

The Rhythm of Difference

Introduction

We came together through the organic process from our last intensive; unplanned connections became a new place to be in. We talked about what we wanted to be different in our pod, and we all resonated with Diane's pointing to 'this should be fun, you guys!' Our first pods were regrettably hard work: How could we feel refreshed and creative, and would that produce something that we'd feel benefited ourselves and the IF community?

Well, we did! Every time we got together we were either tired or rushed or dealing with something, yet we ended with smiles, feelings of having done something very different, and our energy revitalized. We marveled at that. Maria invited us with gentle structures, and we flowed from small beginnings to something jointly improvised and uniquely different in its power - we followed more our instincts than our minds. We want to explore and share our experience as best we can, and we hope you get a taste.

The Framework

We noticed from our POD experience that when coming together, differences can seem threatening and might create separation and conflict when exacerbated or polarized. But when we run from differences we miss the creative, the incisive and the wisdom that may come from contradiction and conflict.

Conversely, while sameness can limit the benefit of difference it can also bring much needed safety, security and connection. We believe that our human tendency is to work together and harmonize so we over-compensate this difference by seeking sameness.

We often compromise and make agreements so that we can all feel safe inside the homogeny of our sameness. But this sameness while blissful for some time, can also be very limiting for the individual, especially with a creative endeavor and when the group wants to push boundaries, expand and innovate.

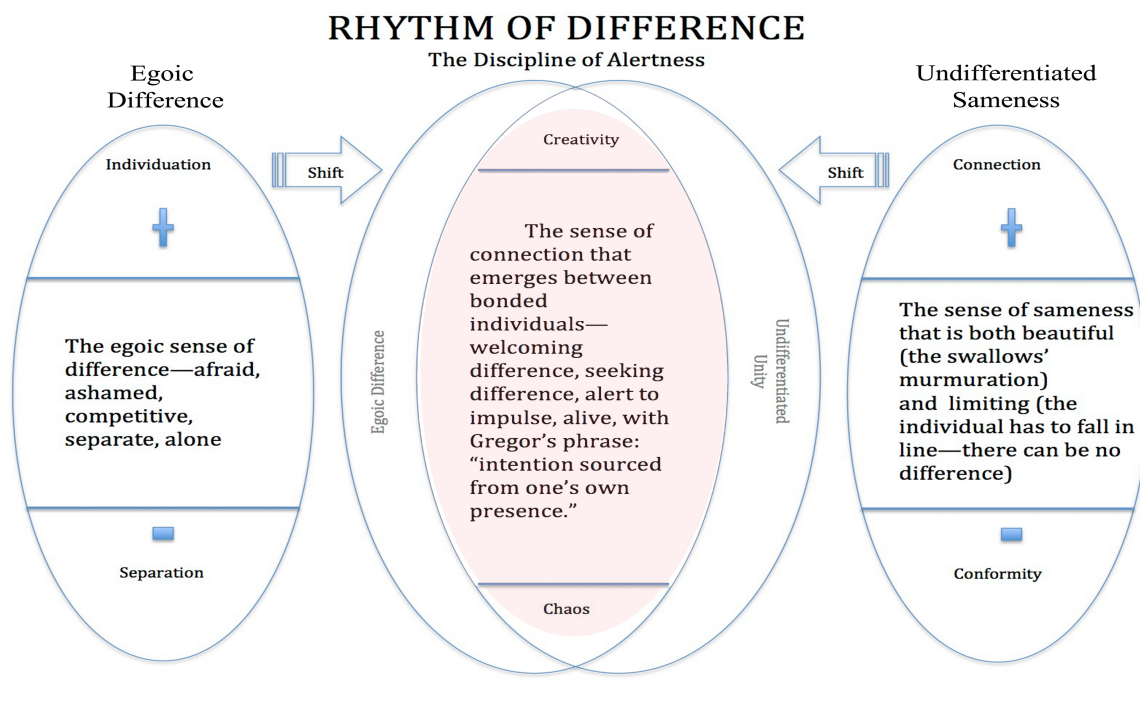
So we wondered as facilitators how can we create the space to harvest what is already happening naturally in our groups in the interplay between sameness and difference. We believe there is a sweet spot for groups in relationship to this difference and sameness that we are calling The Rhythm of Difference, where there's enough sameness and safety to support the difference and risk necessary to be spontaneous, innovative and creative.

In the next few pages we will be discussing tools and applications that helped us in this endeavor of exploration. An important point to make is that we started – and

would start each meeting - with a clear intention to relax and be creative in new ways, and that intention with our ground rules is what generated this framework.

In the interest of space we will not go into depth or details here about intention, but our strong suggestion is that before beginning any process, a facilitator should start by clarifying an intention for him/herself and with the group. This enables the framework to function (an intention to experience awareness in the space of sameness and difference, for example).

Intention will work as a north star on the subtle energies. We experienced this happening like magic every time – playing with seemingly inconsequential moments that at the end of our group calls came together with meaning and coherence toward our initial intention.



The Tools

We found that to make the most out of this sweet spot for deepening relationships and maximizing creativity and collaboration in groups these three tools were necessary:

Alertness:

This is a state of awareness and curiosity about one’s own experience and that of the group. This “alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity,” meaning that we receive each moment with fresh eyes instead of glazing over with our numbing assumptions.

Leveraging the impulse:

It's the instinct of the individual to serve the whole by either stimulating difference and with that activating a "creative chaos" or harmonizing polarizing differences to create coherence.

Playing with the shift:

This is the movement that an individual or group are constantly making, going back and forth from difference to sameness, from difference to sameness that deepens and strengthens relationships creating more trust and ability to risk even greater possibilities for the relationships and what may come from it.

Let's explore each in turn

Alertness

"Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity" ~ David Whyte

- What's been called for in this moment?
- What's called for out of me? Not out of what we think ought to happen or where we think we're going, it's just "what's called for?" out of some essential being of some kind,... and being alert to that... even though we are familiar (to setting or situation) there's an alert edge that is always present

We explored this alertness by making a discernment between the repetition of structure as familiarity and alertness in the curiosity of difference and how we had a need for both... i.e: marching in line like soldiers, 1,2,1,2,1,2 which creates familiar sameness but we also explore the nuances of each step.

- Where is our curiosity?
- Where are we different in our steps? i.e: shorter step, longer? Wider?
- How can we maintain our sameness – the familiarity of structure – but wake up that alertness that arises from the curiosity of the difference?

Leveraging the Impulse

We began by exploring polarity with state experiences, going to the edge of sameness and difference, creating joy and/or anxiety. We asked ourselves:

- What is this impulse?
- Where does it come from?
- When do we follow it?
- When don't we?
- How do we squash it?
- What happens when we don't squash it?
- What happens when we do squash it?
- How does it impact other people?
- Who receives our impulse?

And like this we found the *emergence of impulse*. It happened in connection with other people; we either noticed it or let it go by. We saw that this *impulse* was at the beginning of anything creative.

When we became aware of this impulse we saw we had 2 options:

1. Freeze frame the moment and find out as much as possible.
 - a. What is its voice?
 - b. What informs me?
2. Let it express: say something and see what happens.
 - a. Stay in connection and curious
 - b. What does it serve?
 - c. What is the impact it has on other people?

We created facilitated experiences when we stopped the moment and sensed into this new consciousness that would appear and watched this moment as we decided - going in or going out with it – like putting your hand out to catch something...

- What did it call out?
- “To generate something in everybody when someone speaks states an injunction.” Gilles Duchesne.

This was not a cognitive experience, it was simple and easy for the energy to flow circumventing the part of us that wanted to grab the experience and control it. But instead we really stepped into the part of our brain or ourselves that was just connected, a part that was still “me” but connected to everything else - a very “connected me”. And so we began exploring this polarity: to step into connection while remaining “me”.

Playing with the Shift

We created and set the tone of our experience, invite this playfulness and shift into our creative process and also invited a way to create coherence in the group by creating simple ground rules:

- Be playful together to find the difference between us and use those differences to make what we create more compelling.
- Leverage how we naturally play.
- Be willing for your idea to be changed by others.
- We have the power to change other’s ideas and that can feel mischievous and great. Enjoy it!
- “We don’t have to land this ship!” Be relieved that we don’t need to know where this is going.
- We let go of any sense of where the story needs to go – having an objective – because it is freeing. There’s a space where there’s nothing to do and there’s much to do.
- We stay engaged even when we don’t know what’s going on.
- We play just for play sake.
- Do something familiar and do something risky.

- Structure coherence with personal and collective awareness. Moving with power and fluidity we create alertness.
- Alertness to the moment: notice the overriding thoughts that arise from habitual responses.
- Use Alertness, leveraging the impulse and the play with shift to create an experience of contrast.

The Rhythm of Difference and The 4 Quadrants

To further understand this fluid experience of creativity that was so hard to pin point, we took the lens of the 4 quadrants to dissect it and get to what was essential about this Rhythm of Difference in each quadrant.

UL:

- Values connection within difference.
- Values a space of impulse where we want to feel into (different part of the brain).
- Values feeling a more intuitive energy to bring something that moves from inside. To connect and be present and feel the resistance inside of us, the resistance to “not doing something” or just letting go.
- Values an experience of contrast. Internally: that we feel our preference but also feel “other” and the internal experience of that contrast. Maybe there would be even a rearranging that would happen internally.
- Values being fully present to whatever IS.

UR:

- Suggests experiences of difference and behaviors we will be able to see and physically sense.
- Suggests action: the way I move. How you “are” in the world.
- Suggests contrast: sameness and difference. (Polarity) we experience our authentic expression. We express ourselves – still a “me” – but in service of “other”. And we observe the impacts that happens in our relationships.
- Suggests a practice to being fully present with what IS”.

LR:

- Structure has a beginning, middle and end to this process. What do we need to do so we can enter, be into it in a fully engaged way, and what do we say to tidy it up at the end?
- Structures support what we need in the beginning to be ready to have the middle and an experience and what we need at the end to settle and anchor so that we continue working this information in our lives. Ex: we give precise instructions so everybody can go to the dance like when we were taught to dance we you’re a kid (2 steps forward and back....) and then we go do it. Then everybody starts having fun because there’s music with that and they change direction but they need to remember the pattern. Like this, minimal instructions are given as opposed to “why” we do it.

- The structure allows us to trust the process, to bring minimal “process” and just to let it go to the group and trust it.
- The structure is simple and clear, we allow something that is already there to become clear, exposing and allowing something else to be evident. A minimal structure. To ignite something and stand back.
- Mirroring exercise: people mirroring one person in sameness and then moving with difference until we follow one person again in sameness. (Trust this process... this is how we get our oneness cycling through difference and finding sameness again and again. Pay attention to the discipline of awareness – self-learning experience UL ask popcorn style what was people’s experience. Being fully present is the end result of being able to appreciate difference and engage with it in a “I don’t know what’s coming” way).

LL:

- A culture where everybody is aligned, feeling very together, coherence as they feel the incoherence (this is a valuable place).
- A culture of connection between people. To see and feel it, the texture of the relationship between two people.
- A culture that has an element of curiosity as a whole.
- A culture that is accepting and inviting of difference. A community that celebrates uniqueness and dances/grows with difference.

Applying the Concept

To explore and experience this more deeply set a clear intention and ground to a state of *alertness*. Then, ask someone to stand in the middle of a circle and find their own *impulse* to move spontaneously while other people move as well imitating his or her movements. With this experience we are creating a connection of *sameness* between others and their unique differentiated inner state.

When this feels complete *play with the shift* by asking others to make their own authentic movements and find the difference among each other. Shift again the experience by asking the group to follow and imitate one person and their *impulse*. After a while, shift again to individual movements. This is how we keep our alertness activated and keep making this shift between sameness and difference and in that contrast finding the ebb and flow of our relationship.

At some point allow the flow of the Rhythm of Difference take hold of the group and at any moment anyone following their emerging *impulse*, like Quakers that only stand up to pray when they feel called, connecting to our own sense of call as an experience, the group experiences “sameness... sameness... sameness...” ... until someone has an impulse and brings their call out to initiate a *shift*. This person will take the lead for a while and the group connects to that seeking *sameness*.

As connection increases in the group feelings of energy and power emerge. The moment someone moves - just this moment of being alert - has power. POW! Make

sure to have a container with a clear intention and ground rules - so it's not completely amorphous.

At the end people can move about the room. Some people doing their own thing while others connect. The group has a way of self-organizing in the room however they want. Let changes happen naturally as they create *shifts*. And stay curious:

- How does it create a shift?
- Are there other ways we can create the "shift" as facilitators? i.e. Music.

Benefits:

- Support teams and groups who want to use the power of sameness and difference in their evolution.
- Enable teams and groups to take better decisions and have stronger commitment to agreed processes.
- Increase creativity and innovation in collective decision-making processes.
- Cultivate a quality of alertness necessary to increase self and group awareness about effects that the choices for sameness and differences have at the individual and/or group level.
- Recognize the impulse for the individual or group dynamic to move toward sameness or difference.
- Help build a language to help people articulate the experience of sameness and difference.
- Create trust in groups by exposing vulnerabilities and understanding other's perspectives.
- Bring shadow work safely into a group process.

Conclusion:

As facilitators we can create the necessary tension between safety/sameness and risk/difference to harvest the benefits of this Rhythm of Difference.

We invite you to this kind of intimacy: to be alert to all that is available and waiting for you both in sameness and difference.

Maria Bailey
Gregor Bingham
Kathy Brownback
Gilles Duchesne

Everything is Waiting for You

Your great mistake is to act the drama
as if you were alone. As if life
were a progressive and cunning crime
with no witness to the tiny hidden
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding
out your solo voice You must note
the way the soap dish enables you,
or the window latch grants you freedom.
Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity.
The stairs are your mentor of things
to come, the doors have always been there
to frighten you and invite you,
and the tiny speaker in the phone
is your dream-ladder to divinity.

Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into
the conversation. The kettle is singing
even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots
have left their arrogant aloofness and
seen the good in you at last. All the birds
and creatures of the world are unutterably
themselves. Everything is waiting for you.

David Whyte
from Everything is Waiting for You
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