

## **Disruption in developing self as instrument**

Learning Pod “Mayhem”

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### **Introduction**

Think back to a time when you were facilitating a group where things weren't going 'as planned'. How did you feel? What went 'wrong'? What emerged as a result?

In this paper, Team Mayhem reflects on different types of disruptions and disruptors that can come into a facilitation setting. We explore experiences of disruption and difference, and the energy that is created from those disruptions.

How can we appreciate the energy that disruption brings, how can we include 'disruptors', and how can we transcend and include disruption to reach the goals of a group?

From the Integral framework we have learned that no one is wrong, everyone is having their own experience, and all viewpoints can be considered and welcomed. When we can expand our awareness as facilitators, we can feel the energy of the group, and at the same time maintain an aware presence that is grounded and present. From that place we can *respond* rather than *react* to disruptions in service to a group.

### **Background: Disruption in Facilitation**

Disruption can evidence itself in many forms. Disruptions in flow and congruence can happen in both the subtle and gross domain. For example, during intensives we have been asked to assess the subtle domain with our check in each morning. We have been challenged to feel into the mood of the room and to identify congruence or dissonance in the energy within our group. We have also been taught to experience and explore sameness and difference in our facilitation pod groups and to explore conflict, leveraging resistance. Each of these sessions opened the group and individuals to emotional dissonance which impacted growth and development.

Disruption can also occur in the gross realm. Group participants can influence a physical space in ways that distract, divert, or confuse. Physical disasters or perturbations can occur. Bodies can be out of sync with group process.

The area of learning we would like to explore crosses through and co-mingles with many of the competencies that are identified as practices of an Integral Facilitator. Areas such as Trustable Conscious Influence requires that as facilitators we inhabit full embodied presence and Demonstrated Stable, Open Awareness. Entering disruptions with elegance creates the opportunity to explore our self-as-instrument and is the field in which we demonstrate our awareness, openness and trust ability. Utilizing relational and/or emotional Intelligence, Navigating Group Energetics and Integrating shadow Dynamics, also is an arena for encountering our ability to focus and flow with disruption.

The area of disruption that Mayhem pod would like to highlight in our paper, and share learning space in our group activity, is within STATES, particularly emotions – those fleeting temporary aspects of phenomena found in all quadrants. These STATES of emotions also exist and flow through LINES of development.

### **State Disruption**

Personally disruptive behavior exhibited through state changes in large group facilitation can be dicey and unsettling. Ignoring disruptive behavior, or when we have to, confronting it, can be a scary task. Some of us move against, or play the one-up card, when we are feeling challenged. Others of us shut down and freeze. Some of us choose to ignore the disruption, hoping it will dissipate on its own.

We've found that emotional disruptions are common in groups of individuals at different learning levels, or that hold different worldview perspectives. They are also common in groups that have unformed goals, have not had the time and space to cohere a group identity, or that have porous containers. Emotional disruptions come in many forms: anger, fear, disengagement, grief, humor, joy, etc. These disruptions, as mentioned above, can be creative leverage for a group, if integrated. They can also de-rail a group from achieving its goals. How can a facilitator tell the difference?

Disruption is often masked in indifference or apathy. In the business world we've seen that when someone is not completely bought in on an idea or activity, they often recoil and retract as a way of differentiating. They want the world to know in a subtle way that they do not completely approve and therefore will not give their whole selves to the group. This form of disruption differentiates a group, and when it is not acknowledged and incorporated, can block group process.

Asking a group to actively embrace a disruption—in other words, to embrace change—is often challenging due to the resulting disruption that manifests within the group itself. Even when people recognize that change is needed (e.g., adopting a new business process, agreeing on a project's change in scope, altering the context of a negotiation) the particular method for how that change is implemented can be a flashpoint of disruption. Some may think changes are happening too quickly or too slowly, some may think the wrong changes are being implemented, and some may be hesitant to vocalize any opinions at all. The challenge for the facilitator is that all of these forms of disruption (and more) may be present simultaneously, making it difficult to find coherence and guide the group toward a constructive path.

### **Facilitation Tactics**

We've found that it can be helpful to push and put attention on those presenting the disruption. There is something that sets them on fire and when you give them the chance to express why they aren't passionate about the topic or exercise, they light up and then become passionate about why they're not passionate! Find their button and push it.

We've also found that knowingly posing a suboptimal—but not entirely stupid—solution for the group's consideration can anchor the conversation around specifics. This can help the group

visualize a future (albeit an undesirable one) and create cohesion since the group now has a common rallying point: poking holes in the suboptimal solution. Guiding a respectful yet critical discussion about the suboptimal solution can enhance the feeling of safety within the group, empowering those who may otherwise be reluctant to contribute their views. As the facilitator highlights the “more optimal” ideas that surface within the now much more coherent conversation, the group can take ownership of the change. The interpersonal/conversational disruptions are often diffused in the process. This approach won’t work in every situation and for every group. But in order for this approach to succeed, two elements need to be present: the facilitator can’t be too emotionally invested in their initial sub-optimal proposal, and they must be genuinely supportive of the group’s ultimate decision.

A facilitator can approach emotional disruption with curiosity. This looks like a slight moving towards, sometimes a move to surrender and looking underneath the disruptive behavior or actions. Curiosity can lead the facilitator or the disruptor to discover a new insight, a mystery, or a gem that is worth some exploration in the group. If a disruption feels threatening to a group’s process, ask: Is this threatening to the group or to my ego as a facilitator? How might seeing this individual as expressing a deeper intent of the group guide our process?

Finally, a facilitator can approach emotional disruption using the self as instrument. From Open Awareness, finding the emotional disruption in oneself can support a facilitator in identifying whether this disruption serves the group. By removing a clear ‘I’ from assessing the disruption, a facilitator can more freely and creatively follow the wisdom a disruption may hold.

## **Conclusion**

State disruption in group process is challenging to facilitate. Our human brains and bodies have been tuned to react to emotional disruptions with disruptions within ourselves. By attuning to self as instrument, a facilitator can track their own triggers (e.g., loss of control), mirroring (e.g., am I angry because they’re angry?), and creative possibility (e.g., if I’m feeling a release through humor maybe the group will benefit). And by trusting disruption or exposing the shadows underlying disruption, we can find more creative possibility in a group.