



Volume 18 • Number 3 • Autumn 2011



Building bridges through facilitation

Journal of
The Association for Management Education and
Development



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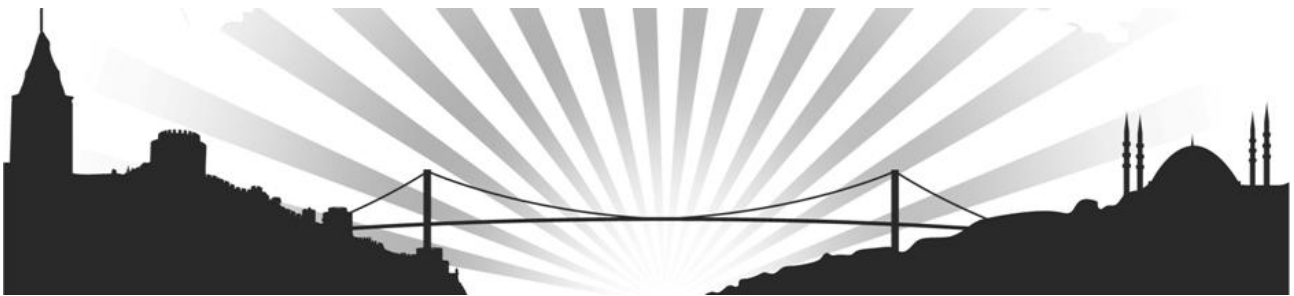
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Volume 18 • Number 3 • Autumn 2011

Building bridges through facilitation

A special edition in collaboration with the International Association of Facilitators to mark their European conference, Istanbul, Turkey, from 14 to 16 October 2011



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The power of transformative facilitation:

building bridges across global challenges

Annette Moench and Yoga Nesadurai



This article introduces a unique approach in dealing with our global challenges by building transformative bridges into our human future on a higher consciousness level. We do this first by understanding who we are as individuals through the appreciation of our unique settings, such as our personal, social and consciousness capital. This is then followed by a



transformative facilitated process using “a room of potentials” and “a consciousness spiral” to take us from “I” to “WE”. We argue that this will lead to a brighter, more collective (human) oriented way of living.

Keywords-

global challenges, global community, personal capital, consciousness capital, universal life principles, 1Malaysia, the transformative spiral, transformative facilitation

Introduction

A few weeks ago Yoga, living in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Annette, based in Munich, Germany, exchanged views about what is happening around the globe, and how this is affecting people's lives at every level. We also considered how this is influencing our own lives and work as facilitators, coaches, mentors and transformers.

In this article, we first outline our reflections on the current global challenges we face. Then we introduce some frameworks – especially the notion of a transformative spiral - to help us build bridges to a desired future. We draw upon the specific example of the 1Malaysia initiative, and introduce the role of ‘transformative facilitators’. Finally, we issue a call to action to our colleagues in the facilitation profession to join hands with us as we embark upon the adventures that lie ahead in achieving our vision of co-creating a universal WE-Human way of being and co-existing.

In the centre of global challenges: A gloomy perspective

The planet: So far in 2011 we've had more major earthquakes than ever before. The one in Japan was a disaster for the country itself, but it also has major impacts for our global community. Are we building our

cities in the best and safest places? Do we have the appropriate energy strategies to sustain human life in the future?

Specific Countries and Societies: North Africa is freeing itself in a spreading fire of liberation. The younger generations in particular want to enjoy life, to be free, to create perspectives with meaning, and to get rid of long lasting, selfish and patriarchal structures. It is just a question of time before the “New and different North Africa” will be born. Are we ready for more freedom and more responsibility?

The Economy: We hope that the most recent global financial crisis is just about over. What learning and consequences can we discern from it? Leading financial analysts have just started to predict the next one. What will be the trigger: natural resources, food, real estate, inflation, bankruptcy of nations? Wherever it starts, it will influence all of us! Do we want – indeed, can we afford - to go on like this?

The Individual: One in five employees in Germany is experiencing burn-out syndrome. People are stressed, overworked, fearful, and don't see a positive prospect for their personal lives. Currently the economy is booming, the unemployment rate has dropped significantly, good social systems are in place, but still something is out of balance. People just don't know how to handle their individual challenges and the global threats. They ask for meaning and for advice to build a more promising and reliable future. Do we have an answer?

A hopeful perspective

In our view, all is not lost. We are just on a challenging curve – the span of a bridge - into a new and different future, and our task is to create it ourselves.

As co-authors, we are both active nodes in global networks, and we both have the impression we are right in the middle of major changes, maybe a storm, which are affecting all dimensions of human life. We have joined hands with many others around the world and we are building new and creative bridges to move onto a higher level of human consciousness. We believe that the WE-Human, the humanist paradigm, will emerge to replace the I-Human, the individualist paradigm of the last millennium. Now we are deciding how we want to live, we are taking personal responsibility, we are acting, and we want to dig deeper under the surface into the meaning of life. This is what real transformation is about and where the art of facilitation can lend a wonderful helping hand.



How can we build our bridges?

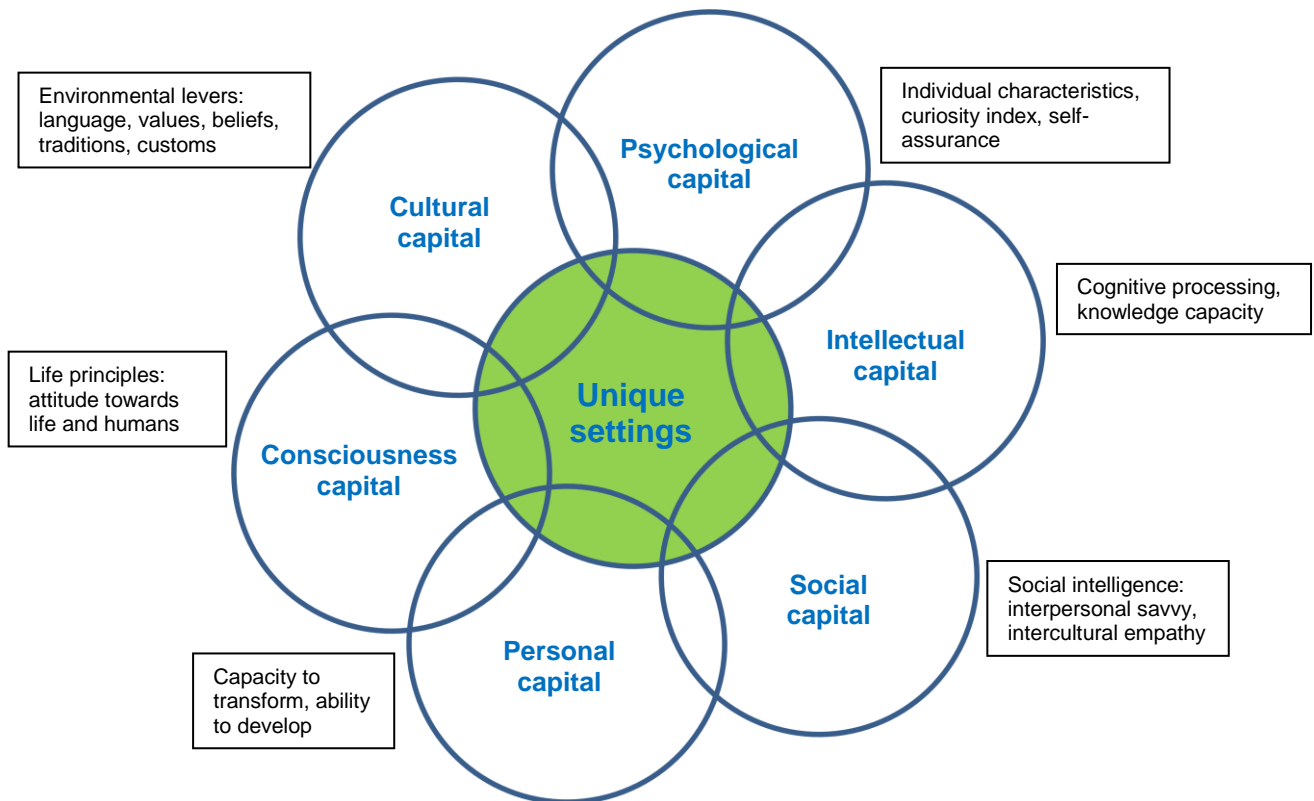
First of all we need to start with our individual selves. The change we want to see in the outside world begins in our inner world. It is an illusion that someone from the outside will rescue us and will make our lives easy, safe, and glamorous.

As humans we have an intuitive interest in wanting to know 'Who are we?' and 'How are we doing?' In any relationship, as humans, we seek affirmations of appreciation, value, and significance from the other party. At the heart of it is the sense of belonging that humans seek. So how do we go about working with the ingredients of this sense of belonging and how can we use it optimally to build our future?

Understanding who we are as individuals

We need to understand who we are in terms of our unique personalities, values, beliefs, perceptions, preconceived ideas, likes and dislikes. We can define these as our unique personal settings, and they are usually responsible for the choices we make every day.

Diagram 1: Components of our unique settings ⁽¹⁾



Source: Options & Choices Advisory ©

Diagram 1 illustrates how our unique personal settings play a big part in our daily decision making and interaction processes. Each of the components in our unique settings is inter-linked to create a map of who we are. This is described in more detail in the section – 'Common forms of capital'.

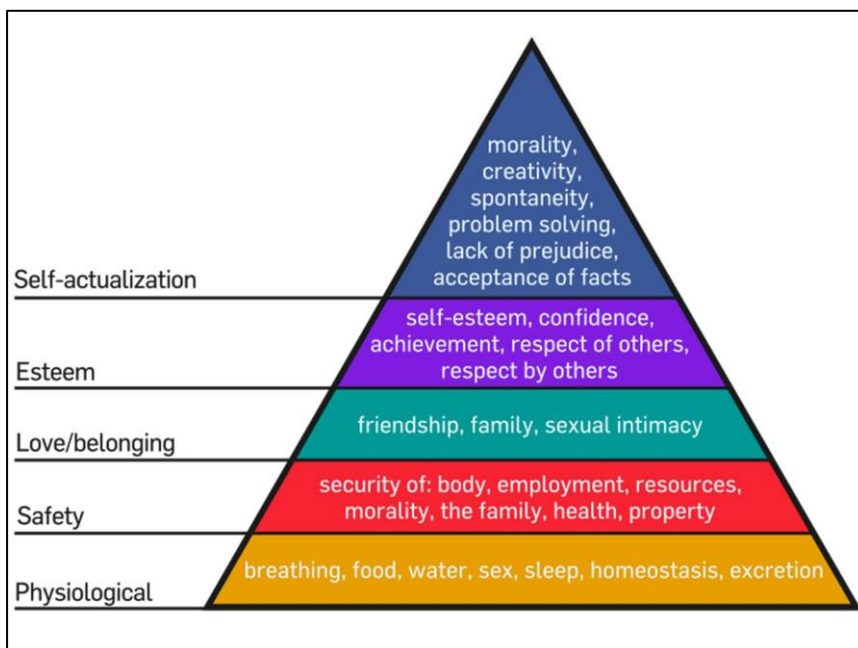
Social capital in terms of our ability to develop interpersonal and intercultural empathy is very much dependent on the settings of the features within our cultural, consciousness, personal, psychological capital

etc. Therefore, the success of connecting and building links with another culture is very much dependent on the settings of the features within all components of our unique settings.

Understanding what connects us to create a global community.

The second major aspect in taking action and making it happen are our similarities as human beings. Given the recent challenges and revolutions around the globe, there is one common theme. As humans, we have far more in common than our differences. We all have the same human structure, and we have similar human needs, which were described by Maslow in his “Hierarchy of Needs”.

Diagram 2: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs ⁽²⁾



In addition to these universal human needs, we detect the emergence of new universal values as equally important. Underlying every healthy human transaction is a desire for integrity, trust, and to be valued.

What are these additional universal human values and forms of capital?

Universal values

It seems to us that these are a desire for the recognition of shared universal values, aspirations, and behaviours. One example is the fight for freedom of choice and opportunity in North Africa. These are not values imposed upon people; they are innate in every one of us. They include the right to equal opportunity and choice, respect, understanding, and freedom from discrimination, as enshrined, for example, in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

We believe that these universal values are going to drive the future of connectivity between humans. They are part of our unique settings, although they have led to a shift in the emphasis in the capitals within our unique settings.

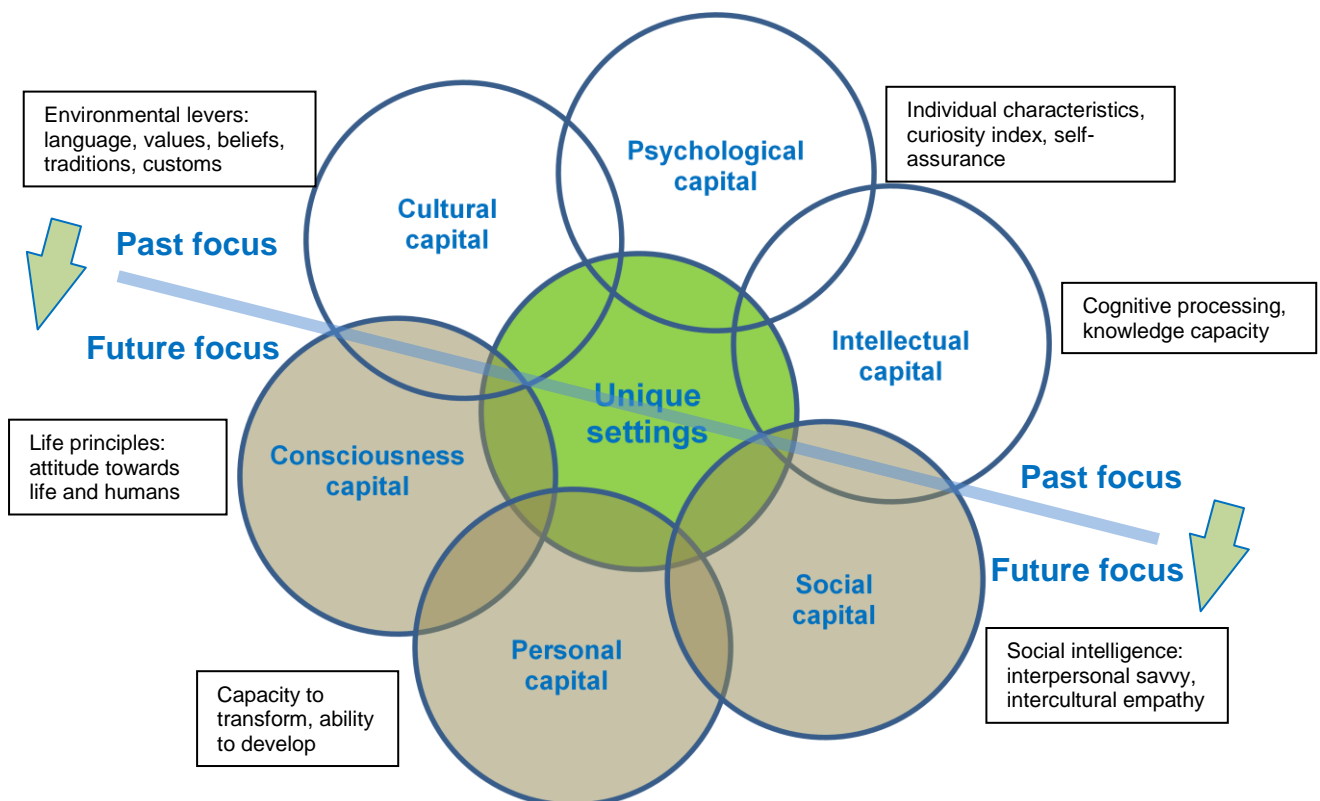
Common forms of capital

In the past, the focus was more on the intellectual, psychological, and cultural aspects of our unique settings. The focus in the future is going to be more on our consciousness, personal and social capital. This requires a fundamental re-thinking of 'who we are' and what we really want as individuals, to then link into what WE want as a community or nation, and proceeding from there.

Take for example our cultural capital. Culture, in the past, through tradition, beliefs and customs, created a worldview that was collective in nature. This sometimes ignored/dismissed the creative impulses of individuals within the community. Culture, in the future, will start more from an inward-looking examination of the self and our environment, thus revealing a more authentic and original spirit of the community through the individuals within it. This is a form of examining, deconstructing, and reconstructing the existing context of traditions, beliefs and values into a new collective worldview and behaviour. The catalyst for this new journey is our consciousness.

Therefore, cultural, psychological, and intellectual capital still remain relevant. However, we believe that people are evolving from their past experiences, becoming more aware of their interconnectivity and relevance to one another, and of their role within this evolution.

Diagram 3: A change in emphasis of our unique settings ⁽¹⁾



Source: Options & Choices Advisory ©

This new awareness is taking place at a deeper level, emphasising our consciousness, personal and social capital, which then become the natural drivers for change and transformation. They form the structure or foundation that will help us build the 'bridges' into our future.

Consciousness capital

We now clarify what we understand as consciousness, as there are so many different definitions of this term.

Our definition of consciousness

Being aware of who I am ⁽³⁾ – subjective experience, awareness, the ability to experience feelings, wakefulness, having a sense of selfhood, using the executive control system of the mind ⁽⁴⁾, understanding that we are an energetic part of a universal network following universal principles ⁽³⁾,

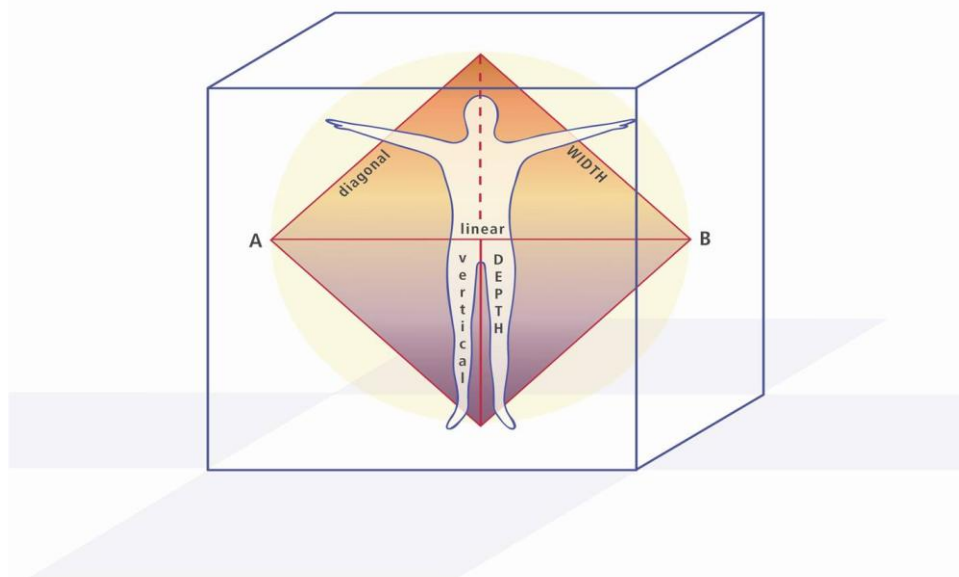
Based on this, the core attitude towards life and humans is to understand that everything is connected and to recognise humans as humans and not only as roles or functions.

This also is reflected in the three major universal life principles ^(1,3)

1. Everything is connected and influencing itself. We are ONE!
7. We live in a world of polarities – we only know light if we have experienced darkness, or we only know good if we have experienced evil.
8. Cause and effect – we set the cause and we must take responsibility for its effect. We have mastery over our own lives.

In other words, we construct and co-create our own reality. We make decisions, we take actions and we are responsible for their outcomes and effects. This is our big challenge and our even bigger opportunity. Another way of putting this is that we operate in a “Room of Potentials” to create our reality.

Diagram 4: The Room of Potentials ⁽⁵⁾



Source: Moench / Schnellbuegel ©

A purely horizontal (linear) approach and method of working and decision making from starting point A to point B is no longer valid (if it ever was). What we now need is to integrate the dimensions of depth (vertical axis) and width (diagonal axis) and thus open up a holistic room full of complex and dynamic potentials. Here, everyone can create his/her individual and self-responsible space as foundation material for building new bridges.

Personal capital

Personal capital is our ability to transform a set of resources into a desired outcome or result with the focus on 'us' rather than on the resources to be transformed. It is a combination of thinking and doing, based on our energy, knowledge, know-how, and character. Personal capital is also defined by our ability to get others to help us deliver a desired outcome or result.

So what are the 'tools' available to us to develop our personal capital? How do we use these tools to build our bridges?

At a high level, we can say that we consist of two main assets:

- *our predisposition* – this is the self which is defined by our unique settings. It is made up of settings that have been tried and tested over time.
- *our potential* – this is the extrapolation of the self which can create a whole array of possibilities. These possibilities help us look at options beyond what is familiar and known, to new and multi-dimensional ways of doing things.

A key tool in developing our potential is our brain and its 'plasticity' – its ability to be changeable, malleable, and modifiable. It is this plasticity that facilitates the development of our potential, combined with the human will to survive and our ability to adapt that gives us a powerful basis for change and coming together. We should bring to 'life' and focus these innate potentials and abilities to build bridges for the future.

Social capital

As humans, we crave a sense of belonging and need for relationships with others. We build social networks and interactions to keep this need alive. At present, our ability to interact with our own and other cultures is sometimes natural and at other times uncomfortable. Cross cultural interactions especially are at times uncomfortable because the focus, in the past, has been on the differences and on the culture or collective behaviour of a particular group of people – the 'other'. In the future, social interactions with our own kind will become secondary, as cross cultural interactions become the norm, and it will take on a different stance. All our future interactions will be bound by our desire to express universal values, which will become the common threads in our interactions, as opposed to the current focus on differences and cultural norms.

The example of 1Malaysia

In Malaysia, this process is already under way with the Prime Minister's vision of **1Malaysia**⁽⁶⁾. The focus is on preserving Malaysia's uniqueness, through the diversity of its people, in building a future nation based on the people's common aspirations. It calls for the dedicated contribution of the *individual* to the future of the nation – despite individual differences – to shape a better tomorrow for all, based on the universal values of opportunity, respect, and understanding.

The aim is to co-create a more meaningful Malaysian identity, purpose and direction, defined by the people as a whole, which will help form a new collective behaviour and worldview.

With the motto *People First, Performance Now*, 1Malaysia aims to be a unifier by promoting the inclusiveness and integration of – building bridges between – members of its diverse population, which comprises three main ethnic groups – Bumiputeras, Chinese, and Indians. Those bridges facilitate the

emergent future of the nation, by connecting those groups and individuals through their common needs and values.

Improving government efficiency is high on the agenda of 1Malaysia. This is to be effected through fighting crime and corruption, improving the quality of education, improving public transportation, and improving the standard of living of low income groups. Such goals are some of the National Key Result Areas (NKRAs – a form of Key Performance Indicator) of this transformation programme. Feedback from the people is received through specific, intermittent focus group laboratories, and regular NKRA progress updates are provided through public media. The focus is to understand what the ‘people’ want to see in ‘their’ future Malaysia. The government’s performance and accountability is monitored and measured through NKRAs, and the Prime Minister is responsible as the main Transformation Agent.

Transformative Facilitators as active global bridge builders

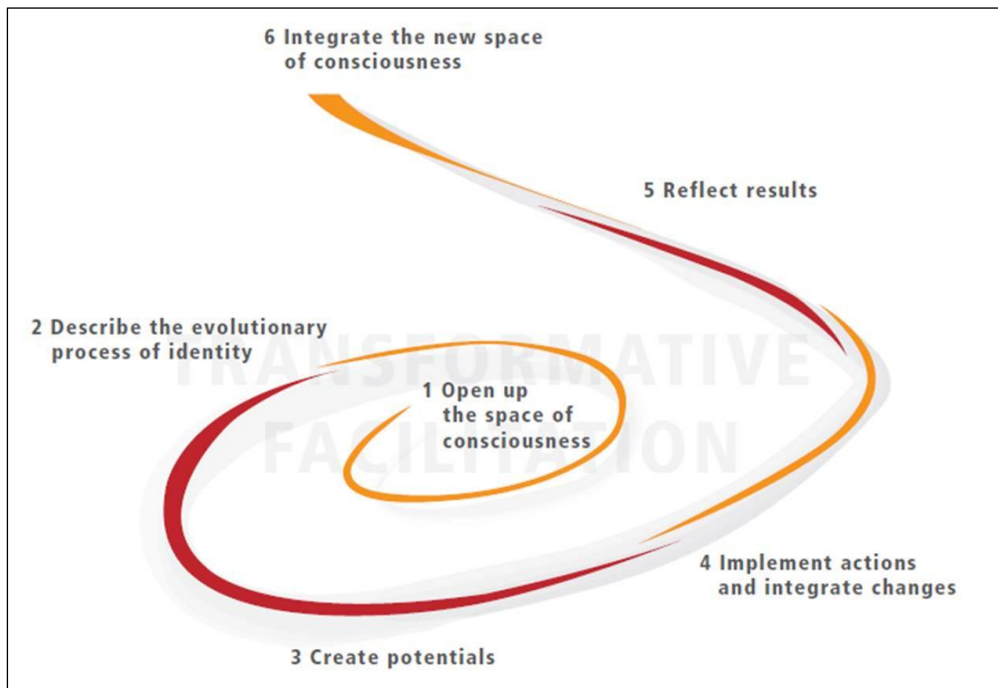
We have both personally worked along those learning curves involved in recognising and accepting the importance of unique settings, universal values, and common capitals. So as facilitators, we feel that we are now better able to support the evolution of our profession towards building essential new bridges. To do this, we use the concept of a transformative spiral to move us on to a higher level of consciousness which creates the conditions for developing better human-centered and more creative solutions.

The spiral is a highly dynamic tool which evolves in the room of potentials. It is not a static model, but works essentially with sense and meaning, with the contributions of the people involved, and with the area of creative possibilities. Our role as transformative facilitators is to go with this spiral flow and to swim or glide along as escorts.

The key to working successfully with the spiral is to open up the space of consciousness through conversation and questions right at the beginning of the process. It is extremely important that everyone involved gets the chance to contribute fully in order to start his/her own learning process. This is a prerequisite to building bridges hand-in-hand. The six sets of questions highlighted in Diagram 5 are examples, and need to be adapted to the specific topic and working group. The questions and the dynamism of the people involved are the critical factors in enabling further development around the spiral within the room of potentials. It is therefore important to approach everyone involved as human beings or as whole entities, and not just by their roles or positions.

We used the spiral very successfully for a global “trouble project” owned by one of the world’s leading insurance companies. A lot of problems arose, because there were disconnects for the project members in understanding and - even harder - in identifying themselves with the assigned roles, tasks, and aims on the one hand, and with the self-concept of the individual human on the other. After each person managed to draw a picture of “Who I am”, “Why I am I working on this project”, and “What are my fears and my hopes?”, it was possible for this very diverse team to define their consciousness level and to create their room of potentials in which they wanted to work. Then, it was a tiny step to commit to the aims and to assign the roles which really could be lived by each individual. The team also set up a procedure to monitor their group consciousness level regularly, and to check if each project member is integrated and committed. Thus far, they have managed to deliver the project’s results much faster, and saved 20% of the estimated project costs.

Diagram 5: The Transformative Spiral For The New Consciousness ⁽⁷⁾



Source: Moench / Schnellbuegel ©

1 OPEN UP THE SPACE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

- Who am I? Who are we?
- What is my/our perspective on life?
- What is the meaning of our actions?
- What kind of knowledge do we have to hand?
- What is our understanding of consciousness?
- ...

2 DESCRIBE THE EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS OF IDENTITY

- What exactly do we want to achieve?
- How do we want to live?
- What are our unique settings?
- What are our common capitals?
- What values do we have and how do we live them?
- ...

3 CREATE POTENTIALS – WORK ON THE CHOSEN TOPIC

- What is our vision for the topic?
- How does it look?
- What do we need to put it into reality?
- How do we get there?
- Which kind of influences are there?
- ...

4 IMPLEMENT ACTIONS

- Projects
- Reviews
- Resources (Hard & Soft Facts)
- Reflect all actions back to the shared vision and the defined level of consciousness.
- Be aware of integrating ongoing changes.
- ...

5 REFLECT RESULTS

- What have we achieved?
- What worked out well? What didn't? Why?
- Do we need to adjust? If yes, what and how?
- How did our consciousness evolve?
- ...

6 INTEGRATE THE NEW SPACE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

- Who are we now?
- Which kind of contribution do we have to make?
- What might be our next steps?
- How do we want to take these steps?
- What kind of knowledge do we now have to hand?
- Celebrate the new leap of consciousness and go on integrating...
- ...

Conclusion: Building future bridges with a transformative spiral structure

In our experience, this aspiration has always been a challenge, as we are not dealing with just a single view, opinion, or even result. People are typically at different levels of consciousness, shaped by their unique settings. This is where facilitative leadership is needed - an approach that does not only think in terms of right or wrong, but which recognises variety as potential and knows how to use it. It is about the acceptance of multi-dimensional options and solutions that can integrate future changes. Getting there is the biggest hurdle, as very often one or at best two-dimensional ways of thinking are still deeply ingrained. Therefore, constantly referring back to the options of the room of potentials is at the core of transformative facilitation.

In today's global and diverse context of living and working together, we have known for a long time that multidimensional observations and solutions are more suitable and promising, if more complex and elusive. Regarding the global challenges that we outlined at the beginning of this article, we firmly believe that this will be our only hope of building robust bridges to our new global future. It will not be easy, because we are not used to it. We have to learn and to practise these new values, capitals, and the integration of the transformative spiral. Our focus will be more upon effectiveness than efficiency, and this is the fundamental change that is necessary in our thinking.

Acting as a transformative facilitator is an adventurous journey – and the fun factor is to get to know yourself better and to learn what life really means for you. This is our call for action - to find out who we are as facilitators, what connects us with others, and how we can contribute to raising and propagating a new WE-consciousness.

So, let's join hands to build creative and robust global bridges over those global challenges to our desired future.



References and websites

The contents of this article are proprietary to Annette and Yoga via their companies, moench networks gmbh and Options & Choices Advisory. Where the content is not ours, it is cited explicitly, such as Maslow.

- 1) Components of unique settings – © Options & Choices Advisory: <http://www.optionsandchoices.asia/ourapproach.html>
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