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# What are the Underlying Patterns & Principles Around the Work We Do?

*Notes prepared by Myriam Laberge from the Open Space Session Convened by Emily Axelrod and Peggy Holman*

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## Record of Open Space Contributions

At the start of the session, several people who had just attended Sandra Janoff's Open Space session on the underlying principles of Future Search suggested that we begin by making a list of these then go deeper. For reference, the principles copied from the Future Search website are:

- Get the "whole system" in the room. Invite a significant cross-section of all parties with a stake in the outcome.
- Explore the "whole elephant" before seeking to fix any part. Get everyone talking about the same world. Think globally, act locally.
- Put common ground and future focus front and center while treating problems and conflicts as information, not action items.
- Encourage self-management and responsibility for action by participants before, during, and after the future search.

AND

- Urge full attendance - Keep part-time participants to a minimum.
- Meet under healthy conditions - This means airy rooms with windows, healthy snacks and meals, adequate breaks.
- Work across three days (sleep twice) - People need "soak time" to take in everything that happens.
- Ask for voluntary public commitments to specific next steps before people leave.

Peggy Holman arrived, and the session started in earnest when she began to share the thinking she has done on the focus question. She said something like this:

- From AI- Questions provide a focus and act as an attractor – helping to set the direction and inviting us forward.

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- The World Café taps the holographic nature of conversation. It also points out the important role of creating hospitable space.
  - Open Space gives us the principle of “take responsibility for what you love”. Underneath this is a deep act of responsibility to the whole and acting in service to the whole by taking what may look selfish and is an offering to the whole. Open Space also gives us the principle of ‘welcoming the stranger who comes’. There is also the notion of ‘radical trust’ that if everyone operates from what they love, then something good will emerge. Given enough time – and iterations (that’s how we learn), we learn to radical trust.
  - Dynamic Facilitation gives us the gift of “the deep power of reflecting back what is being expressed”.
  - All methods illustrate the principle of ‘follow the energy’.
  - We are also learning about multi-modal meaning-making – the importance of beauty, art, music to amplify what we do. The principle of bringing “the aesthetic in the room” (phrase added by Peter Block). Open disturbance, what wants to emerge?
  - The value of ‘messiness’ and of welcoming disturbance: anger, disappointment, speaking the unspeakable – all these things translate into the deeper concern and Dynamic Facilitation shows us how to do this well. Messy space and what makes us uncomfortable allows us to discover our ‘differentiated wholeness’ from which something radically different can emerge. It’s in our uniqueness that we discover our gifts and our connectedness.
  - Myriam Laberge: The value of time – all these methods and processes offer the gift of bringing together participants to focus for an undivided period of time on a common issue, and that in and of itself has great value to the outcomes.
  - Dick Axelrod: These processes are hugely democratic and centered around values such as (listed from his book - Terms of Engagement) equity and fairness, open decision-making processes, freedom and autonomy; maximum sharing of information; this is often where processes get sabotaged.
  - Peggy Holman.: Recognize the power of intent, of common purpose to hold a group together. Analogy of Boeing airplane, “it is essentially three million parts flying in close proximity held loosely”:
  - (Speaker?) Question about facilitation: “Where do we watch to see where emergence is happening? In the hallways? In the room?”
  - Sam Kaner: Differentiate within a shared context of meaning.
  - Stewart Levine: The three million parts ‘accept each other’.

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- Peggy Holman: The language of ‘harvesting’ bothers me. The term ‘birthing’ is more appropriate, as in “calling forth that which has never been named – “the role of midwife” (phrase added by Peter Block).
  - (Speaker?) These methods provide a common language, and at heart, all transformations are linguistic.
  - Tova Averbuch: Once the space is open, my role as facilitator is to be a ‘tuning fork’ for the whole. There is the pattern of music, of dance, and song.
  - From Sylvia James: Three Types of Principles
    - 1) Principles of the Method
      - E.g., transparency
    - 2) Principles of Design
      - Every moment has a clear purpose
      - Every conversation is designed around risk
      - Based on theory (not experimenting live in the room)
      - Reflecting principles of adult learning
    - 3) Principles of the Consultant
      - The values under the facilitation
      - EG. Always ask who is getting smarter, the client not the consultant
  - Barbara Bunker: some patterns are related to whether the method is ‘designed’ or ‘emergent’. If it is designed, then we control what shape the participant will be in when s/he walks out, e.g., NTL If it is emergent, then whoever come are right and whatever emerges will emerge.
  - Sam Kaner: People change in relationships over time by engaging with folks different than them.
  - (Speakers??? for next points) Can’t design tightly and have both emergent and structured.
  - Facilitator capacity – the ‘me’ in ‘we’; how individual facilitators are being is implicit under all of it.
  - Sylvia James: We have a different way of seeing the facilitator role. Is facilitator role invisible? When we work with large groups, we’re working with a central attractor. Our role is more vulnerable; we can’t promise we’ll hold the container; we can’t see the whole room and what is happening; we can only promise that as facilitators we will act with integrity and respond in creative ways and integrated ways to what is emerging.
  - (Speakers??? for next points) How do we step into the field of being/doing?
  - Distinction between design framework is important - structured or flexible?
  - Design is to help the people in the room do the work they need to do instead of imposing on them our favorite exercise. Intent is to design and facilitate with integrity.

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- Peggy Holman: Distinction is that in all processes and facilitators, there must be some places of unknowing or nothing new will happen. Methods differ to the extent that they allow the amount of the unknown. Am I expecting people to act from their full capacities from the start, or to grow into these?
  - David Isaacs: What is our commitment to explore the assumption that we start from?
  - Stewart Levine: How much of a *center* are we really?
  - Nancy??: Energy, knowledge, assumptions – knowledge is relationship, as practicing, as aesthetic action.; practicing is relationship. How build capacity before the event?
  - Sam Kaner: In times of so much change, the pull to go back to intimate relationships is very strong. Coaching is important; not just 1-on-1. Relationships is part of the chemistry of the system change.
  - Dick Axelrod: We are always making design choices. This is affected by my comfort with methods, my comfort with my clients, my comfort with having everyone’s voice in the room; my comfort with the idea that if we get all the voices then we can build cohesion and action will follow. We have to really believe that having all the voices leads to wisdom.
  - (Speakers??? for next points) Voices must not only be ‘heard’ but truly ‘considered’ – dignity.
  - Aviv: I think there are actually four levels of principles to attend to: 1) Design, 2)consulting/ facilitation, 3 )methods and 4) *development* principles. There is a tension for ongoing capacity-building for a system and facilitator to handle the unknown and the need to know. (The Groan Zone in Sam Kaner’s model)
  - (Speakers??? for next points) Kathie Dannemiller said about strange attractors – that the role of facilitators can be very influential. We need to move from the design and follow the energy. We need fearless facilitators who are not afraid of knowledge and energy.
  - Maggie ??: Importance of system readiness. If the system systematically oppresses, then these processes just create an open wound.
  - Sylvia James: Readiness/emergent design (lost the thread here)
  - Chris ??: Facilitator role – justice, what are the conditions; pre-work is everything!!
  - Stewart Levine: If we have all the principles, what is the ‘why’?
  - Peggy Holman: The why is that the faster we can scale our work up in this extinction world, the greater our collective chance of it still being here. We’re growing our capacity for emergence – being open to wholeness and emergence.
  - (Speakers??? for next points) DaVinci Code of the Matrix. This is suggested as the metaphor.
  - Bill?? Our work is doing the work and going into the unknown.

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- Becoming better human beings.
  - Tiffany: Moving beyond euro-centric assumptions about what is “knowledge.”
    - Knowledge is in the body
    - Knowledge as relationship
    - Knowledge as action
    - In Chinese the word knowledge is related to action. In the west it is tied to language.

Deep belief that every voice has value. Not just heard, but considered.

*End of Open Space Session, but participants felt that the conversation was not over. Discussion ensued on how to continue. Peter Block offered his home in Cincinnati. Emily, Sylvia and Myriam agreed to call another meeting as per the declaration for action below.*

### **Declaration for Action:**

Emily Axelrod, Sylvia James and Myriam Laberge declare: *We commit to call another conversation around the work, and ask ‘what are the underlying patterns and principles around this work?’ because we want to go deeper in order to enrich our work and the larger field, and through this out to the world.*

### **Who Will Participate?**

Names and cards were gathered of the people interested in being part of this next conversation with a commitment to contact them within three months. These names are:

Conveners: Emily Axelrod; Sylvia James; Myriam Laberge, and.....:

*Emily/Sylvia – please add any names here that may have been overlooked; these are the ones I have from the sign-up sheet and the cards. Myriam*

James Wiegel; Tom Atlee; Christine Whitney Sanchez; Tree Bressen; Larry Peterson; Ben Mates; Diane Oettinger; Rita Schweitz; Sandy Heierbacher; Mary Kipp; Barbara Stahl; Nancy Glock-Grueneich; 'Dick Axelrod'; Yvonne Cheek; Mauricio Goldstein; Barbara Bunker; Cheryl Honey; Barbara Simonetti; James Myracle; Gabriel Shirley; Rick Martin; Beverly Seiford; Sara Chen-Wing; Janet Palmer; Don Benson; Diane Abbey-Livingston; Beth Ganslen; Ray Gordezky; Tova Averbuch; Margo Adair; Merling Sapane; Suky Cannon; Stewart Levine; Brenda Chaddock; Jan Palmer; Sam Kaner; Peter Block; Shea Howell; Rosi Barbeau; Nancy Aronson; Rick Lent; Gary Petersen; Janet Slemko; Jeffrey; Helen Spector; David Isaacs (david@theworldcafe.com); Peggy Holman