In this Issue....

“People-centered organizations” has been the theme of conversations, activities and reflections this month.

From participating in a workshop about employee ownership where practitioners shared an experience of deep connection and purpose in their work, reaffirming that responsibility lies in ourselves to embody the needed change in the world.

People-centered organizations was also the focus of dialogue at the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) event themed from polarization to problem solving: a learning exchange on public engagement. The NCDD is a coalition of practitioners (organizations, researchers, public officials, activists, artists and students) working to solve problems through quality deliberation and collaborative action. At this event I learned tools (summarized in this newsletter), heard about experiences in difficult contexts and participated in a focus group about internet-based dialogue.

Appreciation for people-centered organizations was deepened on a very personal level during my participation in the Presencing Institute’s workshop Presencing: Collective Leadership for Profound Innovation and Change where we learned how to open our mind, heart and will; to suspend personal voices of judgment, cynicism and fear; and to let go of the past and tune into a future that is seeking to emerge through oneself. This process is called presencing: to act from a state of awareness in the now: sensing and actualizing emerging futures. How is this related to people-centered organizations? “The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor.” Usually we are not aware of the source dimension from which effective leadership and social action come into being. It is this source that theory U attempts to explore.

My “aha” was in realizing that opening oneself to be a vehicle for the emergent is of greater importance than the specific forms they emerge into. My insight is to engage the variety ways that I can be a vehicle to my mission: to foster the art of dialogue, facilitate positive social change and forge sustainable communities. I invite you to share with me and the Foundation your thoughts on what is emerging through you.

Lastly, in this article I offer notes on Clark University’s Difficult Dialogues initiative. As one of 27 programs across the U.S. funded by the Ford Foundation, the initiative raises awareness and develops dialogue skills through a range of public programs, faculty development, courses and activities in student life. The aim is to foster a culture of dialogue on campus and encourage an ethos of transparency and collaboration across the community.

Included at the end of this newsletter is an outline of five dialogue methods so you too can practice dialogue in your own community! I welcome feedback about your experiences and any questions you may have during your learning process!

- David Bohm
**Employee Ownership**

"Employee ownership" refers to the ownership of a company, directly or indirectly, in part or in whole by some or all of its employees. Ownership is generally through a formal plan offered by the employer. Popular types of ownership arrangements in the U.S. are employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs), equity compensation plans such as stock options, and ownership culture.

Thanks to ownership options, employees are able to experience income growth at levels that would not have been available through a conventional salary structure. In real terms, this makes the difference between being able to buy a house, affording college and many other life aspirations dependent on financial ability.

Empirical studies on employee ownership and its consequences have found favorable effects. The effects however, do not come about automatically and the specific conditions under which they arise are largely unknown. A thesis on this topic is currently underway by Phd candidate Joe Hsueh (MIT Sloan) to address the question: **under what conditions does employee ownership improve firm performance?** Because ownership structure is part of a larger corporate system Hsueh has developed a dynamic feedback model of a startup company with various compensation and ownership structures highlighting how each structure influences employee behavior, how they drive business processes, and how those processes interact with market conditions which generate specific firm performance effects. Joe’s contribution to the fields of Organizational Design and Strategic Human Resource Management is this model of causal mechanisms between Human Resource practices and firm performance as well as an analysis of how various combinations of salary, stock options, stock grants, profit sharing schemes and participatory management influence firm performance overtime under different industry structures and market conditions.

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**From Polarization to Problem Solving**

*Battles for the media attention; simplifying complex reality into polarized extremes; civic participation being replaced by apathy... our national consciousness has got to have a better way to evolve.* Well, there is, it’s being pioneered across the globe and one of the actors is The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD).

**An emergent social shift:** Dialogue & deliberation is practiced in conflict transformation, intergroup relations and deliberative democracy. The Boston NCDD gathering brought together public engagement practitioners—facilitators, public officials, school administrators, community leaders, and others—to discuss practical methods and policies for productive dialogue. With the increase in national and local attention to more open, participatory governance and community problem-solving, the conversation focused in on three topic areas:

1. **Quality Public Engagement:** What is it and how to broaden adoption?
2. **Online Engagement:** How can online technology enhance public engagement?
3. **Collaborations That Work:** How to strengthen connections between public administrators, engagement practitioners and the public?

**What is Public Engagement?**

Enabling citizens to have authentic, civil, productive discussions at public meetings ~ even on highly contentious issues. Techniques include National Issues Forums, Study Circles, Town Meetings, Open Space Technology and World Cafe to name just a few. These techniques create the space for real dialogue: so everyone who shows up can tell their story and share their perspective on the topic at hand.

Dialogue builds trust and enables genuine listening to perspectives very different from one’s own. Deliberations are key to public engagement, enabling people to discuss the consequences, costs and tradeoffs of policy options then to work through the emotions that tough choices raise. Almost all dialogue & deliberation techniques involve:

- Facilitators and ground rules that create a safe atmosphere for honest, productive discussion;
- Framing the issue, questions and discussion material in a balanced and accurate manner;
- Having citizens and decision-makers on all sides of the issue talk to each other face-to-face in multiple small groups.
1. **Careful Planning and Preparation:**
   Ensure the design, organization and convening process serve a clearly defined purpose and the needs of the participants.

2. **Inclusion and Demographic Diversity:**
   Equitably incorporate diverse people, voices, ideas and information to lay the groundwork for quality outcomes and democratic legitimacy.

3. **Collaboration and Shared Purpose:**
   Support and encourage organizations from government, to business and to community to work together to advance the common good.

4. **Openness and Learning:**
   Help all involved to listen to each other, explore new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes, learn and apply information in ways that generate new options, and rigorously evaluate the process.

5. **Transparency and Trust:**
   Be clear and open about the process and provide a public record of the organizers, sponsors, outcomes and range of views and ideas expressed.

6. **Impact and Action:**
   Ensure each participatory effort has real potential to make a difference and that participants are aware of that potential.

7. **Sustained Engagement and Participatory Culture:**
   Promote a culture of participation with programs and institutions that support ongoing quality public engagement.

**Resources for Facilitators:**
- *The Skilled Facilitator* - by Roger Schwarz
- *Facilitators Guide to Participatory Decision-Making* - by Sam Kaner
- *IAF Handbook of Group Facilitation* - by Sandy Schuman
- Visit [http://ncdd.org/ncrc/best-of-the-best-resources](http://ncdd.org/ncrc/best-of-the-best-resources) for a list of what NCDD considers the best resources available to build skills in dialogue, deliberation and public engagement.

**Reference:**

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**Exploration**
*People learn more about themselves, their community, or an issue - and perhaps also come up with innovative ideas.*
- World Cafe
- Open Space
- Socrates Cafe
- Bohm Dialogue

**Conflict Transformation**
*Poor relations or a specific conflict among individuals or groups is tackled.*
- Sustained Dialogue
- Victim-Offender Mediation
- Compassionate Listening

**Decision Making**
*A decision or policy is impacted, and public knowledge of an issue is improved.*
- Citizens Jury
- Deliberative Polling
- Consensus Conference

**Collaborative Action**
*People tackle complex problems and take responsibility for solutions they come up with.*
- Study Circles
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Future Search
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Primary Purpose</strong></th>
<th>To encourage people and groups to learn more about themselves, their community or an issue and possibly discover innovative solutions</th>
<th>To resolve conflicts, to foster personal healing and growth, and to improve relations among groups</th>
<th>To influence public decisions and public policy and improve public knowledge.</th>
<th>To empower people and groups to solve complicated problems and take responsibility for the solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name of Engagement Stream</strong></td>
<td><strong>Exploration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conflict Transformation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Decision Making</strong></td>
<td><strong>Collaborative Action</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Features</strong></td>
<td>Suspending assumptions, creating a space that encourages a different kind of conversation, using ritual and symbolism to encourage openness, emphasis on listening.</td>
<td>Creating a safe space, hearing from everyone, building trust, sharing personal stories and views.</td>
<td>Naming and framing the issue fairly, weighing all options, considering different positions (deliberation), revealing public values, brainstorming solutions.</td>
<td>Using dialogue and deliberation to generate ideas for community action, developing and implementing action plans collaboratively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Important When...</strong></td>
<td>A group or community seems stuck and needs to reflect on their circumstance in depth and gain collective insight.</td>
<td>Relationships among participants are poor or not yet established yet need to be. Issue can only be resolved when people change their behavior or attitude, expand their perspective or take time to reflect and heal.</td>
<td>The issue is within government’s (or any single entity’s) sphere of influence.</td>
<td>The issue/dispute requires intervention across multiple public and private entities, and anytime community action is important.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples of Issues</strong></td>
<td>Strengthening democracy, understanding a community of practice.</td>
<td>Political polarization, value-based conflicts, healing after crises or trauma.</td>
<td>Budgeting, land use, health care, social security.</td>
<td>Regional sprawl, institutional racism, youth violence, responding to crises.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organizer’s Strategy</strong></td>
<td>To encourage new insights and connections to emerge by creating a space for people to share their thoughts, feelings and perspectives.</td>
<td>To create a safe space for people with different views to talk about their personal experiences and feel heard. Often, to set the groundwork for deliberation and action.</td>
<td>To involve a representative group of citizens in thorough discussions about complicated policy issues. Ideally, the process is linked to policy making.</td>
<td>TO encourage integrated efforts among diverse stakeholders, sectors, organizations, etc. involved in the issue.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Key Questions for Organizers</strong></td>
<td>How can we ensure people feel safe expressing what inspires and touches them? What will stimulate listening and sharing, without making people uncomfortable?</td>
<td>How can the issue be framed so that all sides are brought to - and feel welcomed at - the table? What are people’s needs &amp; how can healing, action &amp; respect be met effectively? If conflict exists, how overt and volatile is it? How, if at all, to transition people to “what’s next”?</td>
<td>How can we best represent the public (random selection, stakeholder rep., recruit a critical mass)? Should public officials participate side-by-side citizens? What materials need to be developed / obtained? How to ensure the process influences policy?</td>
<td>Who needs to be at the table? What kind of power dynamics exist? What group/leader/ institution is most resistant to change? What group tends not to be at the table, although they’re affected?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Processes</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Conflict Transformation</td>
<td>Decision Making</td>
<td>Collaborative Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Town Hall Meeting</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bohm Dialogue</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Charrettes</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citizen Choicework</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citizens Jury</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compassionate Listening</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consensus Conference</td>
<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conversation Cafe</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliberative Polling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Future Search</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*from NCDD’s Engagement Streams Framework: [www.cnrep.org/documents/tools/ddStreams1-08.pdf](http://www.cnrep.org/documents/tools/ddStreams1-08.pdf)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Exploration</th>
<th>Conflict Transformation</th>
<th>Decision Making</th>
<th>Collaborative Action</th>
<th>Size of Group</th>
<th>Type of Session</th>
<th>Participant Selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intergroup Dialogue</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Single or multiple small groups</td>
<td>Regular weekly meetings of 2-3 hours</td>
<td>Open; recruit for representativeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Issues Forums</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Up to hundreds in 1 room, then break up in interest groups multiple times.</td>
<td>1 two-hour meeting.</td>
<td>Open; recruit for representativeness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Space Technology</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Up to hundreds in 1 room, then break up in interest groups multiple times.</td>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Conversation Project dialogue</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small Group</td>
<td>Multiple 2-hour sessions.</td>
<td>Involves all sides of an existing conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socrates Cafe</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 to 30 people</td>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>Whoever is in the class or at the meeting, or whoever responds to the flyers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustained Dialogue</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Small Group</td>
<td>Numerous 2- 3-hour sessions.</td>
<td>Open; recruit for representativeness among conflicting groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim Offender Mediation</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small Group</td>
<td>Multiple 2- to 3-hour sessions</td>
<td>All inclusive (attempts to bring in all involved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom Circle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small Group (3-12 people)</td>
<td>One or more sessions lasting 1- 3 hours; ongoing sessions are ideal.</td>
<td>Usually used with an existing group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisdom Council</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>10-12 people initially (and sometimes periodically) then entire community.</td>
<td>Several-day session with group of 12, followed by informal large-scale dialogue.</td>
<td>Initial 10-12 are randomly selected from community; broader segment is open to everyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Cafe</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Up to hundreds in 1 room at tables of four.</td>
<td>Single event ranging from 90 minutes to 3 days.</td>
<td>Often held at vents, involving all attendees; otherwise, invitations boost representativeness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As we move down the left side of the U we connect to the world that is outside of our institutional bubble. At the bottom of the U (3. Presencing) lies an inner gate that invites us to drop everything that isn’t essential. This process of letting-go of our old ego and self, and letting-come our highest future possibility (our Authentic Self) - is felt as a connection to a deeper source of knowing. Once an individual and group operate from this sense of future possibility they function as an intentional vehicle for an emerging future. (Visit www.presencing.com to learn more)

The Presencing Institute (PI) is a global action research community applying Theory U for shifting the social field from ego-system to eco-system awareness. The presencing process is a journey that connects us more deeply both to what wants to emerge in the world and to our highest future possibility - our emerging authentic self.

The PI community focuses on refining and co-creating the presencing technology and making it available to change makers, innovators and communities around the world. PI works towards creating a Global Action Research University that addresses the root causes of the current economic, ecological, social and spiritual crisis.

The U process is applied in three ways: (1) as a process template (Observe, observe > connect to sources of inner knowing > act from what emerges and in response to prototype feedback); (2) as a set of principles and practices; (3) as a living connection to what is emerging from the **now**. All presencing connects to the power of what wants to emerge through oneself as a vehicle.

Presencing Principles:
**Reflections on Practice**

1. **Practice, don’t preach it.**
   Listen to others and to what life calls you to do. Listen, connect, and listen some more. Use the U as a tool to deepen connections to others, to yourself and to the whole.

2. **Observe and listen.**
   The U process moves one’s focus from the exterior realm (third-person view) to subtle levels of human experience (second- and first-person views). In this movement data is experienced as objective exterior facts (through open mind), as empathic intersubjective data (through the open heart) and as the trans-subjective realm of self-knowledge (through open will). All three kinds of data requires the cultivation of observation and listening skills. The impact of deeper levels of listening is profound: they can melt the walls of habitual interactions which separate us: from the world, from each other, and from ourselves.

3. **Connect to your intention and operate as a vehicle.**
   Brian Arthur of the Santa Fe Institute observes “intention is not a powerful force. It’s the **only** force.” The more I can connect to what is essential for me: “Who Am I?” and “What Am I Here For?”, the better I can act as an instrument for that emerging future to come into being.

How the U process emerges depends on the quality of our listening:

- **Listening 1:** we download habits reconfirming old opinions & judgments.
- **Listening 2:** we listen for facts, as our mind opens up we begin to notice differences in how people experience facts.
- **Listening 3:** we begin to see from another person’s eyes; with an open heart we experience empathic listening.
- **Listening 4:** is generative listening from an inner source that senses the future wanting to emerge. As we connect to this emerging place, we experience as shift in identity and sense of self.
4. When reality opens up, be fully present with it - and then act from the now.
When you find yourself in a situation where you feel a significant future opportunity, first say “yes”, then DO it, and only after ask whether it’s possible.

5. Follow your heart - do what you love, love what you do.
Steve Jobs comments that “the only way to do great work is to do what you love.” This also is the most reliable way to connect to your emerging future path.

6. Always be in dialogue with the universe.
Assume the universe is a helpful place. Always stay open to evolving your idea as needed and as suggested by the feedback you are receiving from your environment.

7. Create a Level 4 holding space that supports your journey.
The most important tool of presencing is your Self - your capacity to access your highest future possibility. One way to do that is in a daily cultivation practice: a moment of stillness or contemplation in which you filter out all the noise from outside and within (your Voice of Judgement, Voice of Cynicism, and Voice of Fear). Another way is through a circle of friends supporting each other with level 4 listening and facilitating each’s attending to the deeper calling and journey of their personal lives and their work.

8. Balance your talking-doing ratio.
For every word about ethics, perform at least one act. For every word about spirituality or source, perform three.

9. Identify the openings to the future and understand the strategic imperatives for institutional change.
Find areas where the strategic imperatives for institutional change match what people have real energy for. In designing intervention strategies, connect and follow the flow of energy rather than saying “let’s fix the system.” To “fix a system” would put you against the collective energy field. Instead, align with be enchanted by the already existing and further emerging energy field of the future.

10. Use different languages with different stakeholders - connect to them first in terms of what they care about.
Innovation in complex systems requires us to be multilingual; to connect to the various stakeholders in the system about the issues that matter to them. Single-focus approaches are almost certain to fail. Instead, master the art of broadening and deepening the definition as much as necessary to include all the relevant parties - which need each other to alter the existing system - committed to participate.

11. If you want to change others, you need to be open to changing yourself first.
If you want to change the behavior of other players in the system and cannot force them (through the mechanism of hierarchy) or give them sufficient incentives (through bribery or in another way), then the only way left is the quality of your relationship to them. To change your target, you need to first open up to being changed yourself. Only by doing that will you build the quality of relationship that you can use to effect change at a later stage.

12. Co-initiate through local leadership from the heart.
All successful ventures and multi-stakeholder projects are built on the same currency: one or a few local leaders who are highly credible in their own communities because people know they are willing to give their lives to accomplish the common goal. It is that kind of leadership from the heart that constitutes the most critical currency for connecting highly diverse groups of players and stakeholders - and for helping them to discover common ground. If that local leadership does not exist, if instead the leadership comes from an external factor, say, a consulting company, your project is likely to get into trouble quickly.

13. Use sensing journeys to help people see the system from the edges & use collective sensing mechanisms to see the system from the whole.
The movement of co-sensing starts with multiple sensing journeys to the edges of the system in order to get people to empathize and see the system from other angles, particularly from the view of the most marginalized members. Methods for collective sensing include (1) stepping into the shoes of stakeholders, (2) personal story telling, (3) systems thinking, (4) scenario thinking, (5) modeling, (6) constellation practices, (7) world cafe, (8) social presencing theater.

14. Create holding spaces that support the team at the top & the emerging leaders to lead their individual and collective transformation journey.
Earlier points focus on engaging the frontline and the edges of the system. This focal point helps the team at the top rise to the occasion and to help emerging leaders throughout the organization become a force of change on that transformational journey. This support can be given in many forms. It usually involves a learning structure facilitating leadership teams to reflect on the bigger picture, connect to their individual and collective journeys, connect to their sources of Self, prioritize what they want to focus on individually & collectively, and learn by doing and helping each other to lead and innovate.
15. **Prototype by being present and acting from the now.**

Prototyping is a process. You only need to know two things: (1) the big idea, the general direction you are moving, and (2) the immediate next step (the toe-hold you look for when rock climbing), that’s all that counts. The past and the future - which are the cause of most of our worries, thoughts and everyday attention - is a waste of energy. In the prototyping process try to tune out all these worries and tune in to the real experience of taking the next step and attending to what is emerging from it - and then continue to build on that momentum, going with the flow.

Creating the conditions for the prototyping process to run well requires (1) a dedicated shelter from noise, (2) a dedicated core group aligned around the same intention, (3) a network of supportive stakeholders and users from throughout the larger system, (4) a concrete “0.8 prototype” that elicits feedback from partners throughout the system, (5) a never-ending resolve by the core group to push forward while integrating the valuable feedback from stakeholders (“dialogue with the universe”), (6) a mechanism allowing new partners to join the team, (7) regular review sessions that look at all the prototypes, conclude what has been learned, kill what isn’t working, and strengthen what is working and looks like a gateway to future possibilities.

16. **Co-evolve the larger system by using the prototypes as seeds for systemic change through linking micro-level changes with meso- and macro-level leadership.**

The micro and frontline prototype initiatives are the seeds that key leaders throughout the system (from both the meso level such as hospital leadership and the macro level such as ministry leadership) can support and plant in other parts of the system. Making this work requires dedicated new cross-functional, cross-level, and cross-institutional leadership structures that pull together key practitioners and decision-makers around specific topics and hands-on innovation initiatives.

17. **Never Give Up, Never Give Up, Never Give Up.**

Every profound journey of innovation and renewal takes an enormous amount of perseverance. Important ideas, before being born in to the real world, often begins with many years of failed effort by the innovators. The key is: *never give up.* Always figure out what you can learn from failure, get back on your feet and try again. Allowing yourself to be discouraged by failed efforts in the past is a waste of energy. It leads to being trapped by your own and others’ voice of judgement, voice of cynicism, and voice of fear. Doing this kind of work requires a lot of courage: the courage to jump into the space of nothingness, the courage to let go and to connect to what emerges from that nothingness. That courage is an important quality that connects us with the deeper dimensions of our being - who we really are.


**Awareness Practices:**

**Open Mind**

Sit in a straight backed chair with your feet firmly planted on the floor. Feel your feet and legs as well as the connection to your seat and to the earth. Sit with an upright back without tension, without leaning back on the chair. Feel the top of your head rising to the sky. Rest your palms gently on your legs. Your eyes are open, with a soft gaze, cast downward. Be present and grounded in the body. Notice the feeling of your breathing and rest your attention on that feeling. Whenever you notice that your mind has wandered away from resting with the breathing, let go of thoughts of the past or future or judgments and comments about the present. Let thoughts go and simply rest with the feeling of the breathing. Practice gently without judgment. As thoughts settle, experience a more spacious and open mind.

**Open Heart**

Begin with a short session of Open Mind practice. Then bring to your mind thoughts of people or situation with whom you are directly working -- either a personal, institutional or global situation. Reflect on the fact that there is confusion, aggression or suffering of some kind there. Open your heart to that. Say to yourself that you wish to be of the most benefit to those people - to bring more clarity, more kindness, more courage - whatever is needed. Send this feeling out to those people involved with a strong intention to be of benefit.

**Open Will**

Open Will practice instantly cuts hesitation and doubt and brings us in contact with Source or genuineness. Sitting or standing, 1) cut thoughts and notice the feeling of the body. 2) Notice the larger space of earth under the body and the sky above. 3) Join that sense of earth & space at your heart level of the body. 4) Tune into your own genuineness, your own source of knowing. 5) Radiate that awareness (loving attention) out - front, sides, and back.

*This practice is adapted form a practice of unconditional confidence from the Shambhala tradition.*
The Difficult Dialogues is a program launched by The Ford Foundation and is designed to promote academic freedom and religious, cultural, and political pluralism on college and university campuses in the United States. Topics of dialogue included: fundamentalism and secularism, racial and ethnic relations, the Middle East conflict, religion and the university, sexual orientation, and academic freedom.

This report highlights notes from the Clark University initiative which explored more mindful and fruitful exchanges in classrooms, campus life, faculty governance, and in relationships with the larger community.

Because the nature of Dialogue is exploratory, its meaning and its methods continue to unfold... Its essence is learning... as part of an unfolding process of creative participation between peers.

The process of Dialogue is a powerful means of understanding how thought functions... Without a willingness to explore this situation and to gain a deep insight into it, the real crises of our time cannot be confronted, nor can we find anything more than temporary solutions to the vast array of human problems that now confront us.

~ David Bohm, Donald Factor, Peter Garrett from “Dialogue - a proposal”

Perspectives on Dialogue: a reflection following the Clark University initiative.

“This century must be one of dialogue,” urges His Holiness the Dalai Lama. But what is dialogue really... something precise and substantial, or simply a feel-good catch-all concept?

First, dialogue is fundamentally committed to acknowledging and examining the assumptions lying behind our interpretations and explanation of the world. This exploration of self and other emerges out of a deliberate and respectful effort to excavate the often unstated foundation of ideas, judgments, values and beliefs. Dialogue embraces the complexity of phenomena. It can contain contradiction and even conflict without rushing to judge or reconcile differences. It involves acquiring skills of controversy with oneself and others which we also call critical thinking.

Secondly, dialogue reminds us that thinking is not something done silently and by one’s self. By offering an opportunity to mutually discover what too often goes unspoken, dialogue makes explicit the fact that the production of knowledge and understanding is always a collective enterprise.

Our premise is that no lasting shifts in our engagement of difficult issues can happen without looking deeply at the unnoticed rules of the system, including current practices of discourse and our assumptions about them. These conventions and social norms include many forms of discourse that tacitly or explicitly discourage listening, respect, sharing power, engagement or shifts and evolutions in thinking.

In contrast: attentive listening, the ability to learn something new (even change one's mind), willingness to examine assumptions, suspend judgments, and share power - focus on the process of relating and are the core practices of dialogue & deliberative processes. These practices are necessary for empathic relationships, collaboration, effective action and are crucial to the process of a healthy and democratic society. Yet for all they offer, they are counter-cultural and rare in most aspects of our public and private lives.

Our culture present countless obstacles to our willingness and ability to be genuinely present to a dialogic exchange. Spaces of commerce, government, education and even those of friends and family often lack the pre-conditions for dialogue. Resistance to the prospect of dialogue is a telling indicator of its potential. To acknowledge and consciously address real or perceived barriers is a necessary passage to its benefits; that transit is a microcosm of the work as a whole.

To help you construct your next dialogic experience, follow are a few preconditions for dialogue:
Preconditions for Dialogue:

Dialogue as presence and encounter.
Participation in dialogue hinges on presence to oneself and to others. It is mindfulness in action. Conditions for trust between participants are: we speak honestly, listen with respect, release judgments, and seek to understand the other. We do so in good faith, trusting there can be benefit in shedding defenses and in so doing we further conditions in which we ourselves can hear and learn something new.

Dialogue as reflective thought.
As a practice of examining assumptions, dialogue positions us to see the process of thought itself. First we become conscious of discourse as a practice, allowing us to makes choices about it. By looking into the structures within our own thinking and patterns of relating, dialogue illuminates the unnoticed structures of our society and the power dynamics in which we exist. It enhances our ability to see clearly what is happening and to name it.

Dialogue as engagement.
Dialogue presumes participants have joint ownership of the topic at hand, and calls for each participant to take up his/her share. The nonhierarchical space of dialogue empowers an dignifies its participants. Exploratory, not goal-driven, in its essence, dialogue depends on asking authentic questions, identifying issues, raising awareness and catalyzing action based on what is held to be in the common good; thereby focusing that which is valued in common and serve as a basis for trust and solidarity.

Dialogue as “the space between”.
Through the respectful co-existence of difference, dialogue generates new insights and collective wisdom. In the words of Jane Goodall: “change happens by listening and then starting a dialogue with the people who are doing something you don’t believe is right.” And as said by Thich Nhat Hanh: “In true dialogue, both sides are willing to change.” Ancient traditional maps of energy (Taoist yin-yang, Hindu yantras, Buddhist mandalas) see this play of dualities as fueling creativity; the practice of dialogue can do so as well.

“It’s when we let our guard down and allow our differences and doubts to surface and interact that something authentic and original can begin to emerge, tentatively, in the spaces between us. And I’ve found that it’s often in these fleeting and complicated moments that the heart and mind can come into synchrony, pointing to altogether novel possibilities. The key is to remain alert to those moments and to move with them when they arise” - Diana Chapman Walsh.

Dialogue as listening and creative matrix.
In the creative process, as in dialogue, something new emerges through presence and encounter. Both are iterative listening processes, requiring presence in the moment as new information and opportunities unfold. Playful and exploratory, both dialogue and the creative process depends on willingness to enter the unknown.

As you experiment with navigating conversations that matter for you, we invite you to refer to this reference guide as a handy resource.

To continually focus your inner space and cultivate awareness of what you really care about, try the Awareness Practices on pg. 9 and open your mind, heart and will to the future as it wants to emerge through you.

As you invite others to dialogue with you, feel the different ways of holding the space for others by experimenting with the Preconditions for Dialogue (pg. 11).

As people speak, what do you sense is the difference between listening from level 1, 2, 3, or 4? Try listening by suspending notions from the past, see with fresh eyes, open your senses to the new emerging from the unknown, and continually let go of attachments.

The process of dialogue can be held in a number of ways, refer to those listed on page 5. The aim of each process is to enable the crystallization of vision and intention.

Then enact this shared vision with prototyping the emergent by linking the head, heart and hand. At this point I encourage you to refer to the “Presencing Principles: Reflections on Practice” (pg 7) to design the support structure for your ongoing discipline needed for embodying the new. Presencing from the source of your creativity will become a habitual and joyful process. And you will quickly serve the world as a powerful vehicle continually manifesting the new through seeing the whole.