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Workshop: Shared power in community: Regenerative capacity and system blindness

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What I do on a daily basis is help people bridge spaces. Not spaces in a geographical sense but "spaces" in the sense of bridging differences as in emotions being raised through conflict and differences in consciousness as it pertains to different views.

Previously I did this in a legal career but I when I reflect on that I would sooner call this pushing people across the gap and sometimes purposefully in it to confront conflict. I use these terms to indicate that recipients often were not satisfied with the result and neither was I. I had been trained to deal with conflict by practicing law, which for me had absolutely nothing to do with dealing with emotion. It didn't require a deeper look as to the origin of the conflict. All it took was the clear identification of the conflict in the framework of the law that applied to it.

Since those days of practicing law, I have made some changes as I started to wonder about the origin of conflict and what it means. I started to question the way in which we share power and have been curious if there was a better solution to restore balance in our communities. This is why during this workshop I want to talk today about co-creation.

Now, to me it seems we create together whether we like it or not. We do this for the better or for the worse. We create arguments and we create peace. The good news is that it is something we "do." This means we have some influence over it.

To actually use our influence it is necessary that we become conscious of what it is that we do and how we do it. It is only then that we can start with what I would call co-creation: the joining of forces to create a mutually desired and beneficial outcome. To get some clarity around what happens we need some information and I believe that I can obtain this information when I look through the lens that sees human interaction in the perspective of systems.

When we interact we agree on certain spoken or unspoken rules. Some of these rules will be new as they are agreed between us and some we bring along as baggage from the past. Some of it has to do with who you are and have become as a person as you had your experiences in life. Most of it will be like an inheritance from the society, culture and family you were born in. Now, it is possible that because this baggage has been with you for so long you have identified yourself by it. This most likely is something you are not aware of but does affect you and your life. You may even find it hard to separate yourself from your baggage because you believe this is who you are. Pretty much like dropping your clothes, you would feel kind of naked without your baggage. If this is working out for you then that is fine, but it is my experience that when we create together without being aware that this is what we bring on board, it stands in the way of co-creation.

Sure, you can think yourself through co-creation. You can create a protocol and say that when you follow the protocol it is "co-creation". But personally I very much doubt that you'll have the benefits that I would like to see from co-creation. Co-creation is something that originates from certain intent, a kind of consciousness and goes beyond what we call collaboration. All these terms (collaboration, cooperation, working together etc.) could overlay each other but I like to make a distinction here and separate co-creation as



it is this specific consciousness of the system that you were born in, the one you bring along, the one you enter and the one you'd like to create that makes it different from all these terms. It requires a certain self-inquiry to obtain this consciousness. It requires the creation of an observer-self as part of you to take a closer look at what you are doing and for what reasons you are doing this. It is essential that you are aware of the consciousness that you hold while doing it.

It also requires this consciousness when you connect with other people in this same spirit of co-creation. They too will bring their baggage along. Baggage you hope they know about, as it will also affect everything that is to follow if they and you are not conscious of it.

And even though you are conscious of part of the baggage you bring, there will always be parts hidden in the subconscious part of yourself that neither you or they are conscious of. So it requires that you are able and willing to hold the space from the start as it is a given that this will come up and how you deal with it will be decisive for the connection you have and the outcome you create.

Think of the "Johari window" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johari_window). There is knowledge that we share, that we hold to ourselves, that others have but we don't and that which is hidden in the subconscious. Co-creation depends on the willingness to accept that this is so as a reality, accept it and work with in the effort to create a desirable result together. The more information we share the better we will be able to achieve this.

But it requires that we follow the signals from the start: the spoken and the unspoken ones. It requires that we know our own drives and specifically under stress when we feel more pressure to achieve a desired goal. Under this kind of pressure we often forget to connect and hurry on as if our very life depended on it. Shared power is out of the window when this happens. And when it is up to each man to fend for himself the regenerative capacity as a community is lost. But what if our very happiness depended on our connection to others? The joy and satisfaction of co creation is achieved through connection. Connection builds trust and trust is needed when your life depends upon it!

The way in which we operate in our communities is much like this when it comes to conflict. We just want to "fix it" and get it over with. But doing so we forget to really connect. And in trying to fix it we often forget to look at the broader perspective of the cause. We see the behavior of the individual as the cause and look not at the system. In a sense living in the system we have become blind to it. We have become blind to the fact that we have chosen to live our lives by certain rules often over several centuries. And we still follow those rules even though they are not effective and cause great harm. And when we do become conscious of this fact we often blame the system but are still blind to the fact that we "are" the system. We act accordingly in our daily lives at work, in our families and when we are with friends.

So maybe this is not new to you and on a cognitive level you agree and have embraced these thoughts. What I would like to offer you is the experience of what I spoke about so that when you leave here you will embody this and be able to share it with others. I firmly believe that if we want to make a difference it requires a change of consciousness. We will do so by using a number of games that will show you how subconsciously you are a living part of the system and only by becoming conscious of this will you be able to start making a change that supports shared power and regenerative capacity in your community. So lets make a start!

Handout: Game - Crossing Rivers

This free game can also be downloaded under resources/free downloads at www.govertvanginkel.nl