

# Authentic Dialogue and Social Change Facilitation:

A Background paper for organizers and  
facilitators

Authentic Dialogue bridges complex adaptive systems, social movement studies, anti-racism and social change facilitation to support your efforts in transforming relationships, organizations, networks and the world.

**By: Sam Grant, Ujima Press,**  
**<http://www.ujimaconsulting.com>**  
**3/13/2010**

For

Girasol Abia Kokui Leguizamon Grant, you are my greatest inspiration. I hope that by the time you are a young adult, we will have transcended the global patterns of domination, oppression and inequality, and that you will enjoy a more healthy and cooperative world with all of earth's kindred. Whether we fail or not by such time, your mother and I will always be by your side as you lead our world, with your own unique offering to collaboration for transformation.

### **Acknowledgements**

First, to Zea, thank you for raising our daughter so well, and allowing me time and space to gestate this and the projects we are working on together as strongly coupled agents of change. To Judie Cutler, Laura Bloomberg and the whole Full Circle Community Institute family that co-concocted this endeavor (<http://www.fullcirclecommunityinstitute.org>), thanks for being the springboard for this and much of my life's work over the past 13 years. Special thanks of the highest order to the Ramsey County, Minnesota (USA) network of authentic dialogue facilitators, who provided the active, and sometimes very hot active seedbed in which this work crystallized. Finally, thank you, the reader – who I hope will and whom I heartily encourage to extend, refine, challenge and share what is here – so that we can really get down to the important business at hand as effectively as possible – co-generating a new us so that a new world to share emerges.

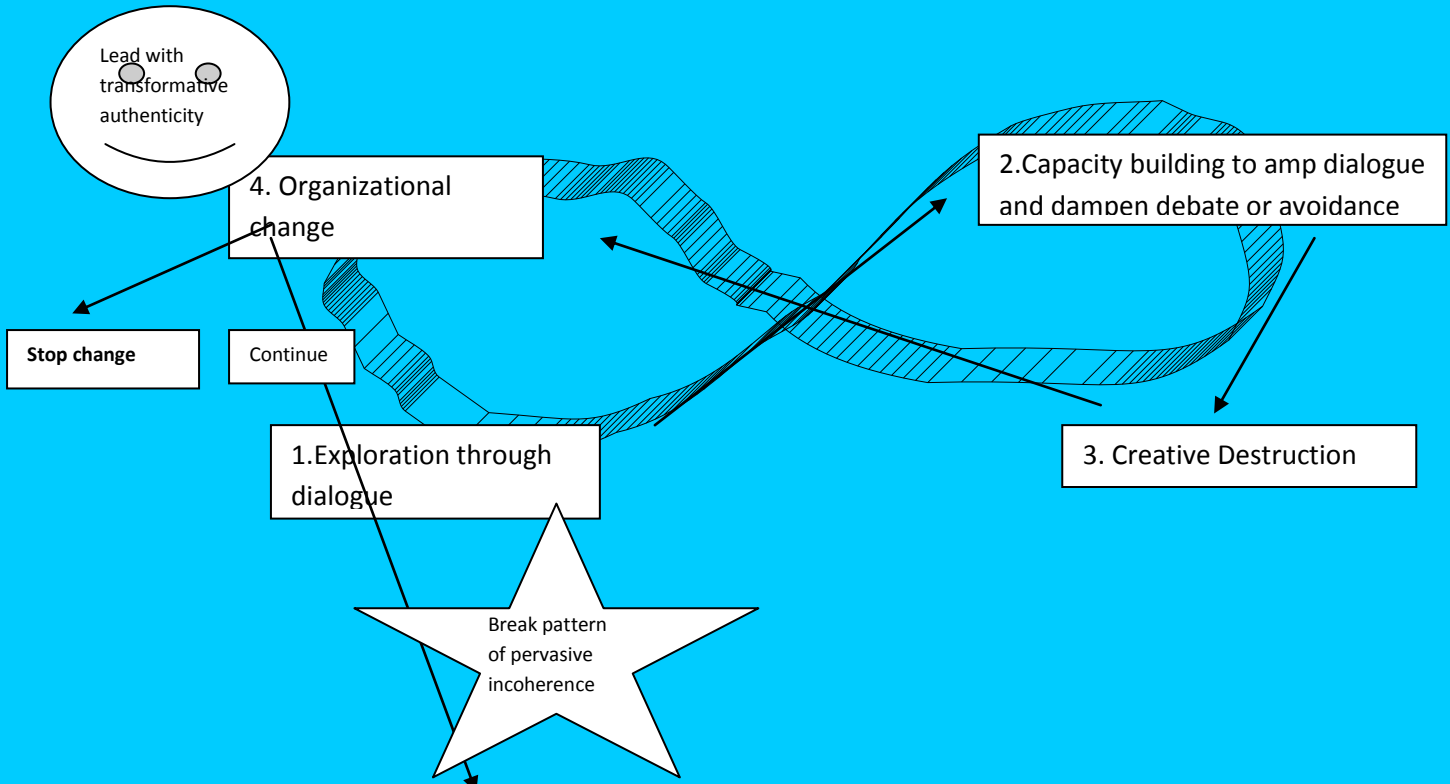
I always have to thank my mother and late father who are the bedrock examples for me of love-in-action, and passion-in-action respectively. To the Human Systems Dynamics Institute community (<http://www.hsdinstitute.org>) – thanks for helping me finally get complexity theory and begin to apply it in all my work.

**Authentic Dialogue and Social Change Facilitation**

**(Background paper for organizers and facilitators)**

**By Sam Grant, Ujima Coop, 2010**

**The Authentic Dialogue and Social Change Facilitation Model**



***The Back-ground or Pre-Steps:***

***Social Change Facilitation begins by lots of listening and observing. After determining what “container” or “membrane” to create in which numerous diverse agents will interact, you need to organize (make an invitation) to get them to the table, and once there, get out of the way and foster emergence of self-organizing – whether it be autopoiesis or sympoiesis***

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## **Dialogue and Social Change Intro**

***“What we “bring” to dialogue includes all of the beautiful heart, openness, creativity, courage and story we have sustained and developed throughout our lives up to that point, AND, all the toxic socially constructed norms we have internalized, and therefore “practice” as well. What we “take and apply” from dialogue depends entirely on our openness to the process and our commitment to co-creating a healthier mutual world together.”***

-Sam Grant

### **Introduction**

“Authentic Dialogue” is the combination of being real and being really open in both conversation and in relationship. The Universe itself is a grand relationship, and when we recognize that our whole life is a communion of diversity and wholeness we partner with the energy of transformation, rather than attempt to assert narrow and short term control for shallow self-interest. Domination falls away and partnership emerges. Fear falls away and love emerges.

Really listening to each other opens up the space to genuinely relate to each other, which, in turn, opens up a deeper conversation. Empathy toward ourselves and each other moves us from our default consciousness into a co-evolving consciousness that is precious and fragile. Co-creating (organizing) and cooperatively facilitating this open or “ajar” collaborative space is what this manual intends to support. The work requires blending, synergizing power and love.

The deeper conversation co-generated is, all at once, inside us, in our relations, and in our way of engaging in systems (processes applied and results sought). By using authentic dialogue to open our minds, hearts and will, we are able to co-generate a new presence, which invites a new world. In a forthcoming manual on Social Somatics and Social Transformation (to be published by Ujima Press in 2010 with T. Zea Leguizamon Grant) we will contextualize social somatic healing as the basis for transformative praxis for genuine co-generative social change (so stay tuned!).

In 1609 Galileo rocked the world by what he saw through the telescope he invented. He knew that what he saw would be upsetting, perhaps reflecting on the fate of Copernicus, so he invited leaders of the powerful Catholic Church to come look through his telescope, rather than taking his word for it. Although he later renounced his “discovery” due to how disturbing it was to the Church, and how much the Church then disturbed him... his discovery was revolutionary for its time and has shaped the present.

We can celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this discovery by joining in the most critical revolution of today – seeing inside ourselves, into each other and into what we mutually create in the social field. For today’s revolution we will need to create an inner-scope to see more deeply than we have looked before, and then see more cooperatively rather than combatively so we can co-create a more peaceful and just world. Authentic dialogue is a tool for this co-evolution.

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Moving from technological fixes in a Newtonian – machine-age-world, we need to pick up the notion of conviviality from Ivan Illich (1973). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the greatest revolution will be the accelerated co-evolution of empathy for all relations. The realm of individualization will be included in the larger frame of whole relation.

*“People need not only to obtain things, they need above all the freedom to make things among which they can live, to give shape to them according to their own tastes, and to put them to use in caring for and about others. Prisoners in rich countries often have access to more things and services than members of their families, but they have no say in how things are to be made and cannot decide what to do with them. Their punishment consists in being deprived of what I shall call “conviviality.” They are degraded to the status of mere consumers.*

*I choose the term “conviviality” to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons, and the intercourse of persons with their environment; and this in contrast with the conditioned response of persons to the demands made upon them by others, and by a man-made environment. I consider conviviality to be individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value. I believe that, in any society, as conviviality is reduced below a certain level, no amount of industrial productivity can effectively satisfy the needs it creates among society’s members.”*

- Ivan Illich, from Tools for Conviviality, 1973, found at [https://clevercycles.com/tools\\_for\\_conviviality/#conrec](https://clevercycles.com/tools_for_conviviality/#conrec)

Authentic Dialogue as a transitional tool opens us up to our deeper ways of knowing and relating, picking up from Aristotle’s 5 forms of inquiry (science, art, practical wisdom, theory, and intuition). We use all ways of knowing to bring into embodiment the future we want to create. To get there, we must let go of our preconceptions and conditioned habits. Aristotle talked about “habitus”, which is all of our conditioning that underlies and shapes our ideology and behavior in the world. The concept was picked up and refined by Pierre Bourdieu, a contemporary sociologist. Wikipedia defines habitus as “a set of acquired patterns of thought, behavior, and taste. These patterns, or "dispositions", are the result of internalization of culture or objective social structures through the experience of an individual or group” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habitus\\_\(sociology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habitus_(sociology)), downloaded April 7, 2009).

What is it we pay attention to in conversation and relationship? Often, we attend to reality from a surface investigation and understanding of what is going on. We respond in the present with our habits (from the past) and therefore make the future a continuation of the past. If we want a better future, we have to source from a different place than our habits. How we attend to today shapes tomorrow. What do we want tomorrow? How do we attend to today in a way that makes it more possible for the tomorrow we desire to emerge? We have to pay attention to today from a deeper “source” than our habits. We have to open our minds, hearts and will, and see more of what is going on that just what is easy to see. We have to “see our seeing” (Scharmer, 2007: 135) in order to consider changing it.

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Authentic Dialogue sets the conditions for authentic organizations and institutions with words and deeds truly in alignment. Once in alignment, we may realize that our existing perspective on how our organization adds value is not generative of the future we desire, and we become more open to changing our “will” (in social somatics we call this social mind-body integrity). This background paper is intended to help you guide generative change within your organization or community.

If we are honest with each other, especially if we come from really different experiences, on what terms and conditions can we both stay in the conversation? Think about the divides of race, class, gender, sexual identity, nationalism, religion, and so on – and reflect for a moment on how each of these form particular dividing lines. They are frames of reference and points of difference. They tend to be the themes around which we are conditioned to draw lines in the sand and say – “you see it that way, while we see it this way, and we really don’t see a healthy middle between our views”... The divide becomes self-organizing and we construct and defend separation (segregation and apartheid). The irony is – that there really is only partial separation – we are still connected, just not in a healthy way.

What happens in such a situation? In many of my own personal experiences, such strong division has fueled sustained conflict, over generations and centuries with repercussions that are complex and unpredictable. We have organized a society that has used divisions as a core “part” of how it sustains the “whole”. The parts (while parts of earlier “wholes”) played roles in creating the emerging whole, and once the whole emerged, it constrained the parts. A society in which we don’t talk deeply and effectively to each other is a complex adaptive system of communication, within the context of structural racism, which is also a complex adaptive system.

Moving from structured segregation, organized pervasively in our families, our communities, our faith-based institutions, our public institutions, and our economy is a monumental task of a transformative nature. It requires a “letting go” of our learned conditioning of racism (both internalized superiority and inferiority patterns) and a “letting come” of our Ubuntu<sup>1</sup> capacity or Namaste<sup>2</sup> capacity. Since our “understanding” and “knowledge” of the world we inhabit is culturally coded on multiple scales of influence: intra-personally, inter-personally, familialy, communally, socially, institutionally, systemically, culturally, structurally – we must design and implement transformative praxis, as change agents, in all of these levels. This essay suggests that authentic dialogue is a tool that is critical to that whole process, at all levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Ubuntu is a word of Bantu languages of South Africa origin (Ubuntu in Xhosa, Umuntu in Zulu, etc) - it means – “the gift of finding the human being in others”. It emerges from a culturally-grounded philosophy that recognizes what MLK Jr. talked about – that all human beings are essentially “one” – caught up in an inescapable common garment of destiny – what befalls one, befalls all. The Ubuntu psychology and praxis that emerges from this philosophy is that we have to regard each other with respect and honor precisely because we are in this together, regardless of our differences.

<sup>2</sup> Namaste, from Sanskrit, literally means “I bow to you” has been popularized by the global fusion practice of Yoga, which has re-framed the meaning to “the light (or God) in me greets the light (or God) in you”.

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Change within is the starting place for change in systems. Bottom-up transformation emerges first in people, then in relationship, then in networks of meaning, then in institutional culture, structure and systems, then in institutions, and then in the societal networks and culture, social systems, structure. Authentic dialogue helps us grow a new inner conversation and co-create with our peers a new partnership conversation and discard the discourse of segregation, alienation and oppression.

**Table 1: Layers and dynamics of non-dialogue**

<b><i>Layer of Being/Scales of Influence</i></b>	<b><i>Dynamics of non-dialogue</i></b>
Intra-personal (inside ourselves)	Without authentic inner-dialogue we conform to our habits and fail to evolve as human beings.
Inter-Personal (in dyadic relationships or small groups)	Without authentic dyadic and team dialogue we create and hold dissonance in our relations or let the perspective/s of dominant members in our relationships determine what we presume to resonate around.
Symbolic (our internalization of categories of meaning)	Without authentic dialogue we accept received categories of meaning without reflection (for example, we accept learned stereotypes about black men or women as actually real and respond according to the symbol rather than the person/s).
Social	Without authentic dialogue we take the embodied meaning of the 3 levels above into co-constructing our networks and our social universe.
Institutional	We play roles in institutions according to learned scripts.
Systemic	We play roles in systems according to learned scripts.
Cultural	We reinforce received notions of culture and thereby freeze it, making it less adaptable and adaptive, while still quite moldable to dynamic inner and external forces.
Structural	Without authentic dialogue we leave the structure in tact without questioning whether or not it is the best structure.

What is “dialogue”? It is, simply put, an honest and open exchange between two or more people in which “winning” points is not the agenda of any parties to it, but rather, the mutual objective is to hear diverse perspectives on a topic in order to come to a more open understanding of how people make meaning, how they each arrived at the meaning they attach to something, and whether and how that meaning is frozen in place and may be unfrozen and changed.

By being completely “present” and “sensing” what is emerging in dialogue with open minds, open hearts, and open wills (aware and co-intentional bodies)– we are able to practice “presencing” and co-create the future we desire (see Scharmer, 2007). Imagine how different what we create is from this space, from that which is created when we only operate from our habits (our received and embodied conditioning).

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Each participant in dialogue is encouraged to listen and speak holistically with our embodied truth AND to suspend judgment and honor that many perspectives may exist, and that they are all equally valid with ours. In dialogue we are open: a) to our own perspective being changed and; b) to the possibility of arriving at new mutual meanings through which we change together.

Dialogue is not necessarily so, but can be engaged as a tool to facilitate deep democracy and meaningful social change in an organization, and more broadly in society. This essay provides some thinking on both what dialogue is and how it can be applied as a tool for social change. Specific reference is made to our current work collaboratively building the Ramsey County Authentic Dialogue model, with a team of more than 20 county employees.

A significant challenge in this essay is to provide enough background on authentic dialogue to guide practitioners for facilitating such dialogues, but also to contextualize the model so that practitioners may appreciate its utility as a tool to facilitate deep change within the structures of an organization, or community. I will identify core concepts, some simple rules, and some basic protocols to guide the practice of authentic dialogue.

One concept that is pertinent to the whole essay – “complex adaptive systems” must here be referenced – ***“a complex adaptive system comprises multiple agents dynamically interacting in fluctuating and combinatory ways, following local rules to maximize their own utility while also maximizing individual consistency with influences from network neighbors”*** (Klein, Sayama, Faratin and Bar-Yam, 2002, as cited in Rogers, Medina, et al, 2004).

All living systems are complex adaptive systems. Any system created by humans that has multiple agents that relate in ways that may generate unpredictable outcomes is a complex adaptive system. This is important for change agents to understand so they can be on the leading edge of change and set the conditions for the form of change desired in systems and relationships. Facilitating change requires a deep awareness of patterns, of relationships, and of process at all levels of systems.

Think of an organization or community as a story. If we think of an organization as a story or as a complex network of stories in dynamic relationship and tension with each other – how do we diagnose the over-arching and sub-stories and embed a new core story (or myth) that makes that old story fall away and the new story become the norm? Part of the work is “unpacking” the old story by not just letting it “run” rampant in the organization. We put it in check with good questions asked respectfully and authentically. We help those who tell this particular story see that it is only one among many plausible stories. We look at the underlying assumptions of each of the stories that are recognized and we pay attention to how these stories inform the way the organization functions and adds value, or strays from its intended purpose with gaps between what it espouses and what it actually does.

In order for dialogue to be engaged as a tool of social change, participants must do both the “inner-work” of cleaning up patterns of internalized inferiority or superiority (around race, class, gender, nationalism, religion, etc) and the “outer-work” of engaging as peers and partners in addressing the core

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conditions in the world around them that divide them and limit the quality of all their lives. We don't have to wait for there to be a crisis before we do this work. In fact, being responsive in crisis mode tends to reinforce the existing patterns. We react in order to return to peace and stability with relatively minor change.

Dialogue, if we allow it, helps us to see the world more openly, more complexly, more dynamically – and thus, more clearly. If we effectively launch a small movement through the authentic dialogue model, and have sufficient heterogeneity on our team of facilitators, we will be able to grow the model to scope and scale within, perhaps, 3 years and significantly change the conversation within the County and thereby change its modus operandi from being embedded within the dynamics of structural racism to being a **point attractor and strange attractor** for anti-racism work in the county as it crosses scope and scale. Each authentic dialogue facilitator becomes a **“strange loop”** within this framework.

A person is a “strange loop” when they completely open themselves to being changed as they are completely present in a situation and don't operate by habit. By virtue of being that radical – open to more of what “is” in any given moment, we challenge our peers to not operate by habit and create a more open social field. That person becomes a point attractor, people begin to pay more attention to what they say and do than others, because they manifest a difference that matters. Over time, peers begin to embody the strange loop way of being and carry that mode into their diverse networks – and this new network mode becomes a strange attractor for change.

As Scharmer puts it (2007: 18-19), we can use dialogue to:

- **Co-initiate** a new way of listening to what is possible and co-inspiring a common intention;
- **Co-sense** where the potential for change is and relate to it;
- Be a **co-presence** where this potential for change exists and connect to it with awareness from a deeper individual and collective source;
- **Co-create** the possibility for change by developing “landing strips for the future” by doing things actively with prototypes to allow the future we want to begin to emerge today; and
- **Co-evolve** a larger and larger web of innovation as your microcosmic complex adaptive system becomes the whole institution.

These are the **simple rules** for authentic dialogue. Apply these in all interactions and notice what emerges.

Scharmer (2007: 19) distinguishes 3 methods used in his model (phenomenology or individual consciousness), dialogue (or the field of conversation) and collaborative action research (enactment of institutional patterns and structures). As I discuss authentic dialogue in this essay I am referencing the integration of all 3 of these methods in the practice. “Inner work” is not only phenomenological, it is transformative. Dialogue is not only a field of conversation; it is, by virtue of its qualities of openness, also transformative. Collaborative action research is a dialogue itself, the dialogue in which we structurally apply our common intention.

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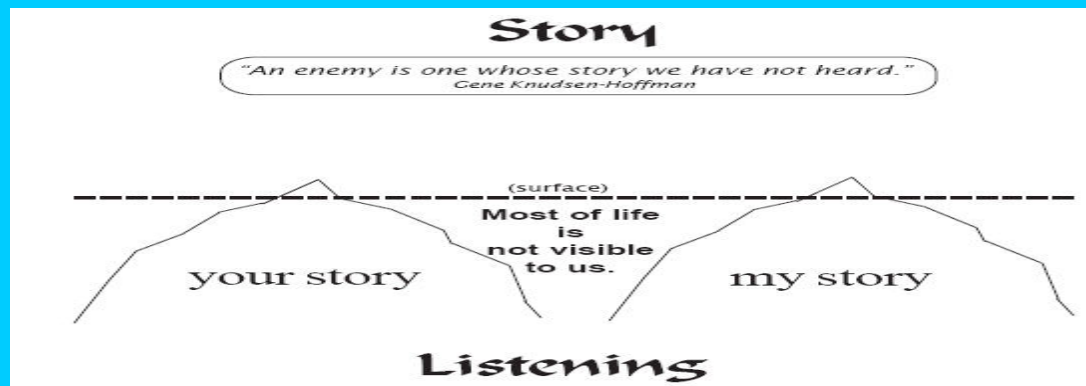


Figure 1 your story and my story/ what's visible? Found at <http://traubman.igc.org/changecharts.pdf>

Notice that most of "story" – yours and mine is beneath the surface conversation. Through dialogue we create a mutually open container in which we can probe the depths of who we are and how our stories are similar and different. By this means, dialogue opens the space for relational and social change.

Dialogue, when we enter it with openness and genuine exploration, advances our consciousness. The expansion of consciousness is the pathway to social change. Gandhi said – "we must each be the change we wish to see in the world". Einstein said "the same consciousness that creates a problem cannot solve a problem". This is an important consideration as we reflect on the world we individually and mutually receive and have created. The suggestion is that dialogue can help us both change the way we personally feel and relate to each other and thereby also help us change the way we co-create the world around us and thereby change the world itself.

It is important to recognize that each of us gets "wired" through social construction of meaning to see "reality" in a particular way. In some areas we are "soft", meaning we are pliable or open to other perspectives on something. In other areas, if we really are honest, we can see that we have lost our flexible thinking, or pliability, on certain topics. We are not as open to change, or perhaps, not open to change at all.

In such circumstances of non-openness we are prone to see disagreement as a source of conflict, and will seek to avoid particular conversations with certain people or go in to "raw debate" on particular topics in order to "prove" that we are right and others are wrong. Raw debate is intellectual warfare, in which there tend not to be any rules of fairness or rationale procedure. It is both raw and uncut. We are in it to win, period.

In situations in which significant risk is at stake, we may moderate our intensity a little or a lot, depending on our willingness to take risks or be protective of our position or privilege in a situation. Under such circumstances of risk avoidance, what may have been raw debate under other conditions turns into one of two forms of discussion: polite or skillful discussion. It is polite discussion if we keep it light, and avoid areas of significant disagreement in order to not upset any parties to the discussion. It is skillful discussion if we have taken measures to reduce the likelihood of eruptions of defense or attack from any persons involved, while also deliberately striving to "score points" for your perspective.

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Raw debate, when it is normative in an organization, facilitates divisions based on who agrees with whom – a “which side are you on” type of situation. A particular side may be most empowered in authority, while another side may be most empowered in terms of constituency size (population). If an area of contention remains “hot” for too long, it eventually disables the organization. People don’t talk about what matters anymore. They just do what they must and talk about what they have to. At some point, those with better options move on to hopefully healthier organizations and the organization itself becomes less competitive and sustainable.

With skillful or polite discussion, no sides of a conflict are expected to “disappear”. While people may actually hope to see such an outcome, no one is vocalizing it. The goal, more or less, is power and control over the conversation within an organization by creating a climate in which there is a particular way that it is okay to talk about things, which while it may sound open and democratic, is actually contrived in a way to privilege particular forms of reflection and conversation while limiting space for others. An example – would be to say that we can talk about anything we need to – as long as no one becomes emotional about it. Those with feelings are forced into silence and resignation with the norm, or an exit from the organization.

With skillful discussion, people constantly strive to raise the stakes on aspects of an issue around which they have maximum leverage and to keep the discussion from gravitating toward areas in which their perspective is not so strong. By keeping the discussion “focused” in a way that supports a “side’s” overall argument, they are able to direct the climate of an organization without raw debate. It might not feel less unsafe for someone who is harmed by structuring of viewpoints in an organization in a way that is not open to all perspectives. Furthermore, they may also feel that they have nowhere to go with their complaint or allegation because of how the political and emotional climate of the organization is set like deeply rooted trees in the organization, or worse yet, they may perceive the prevailing viewpoint as the virtual mountain from which the organization springs. A space for airing of grievances exists “officially”, but not genuinely in an organization.

With polite discussion, we mimic the tone of a win-win situation. We strive to make everyone feel safe and welcome. We keep the conversation focused on where we do agree and on what matters most to the mission and vision –IF- we have consensus. When we don’t have consensus, we covertly, and when necessary, overtly, STOP or prevent any straying of conversation into conflict. The organization may appear conflict free because it has never allowed conflict to arise or get set deeply. You could say it is “killing with kindness” in an organizational setting.



Figure 2 usual communication v. dialogue/ found at <http://traubman.igc.org/changecharts.pdf>

Notice the profound difference between usual communication and dialogue in Figure 2 above. How much communication in your organization is the usual sort? What might shift if you used dialogue consistently? Imagine the difference in an organization in which every one simply reacts to whatever one else says, but no one is listening and cooperating in inquiry about how the organization can add and sustain value? Now imagine how much different the quality of life for workers and the quality of what they create might shift if they applied cooperative inquiry through dialogue consistently.

To make it real simple, with authentic dialogue engaged through frequent formal and informal feedback and feed forward loops, you make sure that your organization is always in learning mode. The **simple processes** by which authentic dialogue may lead to organizational and social change include:

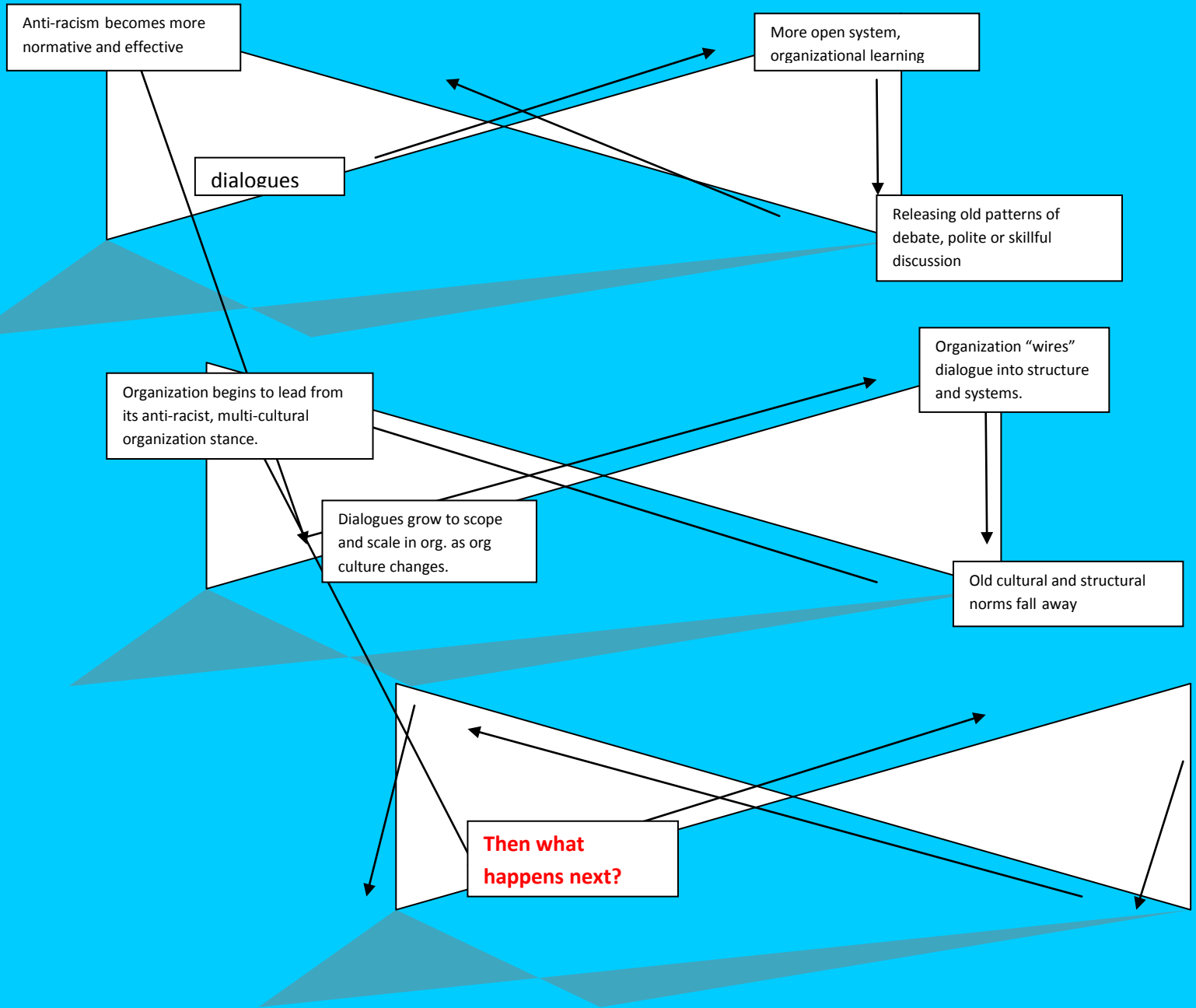
- a) Develop a team of authentic dialogue facilitators who have learned to “source” from the future the organization wants to create and from their own evolving story, applying their meta-skills of facilitation and change in a community of practice supporting organizational change.
- b) Ensure that the dialogue is all inclusive (at all levels of scope and scale in the organization) – open and diverse participation is not an option, but rather a necessity.
- c) Apply what makes sense cooperatively as soon as possible and “test” it in action and reflect on it in subsequent interactions. Make this part of the organizations consistent quality improvement agenda, concretely.
- d) Build a cooperative learning agenda around key themes and questions that emerge in dialogue, and make such inquiry democratic and diverse.
- e) Use what is learned through cooperative inquiry to help the organization sustain triple-loop learning – always challenging and changing assumptions about the core organizational paradigm of action.

This essay is intended to help you consider how to sponsor the needed transformation within your organization so it facilitates dialogue, rather than debate or discussion – in either polite or skillful forms. Moving to consistent dialogue within an organization is part of the process of moving toward a thorough practice of anti-racism within an organization. You will face a slippery slope all the way up the peak and a slippery slope as you manage the transformation once in place – given the reality of an organization

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that has successfully made an inner-transformation still operating in a society that has not made such a transformation.

Figure 3: Co-evolving generative change as a complex adaptive system at increasing scope and scale



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**Power** is a critical consideration in the work. By learning how to use dialogue as a process to build power for a new conversation to become the norm in an organization, we create a new norm in which it is less likely that racist sentiments, decisions and practices go un-noticed and un-checked. It becomes the norm that racism is made transparent and how it is reinforced in an organizations structures plain to see. With transparency, we can trace back through the organization's systems and see who holds the levers of change and how change can best be facilitated and sustained.

The organization itself can be seen as a metaphor for how POWER runs in society, and how it runs through each of us. The organization, from its formation through its demise, tells a narrative of the operations of racism on multiple levels: structural, symbolic, cultural, associational (networks), systemic, institutional, inter-personal, internalized.

When we live in a structurally racist society (as we do), all of us internalize and operate from messages of inferiority and superiority dynamically. A supervisor from an oppressed identity might subconsciously repress their authentic self in order to fit into an organizational culture, and over time no longer see themselves as part of an oppressed identity. In complex adaptive systems identity is "liquid"<sup>3</sup>, even though we tend to treat it as an unchanging substance.

The easiest place for a change agent to start the work of anti-racism is with work on them-self. No matter what else changes or does not change in a setting, we are ultimately responsible for the extent to which we are open to change and follow through consistently with change according to our integrity. As important as this is, thorough change at the individual level does not add up to thorough change at the institutional or more complex levels of change unless and until there is an iterative and dynamic relationship between changes at the individual, inter-personal, institutional and higher levels. It is the cooperative feedback loops of learning and mutual change that foster and sustain conditions for change in systems.

This essay closes with "designing social change" and "intensive process work and deep democracy" sections, which offer the concrete tools that help you effectively apply the authentic dialogue model for social change. We must be intentional about change, and conscious of the relationship between dialogue and the existing nature of our organization or community. "Process Work" is a term we use to describe the in-the-trenches with each other work that we commit to do inter-personally, institutionally and more broadly in order to secure meaningful change. Defining our "process work" is like writing a set of goals and objectives for our journey toward greater democracy and justice. We define an end goal or series of such goals and the steps we will take to get there. The focus is less on what we will do, although that is critical. "Process" is about how we will do it, and paying attention along the way to how doing this work changes us and changes our relations and outcomes within the institution and between us and our customers and their communities, as well as with other institutions and systems. "Deep democracy", although it may sound like empty jargon to some, is a critical part of the process work. It is deeply personal work that we do as change agents, unified with a deeply set institutional

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<sup>3</sup> See Zygmunt Bauman. 2004. Identity. He discusses identity as "liquid" and pushes us to no longer think of it as something that is locked in place.

commitment to accountability, transparency, dialogue and co-responsibility for change – this is deep democracy.

The basic message of this text is – if we create spaces for consistent dialogue around what is most relevant to realization of our highest aspirations and we grow that dialogue to scope and scale, with accountability and mutual responsibility, it will help us facilitate greater social change. In a world as complex as ours, with humanity facing numerous grave and inter-locking crises, it is important that we now take stock of what helps us move rapidly toward connecting with and honoring our common destiny. Through dialogue we can embrace both our oneness and our differences.

*“The spirit of Dialogue is one of free play, a sort of collective dance of the mind that, nevertheless, has immense power and reveals coherent purpose. Once begun, it becomes continuing adventure that can open up the way to significant and creative change.” --David Bohm, Donald Factor and Peter Garret (1991)*

### **Dialogue and Anti-Racism**

Dialogue is intended as an open space in which we each come to it with openness and thorough honesty. We must both bring ourselves with full presence and engage in a mutual unpacking of assumptions and notions about what is happening, and what we want to create. Dialogue is sabotaged when these elements are not offered by all engaged. When engaged authentically (radical honesty by all individuals engaged and set for impact structurally), dialogue creates the conditions for social change within an organization, and more broadly, within society.

Whether our work is improving organizational effectiveness, strengthening families or taking on complex social justice initiatives – all such work requires the engagement of people in mutual exploration of possibilities. Dialogue is what supports the best possible exploration.

Dialogue starts from the premise that problems exist due to a failure of communication and consciousness. When communication degenerates into raw debate, polite or skillful discussion, or negotiation, we are no longer able to talk and work through our differences. We are stuck on them. We deal with being stuck, by reinforcing separation, alienation and segregation. Apartheid is the solution of choice when differences are not appreciated.

As a starting place, I refer to the work of Sara Ahmed (2005) who discusses the “non-performativity of anti-racism” in her important article.<sup>4</sup> Her point is that there is a lot of “talk” about anti-racism – in her case in the United Kingdom – but not a lot of follow through (action). Her question is how to bridge the talk with substantive action that leads to anti-racism in practice. In the absence of such question and

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<sup>4</sup> Sara Ahmed. 2005. “The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism.” *Borderlands e-journal*, Volume 5, Number 3. [www.borderlands.net.au/vol5no3\\_2006/ahmed\\_nonperform.htm](http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol5no3_2006/ahmed_nonperform.htm)

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commitment, the non-performativity of anti-racism reinforces the persistent performativity of racism itself.

She describes a personal situation in which she co-authored an anti-racism guidance document for her university –for which she and her team were applauded and for which the university was seen as a beacon of anti-racism without taking substantive action that results in movement along an ***anti-racism continuum***<sup>5</sup>. This same pattern is recognized in one of the examples of this essay – the tremendous work within Ramsey County to establish and lead from an anti-racism commitment. The substance is not in the words, but rather in the deeds.

What do we mean here by “appreciation” of differences? Rather than simply “acknowledge” that we have differences, appreciation requires that we actually listen deeply to and add value to a perspective – so it appreciates in value. We amp up a perspective, in turn, and then amp up other perspectives as well, in turn. We ask that those who hold diverse, perhaps conflicting perspectives demonstrate their understanding of the perspectives of others by re-stating those perspectives as though they are their own. Then, after this, saying what they are able to appreciate about the perspective just stated without defending their own.

So, in summary, what have we stated so far? First, that it is important to transform an organization from forms of discourse that protect and privilege harmful perspectives and practices by opening up space for dialogue. Second, by connecting dialogue to an organization’s explicit commitment to be a socially just, non-oppressive, organization, we can then use the practice of dialogue to develop, secure and extend organizational capacity to genuinely become and sustain an anti-racism commitment. Third, and finally, that dialogue only leads to structural change when we structure how dialogue is applied so that it is “empowered” to support deep change.

Dialogue generates a “growing space for change”. This growing space only leads to change when it sets conditions for the self-organization of networks of transformation leading to substantive change. Dialogue suggests that problems are not to be resolved, but rather dissolved by expanding our consciousness of what is behind or underneath “the problem” and what is ahead of us (the inclusive us rather than the segregated us) that is much more important than the formerly pressing issue. Dialogue is not simply “talk”. It utilizes the four embodied languages that are always operative in each of us.

The language of the heart – or our feelings is a language that may be hidden from view for those with a “poker face” and may be transparent sometimes or all the time for some people. The language of our words, which may or may not be the same as what we are thinking at any given moment is the most obvious and direct language, although it is our least honest language. The language of our thoughts – is a hidden language that we must constantly “surface” through inner work that helps our thoughts be

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<sup>5</sup> An anti-racism continuum suggests movement from: a) being a consciously or blindly racist institution to b) awareness, then to c) taking action, then to d) realizing and sustaining results through action, then to e) transforming the core cultural character of the institution to that of a genuinely multi-racial/multi-cultural institution. This, in general outline, is the MCARI/Crossroads model adopted by Ramsey County for the development of its anti-racism commitment.

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more in alignment with our other languages as we strive to be more fully human. The language of our deeds – is the language of our “walk” – what we actually do on a moment to moment basis. All of our languages are socially learned. We have each embodied conditioning – “frozen in our being”. What is frozen in can be thawed out once brought to the light of consciousness, the fire of political will, the flow of water.

As a case study of applying dialogue as a tool of social change to help set and sustain conditions for an institution to be an anti-racist institution, Ramsey County, in the state of Minnesota will be used. Ramsey County hired the author, along with his business partner in Full Circle Community Institute to guide them in the application of authentic dialogue explicitly as a tool to support their commitment to anti-racism.

Full Circle was awarded a contract to facilitate 12 authentic dialogues with an identified list of staff from diverse divisions within the department in a train the trainer model. The expected outcome at the end of the contract would be 20 or more Ramsey County staff with the capacity to “carry the model forward” – meaning that Full Circle services would no longer be needed in order for authentic dialogues to continue in the county.

At the end of one year, the 20 or so participant-leaders of the authentic dialogue model would be able to lead an authentic dialogue on their own or in partnership with participating peers. Secondly, the team as a whole would be capable of recruiting and training more leaders to partner with them in engaging authentic dialogue as a tool of change within the institution.

### ***Conditions under which dialogue supports social change***

Social change through dialogue emerges under specific conditions. The first condition is that people come into the dialogue ready to “bring” their full self or presence to the experience and allow others to bring their full presence as well. The second condition is the facilitation of cooperative inquiry through which we unpack and demonstrate a willingness to let go of existing assumptions and co-generate learning cooperatively. The third condition is the emergence of cooperation as the norm rather than conflict or frozen tension which may have been the norm before the dialogue.

We have to admit that it is far more normal to experience racism as a topic that we don’t talk about or fail to talk about well. We often may take it for granted that this is just the way it is and perhaps always will be. Authentic dialogue starts from the premise that we can talk about anything and everything – that it is built-in to our human nature to be able to do so, and do it quite well.

Since it is not the norm for us right now or historically, for that matter, in society, we have to initiate it from a “wobbly” place with limited capacity – like a person learning to ride a bike for the first time. At first it is difficult, but with practice it becomes really easy - and we don’t tend to forget how to do it if we take a break from it for a while either.

How do we create conditions so that people will bring their “full self” to dialogue when it has been the norm that it is not safe, expected or necessary to do so in the past? A long-standing pattern to

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appreciate here is that with any change effort there are “early adopters”, “fence-sitters” and “resisters”. Obviously, it is easiest to start with early adopters. However, it is wise to appreciate the pattern of diversity found in nature and consider how to invite in and sustain the participation of fence-sitters and resisters, so that their perspectives are visible and respected throughout the change effort. Exclusion strengthens resistance to cooperation because it violates trust and relationship.

**Table 2: the four languages at play**

Language	Expression Before Authentic Dialogue	Expression After Authentic Dialogue
Head or thought	“What I really think the solution is – is to stop worrying about what the solution is – and just continue doing what we are doing. What we are doing is good enough to serve the mission and vision.”	Wow! I have all kinds of light bulbs going off in my head now about perspectives I never thought of. I recognize now that I have heard some of this before, but dismissed it, because it was not my perspective or my organization’s perspective.
Feeling or heart	“I am feeling disturbed/unsettled by the contentious energy on our team. We don’t listen to each other and we just fight, fight, fight.”	I felt safe to say what I really feel for the first time.. I like it when I and others can really say what we need to say – and it matters.
Words	“Let’s just get back to work! These meetings don’t solve anything”.	“Okay, let me tell you what I really think”. “Thanks, it is nice to feel heard.”
Acts	I work on the sidelines (between meetings) setting up networks and divisions so I get “my way” even though I never expressed what that was in the meetings.	Now that we have this little safe space in a big organization, here is what I suggest we do to make dialogue like this the norm, everywhere in the org.

“Inner-work” is the task of the change agent and facilitator to prepare herself/himself to guide effective change. It is only by doing this inner work ourselves that we can be authentic in engaging all participants in a dialogue to do the same – both “on the spot” and over time. You will be called upon to consistently work on integrating your head, your heart, your words and deeds. Authenticity and integrity go hand in hand.

If someone in dialogue says – “we should all really respect each other’s viewpoints and not attack each other in here”, but is known outside of the dialogue as the main culprit on a work team that is always chopping off other’s perspectives when they are not in alignment with his – what can the facilitator do about this? Often the facilitator will not know, and in some cases, no one will tell her. It is through the consistent improvement in meta-skills as a facilitator that you will be able to tell when there is a lack of alignment between any of the four languages above – by paying attention to what is actually said, the context in which it is said, and shifts in body language and interaction.

Dialogue may be one of the most simple and powerful strategies available to help us work through many of the pressing issues that divide us. We are all socially conditioned in ways that reinforce norms of

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segregation, violence, poverty, oppression and inequality. We each “internalize” the world in which we are socialized. With this internalization are processes in which what is outside becomes what is inside and then what is inside reinforces and extends what is outside. We socially create and socially extend a system that works for very few of us. We find it easier to blame and scapegoat each other than to embrace each other in a cooperative process of co-evolving.

It can change, if we embody and embed the will. The final language form – “action” - is expected, with sufficient dialogue, to be more in alignment along with the other three languages. We cannot be in deep alignment in relationship when we are not in alignment internally, and vice versa. As we have already said – what is inside generates what is outside and what is outside becomes the inside.

***Why would we not be authentic in any and all given moments when we accept the call to dialogue?***

The perspective shared among practitioners of dialogue and social change is that we all have learned habits of seeing the world only partially (through lenses we learn and adopt in our social networks. It is not effortless to simply change our worldviews. The process of dialogue, when done well, opens us up to see new ways of connecting information and experience so that new ways of seeing the world emerge.

David Bohm (1996) wrote a short book on dialogue to apply what he learned over his life from physics to exploring dialogue as a vehicle for social change. We, as a collective whole, and as separate camps within the whole, are the dialogue we are having. What we have come to believe is embodied in each of us and embedded in all our social relations and institutions. The dialogue we extend may either shape a continuation of norms of inequality and violence, or may serve to bring us together in new ways and promote greater justice, peace and harmony.

***“Authentic dialogue”*** invites us each to be fully present, completely honest, and thoroughly open to new ideas and learning from new and old peers alike, and willing to engage our differences respectfully in creating new possibilities. The social divisions in society are sharp and deeply felt. We have ingrained habits of holding strongly to our separations and divisions – inviting others to see it our way, but necessarily being open to being the ones to let go of our beliefs to learn from and with others. The torn social fabric is an outcome of this dynamic. We created it, and we can change it if we choose. Whether our focus is structural racism, gender inequality, poverty traps or shared prosperity, dialogue is necessary although insufficient alone along the road to sustainable change.

For the sake of this essay, the very basic framework applied is that of Kurt Lewin’s (1947) change cycle of recognizing where we are each “frozen” in our current understandings, letting go of these frozen understandings as we make collaborative meaning – or “thawing”, and letting in and locking in new insights – “re-freezing” new meanings, new relations and new practices in our networks and systems, making continuous, co-evolving improvements over time when possible. Cycles of dialogue and action are applied to support continuous iterations of this process.

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### Etymology

The Ancient Greek form of democracy was based on a culture of dialogue in the polis (the political meeting space, which while very democratic for those present excluded slaves, the poor and women). In their language dia-logos means “flow of meaning”. This flow of meaning is involved in the exchange of listening and voice, respect and suspending of judgment<sup>6</sup>. It is robust dialogue that facilitates decision-making and action that is best in any particular situation. The diverse parts and wholes are able to align sufficiently to generate a greater whole. Diverse participation in meaning-making is at the heart of the matter.

Full Circle Community Institute appreciates defining what something is through comparison to its alternatives. For us, it makes describing what something is much more tangible for end-users. We have found it helpful to distinguish dialogue from three well-known alternatives: raw debate, polite discussion, and skillful discussion. For the sake of this essay, we have also incorporated “negotiation” as an additional alternative.

*We define “authentic dialogue” as any form of dialogue in which people discern their own and each other’s honest perspectives in a safe enough space for people to take risks and an open enough space for people to be real, surface assumptions and make new meaning together. This new meaning is then applied, personally and systemically, to foster conditions for desired long-term change.*

**Table 3: The Continuum from Debate to Dialogue**

Raw Debate	Polite Discussion	Skillful Discussion	Negotiation	Dialogue
Each side escalates in relation to the other in an effort to win. Neither side is willing to “bend”. There is simply one right answer – mine. Tends toward degenerative dominant-subordinate relations	Each side chooses to minimize areas of tension and hold discourse in the “safe zone” in which neither side has to put itself at risk.	Each side does further research on things that matter and for which a conversation is desired. Issues from a particular frame and seeks to “win points” by making a greater number of gains than losses in the areas of disagreement.	Each side, either with or without a mediator, defines the boundaries of negotiation and goes into it wanting to win some things and perhaps willing to compromise on others.	Parties come to the circle ready to listen, to respect, to suspend judgment and to learn to make meaning together. There is not necessarily an “agenda”. A dialogue allows people to connect and let come what they are able and interested to discuss. A range of possible agendas emerge from the open space.

<sup>6</sup> Isaacs, 1999. Dialogue. P...

**Dialogue and Social Change – Going Deeper**

Booher and Innes (2000) propose that a mix of 3 elements, when present, generate network power – and therefore greater power for social change. The elements are **diversity, interdependence and dialogue**. They say that “as a result (of these three elements co-presence) (participants) are enabled to act both independently and inter-dependently with central direction” (ibid, p. 3). Let me specify that by “*central direction*” we are not justifying a command and control pattern, but rather saying that all agents within a container operate by a shared set of simple rules, enacted both autonomously and inter-dependently.

A key point here, relevant for any large-scale, whole-systems change initiative is that the process builds upon long-term discussions and transformative feed -back/forward loops. Sufficient dialogue opens the space for evolution of new norms. Insufficient dialogue prevents new possibilities from emerging. Similarly, a lack of diversity engaged in our dialogues and lack of sufficient time to build trust and inter-dependence reinforces existing norms. Growing trust and inter-dependence is a critical part of the work, **if** dialogue is intended to support social change.

Initiatives that intend to use dialogue as a social change strategy need to allow enough time for dialogue to help those engaged work through levels of process work. Dialogue is a democratic space, but only becomes so when the participants have built the common sense of how to be democratic with each other. A democratic space requires constant care to the elements of dialogue to be discussed later – listening, respect, suspending and presence – and when these four elements are co-occurring – then transformation.

Booher and Innes reflect on the new norm – generated by the information or network age – that hierarchical forms of organization and decision-making are increasingly a poor fit for reality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and that this form is being replaced by an “all channel network” form, in which all nodes can communicate with all other nodes. We must embrace and invite diversity, set the conditions for self-organizing of true inter-dependence of diverse stakeholders, and foster consistent, frequent dialogue to guide collaborative meaning-making and social change.

Zaid Hassan (2007) describes the shift in this network age as one from “solid modernity” in which we are certain that we can create the future according to the images in our minds by applying the technology at hand – to a liquid modernity in which we learn to live at the edge of chaos and encounter complexity consistently and wisely.

Currently, if we don’t realize what we hope to achieve, it is seen more as a technical problem, than as something more complex. We live in a time now of “liquid modernity” characterized by high uncertainty, growing and continuous risk and shifting trust and alliances. When everything around us is moving and becomes dynamic with minor permutations in any element of the structure, we must design more nimble approaches to change that engage diversity in understanding our world and our possibilities.

Diversity, which has been historically marginalized, is now coming front and center as fundamental to good decision-making in any business or social change environment. With this reality comes to the tension of historical pattern. We are so well-trained to be exclusive and to focus on bonds within our

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networks that match along sectoral or cultural lines that it is quite difficult to be cross-culturally and cross-sectorally engaged on a sustainable and equitable basis.

A dialogue-grounded approach assumes that ‘power’ resides in what is in our minds and how we make meaning together. If we change our view of things we change the possibility of situations. If we use the metaphor of “evolution” from evolutionary biology – species, societies, organizations, and people change when they synergize differentiation and coherence.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Dialogic Roles***

Isaacs (1999) identified four fluid roles that all of us are encouraged to learn in order to be great at dialogue. The roles are “mover”, “opposer”, “lover”, and “bystander”. It is important, in effective dialogue, that people are supported to enhance their capacities to flow between all of these roles as appropriate. It is only when all four roles are in even tension that a dialogue is whole.

We have some in our communities and organizations who are the “**movers** and shakers” and they may prefer to always lead from this role and diminish the significance of the other roles in their leadership. There are others who have adapted to existing leadership dynamics and established a firm footing as the **opposer** who consistently challenges convention, but does not fluidly assume the other roles as well. This is the person who becomes typecast as the “cynic” and in particularly problematic organizational cultures and with lack of self-care, becomes a “frustrated cynic”. The “**lover**” is the person who adopts a leadership support posture and pays attention to what they perceive to be plausible or good enough ideas proposed by leadership and strongly endorse these views in order to build momentum behind the leader’s ideas. This form of loving can often be synonymous with loyalty, and it is not healthy in organizations or communities for people to become frozen in this role. The **bystander**, in health, is a critical role of appreciative listening that supports everyone in suspending judgment and getting all perspectives equally aired. In poor health, the bystander is a person frozen in an outsider role who pushes for inter-subjective understanding, but whose practical example of listening to the whole is persistently peripheralized.

Table 3 below describes each of these four roles and aligns each with their Jungian archetypes (see Moore and Gillette, 1990). Further, as we consider the roles below, it is important to build the practice of supporting the full diversity of people and networks present to move just as freely among the roles as any other person or group.

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<sup>7</sup> See Martin A. Nowak. 2006. Evolutionary Dynamics

**Table 4: The Four Roles**

Roles (Jungian archetype)	Practice
Mover (sovereign)	Makes propositions and about what needs to happen, and how to do it – and leads by example with authority.
Opposer (warrior or rebel)	Consistently challenges proposed ideas in order to support consideration of alternatives – but does not necessarily express the alternative – just a challenge to the proposal.
Lover (lover)	Strives to generate support for the movers' ideas by animating what is good about them, while damping challenges. Seeks to build momentum and alignment behind the mover.
Bystander (magician)	Like an “alchemist” sifts through all of the ideas and challenges and promotes a synergetic cross-currents understanding of all said, and all that is possible, without expressing a preference.

In healthy communities and organizations, people flow freely through all of these roles and are thereby able to generate a co-evolving sensibility about their possibilities and practices and realize alignment and effectiveness. How do we go about co-generating the capacity within our organizations and communities to practice healthy dialogue and action? Below, I discuss the building blocks of the process.

### ***Building Blocks***

There are some underlying elements (assumptions) that make good dialogue and action possible. Below in Table 4, I identify and explain seven such elements, with some questions for you to consider about your current capacities in each area.

The basic building blocks of great dialogue include listening, respecting, voicing, suspending judgment, presence, learning, and co-evolving. I suggest that wherever you are now in your capacities, by consistent practice and learning, you and your network will become more capable over time, especially if you pay attention to engaging diversity comprehensively in your efforts. At some point, homogenous dialogue in a world of diversity becomes a destructive monologue.

We live in a complex world in which our worldviews have become incoherent to each other. We are wedded to our separately constructed coherence and are prone to irresolvable conflict when we compete with each other for who is right and who is wrong. We set up win-lose situations. Our efforts to create change fall short of the mark. A large part of the underlying dynamic, hidden from view still to most of us, is that we can no longer live our lives and construct our institutions and relations with a Newtonian age machine metaphor. Applying the new thinking from science (physics, biology, chemistry, ecology, psychology) we recognize the society, our organizations and networks are each complex adaptive systems. Each of us as an “agent of change” comes into a dialogue with a set of assumptions and set ways of behavior. By entering a dialogue with significant diversity of perspectives and practices, we create a space where each of us can put our assumptions in abeyance (suspend), learn from alternative perspectives and practices (cooperative inquiry), and generate new possibilities that may lead to the long-term change desired (prototyping or improvisation), and institutionalize (freeze-in) those strategies with coherence that help us all see and practice in a way that delivers a greater whole – a new structural coupling.

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**Table 5: Capacity Building for Dialogue**

Dialogic Capacities	Description	Capacity Questions
Listening	Allowing each person to fully express their views without interruption.	How well do you listen? Do you listen equally to diverse perspectives?
Respecting	Honoring that each person is telling their own story and that it does not need be alignment with your story.	Do you respect your own views equal to your respect of all others?
Voicing	Being free (fierce, respectful and wise) in the expression of our deepest, relevant, perspectives to contribute in dialogue.	Do you feel safe and confident enough to express your views consistently with everyone?
Suspending Judgment	Being willing to let go of a view we currently “hold” in order to challenge our own “filters” and allow new awareness settle in.	Are you able to suspend your judgment, no matter how strongly held in any context?
Presence	Being fully in the present moment with awareness of our assumptions, thoughts, feelings, practices, and the bliss and tensions we feel living through us. Moving from a space of genuine commitment to a common vision is essential.	Are you able to sustain presence no matter how much frustration or tension you feel? In what cases do you notice it is hardest to remain present? What is your commitment and how do you hold it?
Learning	Letting go of out-dated notions and letting in new perspectives. We co-generate new meaning together. We recognize new possibilities that may be planted.	Do you start over fresh each day, with each experience and let new learning in consistently?
Co-Evolving	Partnering with peers to generate new shared understandings and practices. This embodiment of cooperation.	Are you sensing co-evolving and cooperation or combat? How do you go about setting conditions for co-evolving and cooperating?

Really listening to others is one of the most profound acts of love a human being can offer. This is especially significant when we are able to listen to those with views and experiences remarkably different from our own. When people are “listened to” they are paying attention subconsciously to whether or not they feel heard and seen, and also to whether or not they feel respected. Respecting that our view and experience is not the only valid data set, creates an open space for learning. We must each come willing to let go of assumptions and respect other views no matter how much we might not like other’s views. This does not mean we shy away from voicing our perspectives clearly and comprehensively. We say where we are coming from – perhaps even with very strong advocacy – with the intention of being understood and willing to suspend judgment about right and wrong. This process takes a deep level of presence. We are aware of what we believe and the tension between us and others, and we remain focused on what we want to mutually create, rather than what we want to win competitively. Following these steps, we are able to actually learn together – the dialogue is able to set conditions for cooperation. When we cooperate, we co-evolve.

Axelrod (1997) suggests that cooperation is only beneficial when three conditions pertain: **a) there is an existence of reciprocity; b) the participants have a significant stake in the outcomes sought through cooperation; and c) each participant trusts that the cooperative endeavor will endure and continue to be useful over time.** It is in light of these conditions that we must consider how we go about using dialogue for the purposes of supporting social change.

Bringing people together for a weekend and then sending them back to do business as usual won’t lead to change. People must be willing and able to work together over a long enough period of time in order to create change together. Having said this, there are many instances of using dialogue as a tool to generate open space for new considerations and just allow people to sit with it for awhile as they continue what they are doing. At some point, people who remember some of what they heard in a dialogue may choose to go back for more, and at that point be ready to consider change. People have to be mutually invested or it can’t work.

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What kind of reciprocity in an organization would need to exist for dialogue to lead to change?

Reciprocity implies that all contribute and all receive a return. It does not suggest or require that the investments and returns are equal, but they must be satisfactory to the people involved. When you invite reciprocity to emerge in a place in which it is not the norm it often may require a much more complex re-wiring of networks within which people interact and make decisions in an organization. Organizations hesitate, for obvious reasons, when they consider truly embracing complexity and setting conditions for co-evolution through cooperative inquiry in an organization.

Under what conditions do all staff in an organization have an equal investment in an outcome? Does the staff of Ramsey County have an equal investment in the county becoming an anti-racist county? Do people involved in the county's numerous anti-racism efforts have deep trust that what the county is doing will lead to change – enough that they will invest themselves in the process for the long haul? These are important considerations for the county to consider as it implements its authentic dialogue model.

Several models of social change, which incorporate dialogue, exist that have been extensively studied. Holman, Devane and Cady (2007: 12) wrote "The Change Handbook", which lists and describes more than sixty methods. In their explanation of the various methods, the authors indicate that groups seeking change have a range of resources, timelines and capacities to facilitate change and therefore it would be useful to provide a broad range of options for consideration. All the methods have proven useful in producing dramatic and sustainable change. The common elements across the change methods include: a) they facilitate the contribution of participants in a meaningful way that compels people into action; b) they support the unleashing of people's contributions; c) the head, heart and spirit of all participants are engaged; d) they assume that an abundance of untapped or poorly tapped knowledge and wisdom exist in any group; e) they use participatory processes to generate co-created bases of information to guide change; f) all methods seek a view of the whole system including deeper clarity about how all of our parts and processes generate what we are experiencing and where the levers of change are that facilitate re-direction in alignment with the vision; and g) all methods see change as a process that is on-going – iteratively and dynamically. Change is not an event.

So, how do we construct dialogues that incorporate all these elements? The Full Circle Community Institute model ***starts with a core commitment to always create a safe place for dialogue***. This is always necessary, but especially so when we are bringing together people who have very different views of the past and/or present and do not trust that they can be partners with the others present in co-creating a better common future. We have not worked on an initiative yet where this fundamental tension was not very alive, so starting by creating a safe place for dialogue is truly critical to success. A safe place for dialogue should in no way be assumed to include "political correctness". Dialogue doesn't work if people are trying to say the "right thing" according to others. The right thing to say is always your truth, nothing more and certainly nothing less. Creating a safe place includes identifying some simple rules for dialogue that help it go well.

We provide one to one coaching to participants before they arrive in the dialogue (when possible) and engage the participants when they arrive in reviewing the "agenda" if already set and agreed to, or collaboratively setting an agenda if that is appropriate. People have a common set of rules to function

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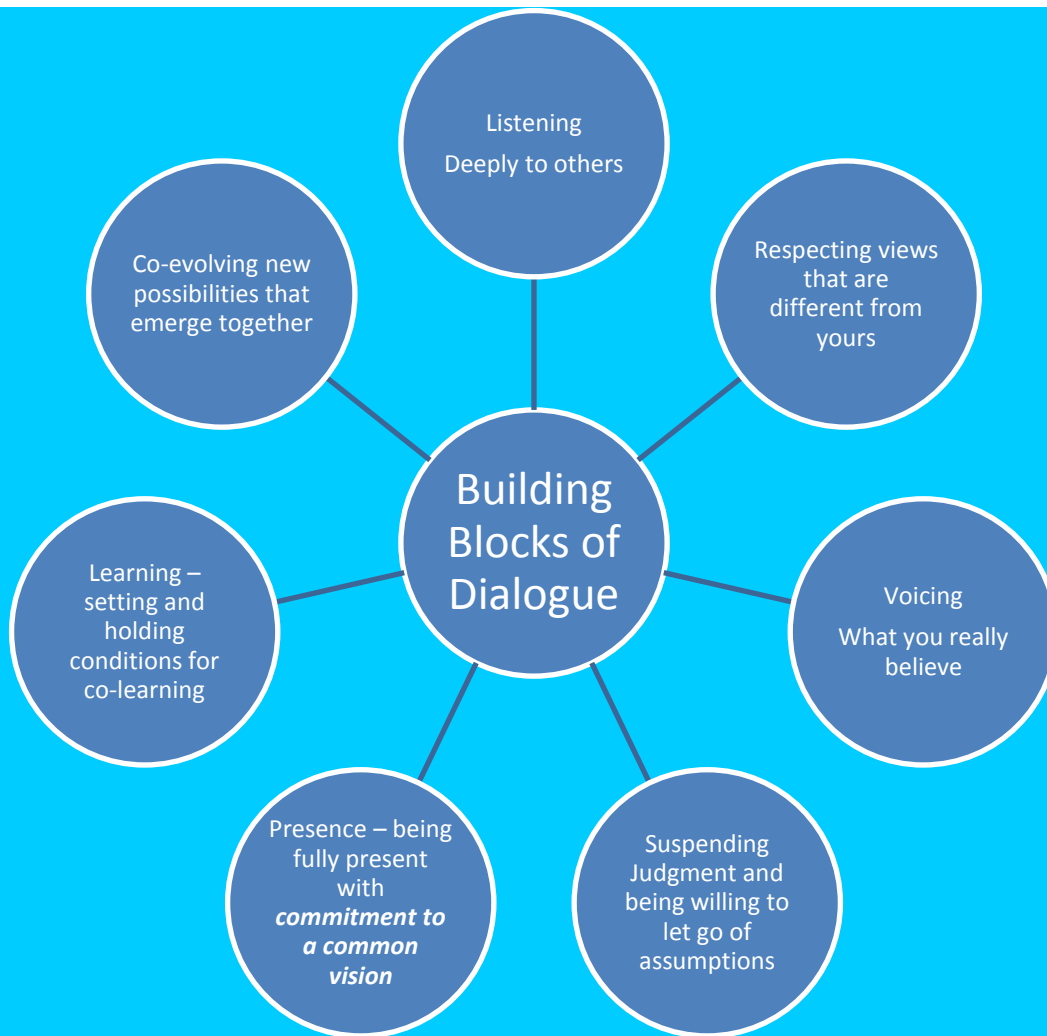
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with, and an agreed upon agenda and time frame, with coherence about how to adjust the agenda as needed. It is important that the rules for dialogue agreed to are adhered to. If anyone steps out of line significantly it is necessary for the facilitator to ensure that saboteurs are redirected or asked to leave the space. Re-direction has always worked for us. We have never had to send participants packing. Setting the container with participants sets a condition in which they co-own the space. Since they created it, they respect it.

**The basic model of authentic dialogue includes the following components:**

- **Setting the Container** (welcome everyone, provide a basic overview of what an authentic dialogue is, share the simple rules, and facilitate a participatory process of setting ground-rules for the dialogue. To set the ground-rules, ask all participants to answer the question – what do you need from yourself and all the other people here to be fully present and open to the experience? All participants list and then make sure everyone understands what is raised, and search for consensus on what “rules” to live by in the conversation. Dialogue requires the simple rules on page 7 be honored. These ground-rules are different; it is an open space for people to express their felt needs for safety in a group setting. A lot can be learned about the diverse places people are coming from by doing this, BUT, don’t dwell on it. Do it efficiently so you can get to the dialogue.
- **Dyadic work** – talk to people about the principle of “generative listening” and get people involved in one to one dialogues around a question related to the core subject of the dialogue for the day. This gives people a “warm-up”, a chance to begin to immerse themselves with just one other person and recognize the similarity and difference of perspectives. Do a review of what came up in the one to ones with the whole group before you go on – so everyone can see the range of perspectives and background that are present – and begin to make individual and collaborative meaning about that.
- **Split the group into thematic dialogues – and commence authentic dialogues.** Make sure the simple rules and ground rules are followed. It is a good idea to have the simple rules and ground-rules up on the wall on easily visible paper to provide a reminder of how we are to relate in the experience. Make sure visible recording is going on of what is being said so people can keep tracking as the dialogue progresses.
- **Close with Collaborative Meaning-Making** (collaborative action research). Bring the groups together and search for collaborative meaning and discuss what was useful, what was new, and what to consider doing next to go deeper with dialogue and get to desired transformations.

Figure 4: Building Blocks of Effective Dialogue



When all seven of these building blocks are in place, people are best able to generate co-evolving collaborative meaning and change. They are able to set the conditions for co-evolution. What before was perceived as not possible becomes self-organizing. Imagine the possibilities!

In order to get there from where we are, we each need to develop the discipline for dialogue, diversity and interdependence. Develop a self-empowerment plan to expand your capacities in each of these areas. Keep a journal of your growth in each of these areas and how as you grow in one area it reinforces or challenges you in other areas. Take note of how your engagements with peers at work, in community and in family shift as you build capacities in all of these areas. What is becoming new about you? How have your relationships with fear, with tension, with operating assumptions, with worldview

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and practice shifted as you “develop” as a fuller human being? What new perspectives and possibilities are you now able to embrace that before were unacceptable to you or outside your imagination?

As we consider the “language” that we “show” in dialogue, it is important to recognize, that like the roles we play are multiple, so are the languages. Earlier (see page 11) I mention four languages in dialogue, one of which is not publicly displayed (our thoughts). The framework below leaves out the hidden realm of our thoughts, or the area that anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1973, 1990) called the “silent language” (which is composed of our thoughts and the social-cultural background in which our thinking emerges).

Three dialogues have been identified by Isaacs (1999) and the MIT and Society for Organizational Learning as constantly operative and visible to others. One language is that of direct expression – in which we state our meaning with voice. The second language is the expression of feelings – in which we state how we feel about what is going on in relation to what we and others want. The third language is the language of our power – or our acts, this is the expression of language through behavior. It is often the norm that a gap exists between what we say we are doing and what we actually do. As Donald Schon puts it – there is a gap between our espoused knowledge and our tacit knowledge.

**Figure 5: The Three Languages<sup>8</sup>**



*Thought is the hidden language that operates through the other three languages.*

<sup>8</sup> P. 13 William Isaacs. 1999. Dialogue and the art of thinking together. New York; Currency-Doubleday.

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It is important to develop the cultural competence, racial and gender equity and address other power inequalities that limit equitable voice, feeling, power and practice among all stakeholders. A challenge in the process is to consider at all steps – who is here in relation to the full diversity of people who could contribute here. Always ask yourself and your peers – who else needs to be here and how will we engage their full participation? Inviting full participation puts any frozen understandings at risk. Inviting token participation prevents an authentic dialogue and counters the goal of co-evolutionary learning and practice.

While it is uncomfortable to entertain perspectives and options in conflict or tension with your own, dialogues offer you and others the opportunity and process to bridge what seem to be impassable divides. Allow the process time to work.

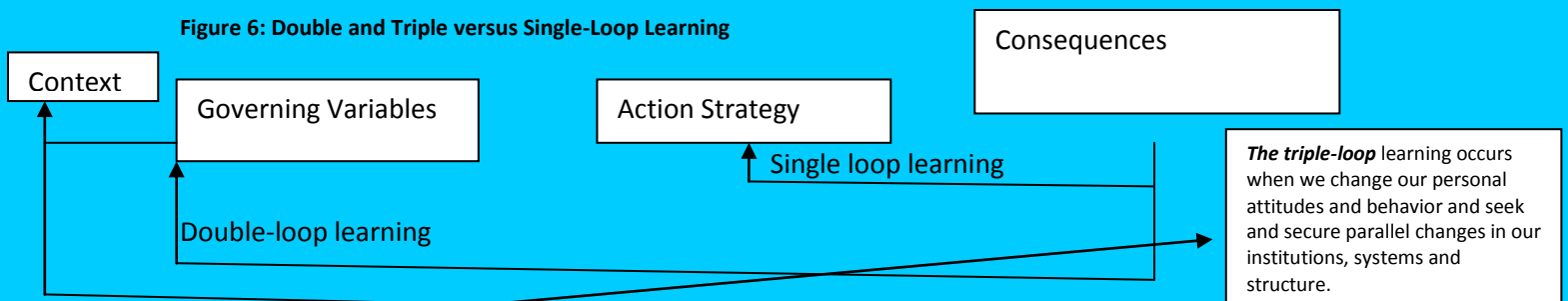
### Layers of Dialogue

Dialogue reaches increasing levels of depth and breadth of shared meaning as it breaks through surface and moderate layers and gets to the underlying deeper layer where are frozen understandings and commitments are in conflict and/or hidden from view. We can chart our existing discourse on a landscape diagram and design a pathway toward the deeper discourse that generates the change we seek. We start by facilitating iterative cycles of **stretching and folding**.

To “**stretch**” means to add differences, and amplify the ones that matter. We expand our scale and scope of consideration, and consciously include diverse people and possibilities. To “**fold**” means to “bring in” the new perspectives as our own and look for common ground. We make the new insights part of our core considerations and clarify purpose and objectives in light of these new insights and considerations. The process repeats in iterative and dynamical cycles.

Our intention shapes the journey. Argyris and Schon (1974) describe the distinction between single-loop learning and double-loop learning. In single-loop learning we do not put our operating assumptions at risk. We assume that our objective is to make the existing program or system more efficient without due consideration to the governing variables. In double-loop learning we commit to consistently subjecting our governing assumptions to appreciative and critical review.

Figure 6: Double and Triple versus Single-Loop Learning



We facilitate double-loop learning when we each bring valid information and encourage free and informed choice among all stakeholders and internal commitment among all for sustained involvement and collaborative change. Control is shared, and therefore existing power dynamics must be put in abeyance and be open for change. Participation of all, equitably, in design and implementation is critical.

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in any change initiative – with particular attention paid to engaging those who have been historically excluded and marginalized.

To operationalize double-loop learning we each have to lay out our “evidence” for what we proclaim and compare how each have made meaning up to now and evaluate our comparative evidence with directly observable data. Through this process we surface conflicting views and set conditions for public testing through prototyping of plausible alternative theories of social change. Participants in a dialogue using double-loop learning lay out their “theories-in-use” – each describing what they are doing or think we should do that leads to the desired change. Participants then engage in public testing of the utility of each theory –in-use in relation to what is actually happening.

Dialogue works best when we are each able to consistently surface our core assumptions and put them out in the open air, explicitly, for re-consideration and testing by all. As dynamics in networks, resource flows, policy options, demographics and so on shift – by facilitating consistent double-loop learning – we are better suited to invite in the “edge of chaos” – and put the landscape of change in light of the greater whole of social dynamics.

Once we have set conditions for sustainable double loop learning, we may then reach for the deeper terrain of “triple loop learning” (see Peschl, 2006). Long-term change objectives are not realized cognitively, although consciousness change is fundamental in the process. Securing long-term change requires a change in our sense of who we are in relation to each other and the way in which we relate in constructing our shared world – cooperatively.

Triple-loop learning asks what has to change about who we are (identity) in relation to each other in order to facilitate the desired long-term change goals. Double-loop learning deals with the “rules” that shape existing resource flows and outcomes. Single –loop learning helps us each think about our day to day transactions with each other and what we can change at the personal and inter-personal level to take blind spots out of interactions. The third loop asks us to go deeper still and facilitate a fundamental shift in the basis of our relationships. This is the level of learning required to address structural racism.

Another way to look at this is to say that there are: a) tactical levels of interaction, and through open interaction we can mutually examine our interpretations of what makes sense and be open (or not) to revising our individual and mutual interpretations; b) strategic levels of interaction, which are less frequent than tactical interactions, and provide a space to reconsider and revise our elected purpose and direction; and c) the integral level, which requires us to unpack and change our assumptions – and this is the step that happens least frequently in organizations or society (Beck and Schornack).

Using a “landscape diagram” we can examine the inter-relationships of areas of certainty and uncertainty, agreement and options on which we are far from agreement. The way we go about making decisions must shift appropriately in light of the level of certainty and agreement that is held among diverse stakeholders in the space of dialogue. We need to improve our effectiveness in generating viable pathways to our desired future with the recognition that there is much that is not in our direct control and awareness on a day to day basis. Our change strategies themselves must become complex adaptive systems.

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If we reflect on Ramsey County as an example, it had small but consistent diversity from the founding of the County in the 1800s up to the 1980s. Starting in the 1970s a significant and steady influx changed the fundamental character of the county from being a white county with a few communities of color and small overall percentage of people of color to a county that now has a majority of children of color in its public school system and is likely to be less than 50% white by the year 2020.

Ramsey County, as an organization, has not kept pace with the growing diversity of the population it serves in its staff composition. This becomes more and more the case as you climb the power hierarchy of the county. To its credit, the county has made consistent strides in its hiring, retention, and promotion strategies. It has also worked consistently to improve its cross-cultural competence, organization-wide.

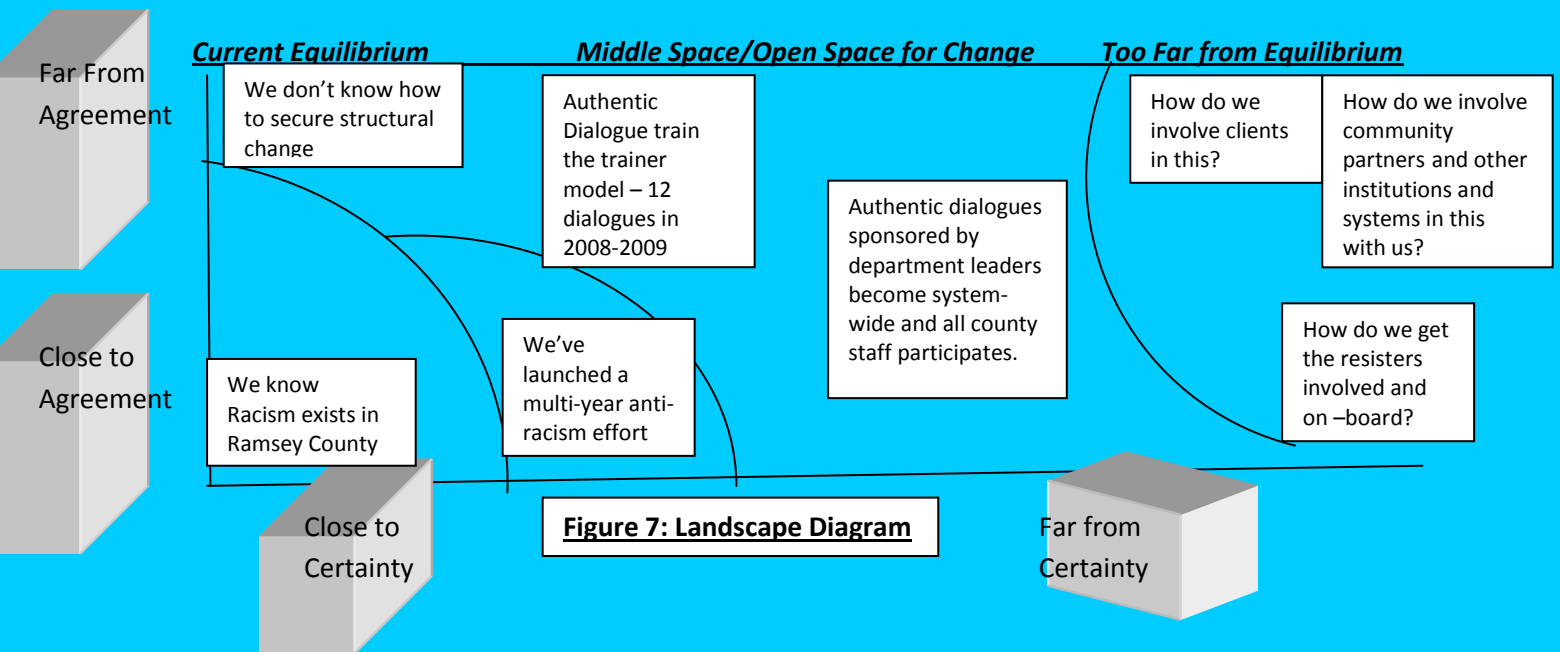
Among the more recent efforts in the county, it launched an anti-racism effort in 2003. The expectation was that if department and division leaders went through anti-racism training, and such training was made available across the county's divisions – that enough people would develop a common understanding and framework from which to develop and sustain effective anti-racism efforts. Eventually, such efforts are expected to lead to the county reaching its goal of being an “anti-racist, multicultural organization”.

As diversity has changed in Ramsey County, so has the complexity of its operations and its tasks. It recognizes that it has been using Eurocentric norms and processes for a county that is no longer almost entirely white. Given the goals of the county to recognize and stop patterns of racial disparities when they arise, it is necessary for the county to take stock of the extent to which its approach to diversity sufficiently embraces complexity.

As the diversity of the population served by the county has increased, particularly among those with multiple factors of marginalization, the complexity of the approach within the county has been lacking. Ralph Stacey (1996) developed the “landscape diagram” as a tool to help organizations look at the relationships between certainty and agreement in the organization. As complexity increases, what is certain and areas of agreement both diminish. The organization will likely see diminishing returns in its outcomes over time, unless and until it is able to embrace complexity more effectively.

This requires changing the tool box. The organization of the 1980s or before used linear modeling to manage and lead. Today's organization knows better. We live in a complex world, in which linear frameworks are simply inappropriate to handle today's challenges.

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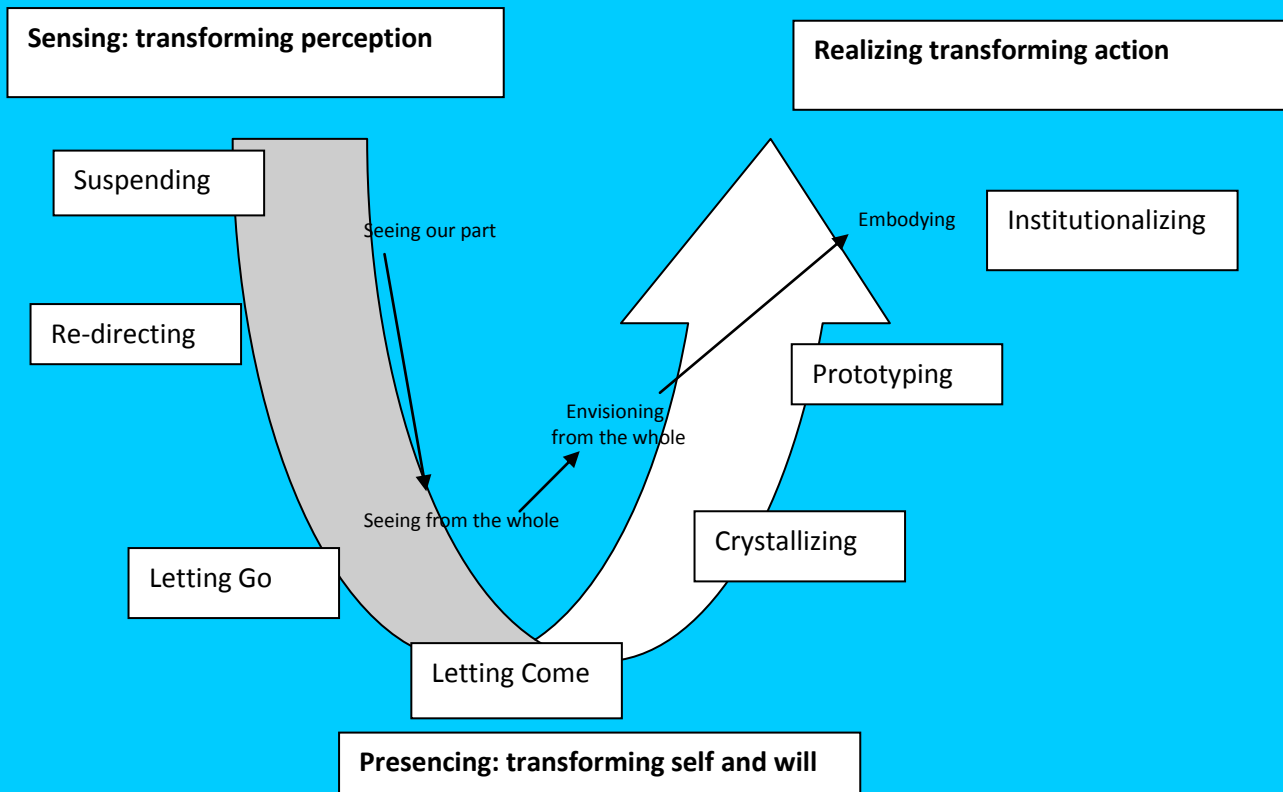
Designing for success in complex dynamics is not a “program”, but rather a “process” of leading with the adaptive learning in your network of change incrementally and contextually over time – call that the “program” if you must. A challenge for change agents is to make wise decisions about where and how to sponsor change in a way that helps people transcend their default mode of decision-making and investment to a broader and deeper investment, taking risks that help the organization embrace the complexity of the situation appropriately.

A significant area of investment over the last decade from the organizational development and social change sectors is re-consideration of what techniques work best in what circumstances – in order to facilitate change. Wherever it is we hope to arrive as our destination, dialogue is part of the journey.

Otto Scharmer (et al, 2006)<sup>9</sup> developed the “U Theory” to describe seven capacities within a “U Movement” that leads to greater mutual understanding and change. We can take the “building blocks of dialogue” considered earlier and unify them with the U Movement process modeled below as we create a dialogic theory of social change. Scharmer and his colleagues have used this model to facilitate “change labs”, which apply dialogue in networks working for long-term change initiatives.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers. 2005. Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society. New York; Currency.

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**Figure 8: The U Process**

Mahatma Gandhi’s famous quip – “we must be the change we wish to see in the world” is relevant here. Each of us has to be willing to suspend judgment, re-direct our awareness and attention and let go of our frozen assumptions and any privileges that go with them in order for dialogue to lead to the institutionalization of change. By being fully present with our vision of change, and witnessing the presence that others are coming from – we create something that did not exist before. Our new common presence is a new entity in the world. At first it will be fledgling and vulnerable to collapse. As Kotter and Rathgeber (2005) say in *The Iceberg is Melting*, we have to stick to our inclination for change when the forces of resistance and conservation of the past push us to return to old ways.

Zaid Hassan (December 2007) wrote “Laboratories for Social Change” to describe the underlying philosophy of “change labs”, which apply the “U movement” shown above. In an increasingly complex world, we must create “containers” that bring the outside in and engage the full diversity of stakeholders that help us grapple with the greater whole. This is the way to get to long-term change in complex adaptive systems. The change lab is envisioned as a space for experimentation that includes dialogue, but dialogue is not the focus per se – prototyping potential change initiatives that can become institutionalized is the core objective.

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Full Circle is intentional about using dialogue as a core tool that is engaged in all of our work to facilitate change. Through dialogue, diverse perspectives connect and change agents are able to bring their part, hear how others see the same contextual matter and foster conditions for building emergent alliances for change. Remember the model of Booher and Innes (2000) that we must engage in dialogue with diversity to generate a new form of interdependence that helps us see reality in a more complex way, and facilitate broader and deeper impact.

**Suspending** judgment opens up the space for a diverse flow of meaning to accumulate. We bring our **focus** onto what we “see” in reality and share that with peers. We then **broaden** our focus by allowing ourselves to be changed by the diverse perceptions of peers. By **redirecting** our awareness from our ideas to the assumptions that underlie them, we are able to surface the role of our social conditioning in “framing” our senses of the world. In this way we are **deepening** our awareness through dialogue and surfacing deep assumptions. **Letting Go** is the practice of personal and group responsibility to allow our old assumptions to wash away and be replaced. It is here that we arrive at our deepest way of knowing - our **source**. **Letting Come, from the source**, is the process of honoring and allowing new insights to come in to each of us, and all of us as a whole. **Crystallizing** is about the process of co-generating coherence – or a common new sensibility about what has emerged and what the dialoguers would like to lock in place. This creative space of co-generating possible ways of creating the future is a precious and vulnerable space. It is here that you create new ideas and principles to apply. **Prototyping** or improvisation is about designing and implementing fast cycle experiments or learning projects to test and refine our crystallized understanding. Through such active improvisation we are able to get a clearer sense of both what we know and what we don’t know while doing the work we have determined is necessary to sponsor change. Finally, **institutionalizing** (embodying and embedding) change is the last stage of the U Movement.

At the root of the whole process is a full authentic presence of all participants. The holding back of one facilitates the holding back of possibilities for the whole. Rather than just consider the negative impact of one agent in the dialogue holding back, consider what happens when diverse networks of meaning fail to be fully present. Putting our privilege behind our perspectives at risk is no small request – yet it is necessary. How often are we willing to do this?

We may work in systems that are rule-bound, with much of what we are supposed to be doing prescribed or proscribed by policy and procedure. We may feel obliged to do things in ways that do not work even when we personally feel other options ought to be considered.

Maturana and Varela (1988)<sup>10</sup> discuss the social mechanisms behind the ways we interact. They define “**ontogeny**” as the “history of structural change in a unity without loss of organization in that unity”. The

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<sup>10</sup> P. 74 in Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. 1988. *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*. Boston; Shambhala.

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American economy and global economy, for example have long sustained norms of capitalism, gender inequality and structural racism. Even with all of the permutations of America and the broader global political economy, poverty, sexism and racism have been enduring features. How could dialogue help generate a new ontogeny?

Since we are exploring the use of dialogue as a tool for social change it is important to understand this concept of ontogeny. Any system that is adaptive and complex is able to self-organize and sustain a unified coherence until the point at which its unity disintegrates. The unity is shaped and reinforced by the way the elements of it are structurally coupled. **Structural coupling** refers to a history of recurrent interactions leading to structural congruence.<sup>11</sup> This and other tools of social change are described below.

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<sup>11</sup> Maturana and Varela. P. 1988. P. 75.

*“Structurally setting the conditions so that what is raised in dialogue actually leads to social change in our organizations, requires transparency and accountability in both decision –making within the structure of the organization and the outcomes of decision-making. Getting to transparency and genuine accountability takes intentional process work and deep democracy.”*

--Sam Grant

### Designing Social Change

So far, this essay has defined authentic dialogue, described its building blocks, and identified the processes by which dialogue may lead to change. Now it is time to consider, more concretely, how to use dialogue to design change. The Human Systems Dynamics Institute ([www.hsdinstitute.org](http://www.hsdinstitute.org)) has developed a framework to lead change in complex adaptive systems. Their simple yet elegant **CDE model** says that if we create an open enough **Container** (C), invite in enough **Differences** (D), and facilitate the appropriate **Exchanges** (E) we can change how we are networked in the world, and therefore change the world. Within the CDE model we can apply seven simple tools that sponsor significant change: butterfly effects; boundaries; transforming feedback loops; fractals; attractors; self-organization; and coupling.

But before we discuss tools, let’s go back to the inner work that facilitators must do in order to guide change. Using Scharmer’s (2007: 38-39) work on the U process, I want to recognize the meta-skills practitioners need as exactly that set that he has identified through years of experimentation and reflection.

**Table 5: Meta-skills of facilitation and process work**

Meta-Skills	What does it look like in practice?
Down-loading	Access your habitus (learned conditioning) without interrogation
Suspending	Access your open mind, requires that we transcend the voice of judgment)
Seeing with fresh eyes	Access your open mind
Redirecting	Access your open heart, requires that we transcend the voice of cynicism
Sensing from the field	Access your open heart
Letting Go	Access your open will, requires that we transcend the voice of fear
Presencing	Access your open will
Letting Come	Access your open will
Crystallizing vision and intention	Access your integration of open mind, heart and will
Enacting	Access your integration of open mind, heart and will
Prototyping (co-creating strategic microcosms)	Access your integration of open mind, heart and will
Embodying	Internalize your integration of open mind, heart and will
Performing	Lead from your integration of open mind, heart and will

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**Butterfly Effects**

Everything shared in dialogue has a “charge” of energy. Pay attention to the charge attached to what people say and show, verbally and non-verbally. Setting good ground-rules, using a participatory process, at the beginning of each dialogue makes it a safe place for people to share both deeply and respectfully. A challenge for the facilitator is to learn, through experience and coaching, when and how to amplify or dampen perspectives that emerge in the group setting.

Imagine that the facilitator has a “fan” to either fan up something said in the group or fan down something said in the group. You help the group focus on what it is important to pay attention to (according to your perspective and you will be wrong sometimes, and that’s okay too). You allow certain things to be amplified in the group and then you can see what amplifying something does in a group – does it shape the direction or change the energy of the group in any way? If the answer is – yes- than this is a butterfly effect. When facilitators fail to amp or damp appropriately, certain things said can become negative butterfly effects that get a group off-focus or reacting in turn to something said rather than keeping the conversation moving forward toward the goal set for the meeting.

You will facilitate with imperfect knowledge about a group’s dynamics. Directing a group according to a pre-specified goal may or may not be appropriate. Sometimes allowing a statement perceived as negative flow across the group by consciously not damping it, it may nonetheless prove to be or to be partially generative of a positive butterfly effect.

**Boundaries**

Our differences are both real and learned boundaries. Our different perspectives on the topics of race, class, gender and so on suggest that we have different frameworks, or perspectives, or ways of understanding and knowledge-building around these themes. These issues may be both personal and political for us, and we may not know how to *talk deeply across boundaries*.

Facilitators in authentic dialogue want to create a group setting in which diversity is present in the room, and the time spent in dialogue across boundaries is optimized (which is not the same as maximized). As facilitators you will be making strategic choices each time a circle is set about how to “manage” boundaries and “honor” boundaries. Managing boundaries includes the skill of damping energy or messages that are disruptive of the container set by you and the group, and amplifying energy or messages that are generative of what people hope will occur in the container.

Honoring differences is about two things: a) getting a diverse group of people in the room to participate actively; and b) highlighting differences that matter and damping differences that distract from the focus. In our Ramsey County Authentic Dialogue cohort, we have a great range of diversity, but no white males in the group. The absence of white males in an authentic dialogue circle process is problematic, but the group’s perspective on this is twofold: 1) no white males signed up to participate, although invited; and 2) the group wanted “closure” at the start so they would know who they would be working with as facilitators and begin the bonding (relationship building) process.

**Transforming Feedback**

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What is discussed in authentic dialogue circles gives us a snapshot of perspectives within our organization or community – relevant for the people who were present in that particular dialogue. While protecting confidentiality of who said what to whom in the dialogue circle, we can compile notes of what emerges in each of the dialogues and think about how each sentiment is a partial descriptor of the system in which we operate.

In order for feedback to transform we must understand the power chain that binds people, perspectives and practice together. If two people have stopped working together well due to a conflict and they are reminded by a supervisor or peer that they both make invaluable contributions to the team and that the unit performed at its best when these two were able to work well together – they *might* decide to work through their conflict and honor what is useful in the relationship. For feedback to be transformative when more than two people are involved or a whole division or series of divisions or systems, it obviously gets more complex.

The length, width and dynamic of exchanges (forms of feedback) help to set in and sustain the impact of transforming feedback.

### ***Coupling***

Simply put, things remain as they are as long as the way they are “*coupled*” remains the same. Some things are strongly coupled, others loosely coupled, and others uncoupled. By creating a container that brings in new people and perspectives and resources – or bring in differences, we are able to generate new exchanges that engage those differences to generate new potential outcomes.

Strong coupling increases control and certainty. Loose coupling establishes co-evolutionary possibilities. Uncoupling isolates two or more people or entities. As HSD Institute says – “connections shape dynamics. Couplings are sustained by some form of a feedback loop, and since there is a finite amount of coupling energy, by changing couplings in the structure of an institution, network or system, you can change the system. Coupling defines the “wiring diagram”. Are you wired for continuation of the status?

### ***Self-Organizing***

Self-organizing is a continual process in open systems that have built-in mechanisms to increase order rather than break down when in crisis. The conditions for self-organizing emerge from the complex inter-relationships of similarities, differences, relationships and dynamics of power. After we have done enough work refining our model of authentic dialogue and have applied it with sufficient diversity in persons, scope and scale in our prototypes – if it works – it will begin to self-organize. We know it has self-organized if it starts to generate its own head of steam and we don’t have to intentionally put gas in the tank for it to go (it’s like a phase change from being an a “prototype”, to an “intervention’ imposed, to a living system that now operates on its own without the original interveners.

### ***Attractors***

Let’s use a metaphor here to explain this important concept. When an organization forms, there is a lot of chaos as the organization seeks out its appropriate inner-order. A series of random encounters and events allow a “storming” process to occur. This storming phase of organizational or team development

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is a “random attractor”. Once the team or organization has clear goals set and outcomes defined – these serve as “point attractors”. Once the organization or team begins to use regular meetings to shape and guide itself according to the goals, it has established a “periodic attractor”. Finally, once a team or organization becomes a high performer, it has become a “strange attractor”. Life in an organization revolves around its core attractor.

We can see “attractor patterns” as the “tracks of change” within an organization. It is easier to go with the pattern rather than against them, and this raises important questions for anti-racism work. How deeply vested is the pattern of racism within an institution becomes an essential consideration for change agents within a system who would like their institution to become anti-racist.

### **Fractals**

A “fractal” is a similarity, difference or relationship that has meaning across space and time. Each dyad is a fractal of the institutions conversation. The institution’s conversation is a fractal of society’s conversation. By noticing the fractal and checking our assumptions about what it is, and bringing awareness to it in dialogue, we can help foster shifts from one pattern to an improved pattern.

Table 6: Authentic Dialogue Circles as new Containers

<b>Containers (efficacy)</b>	<b>Differences (mutual accountability)</b>	<b>Exchanges (relationships)</b>
Authentic Dialogue train the trainer cohorts	Bring what we have experienced in the world and in our spheres of the organization to the dialogue and mix it up.	12 authentic dialogues
Anti-Racism Leadership Team	Leaders and front-line staff from different divisions	Regular monthly meetings and workshops
Ending Racial Disparities Project	Leaders from different departments in the county	Regular monthly meetings and workshops
<b>Next = System-wide integration dialogues</b>	<b>Open space for all of the diverse perspectives we see operating in the county around racism to engage each other in dialogue</b>	<b>At least monthly dialogues and quarterly workshops to go deeper into what emerges. Perhaps an e-newsletter ‘the dialogue crier’ announcing what we will be needing to dialogue about in future sessions.</b>

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### **Intentional Process Work and Deep Democracy**

An organization or community is held together by processes. Once we decide what we want to achieve (goals) it is processes that we design and apply to get there. Garvin (1998) defined processes “as collections of tasks and activities that together — and only together — transform inputs into outputs”. A core process in organizations is communication. Drucker recognized that communication is not the means of organization, but rather the mode of organization.

So, here, we are talking about initiating a movement through which anti-racism becomes a core aspect of Ramsey County’s mode. What would this look like in practice?

I suggest, its character would include the following:

- You would not be able to go anywhere in the county and drop in to any conversation with county staff (of any level or cultural background) and fail to hear race (including culture, ethnicity, etc) raised and addressed consistently and appropriately. Stated positively, racism would be considered well and thoroughly throughout the county by all staff.
- Given the new “communication mode” of the organization you would see the emergence of transforming feedback loops throughout the organization from top to bottom. People would put stops to practices that reinforce racism and promote practices and policies that reduce racism and prevent its further emergence.

The Action Steps of deep democracy work:

- We specify a change objective and set a series of questions about it;
- We invite a diverse set of stakeholders to come and dialogue about our questions and make proposals about the best way to achieve the change objective specified OR proposal an alternate change objective and why that is more appropriate;
- We provide a space of equal time and equal value. Every participant gets equal time to share. All perspectives are equally valued;
- We set the circle with ground-rules cooperatively created by all participants to “make the container” together. We close this section with a public acknowledgement ritual – expressing our shared commitment to the ground-rules or constitution.
- The facilitator, while also human in the process, must have already done enough personal development work on themselves so that she/he is able to quickly work through their own personal stuff in the public space and be consistently available to the group to keep it focused on the field of inquiry and in accordance with the ground-rules specified;
- Amplify the important similarities and differences of perspectives and proposals. Consciously dampen perspectives and proposals that are outside the field of inquiry, while acknowledging their significance and suggesting that at least some members of the group should consider when and how to address this and other tangents that have emerged (create what some call a “parking lot” of issues that are waiting to get in the space to be addressed and appoint some person or group to make sure that what is in the parking lot is

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not ignored – particularly designing ways to bring relevant tangents back to the group’s attention);

Arnold Mindell, a pioneer in the modern re-development of “deep democracy” as a social change strategy, expresses below how the ancient notion of deep democracy that made sense and worked in intact indigenous communities before colonialism or, in a more limited way in ancient Greece, but is problematic in organizations and in a society that feature strong command and control dynamics.

***“My original optimism about our potential for applying the ancient principles of deep democracy to modern world-work problems was discouraged by the rigidity I met in institutional settings around the world. Implicit and explicit social codes, frozen traditions, rules and the sheer power of organizational frameworks always seem to block awareness of conflict and the possible meeting of different viewpoints”*** (Mindell: 1992: 17)

### **How do we get there from here?**

Everett Rogers (2003) in the Diffusion of Innovations (first published in 1962) suggests that if we get 5% of people to adopt a new technology or perspective, it forms a tipping point toward diffusion. Once a diffusion is embraced by 20% of a population, it becomes unstoppable (this is the point of critical mass). So, if a little over 4378 people work for the County, by getting 219 people to go through the authentic dialogue model and commit to the extension of the model through their divisions and work teams, the efforts of the 20 train the trainers who started this might just reach that critical mass of 20% of county staff learning and adopting the model – and at that point it would be (perhaps) unstoppable.

Everett Rogers and colleagues answer the question I had in my mind thinking about the “perhaps” in parenthesis above. I needed to know how, in complex circumstances where there is high uncertainty and low agreement; it would be possible to apply the diffusion of innovation model (and its math) to a project like diffusion of the innovation of authentic dialogues in Ramsey County. Rogers (et al, 1996) answer me by saying – “In cultivating network ties among heterogeneous groups connected by common aims ...the innovator may prompt and, to an extent, guide the complex emergence of innovation adoption in social systems” (Rogers, Medina, et al, 2004).

Further, Rogers specifies that “innovations that are perceived as (a) relatively advantageous (over ideas or practices they supersede), (b) compatible with existing values, beliefs, and experiences, (c) relatively easy to comprehend and adapt, (d) observable or tangible, and (e) divisible (separable) for trial, are adopted more rapidly” (Rogers, 2003).

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## Conclusion

I quote at length a passage from Maturana and Varela, because it sums up nicely what we have said here. It also invites us to consider the journey of where it is possible to go with sufficient authentic dialogue.

***“All we can do is generate explanations, through language, that reveal the mechanisms of bringing forth the world. By existing, we generate cognitive “blind spots” that can be cleared only through generating new blind spots in another domain. We do not see what we do not see, and what we do not see does not exist. Only when some interaction dislodges us – such as being suddenly relocated to a different cultural environment – and we reflect upon it, do we bring forth new constellations of relation that we explain by saying that we were not aware of them, or that we took them for granted”.*<sup>12</sup>**

Authentic Dialogue - when it is designed and facilitated with a good enough container, and diverse enough differences, and consistent enough exchanges - leads to the abrogation of old blind spots and the emergence of new blind spots. It helps us dislodge the old and bring in the new, but also inculcates the awareness that today’s “new” is probably tomorrow’s “old”. We learn to live and learn fluidly and dynamically in relation without imposing judgments from the past to define and unhelpfully constrain our future.

This is about putting what we understand constantly at risk. Why would we do this?! What is at the core of authentic dialogue and the proposed path of change? We suggest that it is love. Maturana and Varela describe it well.

***“Love is a biological dynamic with deep roots. It is an emotion that defines in the organism a dynamic structural pattern, a stepping stone to interactions that may lead to the operational coherence of social life. Every emotion (fear, anger, sadness, etc.) is an emotional dynamic which is deep-rooted and defines structural patterns, stepping stones to interaction, hat may lead to different domains of operational coherences (fleeing, fighting, withdrawing, etc.)”***<sup>13</sup>

When our efforts are guided by love, deep and abiding for all, a whole new world will open up. Whether we sustain what opens is up to us.

Remember “Ubuntu”? It means – the gift of finding the human being in others. Throughout all of our histories, we have defined certain folks as less than fully human – whether it be American Indians, African Americans, women, the disabled, religious minorities, or people who are differently gendered – we have done it and we still do it. The definition of insiders and outsiders of privilege and opportunity

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<sup>12</sup> Maturana and Varela, 1988. P.242. I underlined one portion of the quote for emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp.247-248.

generates its own weight, and when structurally coupled, becomes path dependent. This situation is sustained until such dynamics and such unity is dismantled – or disintegrates. Now is the time. Dialogue is one of the tools.

By applying the simple rules (refer back to page), and the tools for leading in complex adaptive systems identified and addressed throughout this essay, we can both be the change we wish to see in the world as individuals who are actively doing our “inner work”, and co-create a more healthy mutual world together by completing the cycle of the U Process identified by Scharmer (2007), and embodying this new way of being in our person and in our institution.

Race itself is biological. The toxic meaning we have made of race is sociological and psychological. We carry racism like social DNA and install it in all interactions. Through dialogue we can learn to “see our seeing”, and also newly see our doing. With greater insight into ourselves, we can be more open to change, and more capable as agents of change.

The inner work we do supports new ways of being open together. With collective open minds, open hearts and open wills, the institutions and systems we create match our collective desire better than our earlier institutions and systems. Our culture is resonant with our inner-source. Our inner-source more closely resonates with the structure we have created.

However, since we are complex living systems and what we create is a complex adaptive system, we no longer assume that we can “make” the future just so. We learn to be and to ride the winds and waves of fruitful change in ourselves, our relations, and systems.

So, go “in” and dialogue and see what you find. Then, go “out” and dialogue, and see what you find – striving for greater and greater diversity and more and more complex inter-dependencies. Spend the rest of your life integrating the inside and outside of your life-world as authentically as you can. This is the path to the great human-spiritual experience, and the path to ending racism and other forms of exclusion and oppression.

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Schon, Donald, A. 1983. The Reflective Practitioner. New York, NY: Basic Books. This one is of high significance for me, right along side Theory in Practice by Schon with Argyris. It is an important book for the library of any change agent within institutions.

Senge, Peter. C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers. 2005. Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations and Society. New York; Currency/Doubleday. This simple book that speaks from the joy and mystery of “presence”, describes how we create meaning and change by being fully present in every moment.

Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. 1999. Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples. New York; Zed Books. This is one our must read books that we share with all colleagues. Why? Because it lays the groundwork for a comparison of perspectives – the dominant culture and indigenous cultures, and goes on to describe the appropriate pathway to synergizing these realities in tension – from the bottom up. The book gives you a history lesson, puts research in an indigenous cultural context, and then teaches you a participatory, culturally-grounded approach to research and social change that engages the stories and relationships of indigenous people as a starting place for change.

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Correspondence to Sam Grant at [Sam@ujimaconsulting.com](mailto:Sam@ujimaconsulting.com) or Sam Grant, PO Box 622, Point Reyes, CA 94956. *This document is open source, meaning I openly share it with you and want to hear back from you about how you use, think or feel about any or all of it. Best wishes in your social transformation work!*

Zimmerman, Brenda J .2001. "Ralph Stacey's Agreement and Certainty Matrix". Schulich School of Business, York University, Toronto, Canada. This article reviews the development of the "landscape diagram" as a tool for organizational change. It helps you see the range of conditions organizations face from those for which there is high agreement and high certainty to those for which there is little agreement or certainty (great complexity). Looking at society as a "living system" or complex adaptive system, when we are seeking whole scale change, we really need to using a convening and collaborative prototyping and searching process that is drastically different from today's norms. This simple article tilts you toward greater understanding.