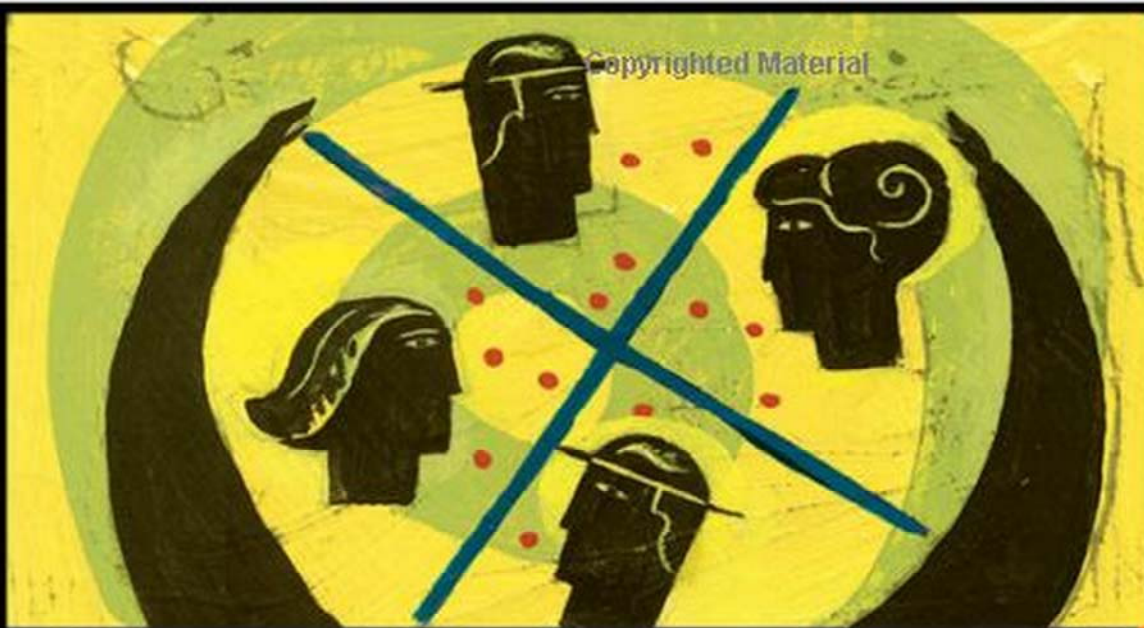


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The Handbook for Working with **Difficult Groups**

How They Are Difficult,
Why They Are Difficult and
What You Can Do About It

edited by Sandy Schuman



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Deep Democracy: Multidimensional Process- Oriented Leadership

Stanford Siver

A Middle East desert expedition peace project set out from Jerusalem, traveling to Tripoli, Libya, by truck, foot, and camel with a goal of demonstrating that they really can get along despite their enormous differences. The group included eight designated participants, chosen for their diverse and extreme experiences, and a small army of support staff that included four documentary filmmakers, three drivers, two organizers, one Tibetan Lama, a doctor, a photographer and various media people who would come and go, an Egyptian security officer, and me, the staff conflict facilitator, all crammed into three overloaded trucks.

The eight participants—from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Palestine, the former Soviet Union, and the United States—had not met before. Despite their extremely diverse views and personal histories, they began the trip with a common belief in their solidarity: *we all get along; it's our governments who don't get along.*

With the pace and the stress of cramped conditions and long days traveling, it was no surprise that the group's difficulties included all of the tensions that exist in life everywhere and Middle East politics in particular: gender politics, conflicts among the support staff and organizers, and participants who projected their conflicts onto government leadership and swore that they all got along despite obvious disagreements and escalating tensions.

In an earlier peace project, the same organizers had brought four Israelis and four Palestinians to South America, sailing across the Strait of Magellan and Drake Passage to Antarctica. They climbed a previously unscaled mountain together and named it Friendship Mountain as a symbol of joint Palestinian and Israeli friendship.

On camera, it had been an inspiring undertaking that grabbed the attention of major media and over five hundred million viewers around the world. Off camera, things were rather complicated.

By the time they reached the mountain, one of the participants refused to be seen in photos with some of the others, and other rifts were evident along lines of gender, ethnic identity, and race. Problems that exist globally tend to be mirrored within organizations, and peace projects are no exception. It was because of these complications that the organizers' executive team had decided to include a conflict facilitator in the second expedition.

The first days of the journey went well. The participants believed in their mission and made inspiring speeches for the media and filmmakers; the staff were busy working to keep things rolling; and the tensions that arose rarely flared for long. Still, despite the obvious tension, there was a clear "no" to deeper dialogue. There was a line beyond which neither staff nor participants were prepared to go until several weeks into the journey when a man from Afghanistan suddenly decided to leave in the middle of a small Egyptian city. Even worse, the project organizers didn't ask why, but were politely saying good-bye while thanking him for having come this far. People should feel free to leave, but I felt that we were failing if we didn't at least try to finally have a deeper and more meaningful interaction. I decided to join him, amplify the reason for leaving, and occupy the role more clearly: "Fine! If he's going then I'm going! If he's not important to all of you, then this project isn't important to me. Fine that he goes, but not without our working together to understand why, to hear his frustrations, and to see if there is something we can do together to make this work for everyone."

It was a chaotic hot spot. The film crew ran for their gear. One organizer was stunned; the other was furious. But everybody gathered around. And then there was a moment of silence. For the first time, the group could see that something wasn't working. It isn't only our governments that don't get along. Something had shifted, and people understood that they needed to work together.

We traveled just far enough to escape the city noise and gathered in a circle on the desert sands of the eastern Sahara. Not certain where to go or what would happen, I dropped the role I'd taken on and spoke briefly as a facilitator and invited the man from Afghanistan to speak first. He talked about his country, about the U.S. invasion, about differences between East and West, between Judeo-Christian culture and Arab culture. And then he said, "It feels like there is no room for my experience. You all believe that it is only our governments, that we are all the same, but I feel so put down by your attitudes."

A chaotic group process erupted as the Iraqi man joined with the man from Afghanistan in speaking against U.S. invasions, imperialism, and the CIA. The men from the United States reacted and spoke about the horrors of 9/11 and the great things that the United States is doing and the beautiful ideals for humanity in the background, and countered that when they had told their stories they didn't feel that the Afghani man had listened. People talked about suffering and love and horrible things that had happened to them, their families, and their countries.

There was a moment of silence and tears. Realizing the shared humanity of suffering often brings people closer together. And then one woman spoke about her vision for humanity, that we can demonstrate that we really can get along, that we can demonstrate peace. There was another moment of silence, but it felt like the air being let out of a balloon. The peace she described felt oppressive. Peace is people being real, open to chaos, open to diverse experiences, working together on difficult issues without picking up guns, saying the kinds of things we don't often say to people who don't agree with us, trying to find the other in themselves, learning to discuss extremely hot issues without recreating war, and learning to understand ourselves and others.

As I thought back to the earlier days of the project, the signals of someone's leaving were there all along, as were the signals of a deeper, more disturbing dialogue waiting to emerge. People *left* by keeping their real feelings and thoughts about other cultures, countries, and religions to themselves, preferring to

support the friendly group atmosphere of camaraderie while gossiping privately about their views. In a sense, they hadn't showed up yet.

The Afghani man did leave. Not everyone wants to stay and work it out with others. Some love it. Some prefer to hit and run. Others prefer to avoid any confrontation. Over time, each group will find its own way to work with the diverse experiences that arise once it finds the courage for deeper dialogue.

DEEP DEMOCRACY

Deep Democracy is a psycho-socio-political paradigm and large group facilitation and change management model that integrates concepts from quantum physics, psychology, and anthropology. The basic methodology involves the use of dual awareness and an attitude of inclusiveness to cocreate group cohesion. The first awareness focuses on the group's content and surface dynamics. The second awareness focuses on microsignals; self-organizing tendencies; subjective experience; and the facilitator's own experience, which is organized by the same forces that organize the group and is a meaningful mirror of the group's process. Introducing and practicing these concepts are difficult because Deep Democracy is not a set of rules about how to run groups. It is a set of tools and principles that can help the group discover its own path by noticing itself and embracing an atmosphere of inclusiveness.

Deep Democracy was developed by Arnold Mindell (1992), the founder of Process Work (also known as Process Oriented Psychology; see www.aamin-dell.net and www.iapop.com). Deep Democracy has been further developed into a multidimensional process-oriented leadership model by Max and Ellen Schupbach, cofounders of the Deep Democracy Institute and partners in MAXFXX, an organizational consulting group.

Arny Mindell (2000), originally a physicist and Jungian analyst, has researched and written extensively on how awareness creates reality, how we perceive experiences on different levels, and how this creates different frameworks of reality. This idea follows discoveries in quantum physics, chaos theory, and the symbolic thinking of Jungian psychology, and also stems from ancient spiritual traditions such as Taoism and indigenous philosophies.

In the late 1980s, Mindell began formulating his ideas as a political principle that he called *Deep Democracy*: Unlike "classical" democracy, which focuses on majority rule, Deep Democracy suggests that all voices, states of awareness, and

frameworks of reality are important. Deep Democracy also suggests that the information carried within these voices, awarenesses, and frameworks are all needed to understand the complete process of the system. Deep Democracy is an attitude that focuses on the awareness of voices that are both central and marginal (A. P. Mindell, 1992).

The focus on voices that are both central and marginal refers to the voices of various states of consciousness, subjective somatic (bodily) experiences, synchronicities, and experiences associated with rank dynamics. Developing our ability to notice, understand, and use the information contained in these voices can help us improve our ability to facilitate complex interactions. It isn't easy to see how our limited awareness is creating a problem when we are in the midst of working with a difficult group. The difficulty seems painfully real, and we may think it obvious that a particular person or group is the cause of the problem. Unfortunately, this narrow assessment rarely helps relieve the tension. It doesn't work.

The greatest difficulty is often our inability to understand and appreciate events in terms of their underlying processes. One way that our limited awareness may serve to cloud our understanding is through an unconscious attachment to our own agenda, which is often expressed through an implicit expectation that a group *should* be easier to work with, which really means that "they should follow me." Groups may be seen as difficult when conflicting leadership efforts are not supported through facilitation, resulting instead in chaotic and painful authority fights.

Facilitators can capitalize on group disturbances and improve their ability to understand a difficult group's dynamics, facilitate more effectively, and transform disturbances by understanding the patterns that structure group dynamics and individual behavior. These patterns appear as signals that are critical for understanding difficulties, recognizing and supporting emergent leadership, and helping groups find more creative and sustainable solutions. Deep Democracy and a multidimensional process-oriented view of leadership provide a framework for understanding these patterns. Mindell defines *process* as a constant flow of information—which we experience through signals, body symptoms, relationship experiences, and other channels of information flow (1989) and refers to a *group process* as an event where people work together to bring awareness to the tensions, roles, ghosts, and dynamics that pattern the group's dynamics.

PROCESS THEORY

Process work theory says that the psychology of the facilitator and the group are organized by the same forces. These forces create a *field*, similar to an invisible electromagnetic field, that pulls people in various directions. These varied directions appear as *roles*, which are the viewpoints or functions within a field that are occupied by various people or subgroups at different times—for example, the leader, the worker, the helper, or the troublemaker.

Although any given role may at times seem to be located within a given individual, roles are actually dynamic *timespirits*. Timespirits are roles that change with time, sometimes quite rapidly, and often move from one individual or group to another. For example, while speaking angrily against tyranny, I may inadvertently tyrannize others, at least momentarily. Timespirits are part of the field's self-organizing pattern.

Groups are most difficult when the structural elements of the field's pattern are not seen and addressed. These elements include the tensions and feelings that exist between various roles and *ghost* roles. Ghosts are roles that are somehow felt to be present but can't quite be located. For example, sexism is a common ghost role in organizations. People may feel its presence, and although no one speaks in favor of sexism directly, it persists.

Group difficulties tend to escalate when key signals are not addressed because the underlying roles remain invisible—like ghosts that are felt and that effect the group but aren't directly expressed or spoken to. Also, groups tend to become frozen when one *polarity* (two central but opposed roles) is given too much attention and when groups lack the *fluidity* (an ability to consciously shift between different roles and to avoid being grabbed by a role) that comes from understanding roles as dynamic timespirits rather than static positions. Understanding roles as timespirits means that any one person or subgroup is not the role but also changes and needs awareness of and access to other positions as well. Groups tend to be more cohesive when disturbing subgroups and individuals are seen as momentarily occupying emergent roles that are asking to be welcomed to interact with the group's dominant views and individuals.

Welcoming disturbing roles and behaviors is difficult because people are often opposed to certain roles and at times enjoy *winning* by defeating and silencing others; and positional leaders and designated facilitators often feel threatened by the emergent, momentary leadership of others and don't always support the group's direction as opposed to their own agenda.

The following sections describe methods for tracking the *process structure*—the patterns that organize the information in terms of the rank, roles, and polarities and the tensions that exist between them and that therefore organize the group structure—and lay the foundation for the section on multi-dimensional leadership. Group structure is patterned by process structure, and thus by the same organizing forces. In this sense, the terms *group structure* and *process structure* are synonymous in this chapter.

TRACKING

If process is a constant flow of information, then signals are a constant flow of symbolic indicators, which indirectly inform us about various competing processes. These underlying processes are evident in signals and their *structure*—the patterns in verbal and nonverbal communications, movement, roles, emotional cues, and somatic experiences. But we often marginalize the signals because we don't understand their meaning. Signals often seem chaotic, and confusing signals are often ignored. For example, in moments when you might expect someone to attentively listen, signals that don't go along with attentive listening (gazing out the window, fidgeting with a cell phone) will usually be ignored until their strength (either through an increase in intensity or repetition) exceeds a certain threshold. Below that threshold, their informational value is lost, and our ability to learn from complex situations is limited.

The root of the word *learn* is *leornian*, arising from a Proto-Indo-European word meaning “to follow or find the track” (Harper, 2001). *Tracking* is the root of learning. Tracking means to notice the signals and discover how they fit together, revealing a path that leads forward. The first step is to notice signals that don't seem to go along with the normal flow of communications and to track those signals.

Groups become difficult because these signals and fledgling processes are often ignored, and they are often ignored because they conflict with other processes, and so the cycle continues. It takes a change of attitude to understand that those signals that we might prefer to ignore can be used to discover an emerging tendency that is crucially deserving of support rather than a troublesome obstacle to be overcome.

Tracking isn't meant to be a reductionist exercise in conducting an increasingly detailed analysis of signals and their patterns, but is meant to

uncover the meaning behind the signals. By tracking signals and unfolding the meaning hidden within their patterns, facilitators can begin to understand the underlying processes that organize the group dynamics and individual behaviors. Process structure is the symmetry between the signals, their informational patterns, the underlying processes, and the way they manifest in terms of individual behavior and group dynamics. Understanding structure is the key to understanding difficulties, recognizing and supporting emergent leadership, and helping groups find more sustainable and creative solutions.

PROCESS STRUCTURE

Central to understanding the structure of a group's processes is an ability to understand the *roles* that are present. Roles perform specific functions within groups, not all of which are popular. Some less popular roles include the disrupter, the slacker, the sexist, the critic, and the oppressor.

People tend to avoid certain especially unpopular roles in order to prevent being scapegoated or being identified as, for example, the troublemaker in a group. These roles are often *unoccupied*, meaning that no one wants to be seen or to see themselves in this way, but are somehow noticeable in a group. They are like ghosts that appear as tensions in the atmosphere, or you may hear people speaking about them by listening to the group's gossip in the breaks. Understanding these ghost roles and their impact on a group is an important part of helping a group deal with its problems and develop its creativity and power.

A group can be viewed as a field or a collection of roles (formal, consensual, ghost, and otherwise) that pull in different directions, polarizing individuals and groups into conflicting viewpoints. Roles grab us to play their parts. A given role could grab anyone, but if I have a particular affinity for that role, then I may be easier to grab than someone else. You might find yourself in a boring meeting and suddenly act like a rebel or be in a chaotic meeting and suddenly stand for rules and structure. The field pulls you into the roles where your own personal development lies. The more emotional affect you have, the less understanding of the role you have and the less access you have to fluidity. For example, developing greater understanding of my own exuberant rebelliousness can help me notice my tendency to react against a boring or otherwise unproductive meeting and to use the tendency in a more positive way. I'm no less rebellious; I'm just better at using it constructively.

One common ghost role is *the learner* (one who doesn't know but is open to learning). It is difficult to be a learner candidly within an organization that values *knowing*. The assumption is that if you are open to learning, then you must not know. It is often more career enhancing, and thus more common, for people to be in a role that says, "I know." Behind this knowing there is a lot of creativity and power, but also there is frequently a lack of relationship awareness in the way that the knowing is expressed (often as a putdown of others) and in the way that it marginalizes learning personally, in others, and within the organization:

Example 1

We should do X.

No! X won't work. We should do Y.

This is very different than

Example 2

I know you've given it a lot of thought. I'm thinking that maybe we should do X, but what do you think?

Wow . . . yes, X. X definitely looks promising. We tried something similar; we may not have had it right, but when we tried it, this is what happened. How could we have done it better or ensure that this same problem won't happen again here? Can we explore that together? And also, we were wondering about Y. What do you think?

The relationship *metaskills* (feeling skills and an ability to consciously choose when to be sensitive or tough, for example; (A. S. Mindell, 1995) demonstrated in example 2 communicate some of the same information as example 1, but also communicate concern for the other and exhibit a style of relationship and organizational teamwork that is important. What you say is informed by your awareness of which role you are in, your feeling connection with others, and an ability to demonstrate fluidity while caring for others. Arnold Mindell (1992) calls this quality *eldership*. Speaking as yet another force countering the other's leadership may not be as effective as eldership: caring for others and for the whole system by speaking first as an enthusiastic supporter before introducing other ideas. Everyone knows this, but we forget, especially in difficult situations, and this adds to the difficulty. Example 1 could be viewed as

leader versus leader, example 2 as (*follower + leader = elder*) versus (*follower + leader = elder*).

Another problem with a leader versus leader interaction, even when it works, is that my inner critic knows it is only half working. I got the slam dunk, but I downed a team member, created an enemy, and disrupted the group's ability to work together. My inner critic says this wasn't so good, but my everyday personality says, "I won't be downed by this criticism, and anyhow, the team needed my strong leadership." Then the elder in me thinks, "OK. Get through this. Relax. Just notice the roles and the tensions . . . critics, power, leadership. Hmmm. Power messes everybody up." The learner is waking up, learning how to do it better next time. "OK. Maybe I can help turn this around."

The next section introduces concepts from physics that have been shown to mirror dynamics in psychology, organizational dynamics, and process structure (Mindell, 2000).

SPIN

One of the remarkable discoveries in quantum physics is *spin*. Spin is a property of particles, sometimes loosely described as the rotational inertia of the particle's magnetic field. Spin has two possibilities, nominally described as either *up* or *down*. Pairs of particles are coupled, meaning that if one particle's spin is up, then the other's is down. The remarkable thing is that if the spin of one particle is changed, then the spin of the other particle changes simultaneously regardless of the distance between them. The particles are *entangled*, and the change is instantaneous. This phenomenon mirrors relationship patterns that we all experience (Mindell, 2008). The first relationship pattern is the tendency to polarize:

I propose X.

No, Y is better.

Oh no . . . not you again.

This doesn't mean that people shouldn't polarize. By themselves, polarities have an enormous creative potential. If we can polarize consciously and maintain a relationship connection with others and use a deeper set of skills to facilitate the polarities and tensions between the roles, polarizing consciously can help a more creative and sustainable process emerge. A tyrannical

leadership style might seem easier and justified, considering that it takes time, skill, and effort to foster Deep Democracy. But it's easy to constantly polarize a group into an exhausted state of chronic ineffectiveness or submission and difficult to follow a deeper path toward developing a meaningful, creative, and sustainable organization. Overall, following the self-organizing process structure is the path of least effort.

Another relationship pattern that entanglement mirrors is related to the connection that changes the other particle's spin. Have you ever left a meeting after a relationship conflict, eventually found some resolution or ability to understand the other person, and then gone back only to find that he or she had also changed? Because of entanglement, relationship is a complex dance of roles and states of consciousness. We work on ourselves and the other person changes, and a fluid dance-like *rotational symmetry* emerges that moves us in and out of various roles. The dance stops, and the other side will not change if you are not fluid or are not facilitating the roles effectively. And if you think the other side will never change, you are finished as a facilitator.

Difficult groups are difficult because there is no *facilitator function* present helping bring awareness to the roles, polarities, tension, and visions of the team members. Facilitation doesn't have to come from a formally designated facilitator. The *facilitator function* is ontologically built in to all groups. It just isn't always used. It is often unoccupied, but anyone can help bring it out. The facilitator is a role, and you don't have to be the designated leader, extroverted, or abnormally charismatic to help bring awareness to a group. You only have to trust in your own experience and want to find a way to help the group that is supportive of others. Unfortunately, noticing and trusting in our own experience are not always so easy. There is only one problem a person can have in a group: not knowing the deepest part of himself or herself and not bringing it out and making it more transparent. The group needs this from its members for its own self-organizing development. Groups also need to learn and develop their own ability to notice, track, and process things and understand how entanglement and rotational symmetry are part of the process structure of a group's role dynamics.

RANK

Discussions of *rank* are challenging because rank is so precious and so complex and so threatening. When rank is mentioned, some may hear a Marxist ghost in

the winds reminding us of those who want to use their own power to down others in a vain attempt to eliminate rank differences. Deep Democracy supports rank as well as power and leadership. We can support rank by acknowledging it and understanding it so that we can use it better. Among the many factors that can make a group difficult, rank problems lay toward the top of the list. People generally don't know how to use power well, so they use it to get at each other rather than to benefit the organization.

Organizational theories generally view rank in terms of formal hierarchical and informal organizational rank. Social theorists tend to view rank in terms of class, gender, and race. There are many dimensions of rank, some earned (such as educational rank) and others not (such as appearance-based rank or rank that stems from health differences) (A. S. Mindell, 1995). Three additional dimensions of rank are

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Psychological rank | This is a sense of ease that someone has, even in difficult situations, that comes from knowing that she will be able to engage in a tense scene while also protecting herself. This includes an ability to track and believe in her own experience and remain fluid when under attack. |
| Spiritual rank | Some people have an ability to ground themselves in something that comes from beyond space and time, giving them access to an inner sense of meaning. |
| Street power | This is an ability to be comfortable in a group that gives you intense negative feedback. |

Group difficulties often emerge as reactions against inappropriate use of rank. Helping the group members become aware of their rank and its effect on others helps them develop an ability to use rank better but also helps the group develop an ability not to rely on rank so heavily. Psychological, spiritual, and street power ranks are less central in most organizations than more normally acknowledged hierarchical ranks. Rank has a lot to do with centrality (an ability to gain access to resources or status). Tensions that derive from rank differences effect cognition and change our sense of our IQ. For example, I'm heading a meeting and feel as though things are going great. My boss walks in, and my IQ drops twenty points. Suddenly I get attacked, and it drops to single digits.

Rank is a contextual and relativistic concept because rank doesn't exist in and of itself. For example, people don't inherently have more rank based on gender or race; only within a sexist or racist context do these create rank differences, and these particular differences are only meaningful as models of gender- or race-based oppression.

Rank affects our abilities to think, speak, and stand for change, and it impacts our health (Morin, 2002). If there is a rank problem between two people, it exists because neither of them understand his or her own rank well enough. If they did, they would be able to understand the tensions, facilitate the conflict, and defuse the conflict. Rank problems can ultimately foster greater understanding and learning for the individuals and the group. For example, if you have a rank problem with someone of lower rank than you, you will notice it through her or his feedback. You say something the person doesn't understand or doesn't know much about, and he or she may look down or signal discomfort in some other way. If you have a rank problem with someone of higher rank, you may experience a constant irritation in the background.

If the organization has a culture where these problems can be addressed directly, great! This is the best. If not, you can work on yourself to understand what it is about the way that the person uses her rank that is disturbing. Generally, the most disturbing thing about rank is that people don't know they have it. If they knew they had it, they would use it in a more conscious way. Your challenge is to find a way to help the person see that she has it. To do that, you have to love her rank. You have to think, "This person does this and this and this, and she can't see it and can't love it yet. That's why it is so irritating." If you can love it in the other person, great. Then you can praise it and congratulate her for it and encourage her to use it more consciously. You have to momentarily be her therapist even though she has more rank. Eldership is learning to love every signal (Schupbach, 2004), which also means learning to love that you hate certain things.

There's something shamanic in the role switching involved in noticing my experience as a subordinate, understanding the scene with my superior, shape-shifting momentarily into being the coach or the therapist, making an intervention, and then returning to being the subordinate, all the while checking feedback carefully to make sure I'm on track. Is awareness enough

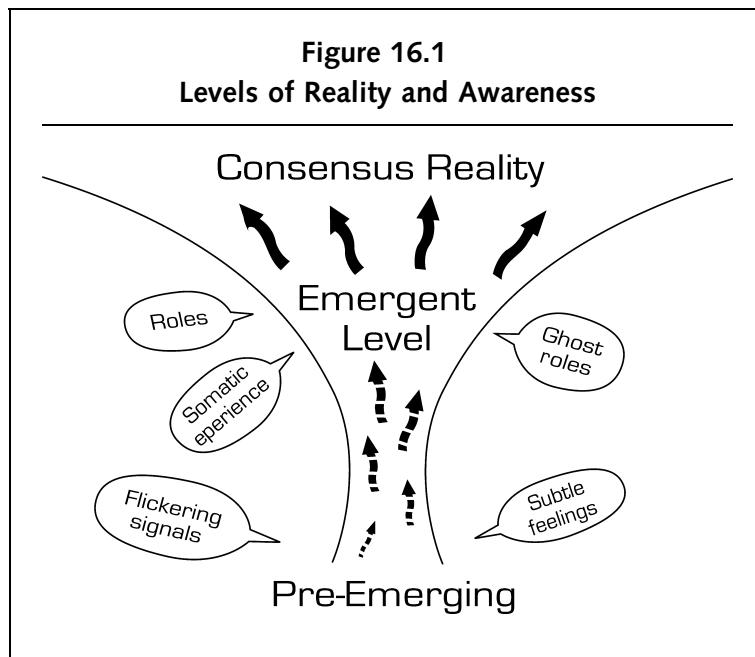
to change the world? Is it enough to notice that my boss could use his rank better? Or does the world need a little push from time to time?

What does it mean to use your rank consciously? Let's say you have enough rank that one word from you can stop anything. When do you use that word? Before you use your rank battery, think, is there another way to go? For example, imagine that a subordinate makes an insensitive remark. A classic approach to dealing with the situation would be to immediately reprimand the subordinate. An alternative approach is to directly support the power and developing leadership behind the remark and suggest that the individual consider the advantages of transforming his or her power into something creative, useful, supportive of the leadership of others, and respectful of rank. It isn't possible that the remark is only negative. There is also something emerging that can benefit the relationship and the organization.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL PROCESS-ORIENTED LEADERSHIP

The main leadership paradigms all agree on certain basic principles: the leader has to have a vision and hold on to it while working to improve communications and to push power down by developing other leaders. From a process-oriented view, business, like everything, is driven by psychological and emotional profit margins. Because financial success is a by-product of these profit margins, the community aspects of the organization are as important as leadership and team development. Difficult groups are groups where the psychological and emotional profit margins are in the red and the community is failing to develop the team and its leadership (Schupbach & Schupbach, 2008). Multidimensional process-oriented thinking can help leaders, designated or not, turn this around.

Three distinct leadership models are an authoritarian model (an individual person leads), a systems model (people lead by consensus), and a chaos-driven, self-organizing model (where leadership is nonlocal—it can't be definitively located in any one person or group but is distributed throughout the field). These three models are very different. Similarly, there are three levels of human experience that need to be acknowledged and appreciated in order to help facilitate a group's development, as shown in Figure 16.1.



Consensus reality (CR): Consensus reality includes experiences that we tend to agree on; it includes focus on rules, structure, and objectively measurable outcomes and is based on an assumption that we can control events.

Emergent level (EL): Emergent experiences are subjective, not measurable, and not in our control. They include group and relationship issues, experiences of rank differences, somatic experiences, roles, and our assumptions about each other.

Pre-emerging (PE): The pre-emerging level is something that is sometimes barely noticeable, like an atmosphere or the most deeply held values that we can't quite articulate. It is an indescribable yet sentient essence, like a feeling, a tension, or something joyful.

For example, I'm working with an organization and notice that, over time, the routine CR details seem to be going well, but initiatives for new programs are blocked for reasons that only partly make sense. There is a mood, an atmosphere, that I can at times barely notice. It is a flickering signal mirroring a PE essence. As I observe my experience of the mood over the course of a few interactions, I notice two roles emerging: one is something like a creative revolutionary in the field who wants change; the other is something like a traditionalist who wants structure and supports things as they are.

These levels are based on what Arnold Mindell calls *consensus reality*, *dreamland*, and the level of *sentient essence* in clinical work. Schupbach and Schupbach (2008) and Schupbach (2007) use Mindell's levels in a change management context, and in this context call them CR, EL, and PE.

Awareness of each of these levels is an important aspect of the facilitation of groups. The solution to a problem in one of these levels lies in the other levels. Mirroring western culture's focus on CR details, organizational interventions often focus solely on the CR level and ignore the importance of working with EL and PE experiences. When Einstein (1931) said that we need a substantially new manner of thinking if we are to survive, he was referring to this shift in awareness away from hypnosis to objectivity and verifiable phenomena: "The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious . . . the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science."

Some problems need to be worked out in CR; others can't be. The good news is that you don't have to *solve* these problems at all—at least not in the ordinary engineering sense of the word. You only have to support the self-organizing tendencies that are already present by facilitating the experiences in each of these levels to help complete the processes in the background. Notice what is already happening and help it complete (that is, emerge more easily). For example, I couldn't solve the relationship and political conflicts with the peace project, but by following the tendencies that were already emerging, I was able to help a more constructive dialogue take place.

The tendencies that drive everything appear at first as briefly flickering PE experiences and later appear as EL experiences with more defined signals, roles, and process structures. PE and EL control CR, but we can only follow PE and EL. We can help facilitate processes to complete, but we can't control them. However, we do often try to control CR. When this works, we feel like heroes;

we don't admit that we were just in the right place at the right time but really don't know why it worked. When it doesn't work, we feel like losers. Trusting in PE and EL experiences means believing that they will help guide us toward sustainable solutions to CR problems.

When PE experiences first appear as brief, flickering signals, we tend to overlook them, ignore them, or actively discount them. We aren't sure what to do. They are tiny microsignals that seem to flirt with us. We might suddenly notice a colleague and wonder if something signaled opposition to our proposal. What was it? Did her head move away almost imperceptibly? Did his eyes really narrow when I looked at him? Did I really see that? Does it mean what I'm thinking it means?

Chances are that these flickering signals will grow stronger down the road until the opposition has congruently developed into a full-scale roadblock. Noticing the signals early on gives us the chance to help complete the process in the background. But there's a problem. We don't always know what the signals of others mean, even if we think we do. Sometimes we are right. Often we are wrong. Western culture doesn't yet support us to work together on this level. It's too intimate. But we must. Our collective misunderstandings of these signals and their meanings, and our collective inability to facilitate deeper dialogues ultimately lead to war. What to do?

It is a very intimate thing to say something like, "I noticed while I was making this presentation that you were looking out the window, and I wondered if you might have some hesitations about the project. If so, I'd love to hear what they are so I can address them directly." Helping the hesitations emerge earlier is important so that they can be related to directly.

It's more common to feel relieved that the hesitations didn't emerge and to hope they will go away. Groups become difficult when the hesitations remain hidden, experienced as brief signals that don't coalesce as clear roles that can be interacted with. It can help to introduce this as a role play: "Imagine someone who would be against this proposal. What would that person say?" This allows people to speak more freely without fear of getting stuck in a role or being seen as negative. This freedom is the basis for empowerment, which plays a big part in helping a difficult group develop its ability to track its own experience.

There is a simple way to empower people. Anything that you see has meaning for the organization, although frequently the meaning isn't clear. Empowerment happens through understanding the meaning of the person,

event, or signal and reframing it in terms of its meaning to the group and to the organization as a whole.

Imagine being in a meeting where someone interrupts another person. Behind the interrupting may be a role that says, *I know better than you*. A facilitator might reframe this: “Two things are happening at once. Great. I hope that both will get to be completed.”

Or imagine being in a meeting where one person doesn’t speak. Someone says, “There is Bill. How come he never says anything?” The roles are *Verbosity is better. Those who speak know more* and *He who says nothing doesn’t know, and knowing is better than learning*. It’s basically a put-down that comes from misunderstanding Bill, misunderstanding the function and dynamics of the group, misunderstanding creativity, and overvaluing centrality. A facilitator might reframe this: “I like what Bill does here. So many good things are being done here that we barely have time to listen. When I look at him, it reminds me to listen too. I think we’re missing something because we don’t take more time to listen and learn more.”

FIRST AND SECOND TRAINING

The facilitator’s first task is to notice and explore verbal content and nonverbal signals, but the second and more important task is to follow the signals toward something unknown and intimate and mysterious. This isn’t a trivial distinction. Self-organizing forces can’t be controlled.

Mindell refers to developing mastery in these two tasks as the *first training* and the *second training*, emphasizing the complexity and enormity of each of them. The first training is developing mastery in noticing and tracking signals, forming structural hypotheses from the patterns, creating interventions from these, and carefully noting the feedback from the group, which will either confirm the hypothesis or suggest another direction. The second training is developing mastery in following something mysterious and intimate, even when it can’t be described by signals and structural patterns. It is ineffable, but it leads to the core of a group’s self-organizing tendency and is always something intimate.