

Exploring Presence through Mudras

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Our Intention

Through this POD exercise we are exploring how attending to our embodied experiences using postures, or mudras, is a gateway to each person's unique, felt experience of presence.

Creating a Pod Presentation from the Right Brain

Our Pod group process is a living example of our focus on creating an engaging experience for participants from which they can draw their own insights. This approach is in contrast to conventional experiential learning in which there is a clear learning goal with a structured experience.

Rather than following traditional problem-solving steps, our Pod trusted emergence. We found our way forward through successive rounds of creativity, self-inquiry and evaluation. This approach mirrors the shift in the IF faculty's method of Pod formation:

The first round of Pod groups had been formed by participants clustering together in real time around topics of common interest. To form the second round of Pod groups, we formed affinity groups through a process of non-verbal milling, so that one of our first tasks as a Pod was to identify a topic.

First Meeting

We shared ideas about possible topics. We talked about the impact of the first five minutes of a facilitated session, power and the facilitator's relationship to spirituality. None were excluded at this stage.

Instead there were rounds of inquiry in response to such questions as:

- How do you experience power?
- How can we explore the power/vulnerability polarity?
- What's alive in you now?
- What kind of experience do we want to deliver?
- What does and what doesn't bring energy to how we work together?

Our guideline was, "If this becomes hard work we need to re-assess."

Second Meeting

We agreed on an outline design. There would be four stations each directed by a Pod member. Participants, divided into four groups, would rotate from station to station. At each station, one member of the small group would serve as facilitator. The facilitator would be asked to adopt a different physical stance or posture: standing with their back to the group, standing on a chair,

kneeling, etc. Participants would have the opportunity to reflect on the impact of the four different postures.

Third Meeting

We had an extended discussion on how the postures or mudras could be interpreted and presented to participants. Our intention at this point was to enable our cohort to experience the power/vulnerability polarity through physical metaphors for spirituality, centeredness and balance.

- Was the mudra a metaphor?
- Could it be associated with a koan?

We also brainstormed around logistics and the start of the session.

- How do we introduce the topic?
- How and when do we move the participants into four small groups?

At the end of this meeting, we had the following reflections on our own Pod process:

- It's informal, efficient, not overly structured, and much less stressful than the last POD. It feels like just enough work.
- There was a sense of power in our process related to vulnerability. Our Pod members were skilful working with the group's needs while expressing individual perspectives, and yet surrendering to the group.
- There was trust and patience with each other despite our different approaches.
- We all exhibited flex and flow, avoiding getting stuck in perspective and preferences.
- We emphasized appreciation of the experiential and embodiment aspects. We explored the cognitive/conceptual but continued to express a preference for experiential.
- Momentum has kept flowing and none of us has gotten stuck in persistent patterns from the previous Pod project experiences.

Fourth Meeting

At the beginning of the meeting, some of us expressed reservations about our first prototype: It was too complex for the time available. Gabe reminded us that one of the purposes of the Pod presentation was to provide the opportunity for us to demonstrate to staff our abilities as facilitators.

We spent the meeting radically simplifying the design (only two mudras, Pod members as facilitators), increasing participation (everyone holds mudra) and adjusting the time frames.

Fifth Meeting:

We went through the design for our presentation clarifying timing, logistics, timing and roles. We then turned our attention to editing the first draft of this document and agreed to meet one more time at the beginning of the Intensive.

Reflections on our Pod Process

We enjoyed the dance of our work together. Bringing ourselves back to our present embodied experience, and tracking our excitement was refreshing. Our time together was more like play and less like conventional work.

Our process was strongly influenced by Mari and Julian who had worked together on the project "Everyday Tantra: Facilitating from Future as It Emerges" presented at the February intensive. As demonstrated by their previous work, this approach heightens the probability of creating an engaging experience for participants. Potentially, it lowers the probability of fulfilling the assignment given to the Pods: "Explore one integral application related to facilitators and facilitation," as we didn't focus specifically on integral theory when we created the experience.

The Experience

We designed an exercise that explores how magnifying our physical awareness through both centering and off-centering postures, or mudras, can be a gateway to empowering our presence and facilitation.

Set-up

- Four groups of 5-7 chairs in each corner of the room
- Music system
- Song to go with the body scan
- Bell
- Julian assigned to overall time keeping (one-minute warning)
- Brief Atta on cohering the group

Opening-Creating Safety, Priming and Setting Intention

- Music will be playing as Atta is getting people into the room.
- Mari will welcome staff, faculty and cohort to enter the space via a quick Embodiment: Form a circle and enliven body parts to great music track
- Nikki and Mike will Introduce the exercise.
 - *State the intention:* Through this POD exercise we are exploring how attending to our embodied experience using postures, or mudras, is a gateway to our unique felt experience of our presence
 - *Introduce the experience:* Using our body as instrument as we facilitate and communicate, we express and we receive through our physical postures, gestures, facial expressions, and senses: hearing, seeing, energy, emotion. In this session we provide the opportunity to focus on these aspects of ourselves by interfering with our habitual ways of being.
 - *Debrief on logistics:* In a moment we'll break into small groups, and we'll ask you to you to hold a particular body position for the duration of the conversation. The topic of the conversation will be your experience in the moment as you hold this position. We'll keep those same groups and rotate to experience a second mudra, or body position. These instructions will be repeated in your small groups.

- *Move them into groups:* Randomly form four groups by moving to the chairs in the corners of the room. Once there, you will be asked to participate in a conversation facilitated by one of us (Pod members).

Small groups

As a part of the experience, the individual facilitators (Pod members) will be exploring the impact of the respective mudras on their groups and themselves.

First Round Script

I will facilitate a conversation for ten minutes regarding a body posture or mudra. A mudra is a Buddhist practice of holding a body position with the purpose of heightening an experience in the felt-body, or your mood. The first Mudra that I invite you to hold is hands in gassho and eyes closed. [model and invite participants to engage in the mudra; optional: settle into the mudra]

Holding this mudra I want you to reflect on:

- *Inwardly, how are you experiencing the impact of this mudra?*
- *How does this mudra impact your communication with others here now?*

Facilitate a conversation for 10 minutes. Bring the conversation to a close and then provide the following instructions:

We will debrief this experience after we engage in a second Mudra. To release energetically this mudra please stand up and as a group go to [POD member's name, moving the group clockwise in the room].

Second Round Script

Stack/Move chairs as people are moving. Use the same instructions and inquiry with this new mudra as with the first.

Stand on one foot with your weight only on one foot at all times. You can switch feet as needed, but please have only one foot on the ground at a time.

Holding this mudra I want you to reflect on:

- *Inwardly, how are you experiencing the impact of this mudra?*
- *How does this mudra impact your communication with others here now?*

Facilitate a conversation for 10 minutes. Bring the conversation to a close and then debrief within your small group. Do as many rounds as time allows with this sentence stem:

What I noticed during this experience was....

Closing

Julian will bring the groups back into one large circle in silence. Invite them to embody a posture, or mudra, that reflects what is most alive for them right now. Then invite gassho of the whole group.

Conclusion

In exploring the theme of presence through embodied experience we sought to provide an embodied experience that explores this concept. As we are requested to submit this document in advance of our presentation, we cannot comment here on its impact.