

HOLDING CHANGE

**THE WAY OF EMERGENT STRATEGY
FACILITATION AND MEDIATION**

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Foreword

My body of work is mostly about attention. I want to bring my attention, movement attention, and the flow of our human attention to the places we as a species most need to learn and grow.

With *How to Get Stupid White Men Out of Office* (2004), the focus was: how do we practice complex strategy that advances our organizing work while also harnessing our power to contend for electoral territory?

With *Octavia's Brood* (2015), the focus was: how do we attend to, and liberate, imagination, recognizing that we must imagine what we want to create as a future society; imagine who we need to be in order to move and grow in life-affirming directions; and imagine solutions, even when we are told we have reached an impossible problem or condition?

With *Emergent Strategy* (2017), the focus was: how do we attend to being part of the living world? How do we learn from nature, from the constant force and beauty and power of this planet, and how do we partner with change?

With *Pleasure Activism* (2019), the focus was: how do we attend to, and reclaim, pleasure, satisfaction, and joy, in and as the work of justice and liberation?

With *We Will Not Cancel Us* (2020), the focus was: how do we attend to the ways we treat each other within movement, and how do we cultivate an abolitionist attention for humans who make mistakes?

Now, with this book, the focus is: how do we attend to our collectivity in ways that align with nature, with pleasure, with our best imagining of our future, that support the ways we contend for power, that support our visionary abolitionist movements? Which is to say, how do we attend to generating the ease necessary to help us move through the inevitable struggles of life and change? How do we practice the art of holding others without losing ourselves?

This book is about attending to coordination, to conflict, to being humans in authentic and functional relationship with each other—not as a constant ongoing state, but rather a magnificent, mysterious ever-evolving dynamic in which we must involve ourselves, shape ourselves and each other.

Thank you for bringing your attention to this work.

Opening

Holding Space, Holding Change

Welcome to this offering on holding space, or holding change, which can also be spoken of as the sacred way of facilitation and mediation. This is the Opening, and it is my intention in these first pages to give you everything you need to most effectively use this book.

Holding change is a variation of holding space. I use it to distinguish my use from others,¹ but also to foreground that this is the emergent strategy approach to holding collective work, and emergent strategy understands that all is change. Space is never fixed by literal, physical dimensions. It varies according to histories, dynamics, emotional nuances, moods, pressures. It does change. It is change. We hold space for each other to change at the individual and collective level. I will use the terms interchangeably throughout this text.

You picked up this book because you hold space for others, and want to weave your ways and these ways into something exquisite.

Or you got this book because you want to hold change, and hold it well.

Or...maybe you're just like, what exactly is holding change?

1. Particularly at this moment in movement, I want to hold the distinction between what I offer here and the incredible facilitation teaching that Autumn Brown and Maryse Mitchell-Brody have been growing in the Allied Media Conference space for years in workshops titled *Holding Space*.

Do you remember being young, guided in an exercise of breathing where you cupped your hands around an invisible ball of energy and moved it?²

Breathe with me now, either visualizing or practicing:

In front of you is a ball of energy. It is yours, an extension of you. It hovers in the air, shifting with your attention.

Breathe out while pushing this invisible ball of energy away from you.

Breathe in, bringing the energy into and all around you.

Breathe out, move it up above your head, spreading it into a massive glorious umbrella.

Breathe in, bring it back to center and hold it there.

Breathe out and take it down through your bones to the floor.

Breathe in, rolling back up and bring the energy back into your heart.

Keep breathing.

Whenever I breathe this deeply with others, I feel calm, I feel how solid this presence, this energy, is, in me, in my hands....even when I am time traveling from the moment of me writing this to the moment of your reading it.

Since I was young, in most rooms, I could sense the tangible—the demographics, the looks on people's faces, the body language, the excitement or exhaustion. But I could also—can also—feel the room, feel the matrix of the intangible, invisible, the space between the bodies, the space that is fed by our collective emotion. It feels thick and vibrant to me, nearly solid at times.

Do you feel it?

It has taken me a long time to understand all the things I feel, all the feelings that are possible. Sometimes, there are thrills up and across the top of my spine and shoulders. Or a trembling in my gut. Or deep roots extending down from my hands and feet, growing wide under the room.

I used to try and deny these feelings.

2. I later experienced this flow as an adult in tai chi and qi gong practice.

Then I tried to control them.

Then I began to study feeling.

I became fascinated that not only can I feel so much—but that all of us have the potential to feel the space we can't see.

Now, I've spent years learning how to facilitate and mediate using both the things I can see and the things I can feel to guide my moves. I started hearing the phrase "holding space," and it felt like a beautiful way to understand and express what I was up to. Later, as I integrated that change is the only constant, I came to understand my work as holding space for change, holding a space in which change is inevitable.

So. What is holding change?

To "hold change" or "hold space" is to hold both the people in, and the dynamic energy of, a room, a space, a meeting, an organization, a movement.

To hold change is to make it easy for people with shared intentions to be around each other and move towards their vision and values (facilitate), and/or to navigate conflict in a way that is generative and accountable (mediate). I will dive more deeply into what facilitation and mediation are in those sections, but the basic definitions to grasp here are that facilitation is making it as easy as possible for groups of people to do the hard work of dreaming, planning, visioning, and organizing together; and mediation is supporting people when conflicts or misunderstandings arise that make it hard for them to hear and understand each other in direct conversation.

Holding change is something I have learned with and from so many cofacilitators, especially a generation of humble and dynamic Black feminists, so this book weaves my lessons together with wisdom from other Black feminist facilitators.

I am most experienced in holding change for people who are trying to change the world and generate justice and liberation, primarily with Black organizers, feminists, and climate warriors. Most of the lessons and reflections I will share in these pages were learned from holding space for movement workers focused on

Black liberation and climate justice, though I am blessed to have been in service to many movements of my time, including reproductive justice, HIV/AIDS, and antiwar.

Holding change happens in a number of different ways:

I have facilitated groups in a service-provision way, where they hired me to help them move towards their predetermined goals.

I have facilitated groups in experimental ways, where I supported them to show up, trust each other, and let the direction emerge, often pointing towards healing organizational trauma, shifting structures, and clarifying vision.

I have facilitated groups coming into existence, and groups that were complete and ready to sunset their formation.

I have facilitated groups that have claimed success, and groups that have felt like they failed.

I have mediated people in formal (not legally mandated) ways—where I was asked to set up a specific time and process to help people move through conflict.

I have mediated (much more often) conflict that has come up in the midst of a gathering and needed to be held and moved through to attend to the group's continuation of their work.

I have supported others as a doula, holding space for birth to unfold in miraculous ways, towards death, towards life. Ah—there is nothing like being with the instant and total devotion of new life coming into existence. A new organization, movement formation, or idea can sometimes have that same miraculous energy. The doula sensibility now shows up in every part of my life and I wish more people in our culture had a root system in some lineage of powerful care.

I have mediated movement workers through romantic and friendship and organizational breakups.

I have held the hands of friends and strangers going through loss, death, grief, broken hearts, lost pregnancies, failure—quiet space, screaming space, impossible space. Space filled with tears and longing. Space where we faced, together, that which is perpetually unfair and mysterious. Space where we learned what shapes us and what would make us strong.

All of this holding has shaped me. We don't always know all the ways we learn to facilitate, but it helps me to consider that every part of my life is shaping every part of my life, every experience shaping me. On this journey, teachers are everywhere, in our own thoughts and actions and in every interaction and mass action.

Other facilitators have been a gift to my life and learning. Many of these facilitators have very different perspectives on the work and call of facilitation than I do. Some tilt more towards outcomes, others more towards process, or logic, or fairness, or magic, or planning.

This is a time when we need a lot of facilitators and mediators—a lot of holders of change. We are at a very particular moment in human history, a period of time when we need to shift away from the competitive, directive, combative, colonial energy of toxic leadership at every level of society. The structures built to pierce the sky, the walls conjured to make the earth a puzzle of combating territories, keeping some in power and others without it...all of these structures are crumbling.

It is time to move towards ways of being that are focused on listening to each other deeply and accepting each other, whole. We need to learn ways of being in space together that help us see beyond false constructs of superiority and inferiority without asking us to sacrifice what has shaped us. We need to study being receptive and nonjudgmental with each other, letting the earth and community hold us until we remember we already belong.

I believe holding change can be sacred work, and I'll admit it is most satisfying to me when the sacred is palpable in the room.

The lineage of holding space reaches back to our original ways of being in relationship with each other and the earth. Like many displaced peoples, I have had to find my way back to listening to the earth and my own nature through longing and intuition, gathering little pieces and practices, studying different methodologies, asking a lot of questions, stumbling, making mistakes. I am still returning.

With time, some of the indigenous roots and paths of these practices and methodologies have been revealed to me. I believe that even if I can't see the roots, they are there. I believe that

anything new I feel myself innovating is an adaptation of something that came before me. Circles talking, doulas holding, humans releasing tension, heartache, vision. It excites me that over and over, humans have realized that some of us can support others in this way, some of us are called to hold the containers in which life transforms and the future unfolds. As always, I will try to walk the line of honoring complex lineages of this art, this science, these methods—while accepting the mystery and apparent randomness of my own learning.

There is a simplicity to facilitation and mediation—holding, listening, reflecting, deep breaths, yes, say the truth, find the way forward.

There's also a remarkable complexity to this work. Humans are complex in every way—structurally, spiritually, emotionally—we are constantly changing into something else. Emergent strategy is about helping us find our place in this complex existence, perhaps even making it simple to be complex together.

I won't presume to tell you everything about how everyone should facilitate and mediate. I am not focusing here on tools you can find elsewhere—I am offering what feels fundamental to me to share right now for those who want to bring emergent strategy into their work of facilitation and mediation. Most of this book is about how to be and think in the work of holding others through change. Of course, in my heart of hearts, I believe this is the way, and this way would serve any who truly tried it on. All of this is invitation, and if at times it is proselytizing invitation, forgive me, and see me.

The Spirit, The Way

The spirit of this book is to offer up everything I know about facilitation and mediation, as simply as possible.

There are so many people already practicing emergent strategy facilitation and mediation—if that's you, please take from this text as it's useful. Add your own notes all over it.

If you are just beginning your journey with emergent strategy, there's a refresher in the next section, but I recommend reading *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* before diving in deep.

It's taken me a while to relax into the idea that, after more than twenty years of holding change, I have some things to share. Things that are bigger than me. The concepts of emergent strategy predate me—I believe they were gifted to us for this time and generate a stronger bond between our species and this planet, and each other.

I want the concepts and growing practices of emergent strategy to be available to anyone doing movement work, and to anyone who wants to learn from, partner with, and even surrender to being part of the natural operating systems of the world. I believe that if you listen to the natural world, you will inevitably find your place in movements for social and environmental justice.

The words in these pages are things I've learned and offered while giving facilitation trainings, spoken in speeches, things I have woken up knowing, dreamed, caught in a candid conversation. Things I have jotted down while facilitating groups. Things about facilitation as a practice and instinct, things I am not convinced can be communicated in words, but which I really want to share.

I have been deeply moved by the *Tao te Ching*, the work of a Chinese philosopher named Lao Tzu, translated many times in many ways. It is full of brief lessons that inform a way of moving people and power, understanding the forces of the universe. One of my very favorite stanzas of the *Tao* is:

the tao (way) that can be spoken (named, told) is not the constant (eternal) way.

the name that can be named is not the constant (eternal) name.

the nameless (unnamed) is the beginning of heaven and earth (the eternally real);

the named (naming) is the mother (origin) of all (particular) things.

Every time I write to capture a way of understanding or doing anything, I am instantly humbled. I am trying to describe something that I am feeling, learning, something unfolding, something changing, that has a million paths, of which I may only grasp one.

And there are things that are true about facilitation and mediation that I may not be able to put into words, or may never be able to make clear.

The facilitation I most love feels like a sacred act. In addition to the strength of a good agenda, clear direction, generative agreements, and values-aligned logistics, I believe facilitators offer our most powerful contribution when we operate from faith—faith that this work in this moment will shape change. That the people in this room are a collective succession of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, John Brown, Grace Lee Boggs, and other known and unknown freedom fighters.

As facilitators we step back from the knowing that makes us stand out as individuals, the call to make ourselves distinct from each other and the universe. Facilitation is a commitment to the power of the collective. We hold space for humans to find each other, clearing the debris between them so that they can access the forward motion of life, the flowing river of change, the rich ecosystem of differences.

There are moments in facilitation when you can feel the way to the future unblock, when you can feel the room burst forward on behalf of the species. In those moments, I can feel the tingling prickling aliveness of interconnection, of history, of futures becoming possible. Even in those moments, looking around at each other all brightly shining with the present moment, there are no words vast and timeless enough for the spirit amongst us.

So in the humbling impossibility of eternal communication, I name facilitation and mediation as ways the spirit moves towards justice! I weave myself into the lineage of understanding facilitation and mediation as a way we bend the arc.³

Emergent Strategy Refresher

Emergent Strategy is fundamentally about how we get in right relationship with change, realigning with an indigenous worldview that understands the relationality of all things. At the intersection

of ancient understanding, science, the sacred, and science fiction sits a set of principles that helps us practice shaping change.

Nick Obolensky defines emergence as “the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions.”⁴ Emergent strategy is about how we shape and generate complex systems and patterns through our own relatively simple interactions. Nature moves in small fractals of interdependence, accumulating nonlinear changes and creating more possibilities with the constant adaptations of a resilient earth. If we attend to nature’s lessons, we can remember that we, too, are nature; we can unveil our own organic gifts, our way to the future together, our path to thriving in this abundant world. Emergent strategy invites us to give up competing for death and begin collaborating with the planet and each other towards life.

Octavia Butler

All successful life is
Adaptable,
Opportunistic,
Tenacious,
Interconnected, and
Fecund.
Understand this.
Use it.
Shape God.

(amb)
(Fractal)
(Adaptive)
(Nonlinear/Iterative)
(Resilient/Transformative Justice)
(Interdependent/Decentralized)
(Creates More Possibilities)
(Scholarship, Reflection)
(Practice/Experiment)
(Intention)

3. “We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.” —Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” Speech given at the National Cathedral, March 31, 1968.

4. Nick Obolensky, *Complex Adaptive Leadership: Embracing Paradox and Uncertainty* (Burlington, VT: Gower, 2014), 93.

Element	Nature of Element
Fractal	The Relationship Between Small and Large
Adaptive	How We Change
Interdependent and Decentralized	Who We Are and How We Share
Nonlinear and Iterative	The Pace and Pathways of Change
Resilient, Rooted In Transformative Justice	How We Recover and Transform
Creating More Possibilities	How We Move Towards Life

In the study and practice of emergent strategy, there are core principles that have emerged and that guide us in learning and using this idea and method in the world. I gather them here with the expectation that they will grow.

- Small is good, small is all. (The large is a reflection of the small.)⁵
- Change is constant. (Be like water.)⁵
- There is always enough time for the right work.
- There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have.⁶ Find it.
- Never a failure, always a lesson.⁷
- Trust the People. (If you trust the people, they become trustworthy, and/or the necessary boundaries become clear.)⁸

5. "You must be shapeless, formless, like water. When you pour water in a cup, it becomes the cup. When you pour water in a bottle, it becomes the bottle. When you pour water in a teapot, it becomes the teapot. Water can drip and it can crash. Become like water my friend." Bruce Lee, *Bruce Lee: A Warrior's Journey* (Warner Home Video, 2000).

6. Idea articulated by Tai James in the co-facilitation of environmental justice resource redistribution initiative Building Equity and Alignment's inaugural meeting in 2013.

7. Rihanna has this concept tattooed on her chest.

8. This is an inversion of the quote "If you don't trust the people, they become un-

- Move at the speed of trust.⁹ Focus on critical connections more than critical mass—build the resilience by building the relationships.

- Less prep, more presence.
- What you pay attention to grows.

And here are the elements of emergent strategy in more detail, and paired with their most relevant principles:

Fractal: The relationship between the small and the large. The large is made up of the smallest things, patterns repeat at scale. Help people see, celebrate, and build on the small shifts they are making.

Principle: Small is good, small is all, the large is a reflection of the small.

Intentional Adaptation: We are constantly changing—the more ease we bring to how we change, and the more intention we bring to our daily lives, the more that change can serve our vision. Help people change with intention. Not just react, not move into scarcity thinking where we have to handle every crisis, but adapt in ways that move us towards where we want to go.

Principle: Change is constant (be like water). Freeze bullshit, move like rapids when collective energy is flowing. As the facilitator, you need to continuously transform to meet and guide the room. Less prep, more presence.

Interdependent / Decentralized: Attend to the relationships and power dynamics in the rooms you hold, creating structures that support authentic, intimate relationships, mutual transformation, and collaboration.

Principles: There is always enough time for the right work. There's a conversation that only these people at this moment can

trustworthy," from Stephen Mitchell's translation, Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988). I added the line about boundaries here because there are instances when trustworthiness would need more time than we can, or are willing, to give it.

9. This is communications strategist Mervyn Marciano's remix of Stephen Covey's "speed of trust" concept.

have. Help people see themselves. Help them harness the full potential of their work, intention, skill, and capacity in this moment. Trust the people, they become trustworthy—or the necessary boundaries become clear. Sometimes group capacity, time, or other resources aren't aligned to support each person's arc towards trustworthiness. In those times, you need boundaries to keep the forward motion.

Nonlinear / Iterative: Change comes from cumulative shifts. Reflect to groups how they are accumulating change...or not. Reflect to groups what they are practicing—both in and out of alignment with their values.

Principles: Never a failure, always a lesson—help people find the lesson. What you pay attention to grows. Move at the speed of trust.

Transformative Justice / Resilience: Make room for the inevitable presence of socialized oppression. Keep a systemic view on it, even if it appears as individual behavior. Recover from oppression together by addressing it at the root. Seek understanding of what and who needs to be in the center of the struggle in the room, as all oppressions are usually present, but not equally weighted in each group.

Principle: Move at the speed of trust. Focus on critical connections more than critical mass. Build the resilience by building the relationships. We cannot build highly effective mass movements without trust at the core. Trust is slow until it is fast.

Creating More Possibilities: In healthy ecosystems there are many ways to be and many ways to grow, many paths to the future. Make room for us/the group to stay visionary. As facilitator, create the possibility of more time spent on our revolutionary goals.

Principles: Less prep, more presence. The less you pre-process, the more you are actually present, the more possibilities are available in the room.

What you pay attention to grows. Bring attention to the small, to each step people make towards each other, towards their work.

Make room for many possibilities, especially early in a process. Help groups learn to tolerate many paths in the pursuit of best options, versus reducing to less satisfying solutions in the rush to end the discomfort of the unknown. Bring attention to presence and the allotment of solutions. Change is constant.

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Since *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* was published, I have identified some additional facilitation principles:

Begin by Listening. This core principle from Allied Media Projects is also a best practice for facilitation.¹⁰ Ask questions, find out what people need, listen to what people say and don't say. Begin by listening to your own truths and feelings, and listening to each other.

Transform Yourself to Transform the World. This guidance, articulated by Grace Lee Boggs, is facilitation and mediation gold.¹¹ How you are, how you show up, invites a quality of presence from participants. If you want to change what is possible in the room, change what *you believe* is possible. Change how present you are, increase your rigor, focus your energy. Invite participants to have the same power to transform themselves to transform what is possible in the room, in the group.

What We Practice Is What We Are. What do we *say* we're practicing? What are we *actually* practicing? What do we *want* to be practicing? Practice is how we become what we long to be.

Name What Is, Make More Possible. We must deal in reality. It is nearly impossible for people to build trust over time if they cannot name and face what is actually happening. If we don't fully understand where we have come from, what created us, and where

10. See www.alliedmedia.org/networkprinciples.

11. Grace Lee Boggs is a Detroit ancestor and author of *Living for Change* and *The Next American Revolution*.

we are, then we are building our future on quicksand. By building a shared analysis of what's real, you create more possibilities for things the group can actually do.

Release Perfection, Relinquish Judgment. You are not necessarily right. And you are not better than any of these participants. They are living their lives and learning their lessons on behalf of the species, just like you. If you cannot support them without judgment and superiority, then you are not the right facilitator for them. "Perfection is a commitment to habitual self-doubt," teaches Prentis Hemphill. Create spaces that support participants to learn to trust themselves.

Create a Culture of Celebration—Pivot Towards Pleasure. It seems simple—but people stay more engaged in a space where they are enjoying each other, and feel celebrated and appreciated. Small, personal celebrations help fuel groups through the hard work, reminding them that they are humans together, regardless of the external pressures they face.

Invitation Goes Further Than Manipulation. It can be very tempting to use charm and pressure to bend a group to your will. Especially if you tell yourself that your will is just to help them achieve their goals. But if you manipulate them to completion, the results won't stick, because they didn't do the work to actually get to the conclusion themselves. Invite them, continuously, towards their own vision, into their own rigor. Invite them to participate in their own liberation.

Release Your Way to Feel The Way. If you are overly convinced that you know the right way, you will not be able to support the group to find the way of the collective. There are absolutely times when your perspective or opinion is the necessary ingredient for the collective to take a next step. With time you will learn the subtle art of when to speak up (rarely) and when to listen and support (mostly). Primarily, you listen and support and keep opening more room for the group.

Time Can Bend. It's so powerful to play with time. Cultures with long memories, still connected to their oldest ways, know that time is nonlinear, circular, mysterious. When we are facilitating a space and we remember that time can bend, we focus not on time scarcity but on the people in the room, the presence, and the work that must be done. I have been in so many rooms where we bent time, expanding it for a big emotion to move through, reversing it to undo a harm, finding ourselves satisfied well before our planned ending time. I always consider that maybe we didn't bend it, but the universe, a great spirit, approved of our work and opened for us.

Soundtrack While Writing this Book

My Jazz Vocalist Women playlist on Spotify (which has been with me at crucial moments for every book so far)

Love and Rage: Loving Our Anger playlist on Spotify

Celebrating One Step playlist on Spotify

Happiness Frequency videos on YouTube¹²

The *Crystal Singing Bowl* playlist by April Forest on Spotify

Black is King/The Gift, Beyoncé

Frank Ocean

Justin Bieber

Moses Sumney

Shantel May

serpentwithfeet, especially *Psychic*

Hamilton, sung by the original Broadway cast.

Lianne Le Havas, especially *Paper Thin*, *Weird Fishes* (actually

I love the whole radio station playlist Spotify builds around *Weird Fishes*)

Megan Thee Stallion's album *Good News*

Taylor Swift's *Folklore* and *Evermore*

Beautiful Chorus

Beverly Glenn Copeland, especially *Let Us Dance*.

12. My favorite is from Greenured Productions, called *Happiness Frequency: Serotonin, Dopamine, Endorphin Release Music, Binaural Beats Meditation*.

Assessments

In *Emergent Strategy* there's a set of assessments that I created myself. They do the job, but even as I was creating them, I was aware of my limitations: surely there was a better way to create tools that people can use to understand where they are related to a set of skills or conditions. I considered reaching out to my expert researcher friend Zuri Tai to help, but by the time I realized I wanted that, it was too late in the journey.

Fortunately, this time, Zuri was available when I remembered the assessments for this book, and my, my, my does she have a gift for community-based research. Zuri did a beautiful job translating my chaos of questions into a process that will help you assess your group's culture, functionality, emergent strategy capacity, purpose, and the presence of power dynamics.

There is also a facilitation self-assessment, a co-facilitation assessment, facilitation intake questions, and a mediation assessment.

Group Assessments

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Group Efficiency Assessment (Check the statement in each row that applies best to your group)				
We are often able to set shared goals _____ (4)	Sometimes we are able to set shared goals _____ (3)	Rarely are we able to set shared goals _____ (2)	We have not tried to set shared goals _____ (1)	
We are often comfortable sharing responsibility _____ (4)	Sometimes we are comfortable sharing responsibility _____ (3)	Rarely are we comfortable sharing responsibility _____ (2)	We have not tried to share responsibility _____ (1)	
We are often able to meet shared goals _____ (4)	Sometimes we are able to meet shared goals _____ (3)	Rarely are we able to meet shared goals _____ (2)	We have not tried to meet shared goals _____ (1)	
We are often creating impact beyond our group _____ (4)	Sometimes we are creating impact beyond our group _____ (3)	Rarely are we creating impact beyond our group _____ (2)	We have not tried to create impact beyond our group _____ (1)	
Each answer in this column = 4	Each answer in this column = 3	Each answer in this column = 2	Each answer in this column = 1	Total score _____
Grand total				(Add all scores) _____

Group Relationship Assessment (Check the statement in each row that applies best to your group)				
We often feel joyful during and/or after meetings _____ (4)	Sometimes we feel joyful during and/or after meetings _____ (3)	We rarely feel joyful during and/or after meetings _____ (2)	We have not felt joyful during and/or after meetings _____ (1)	
We are often vulnerable with each other _____ (4)	Sometimes we are vulnerable with each other _____ (3)	Rarely are we vulnerable with each other _____ (2)	We have not tried to be vulnerable with each other _____ (1)	
We feel a strong connection to others in the group _____ (4)	We feel a growing connection to others in the group _____ (3)	We feel the possibility of connection to others in the group _____ (2)	We feel it's unlikely that we'll have connection in the group _____ (1)	
We often feel enriched during and/or after meetings _____ (4)	Sometimes we feel enriched during and/or after meetings _____ (3)	We rarely feel enriched during and/or after meetings _____ (2)	We have not felt enriched during and/or after meetings _____ (1)	
Each answer in this column = 4	Each answer in this column = 3	Each answer in this column = 2	Each answer in this column = 1	Total score _____
Grand total				(Add all scores) _____

Write the grand totals for the two assessments: _____ Efficiency _____ Relationship

A. high efficiency (score: 12-16), high relationship (score: 12-16)

- These groups are exhibiting peak collective function, contributing to a clear mission and meeting goals. We can count on each other, trust each other, and enjoy each other.

B. low efficiency (score: 4-11), high relationship (score: 12-16)

- These groups are survival bonded. We stay together, enjoy and maybe even love each other, but may not meet our stated goal or purpose.

C. high efficiency (score: 12-16), low relationship (score: 4-11)

- These groups often form in response to a crisis. We get shit done but aren't sure we are all moving from the same intentions or if the outcomes are meaningful. The relationships feel temporary and people eventually get hurt.

D. low efficiency (score: 4-11), low relationship (score: 4-11)

- Not accomplishing much for or beyond the group; gathering may be a coping mechanism because we don't want to be alone. Gathering is dysfunctional and lacks joy.

For high efficiency/high relationship read the Black Feminist Wisdom chapter

For low efficiency/high relationship scores read Creating More Possibilities, p. 178

For high efficiency/low relationship scores read Fractal Facilitation, p. 100

For low efficiency/low relationship scores read Interdependent/Decentralized Facilitation, p. 134

Group Function Assessment

1. How often do they need breaks?

- a) ___ Every 60-90 minutes, often after a piece of work is completed or reaches the satisfaction of a next step
- b) ___ Every 30-60 minutes, and conversation is easily moved into tangents
- c) ___ Never, or need to be reminded that breaks are an option
- d) ___ Right when the group is on the verge of taking action or landing a decision

2. What do they use their breaks for?

- a) ___ Bathroom, snacks, connecting to each other personally, deepening the work in the room
- b) ___ Talking to each other, doing work on other projects, second guessing the work that's moving in the room
- c) ___ Work. You have to remind them to use bathroom and go outside of the meeting space
- d) ___ Fomenting dissent or disillusionment

3. What is the tone in the room when disagreement arises?

- a) ___ Competent, turning towards it with solution mind
- b) ___ Fear of conflict, resistance to name what's going on
- c) ___ Unemotional, pushing for quick resolution that doesn't go to the root of the issue
- d) ___ Avoidance, checking out

4. How do they move through disagreements?

- a) ___ With integrity, attending to necessary root systems of the conflict but not wasting time
- b) ___ Struggle to stick to political lines, make arguments personal
- c) ___ Stick to the surface issues, rush to move things along in ways that leave issues to fester
- d) ___ Struggling to speak the truth in the room, lots of side conversations

5. Are they dysfunctionally high in session? Or show up late after nights of partying?

- a) ___ Rarely, and/or collectively after big moments of work
- b) ___ Often, struggling to be present for the work
- c) ___ No, and they judge each other for any signs of fun or coping
- d) ___ They aren't present enough to tell what is causing the low participation

6. Do they follow through on tasks and commitments?

- a) ___ Yes, they are accountable to each other
- b) ___ No, but they talk about the reasons why
- c) ___ Yes, but with conflict in how the tasks are done, working competitively instead of collaboratively
- d) ___ No, tasks seem to disappear into a black hole

7. Are the power dynamics clear in the room? (Who has power? How did they get it?)

- a) ___ Yes. The power dynamics are clear and the group is comfortable with them.
- d) ___ Not quite—there's a story that power is fully shared.
- c) ___ Yes, but people don't think it's necessarily fair, or know how to change it.
- d) ___ No, and the power that is in the room is used to delay action rather than move it.

Count the number of a's ____; of b's ____; of c's ____; of d's ____

If you selected mostly a's then you're working with an engaged group. They use emergent practices, are usually present, in high relationship with each other and have a clear understanding of power and boundaries.

If you selected mostly b's then you're working with a resistant group. They are often second-guessing the work and prone to conflict or getting stuck and distracted. They are in low

relationship with each other. They may have high energy but low focus, and are unclear on the power relations and boundaries in the group.

If you selected mostly c's then you're working in a driven group. They are task oriented and likely have short-term high focus. They are usually in low relationship, yet may be able to move work forward. However they lack emergent practices and clear understanding of how to negotiate power and boundaries.

If you selected mostly d's then you're working in an avoidant group. They are more likely to spend energy debating or ruminating about what should be done than actually doing any work. They are usually in low relationship with each other and lack an understanding of how power is playing out in the group. Boundaries are often ignored.

FACILITATION

&

MEDIATION

What Is and Isn't Facilitation

Facilitate: To make easy, or easier. To facilitate movements for social and environmental justice is to support movement workers to bring about change.

People are complex! Organizations are complex, society is complex. The work of a facilitator is:

- To make it as easy as possible for complex people to do the complex work of shaping change together;
- To make it easier for a group or organization to understand where they are going and how to get there;
- To understand the culture they are trying to create, and give them a place to practice;
- To understand how their visions can be made manifest, and can shape their decisions in the here and now;
- To support solid, authentic organizing;
- And to use every space to dismantle colonial legacies of oppression and supremacy.

Facilitation isn't:

- Training/Teaching, lecture style. Training/Teaching is important, but distinct. As facilitators, we are (mostly) supporting groups to plan and practice movement activity together, not moving information from one mind into many minds. It helps if teachers have facilitation skills,

and this book can help with that development, but fundamentally the content, strategy, direction, and data will come from the group. I generally aim for a 90/10 percentage rule in a room—that anything I have to say takes up no more than 10 percent of the time/space we have together, maximum. And that what I am sharing is agenda review, community agreements, summaries of what they navigated, questions they need to answer. While people often learn off our bodies, and I have definitely had people reflect that they learned from how I facilitated or spoke on something, my intention was not on teaching them, but on drawing forth the knowledge of many minds to align towards their common visions, intentions, plans, and obstacles.

- Manipulation. We are out of integrity if we use our power at the front of the room to make people do what we want, or think they should do. Related: facilitation is not glamorous. We are not casting a spell over people to make them do what we want.
- Organizing. At our best, we are facilitating organizers to collaborate, rather than divide and move against each other. Include our wisdom, yes, but if we cannot trust the group to move content, if we find ourselves pushing the Ouija board planchette, then we may not be in right relationship to the role or the group.
- Fixing the group. We aren't doctors or mechanics. We cannot just tell groups how to change.¹ We especially can't fix a problem that everyone tells us about privately but no one will mention in the actual meeting.
- Keeping groups calm. OR. Making groups happy.
- Leadership Development. We might be models that people are moved by and learn from, but unless we are explicitly hired to develop leaders as distinct work from facilitation, let's not attempt to shape and change the participants of a group, especially without their consent.

1. Believe me, I have tried! Confessions of a Recovering Control Freak.

- Performance. Don't put on a show of process, while the content has already been fully planned and processed. Facilitators are not penguin daddies, regurgitating processed nutrients into baby bird mouths. The process has to be authentic for the movement to be resilient and impactful.
- Diversifying. A facilitator is not responsible for bringing diversity or a different culture into a group. Be wary of a monocultural group, particularly where the culture is privileged, making requests like "sing us a song!" or "perform a poem" or turning to the facilitator for input that a missing population should be providing to the room.

Facilitation is a way of listening through and beyond the words being spoken, feeling for the current of longing underneath what can be spoken, listening through the fear, listening through the scar tissue: What is possible? What is the next step towards that possibility?

Facilitation is also about being the grounding presence in the room. Generally, don't party with the group. Don't get caught up in playing favorites or making the participants compete for your attention. Don't cross boundaries, and if, when, you do, be accountable and reestablish the lines. As the facilitator, you need to be a presence that the whole room can trust—trust to be present, on time, on purpose, trust to be a neutral person to whom anyone in the room can bring concerns, feedback, and ideas.

For this section of the book, the facilitation offers are organized by element. Within each element are Brief Thoughts (my attempt at a Tao of facilitation), some specific deep dives on approach or framework, and then suggested Practices for growing facilitation skills in that element.

- Therapy for either or both parties
- A public process, or a process guaranteed to have a public outcome
- A stand-in for other healing work
- Appropriate for a situation in which ongoing physical, sexual, or psychological abuse is active

What Is and Isn't Mediation

Mediation is holding space for tension and conflict to get expressed and addressed in a dispute, process, or relationship. Mediation happens when a pair or group of people cannot reach resolution between themselves and seek the support of a third party who is relatively neutral.

To mediate in a movement context is to intervene on organizational or interpersonal conflict, particularly conflict that is not generative, is distracting from our collective justice and liberation work, or that embodies regressive values we are trying to dismantle.

Mediation is one part of a transformative justice approach to the work. It asserts that, rather than moving into punitive measures like suspension, firing, calling out, public shaming, cancellation, or prison, there should be an attempt to hear each other, seek understanding, accountability, and interpersonal or community resolution. Mediation can help people find appropriate consequences, rather than reactionary punishments. Mediation helps to clarify power dynamics, make harmful patterns visible, and introduce the possibility that things could be made right, whole, and caseful.

Mediation is not:

- A surprise accountability process
- Guaranteed to help people get along like they used to
- An attempt to get one person to admit they were wrong

Mediation, the way I approach it, is an ancient human practice that happens in intimate space—I have done most of my mediating around a kitchen table, over tea, where people can see and feel each other. I imagine a lineage at my back, of oak trees and mycelium and grandparents, knowing this moment is temporary and survivable.

Mediation holds that the current moment is not the only moment, and that there are things we can do to decrease harm and increase respect and communication over time to change conditions and dynamics.

Mediation in my work often an extension of facilitation, a focusing and deepening of the attention brought to a single relationship, usually inside of a vast network of relationships. If one relationship in a system or network is dysfunctional or vulnerable, it means the whole system has a weak spot. And to strengthen it is not necessarily to mediate people towards friendship or recovery—a strong clear boundary can be the necessary reinforcement. For the structure of this book, the specifics of mediation are tied to emergent strategy elements after the facilitation teachings for that element. The deepest dive into my mediation methodology is in the transformative justice/resilience chapter: Kitchen Table Mediation.

right at the moment when shared action would most help. Facilitation keeps people turning towards the most necessary next step.

Trust is built in small gestures and vulnerabilities. People build trust in mutual experiences—in pairs or small groups, where there is room for both/all people to show aspects of their true selves.

True self is the self we are when we aren't holding a particular role or representing a particular group—it's equal parts passion, skill, and calling. We are often our truest selves in solitude—as facilitators we want to make room for true selves to be in relationship with each other. We want to continually invite the selves that are unmasked, not performing and not repressing what is felt and known.

True selves extending trust to each other make up the most efficient working body, as less time is spent on posturing, repression, backdoor organizing, lies tangling and untangling, or doing work no one is actually excited about.

Most changes happen in small ways, and then build up. In our bodies, what seem to be sudden changes in health are often the final throes of long-term visible and invisible health struggles and choices. The same is true in our organizations. We need to pay attention to what we practice. Each practice of an organization is a small scale way to grow or shrink its own realization of its espoused mission and values.

Create a culture of celebrating the small victories. Seed trusting relationships, notice and attend to your learning, harvest your excellence.

Critique is important, but if it dominates the culture, it becomes impossible to sustain motivation and forward motion. Critique should be seen as a set of brakes—use it to help the group move at the right pace, not speed ahead of themselves, their analysis, their skill, their capacity.

Most of the time when the group feels overwhelmed by the task at hand, the task is too big. Make it smaller, find the practices

Fractal Facilitation

Brief Thoughts about Fractal Facilitation

Very few things can actually happen in a large group. Almost nothing can happen in a large group without trust. Often, a group may want to have an involved, large-group conversation to build alignment. Without trust, these kinds of conversations can quickly become a space of performance and posturing. This can be a set-up.

It's harder to hold hate, cynicism, or judgment against someone when we know more of what they are going through. Create relationships between the people in the room. Let them ask and answer how they are—that can change what's possible in the room.

Part of our job as facilitators is to continuously assess for the trust in a group. This does not mean trust is a destination, or that we are searching for a perfection of trust. Trust begins as an internal measure of integrity—is there a felt and/or proven alignment between what is being said, what is done, what is felt? In a room, it helps to think of trust as a spectrum—is there adequate trust to move forward? If a group seems stuck in quicksand, ask if people are feeling trust in each other, in the process; ask what could increase trust, and give more time to the relationships.

People often think they need to take action when they actually need to build relationship. People often think they need process

that can help create the shift. It takes humility to attend to the small practices, changes and steps that actually lead to massive change. One moment of humility makes room for another.

Remember, what seems like a small step to you may not actually be small for the group. Talking about something is wildly different from undertaking it—it takes a huge effort to shift something small and fundamental. Our groups rarely have small visions. Often, a small step needs to be repeated, become a practice, in order to produce a new capacity or shape in the group, or leadership, or even in just one person. Support your groups to build up to the right size scale through practice.

Observation and Feeling

You need to be able to accurately observe and feel other humans' emotions in order to facilitate a group through a complex process.

Or be willing to ask what's happening, without your ego getting in the way of listening. Humility allows us to hear where we need to adjust, where the group needs to be held more gently or firmly.

Your sensations and emotions can be your best data in a moment of holding.

Once upon a time I was having a hard moment with a loved one. We asked our friend Susan Raffo to hold space for us. She asked us to sit face to face and speak to each other about what was happening between us. We spoke, flowing back and forth with words, truth, tears. At a certain point we lost each other, and Susan stopped us and said, "I feel disassociation in the space. Can we slow down and find out where it is?" She had sensed that we'd lost each other, and with no assumptions about why, invited us to feel the moment, the truth, the connection. We dropped back in and found our way back to each other.

Somatics is the purest methodology I have found for learning to feel.¹ Somatics is a practice of mind/body connection that explores internal and relational physical perception and experience. Somatics teaches us to center, to find a place within ourselves that we can return to no matter what condition we're in, a place from which to make intentional choices about how we want to show up, lead, and hold.

Bodywork, yoga, and martial arts of all kinds also help. Breathing, listening, feeling for what you are capable of, noticing pain and discomfort and tingles and movement and any other feeling—all of these are part of the journey.

As facilitators, we must learn to discern when we're feeling a way forward, versus the most elegant and right next step for this particular group of people. I can often see a way forward that doesn't suit where a group actually is, the trust they actually have in this moment.

To make more possible, deepen the trust.

It's very rare to have a 100 percent emotional alignment in a room. It happens, an ecstatic moment, a grief moment. Even then, there are different degrees to which people can feel. Some will be wide open, others cracked just the smallest bit. Instead of seeking totality, you want to attend to movement and momentum. Who are the people who generate movement? Who stops it? Who critiques but never acts? Who acts but never reflects? The way forward is a river moving through these obstacles. Who pulls the bottom out, creating a waterfall which is fast, but not necessarily flowing forward? Who only thrives in the rapids? Who can't see the beauty of the riverbank because they are focused on the ocean they want to reach? The river balances all of these factors, adapting constantly to keep the right pace for the water and fish and sediment to find their ways home.

1. Somatics is explored in-depth in *Emergent Strategy* and *Pleasure Activism*. You can find out more about the lineage I have studied at generativesomatics.org.

Not a Missing Ingredient

You are not the missing ingredient to add diversity/fun/magic/color to the culture of the group.²

This phenomenon, of being a person asked to singularly represent "otherness," happens often when facilitating dominant culture groups—wealthy people, philanthropists, majority-white groups, masculine-culture groups: You (I am mostly speaking to women of color, based on my own experience) are invited to facilitate a meeting, but in the process you are asked to sing, or to dance, or build an altar, or bring in a chant—to inject some aspect of your culture, or assumed culture, for the sake of the meeting's culture.

Your job is not to cover the gaps in the culture of the group. Your job is especially not to inject diversity into a monocultural group. Do not be a minstrel version of yourself.

Do not perform your ethnicity or race for money.

Do not sit by and be complicit in cultural appropriation and cooptation.

When it feels like you are being asked to do so, here are some responses:

- I am really glad you are thinking about the cultural aspects of this meeting—that shows you want to invite more from the people in this group than just their labor. But it feels like you are reaching beyond the cultural reality/presence of your group to do so.
- What are the cultures present on your staff? In your network/community/board? Let's generate cultural practices for this meeting from those lineages.
- I am not comfortable with your request—it feels like you want me to perform my culture. Let's explore why you are making this request, and what needs to be learned, or done, to let this be a moment of growth.

2. This is different in a multiracial, multicultural space. You get to choose how much you want to weave your culture into the space. Also, dominance can show up in a lot of ways. You are still not required to bring those additional cultural offerings if it doesn't feel like an organic offer from you.

Trust As A Fractal Construct

How trustworthy are you? How do you know when to trust others? Do you know how to grow trust between yourself and others?

In facilitation, you want to be trustworthy to your group—don't over promise and under deliver, and don't pretend you understand that which you really don't.

Different levels of truth are required for different kinds of work—some groups, especially movement direct-action entities, need to be able to trust each other in life-or-death conditions. Other groups need to be able to trust each other to move resources together. Others only need enough trust for a broad coalition, light alignment to move towards a common goal.

If the trust needs to be deeper, you will need to give the group more time and space to drop in with each other. Any group that is supposed to make decisions together needs to have some basic trust-building time.

These days, it's not unusual to sit in a meeting where there is barely any actual presence—everyone is behind a computer or on their phones, sometimes participating in multiple meetings at the same moment. Some of this is a function of modern life—we have short attention spans and a multitude of distractions.

Some of this is because there is a strong need for radical movement leadership and labor, paired with a scarcity of time and resources for deep leadership development, which results in a smaller-than-necessary number of leaders holding a ton of urgent and very necessary roles.

Some of this is the ego that is born out of insecurity. By moving from point to point but barely being anywhere, we can make ourselves look and feel important, covering the truth that we often don't know what we're doing, how to contribute, or what our value is outside of constant production.

We have movements whose members struggle to trust each other at a time when those who oppose us can easily track and weaponize that distrust. It is strategic to take the time to build internal trust in our work.

Everything changes when people are face to face. I was once with author, scientist, and spiritual teacher Barbara Holmes in a Beloved Community gathering in which she explained how the heartbeat creates a 360-degree vibrational field. When we are in proximity to each other, she taught, we are literally sitting in each other's fields, co-creating a vibration unique to us.³ As often as you reasonably can, move people into proximity with each other, into direct conversation and mutual exchange of energy.⁴

Allow relationships in the room to grow at the scale of reality—initially one to one. Then grow into family sized units, three to eight people. Ten is big, ten is a lot of people to try and find common ground within.

The scale that most movements and groups try to move in is too large for the intimacy of possibility.

Our work as facilitators is to help every group find ways to generate intimacy, deepen relationship, and learn respect for each other. Each connection between two people in the room is a thread, and as they connect, the group can weave into a fabric strong enough to hold the collective through change and crisis.

If there's no conversation possible at the level of pairs, there will be no conversation possible for the whole room.

Build the trust person to person and then let it begin to flow through the room. In a meeting where trust is required to move the content, pair people up as soon as you can after getting started—even if each person doesn't trust every single other person, after the first pairing, you'll know that each person is building trust with at least one other person. The more pairs you can create, the more pathways there will be for connection and trust in the room.

It is quite remarkable to have a room of hundreds willing to move forward together because they trust at least two other people in the space. This is what I sometimes think of as trust flocking, finding the balance between depth of connection and quantity of connections that allows the group to move in sync, on purpose, as something larger than the sum of its parts.

3. Facilitation science is dreamy.

4. Even in a virtual environment, pairs and small groups allow more intimacy to build.

trust the people (a spell)

lessons from the emergent strategy immersion new orleans:

trust the people who move toward you and already feel like home.

trust the people to let you rest.

trust the people to do everything better than you could have imagined.

trust the people and they become trustworthy.

trust that the people are doing their work to trust themselves.

trust that each breach of trust can deepen trust or clarify boundaries.

trust the people who revel in pleasure after hard work.

trust the people who let children teach/remind us how to emote, be still, and laugh.

trust the people who see and hold your heart.

trust the people who listen to the whales.

trust the people and you will become trustworthy.

trust the people and show them your love.

trust the people.

Practices For Fractal Facilitation

Practice observation when you're in any room. Make notes to yourself when the energy shifts, when the collective mood changes, even (especially) when the changes are small.

Make sure there are plenty of small ways people can support holding the container—and by container I mean both the physical space of the gathering and the logistical, documentation, and energetic needs of the group. Tasks that can be distributed include taking and/or compiling notes both digital and butcher paper, summarizing the day, facilitating small groups, facilitating icebreakers and stretches, documenting historic moments with photography, social media posting (if the group has agreed to such documentation and it suits the security culture).⁵

5. See more about security culture in "We Keep Us Safe: Facilitating Safer Spaces" by Ejeris Dixon starting on page 83 in the Black Feminist Wisdom section.

Align the container with the values, so that there are lots of places to practice being liberated together. The values of a group, what they care about and want to generate in the world, are one of the first things they can and should articulate with each other. The values can continue to be revisited as the group learns what they care about based on where they put their time, attention, and other resources. Everything from how you provide water and food, to the gender access of bathrooms, to the way the group introduces themselves can help to align the group with the world they are working to create. Values don't mean much if there is no way to put them into practice and action. Wherever there is time and capacity, attend to these fractal ways that the container you are in represents the world you are generating.

Notice and celebrate every small step towards the vision/goal/objective/dream/intention. Every step. If there is only forward motion without noticing and celebration, the group will get exhausted and have no sense that they are making the incremental changes that eventually build into monumental change. Notice, and invite everyone in the group to pay attention to and celebrate their collective work.

Grow rigor with small, repeated practices, and invite people to practice in relationship. For most participants in our current political moment, rigor is less compelling than relationship and the projection of expertise. Practice is the path to embodiment, which is when a way of being is not just something we believe in our minds, but something our bodies can fully hold, something that becomes a default in our behaviors, choices, and actions.

We embody whatever society shaped us to be and believe until we awaken to the reality that we can change, we can shape ourselves, we are constantly changing, and we can reorient ourselves to grow towards life that is collective and collaborative. In the same way that repetition of a practice is the path to embodiment for an individual, being in collective practice is the path to embodiment in a group.⁶ Practice rigor together—collectivize being on

6. According to Richard Strozzi-Heckler, three hundred repetitions lead to muscle memory, three thousand lead to embodiment. See strozziinstitute.com.

time for shared work, collectivize holding a sacred space, collectivize non-dramatic accountability, collectivize creating a container of transformation.

Create moments of doing the right thing. Doing the right thing is less compelling for many people than being seen/assumed to be doing the right thing.⁷ As a facilitator, you have to see the trauma in a collective shape, the pain that leads to procrastination, the hopelessness and heartache that yield pontification, the exhaustion and apathy of shady behavior. Slice thru, start small, create a moment of doing the right thing. Let people get a felt sense for being on the right side of history. Let that alignment galvanize and deepen political commitment for the next steps.

7. I blame organized religion—putting the performance before the substance.

- **Negotiation:** Here we identify what both/all parties need in order to move forward. Apologies? Boundaries? New behavior? Closure? A new narrative to your community?
 - As the mediator you are listening for these needs and requests throughout, and particularly paying attention to where the requests might be at odds. For example, if one person wants to be in better communication and the other needs to not speak again for the foreseeable future, your job as the mediator is to hold up the reality, the gap between the needs, and help them land in a solution that affirms the different desires. Help them see what is and is not possible at this time. Usually the person in need of boundaries or closure takes precedent, as no one can be required to stay in a relationship for any reason.
- **Closure:** The closing of the mediation should be clean as a whistle. Very clearly stating the next steps, boundaries, agreements, and if there is anything else expected of either party.
 - In some cases, I will instruct participants to communicate through a third party (very, very rarely is that third party me) for the foreseeable future, while the mediation is ongoing, or for a set period of time upon completion of the mediation. This is particularly useful for a mediation of people who are in common movement locations and need to end their personal relationship. This phase of mediation can be the most dangerous phase for the community, because the impulse to publicly destroy each other is high and the means are readily available.

Pay attention to what both/all parties are needing. One of the most helpful things we can do as mediators is to help people clearly articulate what they need in order to experience closure, clarify boundaries, or regenerate a positive relationship. So many of us think we are communicating clearly when we are speaking through clouds in a wildly circuitous manner. As the mediator you can keep trimming off the hyperbole and looping so that the participants can hear the essence of the conflict.

Fractal Mediation

Mediation is a fractal art. Helping two people, or a small group, resolve conflict in ways that don't involve violence, prison, the police, or public shaming, is crucial for our species learning to practice justice at a collective level. It's fundamentally about noticing small things—a flicker of emotion can be the first small step towards big accountability. Below are some best practices for the fractal aspects of mediation.

Understand that mediation generally breaks down into smaller phases. In some cases, these phases can all happen in one session; in other cases, the phases happen over time. Here's how I define the phases:

- **Surrender:** The initial phase of acknowledging that mediation is needed and why.
- **Landscape:** Both/all parties laying out the landscape of tension/conflict as they see/feel it. This can happen by email or phone call, but I recommend it is done one-on-one with the mediator.
- **Listening:** This is the heart of the mediation—as the mediator you are holding a wide space to allow the mediated parties to hear each other. A very rudimentary tool here is to have people reflect back to each other *what* they hear, and *that* they are hearing each other.

1. See Kirchen Table Mediation in the "Transformative Justice / Resilience Mediation" chapter for more details on running a mediation.

Plan the mediation in bite-size chunks.

- I often aim for an hour at a time. I want to ensure that the conversation stays focused, and that there is enough emotional energy for covering the necessary work.
- If a conversation has no container, one or more of the people who need help can end up completely emotionally exhausted. Especially limit the time if you suspect there are harmful dynamics afoot in the situation—imbalanced power or emotional labor.
- Particularly if you have people who can get lost in long monologues, repeating stories, infinite loops of blame, you can focus them by letting them in on what the end time is. In extreme cases I have set a timer that allows people to have a sense of when the time is winding down. When people struggle in conflict they can lose touch with how much time they are spending in the reliving phase of mediation.
- Celebrate the work you are able to do.
- Seek moments of clear request, clear offer, clear accountability/apology. Highlight and slow down these moments.

Finally, you can ask people some hopeful questions:

- That sounded like a request/offer/apology. Can you say it one more time?
- Can you respond to that request/offer?
- Can you clarify what you are apologizing for?
- Can you take in that accountability/apology?

Intentional Adaptation Facilitation

Brief Thoughts on Intentional Adaptation

Change is constant. You can't stop change, control change, or perfectly plan change. You can ride the waves of change, partner with change, and shape change.

Adaptation is long term or structural change in a creature or system to account for a need for survival. Adaptation is not about being reactionary, changing without intention, or being victimized, controlled, and tossed around by the inevitable changes of life. It's about shaping change and letting changes make us stronger as individual and collective bodies.

How do we get relaxed and intentional in the face of change?

Get curious, in your own life, about how you face change in powerful ways, in ways that show your dignity and help you stay connected to what you care about. The more you practice this in yourself, the more you will be able to embody and support dignified change in the groups you hold.

Think of the tenderness with which you hold a newborn. Everything is connected, resilient, and growing, and you have the control, the strength, the power to actually protect the small and new from the chaotic world.

