On Relational Facilitation:
Supporting the Creative Potential of Divergent Perspectives
by R. Zubizarreta

As practitioners of the participatory arts know, there are many benefits that can arise from engaging the collective intelligence of groups. In addition to specific practical outcomes, other benefits include the greater systemic understandings that participants develop, along with a greater sense of cohesion and purpose. One might say that regardless of methodology, participants seem to generally enjoy processes where a diversity of perspectives is welcome, where they have the opportunity to learn about

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1 see for example Kadlec & Friedman, 2010; Melville & Kingston, 2010, on the benefits of engaging community members in participatory public policy processes

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other points of view, and where they have an opportunity to make meaningful contributions on topics that matter.

While that last statement conveys some sense of equifinality about whatever method we may choose to work with (many paths leading to the same place), many of us nonetheless find great value in learning about the wide variety of processes that are available. We enjoy discovering the unique gifts of each, as well as what contexts and purposes each process is most useful for. And, we also enjoy understanding the shared underlying principles that make these varied processes effective.

So I am writing for my fellow “process geeks”, as well as anyone interested in participatory processes and their potential for helping groups arrive at practical and creative next steps with regard to specific challenges. These challenges could be within an organization, a community, or a region.

I am particularly interested in the potential of participatory processes for supporting new forms of governance. Initial experiments in this regard go by the name of deliberative democracy, participatory democracy and participatory planning². Deliberative democracy often works with sortition-based mini-publics, such as Citizen Juries and Citizen Assemblies, and its use has been growing around the world. I am interested in how relational facilitation approaches³ can enhance the design and facilitation of these processes. I am also interested in the “dialogical turn” in organization development, which emphasizes generative and emergence-based processes⁴, and its implications for the work of deliberative democracy.

**Some initial starting points.** While I’d had some experience with group processes before then, it was not until the year 2000 that I first encountered *Dynamic Facilitation*. This particular process is especially indicated for eliciting participants’ creativity in the face of issues on which there is a high emotional charge. As others have written, this

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² Gastil & Levine, 2005; Forester, 1999; Barber, 1984
³ for one compilation of the growth of relational approaches in fields other than group facilitation, see Spretnak 2011
⁴ Bushe and Marshak, 2014, 2009
process tends to result in a strong sense of “we” among group participants\(^5\). One of the key aspects of this approach is listening deeply to each person in the group. Given my background in peer counseling, this was something that felt familiar to me, even though most of my listening work before then had been in dyads, not in a whole-group context. My desire to understand how this method worked led me to return to school later that year for a master’s in Organization Development, where I continued learning about many other ways of working with groups. During the course of my learning and practice in the field of participatory processes, one key discovery has been that each method I have learned has its own gifts to offer. While this may seem obvious, it is also worth stating, given the methodological partisanship that can sometimes characterize this field.

I have been particularly interested in methods that can work creatively with the potential energy inherent in conflicting perspectives, and that are also applicable for working on issues of public policy. While learning and practicing other forms of working with groups, I have also continued to learn about, practice, experiment with, and teach the Dynamic Facilitation (DF) process. More recently, my interest in the power of theory for understanding our world and leveraging change has led me back to school for doctoral studies.

**Where things are now.** As of this writing in 2019, Dynamic Facilitation is a key element in the “BürgerRat” or “BürgerInnenRat” format that has been used more than 50 times in participatory public policy processes in the state of Vorarlberg, Austria\(^6\), another 50 or so times in other regions in Austria\(^7\), and to a lesser extent in Germany\(^8\). In English, “BürgerRat” translates as “Citizen Council or Civic Council”; it is based on the Wisdom Council model developed by Jim Rough, who is also the originator of DF.\(^9\) The Vorarlberg Bürgererrat model is similar in some ways to a Citizen’s Jury, yet public

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\(^5\) Asenbaum, 2016; Trattnigg & Haderlapp, 2014
\(^6\) see project description for Bürgererrat/Civic Council at https://democracyrd.org/work/
\(^7\) conversations with Martina Handler
\(^8\) Rausch, 2016
\(^9\) Hellrigl and Lederer, 2014
engagement practitioners in Austria have found it more cost-effective than other approaches while equally powerful.\textsuperscript{10}

Dynamic Facilitation has also been successfully used to help solve gnarly challenges in the business world\textsuperscript{11}. Yet while more effective forms of participation are certainly needed in the business world, that is not the application I will be focusing on here; I am simply pointing out the usefulness of this approach in a wide variety of contexts.

Back to the Councils in Austria. While they have proliferated, little of this work has found its way into the English language to date\textsuperscript{12}. That is too bad, as those of us who are committed to more participatory forms of democracy would do well to learn from one another. While I have been only indirectly involved with the Austrian or German Bürgerräte, I have had extensive conversations and in-depth interviews with my colleagues who have facilitated these Councils. These connections have grown as a result of my leading workshops in Germany several times on DF, the main “operating system” of these Councils. I have also written a book on this methodology that has been translated into German.

What I’d like to do next, is to lay out a few insights I have gained about some of the underlying dynamics of how this particular facilitation approach works, and why it can be such an effective tool for helping a group work together effectively. Please note: I write “can be”, since any tool can be misused or poorly applied. What I am writing here, is not a “how-to” guide; that exists elsewhere.\textsuperscript{13} Instead, it is an attempt to “connect the dots” by connecting what I know from practical experience, with relevant work that has been done in other fields.

At the same time, the underlying principles that I am foregrounding here, are not unique to any particular methodology. While I have found them extremely helpful for understanding why DF works so well, I have also seen these principles at play in other

\textsuperscript{10} Hellrigl, 2012
\textsuperscript{11} zur Bonsen, 2014
\textsuperscript{12} see https://diapraxis.com/home/translations-of-germanlanguage-resources-on-df-and-cccs for a compilation of some English-language materials
\textsuperscript{13} Zubizarreta, 2014
processes, and will be sharing those observations as well. Conceptually, it makes sense that there are often many different instances that show the same principle or underlying theory at work, albeit in different forms. I will be exploring each of the following themes in turn, ending with a brief section on implications for research:

--psychological safety, feeling “gotten”, and the social engagement system;
--welcoming differences while supporting creativity; and
--relational facilitation, a regenerative culture, and “taking all sides”.

I. Psychological safety, feeling “gotten”, and the social engagement system

As a practitioner interested in theory-building, one of the more exciting encounters I’ve had recently has been the work of Dr. Amy Edmonson on the importance of psychological safety for effective work in groups. Her work helps explain

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14 Edmonson, 1999, 2019; for further applications see Duhigg, 2016 and Reynolds & Lewison, 2018
one of the key principles in Dynamic Facilitation (DF), which is to create a space where each person can feel safe enough to risk being creative.

**Ia. Psychological safety in DF.** One of the key ways in which we create psychological safety in this method, is through a very active role on the part of the facilitators. Initially we work in a dyadic fashion with each participant in the group, drawing out and reflecting back their contributions, while the rest of the group is informally listening and observing. This is very similar to what Covey calls “listening to understand”\(^{15}\), and what has been known for decades as “active listening” or “empathic listening”\(^{16}\). It is also similar to what The Center for Understanding in Conflict calls “looping”\(^{17}\); in DF we, too, follow up our “reflecting back what we have heard” with a question to actively check whether we have in fact understood: e.g., “Did I get it?”

Whenever “looping” (or active listening, empathic reflection, resonant listening, or whatever we may choose to call it) is done in an authentic manner, motivated only by the desire to truly understand what another person is communicating, the results can be quite powerful. While not focusing on active listening itself as a tool, positive psychology researcher Dr. Barbara Frederickson writes in depth about the outcome of active listening: the experience of “feeling gotten”. In her general-audience book “Love 2.0”\(^{18}\) Frederickson describes how these “micro-moments of connection”, of feeling seen and understood by others, are not just emotionally satisfying; they are also one of the most beneficial experiences that humans can have on a physiological level.

Likewise, Dr. Stephen Porges’ Polyvagal Theory\(^{19}\), which is being widely used in trauma therapy, illuminates the tremendous difference between humans being in a low-level of fight-or-flight stress reaction (which neuroscientists have been verifying is quite common in many group situations) or instead, being connected with what he calls our “social engagement” system — the nervous system’s state of being relaxed yet alert,

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\(^{15}\) Covey, 2004  
\(^{16}\) Arnold, 2014  
\(^{17}\) Friedman & Himmelstein, 2008  
\(^{18}\) Fredrickson, 2013  
\(^{19}\) Porges, 2017
which allows us to be curious, take in new information, play, and engage in complex problem-solving with others.

From this perspective, the role of the facilitator in DF can be understood as simply supporting each person in the group to feel psychologically safe enough to stay in their “social engagement” zone, while the facilitator is also actively welcoming divergence and creativity. This allows each person’s natural drive to create meaning to work unimpeded, and allows the entire group to engage constructively and emergently with a complex set of multiple perspectives. Of course, there are more details about how we do this; but more and more, I have come to see this as the essence of the work.

**Ib. Psychological Safety in other facilitation modalities.** There are other interesting and effective ways to create psychological safety in a group. For example, “functional subgrouping” as developed by Yvonne Agazarian\(^{20}\), a renowned group therapy practitioner and theorist, also has useful applications for organizational and community contexts. It offers a way to move beyond polarization with a series of sequential “fishbowls”. First one “side” gets to explore an issue with others who feel the same way; this becomes the “inner circle” of the fishbowl, while others with a different perspective simply witness the first side’s interactions, sitting or standing in an “outer circle”. For the second half of the process, those aligning with the “other side” of the issue move into the center of the fishbowl, where they get to explore their perspectives with others who feel similarly, while the original fishbowl occupants now observe from the outer circle.

A different process, Future Search, is Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff’s format for a three-day whole-system working conference\(^ {21}\). It is designed to find and build upon common ground, not to explore controversial or emotionally charged issues. In addition to developing Future Search, Weisbord & Sandra Janoff have also developed a minimalist approach to group facilitation, described in their book *Don’t Just*

\(^{20}\) Systems-Centered Training and Research Institute, 2012
\(^{21}\) Weisbord & Janoff, 1995
Do Something, Stand There. There and elsewhere, they credit Agazarian for inspiring one of the very few group interventions they use: inviting participants to “join” someone who has gone out on a limb within the group.

In that kind of situation, they ask the group, “Does anyone else feel that way”? As others “join” that person, this prevents that participant from becoming isolated or silenced. In essence, this creates a version of a “functional subgroup”, even though Weisbord and Janoff do not necessarily implement the “fishbowl” aspect of it; they feel that simply knowing that this is not the “only” person in the room who feels that way, is usually sufficient to shift the dynamics. (For a related insight on the power of group pressure, see this discussion of Solomon Asche’s experiments on social conformity.) And, in the rare event that no participants respond to the invitation, the facilitators themselves will find a way to “join” the person. It is worthwhile to note that this, one of Weisbord and Janoff’s very few active interventions, serves the crucial function of creating psychological safety in a group.

Then there is Open Space Technology, the original approach to self-organized “unconferencing”. In this format, the Law of Mobility (aka the “Law of Two Feet”) can be seen as a sort of “safety valve” that allows people to self-regulate. On a systemic level, it serves as a kind of “checks and balances” that limit the possibility of a topic convenor or dominant participant abusing their role. The “Law” proposes that whenever a participant feels they are neither learning from, nor contributing to, their current group or conversation, they are free take a moment’s pause, remember their agency and mobility, and choose to go elsewhere — even in the middle of a session or conversation. The intention is to encourage participants to take responsibility for their own experience at an Open Space gathering.

At the same time, how we interpret this law may be influenced by our gendered experience. Anne Stadler offers a reminder that “The Law of Two Feet” is also an invitation to take a stand for what you believe in. According to Peggy Holman, Anne’s

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22 Weisbord & Janoff, 2007
23 Owen, 2008
take highlights that “For many women, who may be culturally conditioned to stay quiet, the law is an invitation to speak up.”24 This requires courage, and possibly the psychological safety that comes from knowing that we have some allies in the room.

While Council Circle25 is very different than Open Space, one similarity with reference to our current topic is that the structure itself creates some degree of psychological safety. Whenever we “go around the circle,” each person knows when it is their turn to talk, and also knows that they won’t be interrupted. This often allows participants to “drop down” and communicate from a deeper level than they would otherwise.

Ic. What psychological safety is NOT. Some group facilitators offer a valuable concern when the topic of “safety” comes up. They want to make sure I am not implying that a facilitator can guarantee safety from external consequences. Thus, I have found it helpful to clarify that I am specifically referring to psychological safety within the group, not what happens afterward.

Thinking about external consequences is especially relevant for facilitators working in an organizational context, though it’s also useful for all of us to consider. As group facilitators, we are not generally in a position to ensure safety for participants with regard to external consequences that may later ensue as a result of having shared something vulnerable within the room. That’s a different matter altogether, and safety in this regard is something that we can neither assume nor guarantee.

In the planning process before an event, we can certainly inform meeting sponsors about the negative consequences that are likely to ensue if participants “open up” during a meeting and are later “punished” for that by others. If we sense that this is likely to happen, we may have an ethical obligation to refuse the engagement. At the same time, there is usually some degree of safety built in, in that participants are usually quite aware when they are in an unsafe context, and are likely to remain quite

24 Peggy Holman, personal feedback
25 Baldwin & Linnea, 2010; Zimmerman & Coyle, 1996
closed in those circumstances for their own protection. So this would be another practical reason to refuse the engagement, as we are not likely to be able to do much good in those conditions.

A different (yet often related) concern regarding safety has to do social inequities. “Psychological safety” as it applies to DF, means that the facilitator is doing their best to offer basic respect to each person, along with preventing any overt put-downs, criticism, or undercutting of anyone’s ideas or contributions. It does NOT mean, however, that no one in the room will ever utter an unconsciously racist, sexist, or classist comment. To be able to respond effectively to this kind of situation requires those of us who are facilitators to be developing our own sensitivity in these areas in an ongoing manner, through cultural competency trainings, equity and inclusion trainings, etc. By doing this, we will be better able to recognize these kinds of difficulties when they happen, and respond in a useful manner that supports a learning environment for all.

A third concern about emphasizing psychological safety, is how it can unintentionally support conflict-avoidant behavior. As Peggy Holman writes, “I see the risk of attention to safety, as shutting down difference so that no one is triggered […] facilitators who get fearful and tamp down people’s comments can squash authenticity, sometimes in the name of civility.”

In the next section, we’ll be looking at what we have learned to date about welcoming authenticity, while still creating enough psychological safety to encourage creative thinking.

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26 Peggy Holman, personal feedback
II. Welcoming differences while supporting creativity

While the first principle explored above has to do with creating a basic level of psychological safety, this second principle has to do with maximizing creative tension while still minimizing interpersonal anxiety. As facilitators, we seek to welcome different perspectives, as different perspectives are essential for creativity. Yet people won’t usually allow themselves to get creative if they feel they are going to be criticized.

*IIa. Early learnings about eliciting and protecting creativity in groups.* In the late 1950’s and early 1960, creativity researchers William J.J. Gordon and George Prince discovered the major importance of group climate for the generation of creative ideas. In audio recordings of unfacilitated groups, they noticed a pattern where whenever they heard someone responding dismissively to another person’s idea, they could rewind the recording and find some time earlier in the process when the now-

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27 Prince, 1970
dismissive person had offered an idea of their own which had been subtly ignored or overlooked. After witnessing this pattern repeatedly, they realized the key role of facilitation for generating the optimal environment for creativity. Prince wrote: “Perhaps the most remarkable lesson that has emerged from our work, is the fact that people cannot wholeheartedly work in a group unless the individuality of each is carefully protected.”

Of course there are different ways we can go about “protecting people’s individuality” in groups. And despite their potent insights, I find it unfortunate that the powerful methods Gordon and Prince developed for encouraging creative thinking were all designed for commercial innovation. Yet given various crises we are currently facing (crisis = danger + opportunity), it seems timely to explore how we might take what we know about human creativity and apply it to socially significant issues.

One of the early formats for eliciting creativity in groups was Osborne’s invention of brainstorming. In this process, idea generation (coming up with many different ideas) is separated from idea evaluation (assessing the value of the different ideas) as a way to create enough psychological safety for people to engage in “out-of-the-box” thinking. While brainstorming can be very useful in some contexts, it has also been subject to recent critiques; when not carried out as originally designed, people can still feel inhibited in a group context and perform less well than when they work individually.

A more elaborate way of generating creativity in groups was devised by Edward DeBono, who developed the Six Thinking Hats model (among a much larger body of work). DeBono describes “black hat thinking”, or critical thinking, as a critical element in the design process — yet one that needs to not come in too early, since it can wither the “young green shoots” of creativity. “Green hat thinking” is similar to brainstorming — anything goes — while “yellow hat thinking” is “possibility thinking”: a response to the question, “what would it take for that idea to succeed?” Red hat thinking includes

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28 Prince, 1970, p. 41
29 Isaksen & Gaulin, 2005
30 De Bono, 1992
feelings and gut responses, without the need for justification; while white hat thinking invokes careful observation, while stepping back from any assumptions we may be making. Last but not least, blue hat thinking has to do with meta-level process observations, such as “Which hat might be most useful for us to be wearing right now?” Both brainstorming and Six Thinking Hats can be useful methods for working with groups, yet they are only the tip of the iceberg of a much larger body of work dealing with creativity in groups. The yearly gatherings of the Creative Problem-Solving Institute are one place where practitioners in this field gather. Yet as mentioned earlier, much of this work has been lamentably restricted to purposes of industrial innovation, and has generally not been applied to addressing public policy issues.

**IIb. How we elicit and protect creativity in DF.** Unlike brainstorming or Six Thinking Hats, in DF we don’t protect creativity by isolating critique to a distinct “phase” of the process. Instead, we welcome both solutions AND concerns about others’ solutions, throughout the process. So how do we create the psychological safety that is needed for the “tender green shoots” of people’s creative efforts?

Instead of limiting critique to a certain phase of the process, we ask participants to shift where they aim it. We invite them to address any critiques directly to the facilitator. The facilitator can then reframe those critiques as “concerns”, thus appreciating and welcoming the energy of caring about having a sound outcome that lies underneath each critique. After listening deeply to a concern, and reflecting it back both verbally and in writing, the facilitator will invite that same participant to offer their own creative solution to the challenges that are being considered.

This is one example of how in DF there are various times when we invite participants to speak directly to the facilitator. To begin with, we do so throughout the initial stage of the process, when we are “purging” participants — i.e., harvesting all of their initial solutions, concerns about one another’s initial solutions, relevant

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31 These gatherings are sponsored by the Creative Education Foundation, [http://www.creativeeducationfoundation.org](http://www.creativeeducationfoundation.org)
32 For more on the value of welcoming initial solutions, see Zubizarreta, 2006; also Zubizarreta, 2013
information about context, etc. After this initial stage, participants often shift into speaking directly to one another, while the facilitator periodically pauses the group to reflect back the last handful of contributions and to check that he or she has recorded them accurately.

In the later stage of the process, we move back into the format of “participants speaking directly to the facilitator” in two kinds of situations. One is, whenever strong differences arise that begin to trigger a pattern of attack/defense. Secondly, we also move back into this format, whenever a creative idea has been offered, and another participant begins to respond with the energy of critique instead of building (“Well, but… “ instead of “Yes, and…”)

After checking back in with the previous participant to re-establish resonance, the facilitator welcomes the concern that has arisen, listens to it in detail and reflects it back. No one is “made wrong”. After the participant who has a concern has finished sharing it, and has felt heard, he or she is now invited to offer their own creative solutions. Thus, directing the critique to the facilitator allows the person who was originally targeted by the critique, to sit back and “overhear” it as a concern. This allows for very different perspectives to be shared, while maintaining psychological safety in the group.

Ilc. Other approaches that create psychological safety in a similar manner to DF.

Better Angels is a relatively new organization in the U.S. that is dedicated to creating opportunities for “Reds” and “Blues” to have the opportunity to understand more about one another. One recent innovation they have launched is the Better Angels’ debate format33, where psychological safety is maintained by having participants direct their very different perspectives toward the “chair” or moderator of the debate. The “chair” in this format does not engage in “looping” (i.e., reflecting back the essence of what has been said). However, the simple act of not having participants address their energy at each other, but instead direct their comments to the “chair”, helps to shift the

33 https://www.better-angels.org/what-we-do/#Debates
dynamics of the process such that everyone is better able to listen to the different perspectives being offered.

On the other end of the ancient-contemporary continuum, an elder in Hawai‘i once described to us a traditional ho‘o pono pono process used for community conflict resolution. Once a circle has been called to address a particular conflict, and prayers have been offered, the main parties to the conflict are not allowed to speak to one another directly, “until their hearts have opened” and they are ready to apologize to one another. Until that point, they are asked to direct all of their responses to the Elder who is holding the circle. She or he interviews each of the parties to the conflict in the presence of a small group circle that has been convened expressly for this purpose. The Elder also calls on others in the circle, to offer their perspectives on the situation.34

**IId. Other elements of creating a generative space.** While in this article I have been primarily focusing on the two micro-dynamics of a) helping people feel “gotten” through “looping” and b) redirecting criticism toward the facilitator, as two complementary ways of creating psychological safety for differences, I don’t mean to imply that these are the only ways to create a generative space. From the framing of the original invitation, to bringing together participants with different roles in the larger system and thus different perspectives, to asking questions that elicit creativity, there are other elements that are also significant for a creative process.

Now for the last section, where we will consider the notion of “taking all sides” as an essential aspect of regenerative culture and relational facilitation.

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34 personal narrative, shared with us by a traditional Elder on the island of Malakai
III. Relational facilitation, a regenerative culture, and “taking all sides”

If, as we explored earlier, our work is as facilitators consists of helping each person “feel gotten”, one implication of this is that we need to allow ourselves to be more fully human. We need to welcome people’s emotions, and allow ourselves to empathize and resonate with people.

IIIa. Positive intentions behind the desire to be “impartial”. We want to acknowledge the positive intentions behind the call to “impartiality”. Clearly, the injunction that facilitators should refrain from “taking sides”, aims to have us to treat participants fairly. Yet another way to achieve this same end, can be to “take all sides” or be “multipartial”. In family therapy this has sometimes been called “multidirectional partiality”. This simply means, taking turns empathizing with each side, and

35 Long & Kort, 2016
attempting to do so fully. We don’t need to use a fancy term for it; we just want to point out that this approach has been around for a while, and has been found useful in a variety of contexts.

Yes, it can be harder to do this, than to simply put up a wall of “impartiality” around our hearts. It is often much easier to simply fall back on transactional measures, like giving everyone equal time, instead of seeking to actually empathize, understand, and connect with everyone in the room. And sometimes, in a given situation, a more transactional approach may be the best we can do. Yet it helps to not lose sight of the awareness that more is possible.

**Illb. Other facilitation approaches that actively “take all sides”**. Two approaches informed by Non-Violent Communication (NVC) come to mind here: one is Dominic Barter’s Restorative Circles\(^{36}\), and another is Miki Kashtan’s Convergent Facilitation\(^{37}\). Each of these processes offers its own unique gifts, and is worth exploring in greater depth. Another approach that “takes all sides” was mentioned earlier, the work of The Center for Understanding in Conflict, founded by Gary Friedman and Jack Himmelstein, the ones who coined the term “looping”\(^{38}\). Unlike the first two examples, their work is not based on NVC, to my knowledge.

Then there is the Lewis method of Deep Democracy\(^{39}\), created by Myrna and Greg Lewis and inspired by the Process Work of Arnie and Amy Mindell. Having experienced both, it seems to me that the Lewis approach to Deep Democracy has a greater focus on psychological safety than the original Process Work model. Yet both models honor the energy of divergent perspectives, as a potential resource for greater creativity and growth. And they both embody the principle of “taking all sides”.

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\(^{36}\) see [https://restorativerevolution.com/restorative-circles-resources/](https://restorativerevolution.com/restorative-circles-resources/) for more on Restorative Circles

\(^{37}\) Center for Efficient Collaboration, 2015

\(^{38}\) [https://understandinginconflict.org](https://understandinginconflict.org)

\(^{39}\) Lewis 2015
IIIc. “Taking all sides” in DF. There is not much to add here beyond what I have already written in earlier sections. DF is the first process where I experienced as a participant, what it felt like for the facilitator to sequentially “take all sides” in a group context. While this feels qualitatively different than “not taking sides”, there are also some similarities: (a) our intention is for people to have the experience of being treated fairly and (b) we are specifically NOT “taking sides” with regard to the content.

By “taking all sides”, part of what we mean is assuming, as facilitators, that each person has a positive intent along with a desire to contribute. Furthermore, we see it as our responsibility to draw out each participant, while attempting to understand their contribution and empathize with their perspective; this allows each person to feel “gotten”.

Some facilitators, in learning about this approach, become worried that we are “doing therapy”. In my attempts to understand and empathize with those concerns, I’ve come to realize something key: “taking all sides” assumes a fundamentally different worldview than the transactional approach to communication. In relational facilitation, we are assuming a universe of resonant relationship, where having a listener who cares about what we have to say, makes a world of difference.

It is unfortunately the case in our culture, that often the only people who offer this kind of listening are therapists or social workers. And so the fear of having our work “mistaken for therapy” is quite understandable. Yet deep listening is not therapy, even though it may be deeply therapeutic. Nonetheless, it is still quite a new paradigm in some fields to treat human beings as relational beings, and not as disconnected billiard balls in a mechanistic universe.

IV. In closing: New perspectives on research.

As deliberative democracy practitioners, many of us are focused on the practical work of creating spaces that support engagement, trust, and collaboration. At the same time, from a research perspective, sortition-based microcosms — “mini-publics” where high quality group deliberation can take place — can be understood as a way to improve upon traditional public opinion polls. Instead of answering the question “How
does the larger public feel about this issue, off the top of their heads?”, a method called Deliberative Polling\textsuperscript{40} answers the question “How \textit{would} the larger public feel about this issue, IF they had the opportunity to learn a bit more about it, and then \textit{engage in a moderated discussion} with others about this issue?”

Deliberative Polling works quite well, and is certainly a vast improvement over regular polling. Yet if we wanted to bring more of our humanity into this research picture, we \textit{could} choose to ask, “How would the larger public feel about this issue, if they had the opportunity to learn a bit more about it, and then \textit{engage in a facilitated creative exploration} with others about this issue?”

In the process, we would be expanding our research question — and, we would be opening the door to enhanced creativity, meaning, and engagement. By working with relational approaches to group facilitation, we make room for participants to bring more of themselves to the table. My own research and experience, as well as the many Civic Councils that have taken place in Vorarlberg, other parts of Austria, and Germany, suggest that this can lead to powerful outcomes, and thus serve as a useful step forward toward a culture of deep democracy.

\textit{The author welcomes any questions or comments. You can contact her through her website, at www.DiaPraxis.com.}

\textsuperscript{40} https://cdd.stanford.edu/what-is-deliberative-polling/
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