In the case of loud or aggressive emotion, it can take even more discernment. In this case the emotional person is already choosing to be the center of attention through their own behavior, so it's unlikely that mirroring will bring unwanted attention.The person is often too triggered to give permission, yet the mirrorer still needs to seek it. Asking explicitly is ideal. If that doesn't work (or seem workable), Karen errs on the side of starting to mirror. Be sure to mirror the intensity of the person's message (volume, swear words, body position, etc.), and be as accurate as possible. This is not a time to paraphrase.	

Appendix 6:
Guide to Exercises

Key to the list below:

Number—The exercise number in the book.

✦ General exercise—There are exercises that are useful for many types of meetings on almost any topic. We consider these the basic toolkit for facilitators and recommend mastering them all.

Peo—This number is the size of group that is needed to do the exercise. Note that exercises with small numbers can still be used with larger groups by breaking the meeting into small groups, or doing the exercise individually first and then sharing as a large group. Add time to allow for sharing. We use "+" to mean that we haven't seen a group too big to use this exercise.

Time—The amount of time in minutes that we estimate the exercise will take. A "pp" following the number means that number of minutes per person in the exercise.

Format—If no format is listed, it is an exercise that fits in what we think of as a typical meeting format with participants sitting in chairs in a circle.

Needs—Here we will list any space or materials required for an exercise. We will assume you have indoor space and chairs and don't list them here.

EI—Emotional Intensity. On a scale of 1 (minimal intensity) to 5 (very intense). Note that any exercise can be more or less intense depending on what the group brings to it.

FC—Facilitator Challenge. Some exercises sound easy, but turn out to be fairly nuanced to get good results from. This column is a guide to the skill level needed to get the most out of the exercise. Generally we're pointing here to the "soft skills" of facilitation: reading a room, empathy, identifying common ground, nimbly shifting to follow a thread, etc. The scale is 1 (simple, if you read the directions all should go well) to 5 (if you haven't had significant facilitator training or experience, you might want to talk this through with someone who has before you try it)

Number	Name	# Peo	Time	Format	Needs	EI	FC
✦1.1	Mirroring (Imago Dialogue)	2	10–60	Seated pairs		2–4	3
✦1.2	Temperature Checks	2+	5			1	1
2.1	Validation (Imago Dialogue)	2	10–60	Seated pairs		3–5	5

Number	Name	# Peo	Time	Format	Needs	EI	FC
2.2	Mine/Not Mine	1	30–60	Contemplative	Paper & Pen	3–5	2
3.1	Empathy	2	10–30	Seated pairs		3–5	3
✦3.2	Spectrums	5+	5–60	Movement	Large open area	1–3	4
4.1	Attitude Cards	3–8	30	Hands-On	Printed cards	1–2	3
✦4.2	Milling	6+	15	Movement		1	1
5.1	You Are Amazing	5+	5–10	Movement		2	1
✦5.2	Rounds	4–30	1 pp			1–3	2
6.1	Bridging Circles	4–10	60–90		Timer	4–5	5
6.2	Solution Circles	4–10	60–90		Timer	3–5	5
7.1	Heart Shares	5–20	2+ pp		Altar, object	4–5	2
✦7.2	Silence	any	any	Meditative		1–5	3
8.1	Body Awareness and Differences	1		Contemplative		4	1
✦8.2	Centering	any	2–5	Contemplative	Optional candle or bell	1–3	2
9.1	Ally Mapping	any	30	Table	Paper Poster paper	1	1
9.2	Privilege Walk	10+	30–60	Movement	Large open space	4	4
✦10.1	Contemplate Text or Art	any	30–60			2	3
✦10.2	Cardstorming	any	60	Movement	Flipchart paper, markers	1	3
11.1	The 8-Minute Life Story	4–10	10 pp	Sharing		5	3
11.2	Seven Steps to Differentiation and Connection	any	10–20		Copies	3	2

Number	Name	# Peo	Time	Format	Needs	EI	FC
12.1	What Touches Us?	2–20	1 pp			3	2
✦12.2	Contracting	any	2–5	Facilitator Tool		1	1
13.1	Feedback Sequence for Leaders	1+	1hr–1wk	Feedback		5	5
13.2	Cooperative Culture Leadership Qualities	1	15–30		Copies	2	1
14.1	Micro-Consent Practice	2+	20	Movement		3–5	3
14.2	The Art of True Apology	1	5–10	Not a meeting		5	2
15.1	Inventory of Sharing Potential	any	20	Table	Paper, pen	1	1
✦15.2	Fishbowl	10+	30+			1–5	3–5
16.1	101 Ways to Get Power in a Group	1	30–60	Inventory	Copies	5	3
16.2	Chart Speakers	5+	varies	Observation	Paper, pen	1	1
17.1	The Gold	1	15		Paper, pen	3	2
17.2	Stories I Tell Myself	4-6	45		Cards and pens	2	3
18.1	A Brief Exploration of How I Am in Conflict	1	20+		Copies	4	2
18.2	Appreciation Dialogue	2	10–20	Seated Pairs		3–5	3
19.1	Octopus Exercise	6–10	20–30	Movement	Large open space	3	4
19.2	A Worldview Walk	1	30	Movement	Outdoors	4	1
20.1	Compassion Exercise	1	15	Contemplative		4	2

Number	Name	# Peo	Time	Format	Needs	EI	FC
20.2	Media and Poverty Analysis	1	30	Contemplative	Articles	2–4	3
✦21.1	Pluses and Deltas	2+	2–10		Poster paper, Markers	1–3	1
✦21.2	Spiral Rounds	5–30	1–2 pp			1	2
22.1	3DT	1	30	Movement	Large open space	3–4	2
22.2	Collective Creativity Inventory	10+	30+	Survey	Paper, pen	1	1
23.1	Impacts Telephone Game	5+	30	Interactive	Paper, pen	1	2
23.2	Right Distance Mapping	1	30		Paper, pen	3	2
24.1	Six Common Elements of Conflict Resolution	1	Hrs–days	Process		5	4
✦24.2	Imagery or Metaphor	3+	1–pp			2	1
25.1	Stretching into Receiving	1	20	Inventory	Paper, pen	3	2
25.2	Ritual	any	varies	Movement	Varies	2–4	1–5
26.1	'Splainin' and De-'Splaining'	1	varies	Process		3	3
26.2	Bubbles and Boxes	5+	varies	Process	Flipchart, markers	1	5

Appendix 7:
Facilitator's Toolbox

Goal	Example Situations	Exercises
Increase Connection within Group	New group is forming. New members have joined a group. The start of a new project.	1.1 Mirroring 3.1 Empathy 3.2 Spectrums 4.2 Milling 5.1 You Are Amazing 6.1 Bridging Circles 7.1 Heart Shares 11.1 8 Minute Life Story 20.1 Compassion Exercise 22.1 3DT 25.2 Ritual
Building Foundation of Mutual Understanding	There is a lack of trust. People are assigning bad intent to each other.	1.1 Mirroring 2.2 Mine/Not Mine 3.1 Empathy 3.2 Spectrums 4.2 Milling 6.1 Bridging Circles 7.1 Heart Shares 11.1 8 Minute Life Story 20.1 Compassion Exercise 23.1 Impact Telephone
Work Productively with Conflict	Group members are openly angry with each other. Participation is down without a clear reason. There are competing narratives or understanding of what is happening/happened.	1.1 Mirroring 2.1 Validation 2.2 Mine/Not Mine 3.1 Empathy 6.1 Bridging Circles 7.1 Heart Shares 14.2 Art of True Apology 15.2 Fishbowl (Conflict Version) 16.2 Chart Speakers 18.1 A Brief Exploration of How I am in Conflict 20.1 Compassion Exercise 22.1 3DT 24.1 Six Common Elements of Conflict Resolution 25.2 Ritual

Goal	Example Situations	Exercises
Productive Brainstorming	Group creativity is stymied. People are bored. There is a problem with no clear solution.	4.2 Milling 6.1 Bridging Circles 10.2 Cardstorming 21.2 Spiraled Rounds
Policy Proposal Development	A decision is needed on something that is not simple. Decision-making is contentious or simply dies before you get to satisfactory implementation.	1.2 Temperature Checks 3.2 Spectrums 5.2 Rounds 6.2 Solution Circles 10.2 Cardstorming 21.2 Spiraled Rounds 26.2 Bubbles and Boxes
Raise Awareness about Emotional Tensions/ Process Emotions	There is a sense of things being pushed under the carpet. Conflict is erupting frequently or out of scale with content. Meeting attendance or participation have dropped off.	1.1 Mirroring 2.1 Validation 2.2 Mine/Not Mine 3.1 Empathy 3.2 Spectrums 6.1 Bridging Circles 7.1 Heart Shares 12.1 What Touches Us? 24.1 Six Common Elements of Conflict Resolution 25.2 Ritual
Power Imbalances	A few voices dominate conversation. Decisions usually seem to favor some people over others. People feel shut down. People have stopped coming to meetings.	9.2 Privilege Walk 13.1 Feedback for Leaders 16.1 101 Ways to Get Power in a Group 16.2 Chart Speakers 21.1 Pluses and Deltas 21.2 Spiraled Rounds 26.2 Bubbles & Boxes (Generally just mix up formats)

Goal	Example Situations	Exercises
Work on Oppression Dynamics	People in marginalized groups do not feel welcome, leave, report discrimination or have checked out from process. You have never done anti-oppression work as a group.	2.2 Mine/Not Mine 7.1 Heart Shares 9.2 Privilege Walk 10.1 Contemplate Text or Art 11.1 8-Minute Life Stories 14.1 Micro-Consent 16.1 101 Ways to Get Power 16.2 Chart Speakers 19.2 Worldview Walk 20.2 Media and Poverty Analysis 23.2 Right Distance
Accountability Conversations	Work is committed to but doesn't get done. We don't know how to talk about accountability. Members are worried that others aren't doing or might not do their share.	Imago Dialogue, page 182 2.1 Validation 2.2 Mine/Not Mine 6.1 Bridging Circles
Give and Receive Feedback	Leaders don't seem responsive or tuned in to how they are affecting the group. You don't do feedback. Mistakes and hurts repeatedly happen.	2.1 Validation 5.2 Rounds 13.1 Feedback for Leaders 15.2 Fishbowl (Debrief Version) 21.1 Pluses and Deltas
Vision and Values Development or Review	A forming group has not done this work before. Group purpose seems to be getting lost.	3.2 Spectrums 4.2 Milling 5.2 Rounds 6.1 Bridging Circles 10.1 Contemplate Text or Art 25.2 Ritual
Need to Read the Room	It's unclear where the group is at, and you want input to decide what direction to go.	1.2 Temperature Checks 3.2 Spectrums 5.2 Rounds (quick)

Goal	Example Situations	Exercises
Increase Energy, Movement Break	Long meetings, too much sitting. Feeling in the room that energy has flagged, distraction.	3.2 Spectrums 4.2 Milling 5.1 You Are Amazing 19.1 Octopus
Getting Unstuck	Meeting has ground to a halt. Consensus seems impossible. The group needs a big picture shift.	5.2 Rounds 7.1 Heart Shares 7.2 Silence 12.1 What Touches Us? 25.2 Ritual

Glossary of Terms

Agile—A method of software development and project management that relies on teams working well together rather than hierarchical or individualistic models.

Cross-talk—1) Speaking out of turn or interrupting the flow. 2) Speaking directly to a single person in the group rather than to the group as a whole. Examples: "I like your idea." or "I think you are wrong." This tends to create a sense of a private conversation between two people that can exclude others. It also can result in greater reactivity.

Essence Mirroring—Repeating back to the speaker the overall concept or key message.

Gaslighting—Manipulating the thinking of another so that they doubt their own understanding of reality.

Notetaker—Person assigned to take minutes or written record of the meeting.

Polyvagal Theory—A theory from neuroscience and psychology connecting the vagus nerves to emotional state and availability for social connection.

Pre-Validation—The stance that the speaker must make sense from their own frame of reference or world view.

Retrospective—A practice of Agile software development in which the team reviews a segment of work.

Scribe—Person writing visible notes (usually shorthand) on large paper or board in front of the group.

'Splaining or **Master Talk**—Speaking from a place of asserted expertise that denies the validity of other viewpoints

The Work—(also "this work") The thinking, questioning, knowing, naming, processing, shifting, contemplating, resting, holding involved with adopting and embodying cooperative culture.

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"Yana and Karen describe practical exercises to help groups engage authentically… This handbook addresses social justice in a way that will challenge even the most progressive community."

Crystal Byrd Farmer, author of *The Token: Common Sense Ideas for Increasing Diversity in Your Organization* and Foundation for Intentional Community (FIC) Board Member

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Karen Gimng

Karen walks with communities, organizations and teams as facilitator and guide. Her ability to hold space, foster hope, reflect clarity and invite vulnerability enables groups to strengthen relationships and achieve mission. She lives in Anacortes, WA amid family, beaches and evergreen trees.

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