Building Trust Works
Why Inner Work for Social Impact

Synergos 30th Anniversary Paper
Peggy Dulany • December 2017

SYNERGOS

I cannot turn my eyes,
I cannot count the cost
Of all that has been broken,
All that has been lost.
I cannot understand
The suffering that life brings:
War and hate and hunger
And a million other things.
When I've done all that I can
And I try to do my part
Let sorrow be the doorway
To an open heart.
And the light on the hills is full of mercy,
The wind in the trees it comes to save me.
This silence it will never desert me.

I long to hold the whole world in these arms.
May all beings be happy
May all beings be safe
May all beings everywhere be free.

—— Jennifer Berezan, In These Arms,
A Song for All Beings (audio CD)

This song has become my daily meditation.

It helps me shift from despair about what we humans are doing to ourselves, other species and our only planet, to a surrender into the inspiring beauty and healing power of the natural world, and then back to my soul's purpose – to help create the safe spaces from which people can heal themselves and others.

Finally, it leads me into a meditation chant which renews my hope as I imagine joining with so many others who long for and work toward the well-being of our planet and its inhabitants.

Introduction

Since I wrote the 25th Anniversary paper *Approaching the Heart of the Matter* in 2012 for the Synergos family and beyond, we as an organization have been thinking more about how the inner work (or personal transformation for social impact) component of our approach relates to our other strategies:

- Enabling systemic thinking about seemingly intransigent problems
- Building capacity for "bridging leadership"
- Supporting the creation and growing to scale of inclusive partnerships addressing problems relating to poverty.

The connection, put simply, is this: as individuals, understanding our own obstacles to becoming our most effective selves, leads to the ability to be open to trusting others who are different from ourselves; building trust within groups that need to work together to solve complex problems increases the capacity to collaborate; and finally, collaboration around complex problems is critical to reaching sustainable and scalable solutions.

This is the principal focus of this paper.

But first, some reflections that have become clearer to me since writing *Approaching the Heart of the Matter* five years ago. In that paper I spent considerable time exploring the critical role that fear and lack of a sense of safety play in preventing us from becoming our fullest, most effective and connected selves. As in that paper, I begin here with some personal observations and learnings, this time about the qualities we most need to nurture and call upon to become our whole selves.

Reflections on Inner Work Needed to Effectively Do Work in the World

I have been pondering certain words that keep coming to mind, their relationship to each other, and their relevance to Synergos' mission of bringing people together to solve complex problems of poverty and create opportunities for individuals and their communities to thrive. How can our work to enable people to work through inner obstacles and fears by creating a "safe container" foster the necessary conditions for bridging leadership and inclusive partnerships to more effectively address problems in the world? This paper attempts to connect these dots.

I will explore how to create this "safe container" in greater depth in another paper. But for the purposes of this one, here are some elements we have found to be key to allowing the attributes described below to blossom within people, inspiring and enabling them to develop the leadership skills needed to work effectively in the world:

- Working with a group of people committed to exploring how to become their best selves in service to their work, either personally or by creating a sense of common purpose to solve a complex problem together with a group of diverse stakeholders.
- Being held by the beauty of a wild natural environment which mirrors back to them insights about issues they are grappling with, allowing them to perceive and address inner obstacles.
- Facilitation by guides who have done their own inner work and are viewed as trustworthy, vulnerable, authentic and compassionate, and who have mastered a flexible portfolio of methods that can steer participants through the process of becoming their best and most effective leader selves.
- Exposure to music, movement, work in groups and pairs, and time in the wild as ways of getting past the stuck or fearful places inside.

The following are some of the attributes that can counteract and even heal the fears, trauma, shame or rage that present obstacles to effective leadership and collaboration among stakeholders to resolve complex problems.

Trust is a prerequisite for people to feel **safe** enough with each other to dare to speak their truths openly and without fear.

- When we're able to trust others, it becomes easier to listen more attentively to, and even empathize with them.
- It is, in general, fear that prevents us from trusting; fear based on previous experiences or the warnings of a fearful caretaker.
- Trusting ourself is even more important for us to be able to speak and act authentically, thereby becoming more likely to gain the trust of others.
- "We need people in our lives with whom we can be as open as possible. To have real conversations with people may seem like such a simple, obvious suggestion, but it involves courage and risk." — Thomas Merton, *Care of the Soul*.
- Trust is the social glue that holds families, communities, organizations and societies together; without it, reaching any agreement can become a fraught negotiation.

Vulnerability becomes possible when we feel **safe** and risk **trusting**; it involves willingness to share and examine aspects of the self about which we may feel fragile or insecure.

- It is a precursor to both authenticity and the opening of others' hearts and their own willingness to become vulnerable.
- One person dares to share a story with another person or group in a way that is so tender, so authentic that it elicits empathy and gratitude from the listener(s).
- In response to another's moving story, a listener shares an experience which exposes a secret, long-held fear of being shamed, and the gratitude and reciprocal openness which this sharing confirms for the storyteller the positive effect that showing vulnerability can create.
- The sharing of such stories in a group can, along with other factors, lead to a feeling of trust and safety among the participants, which then inspires further courage to explore their vulnerable edges and be more collaborative in joint problem-solving efforts.
- "We live in a world where bearing witness to a stranger's unfiltered story is an act of tremendous compassion. To listen with an open heart and an open mind and try to understand what it's like to be them – why they think like that, dress like that, made the choice they did – takes real courage." — Catherine Burns, *The Moth Presents All These Wonders*.

Authenticity involves recognizing, becoming and acting from our full, "true" self without having to hide behind a mask or persona; it makes us more believable and trustworthy to others.

- As we become clearer about our purpose in life, we feel safe enough to risk saying what we mean and act more consistently in accordance with our beliefs and principles.
- A person who has been boasting about success suddenly feels safe enough to admit to the

underlying insecurity behind the outward bravado, and is amazed by how those listening respond positively to his or her courageous authenticity.

- Others feel more secure and trusting with us because they know where we stand even if they don't agree with our ideas.
- This is a key factor for effective leadership.

Belonging is the sense of being part of a larger whole, as in a group or community or nation; or a sense of connectedness to a Larger Whole, as in the Divine, whether defined in religious or spiritual terms.

- This larger meaning provides a sense of safety that goes beyond the conditional nature of belonging to a human group, for it allows us to feel accompanied in all that we are and do.
- Belonging to a community or group can offer comfort although, in cases of divisions across groups, this can harden the lines and provide a rationale for flare-ups or conflict.
- Attaining a feeling of belonging to oneself brings with it a sense of stability and safety as well: I know and believe in my authentic self enough to trust that I will behave in accordance with my beliefs and principles.

Curiosity opens a gateway to exploration and growth; we get curious when we become less fearful and therefore less judgmental (for these two are often connected), and better able to approach new situations and other people openly and without suspicion or mistrust.

- After allowing ourselves to trust, become vulnerable and more authentic, we also become more open to being curious.
- "There's a common misunderstanding among all the human beings…that the best way to love is to try to avoid pain and just try to get comfortable…A much more interesting, kind adventurous, and joyful approach to life is to begin to develop our curiosity, not caring whether the object of our inquisitiveness is bitter or sweet. To lead a life that goes beyond pettiness and prejudice and always wanting to make sure that everything turns out on our own terms, to lead a more passionate, full, and delightful life than that, we must realize that we can endure a lot of pain and pleasure for the sake of finding out who we are and what this world is, how we tick and how our world ticks, how the whole thing just is." — Pema Chodren, *The Pocket Pema Chodren*.

Beauty inspires awe and **imagination** and the **opening of the heart**, while natural beauty inspires a sense of **connection with the Larger Whole**.

- A sudden summer rainstorm with the awe-inspiring majesty of flashes of lightning and booming crashes of thunder.
- A field of multi-colored wildflowers, sparkling with their unique shapes, perfumes and foliage.
- A beautifully arranged summer salad with vegetables fresh from a local garden, grouped by contrasting colors or in a circle around a central ingredient.
- A piece of art or music so evocative of a scene that it reminds us of something meaningful to us that it brings us to tears – or laughter.
- Fully absorbed in beauty, giving ourselves over to it, we are more open to coming into a state of presence.

Imagination, when released, is a precursor to freeing the mind from its busy plans, regrets, recriminations, wishes and to-do lists, and allows us to move into a space of greater **creativity** and **presence**.

- Our deepest purpose in life is often obscured by the mind's busy activities; to access the "soul," which holds that purpose, we need to engage in activities that allow the thinking mind to step aside; like immersing ourselves in beauty, engaging the physical body in motions like yoga, dance or active exercise, drawing with our non-dominant hand, writing poetry, singing or speaking aloud to other-than-human beings, prayer and meditation.

- Sometimes we feel self-conscious or embarrassed doing these things. We need to remind ourselves how it was as a child, when we spent most of our time playing imaginary games. Life was a flow. Let's let ourselves talk with animals and trees – even rocks! Let our imagination create their responses and honor the wisdom that it brings; to sing out loud songs or chants we make up on the spur of the moment and surprise ourselves with what comes out.
- Out of the free flow of our imagination arise ideas which may initially seem silly to the thinking mind, but which may lead to works of art, valuable inventions and solutions to what had seemed to be insoluble problems – as well as greater clarity about our true purpose and how we want to go about living it.
- "All … transformations have in common … that they begin in the imagination, in hope. To hope is to gamble. It's to bet on the future, on your desires, on the possibility that an open heart and uncertainty is better than gloom and safety." — Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*.
- "By imagination we have the power to be anything we desire to be, through imagination we disarm and transform the violence of the world. Our most intimate as well as our most casual relationships become imaginative as we awaken to 'the mystery hid from the ages.'" — Neville Goddard, *Awakened Imagination.*
- Lawrence LeShan, in *Alternate Realities*, writes about the seemingly mutually exclusive belief systems that humans hold and the beneficial role that each plays in the richness of our lives and our ability to achieve higher consciousness. Because proponents of each of these systems believe that none of the others has any validity, it takes an act of imagination to hold aspects of all of them as valid and true in their own way despite apparent "proof" to the contrary. This allows us, for example, to see the existence of God and a scientific-rational approach as equally valid.

Creativity, like imagination, can get bogged down by too much rational thinking, and is certainly impeded by too much worrying, mistrust, fear and shame.

- Opening to imagination offers a direct route to releasing creativity. Both stem from the same flow state.
- The flow state can be stimulated by releasing tension in the body. This happens through breathing deeply, moving the body aerobically to release calming endorphins or sounding out loud the emotions stemming from fear, shame, rage – or joy.
- Beauty, too, can stimulate creativity. Who among us has not written or appreciated a poem dedicated to the beauty of a vase, a flower, a young woman, a painting?
- And love, the great path to opening the heart and entering a flow state, is another natural stimulator of our creative juices.
- Intransigent problems in the world need all the creativity we humans can bring to generate solutions.

Humility is the opposite of arrogance, which usually stems from covering up insecurities or feelings of not being good enough. It allows us to give up the masks and defenses with which we bolster our egos.

- It stems from knowing we are part of something greater than ourselves, which then eliminates any shame for what we do not know.
- It fosters a stance of "beginner's mind" and opens us to curiosity to learn more – an endearing and refreshing quality to those who sense our genuine desire to learn from them and others.
- It provides a model for others who feel a need to prove themselves by demonstrating how much they know.
- It takes the threat and competitiveness out of the air and opens the field to more creative and collaborative exploration of how to approach a given problem.

Gratitude is a consummate heart-opener and is often inspired by experiencing **beauty**, feeling **trusting and safe**, and having a sense of **belonging**.

- When our heart is open we are able to listen more empathically to others, thereby increasing the likelihood of engendering their trust.

- When we feel grateful, our fears diminish and we are able to approach the world and others in a more loving way, earning reciprocity from others and making it easier to solve conflicts and problems.
- In a state of gratitude we can be more present to whatever is in the moment and more creative and collaborative in our problem solving.
- Being exposed to beauty, time in wild Nature, being released into our imagination and creativity and time spent in a trusting circle of friends and colleagues can all generate gratitude.

Love, and our access to feeling it, is the ultimate vehicle for showing **compassion** and, in turn, for stimulating others to open their hearts to feelings and expressions of love.

- The genuine expression of personal or transpersonal love can create a field within which others begin to feel safe enough to trust, to allow themselves to be vulnerable, to risk showing their authentic selves and to reciprocate with their own love, thereby amplifying the field.
- Human love, however, is fraught with all the insecurities and fears that characterize us as human beings; without that love being connected to a sense of a Larger Whole which offers the possibility for unconditional love, we tend to regress to closed-heartedness under threat or pressure.
- This bring us back to connection with wild Nature as a pathway to experiencing the infinite love of the Divine, to heart-opening beauty, to our imagination and to our essential creativity which, connected with love and gratitude, open the way to people working together to solve intransigent problems.

Presence is often defined as "being in the moment," in an "alpha," or single-focus place, as occurs in meditation, and as opposed to multi-tasking or "monkey mind."
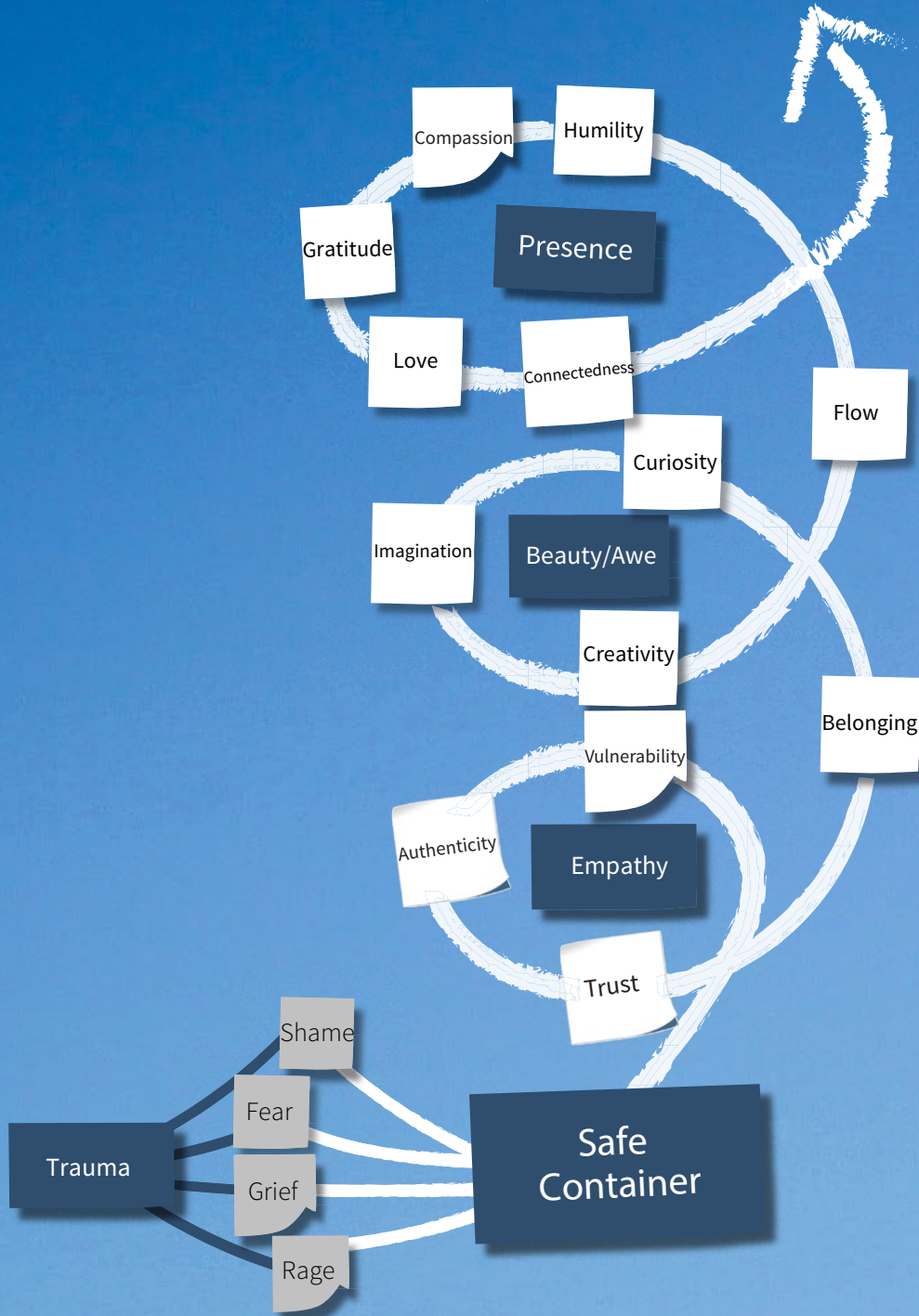
- It allows us to attend fully to the thought, the task or the person or group at hand. Nothing else distracts our attention.
- "Empathy is full presence to what's alive in the other person at this moment." — John Cunningham
- This is increasingly difficult in a heavily populated, internet-connected world where our attention is called in so many directions.
- Yet being in a state of presence that allows us to listen fully to people and our surroundings (and our own inner wisdom) is more than ever needed to enable us to collect ourselves, connect and reconnect to our true purpose and act from an authentic place of clarity that communicates trustworthiness.

- "Listening is the powerful, soothing agent of all communication. Listening is the best tool there is to lower anxiety, diminish division, and open into sameness, into togetherness. Listening will help almost anyone who is triggered to calm down. The deeply beautiful and profound thirteenth-century Persian poet Rumi says, 'Beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there.' Listening is a gateway into that open field." — Diane Musho Hamilton, *The Zen of You and Me*.

The following graphic representation of the spiraling evolution from Trauma to a Serving with Love is one way of viewing the evolution of the inner work required to become our most effective self in service to our work. It is not intended to be linear, as different people may begin at different points and develop first around the attributes in which they already feel strong. And trauma, when triggered, requires a continued practice of coming back to center. The graphic, together with the text, is intended to demonstrate the inter-connectedness of the different attributes described and their relevance to effective work in the world.

Serving with love

Compassion · Humility · Presence · Gratitude · Love · Connectedness · Flow · Curiosity · Imagination · Beauty/Awe · Creativity · Belonging · Vulnerability · Authenticity · Empathy · Trust · Shame · Fear · Grief · Rage · Trauma · Safe Container

The World Out There and the Challenges We Face

Over these thirty years of Synergos' existence, the world has not remained static, requiring us to keep adapting our strategies even as we felt we were moving in the right direction. Mega-trends like population growth and climate change have led to desertification and deforestation, resulting in mass migration of humans, mass extinction of animal species and plant biodiversity, increased numbers of conflicts, a trend toward more repressive governments, and reactionary politics designed to favor the majority in power and keep out the "other." Despite successful global efforts to reduce poverty, the gap between rich and poor has increased dramatically.

The development and expansion of the internet and ease of transportation have had positive impacts but have also facilitated the growth of illegal human, endangered animal, drugs and arms trades and the diversification of corruption into forms that are harder to trace. At the same time, the wide availability of cell phones and cell phone technology has given vastly greater numbers of people more access to information, both social and technical.

As many population groups have become more aware of their rights, legislation in some countries has become more restrictive of them. Advances in health care have made it possible to prevent and cure more diseases, but unequal access to preventive care and medicines has led to a growing disparity in who benefits from them. And changes in job availability and the types of jobs that will grow in the future have advantaged those able to access the education that will prepare them and left millions of others without any prospect of regular work or income; resulting in widening disparity in income in many societies.

For those of us dedicated to figuring out what equations could lead to more sustainable, just and harmonious societies, absorbing the implications of these trends, positive and negative, has been like chasing a train that is speeding up but whose maniacal operator is nowhere to be seen. We tried running faster to keep up with the pace of change, only to exhaust ourselves and see much of what we had viewed as signs of progress be overrun and overturned.

We were each involved in our own efforts, mostly geared in the same direction; but the sum of our parts was increasingly insufficient to reverse or even slow down the trends – or the train.

The Development of a More Integrated Strategy for Inner Change and Outer Impact

It was even tempting to give up. I moved to Montana in the fall of 1997, confused, worn out and only knowing that I somehow had to renew myself and search for something that was missing in my life. It was not that I thought our approaches were wrong; they were simply not enough, and somehow not integrated into a more holistic strategy.

In the nineties and beyond, we at Synergos remained convinced that working together in inclusive, multi-stakeholder partnerships was a necessary strategy for creating sustainable solutions. We intuitively believed this even before there were many well-documented cases of effective efforts in this direction. But we were not yet connecting the successful execution and realization of lasting results to the need for inner growth of the individuals engaged in these partnerships as facilitators or participants.

We had spent close to a decade supporting the creation and strengthening of a movement of community foundations around the world. We had come to realize that what we called "bridging organizations" were a key factor in the social glue necessary to convene and sustain collaborative efforts. These foundations, whose feet were in the grassroots communities which they served but whose boards and staff often had a broader reach to other segments of society and hence could bridge across the divides, seemed an ideal structure to play such a role.

Recognizing and nurturing bridging leadership

Part-way into this decade-long initiative, we began to notice that the kinds of leaders who gravitated toward these community foundations themselves exhibited a capacity to convene diverse people and bridge across the divides that existed. That led to an exploration into what the key qualities of a "bridging leader" were, as there seemed to be a need not only for bridging organizations, but also for leaders who were predisposed to work in collaboration with others.

Much of this phase is described in more detail in Synergos' twentieth anniversary paper, *What's Missing?*, which chronicled our lessons learned up to that point, and in *Approaching the Heart of the Matter*. By that time we realized that the capacity to bridge across divides was a key prerequisite for bringing people into trusting collaboration with each other. But we were also beginning to recognize that most people had internal obstacles that were preventing them from realizing their full potential as bridging leaders. These ranged from being self-centered and ego-driven, to being fearful of taking risks, to being stuck in existing paradigms when collaboration required greater trust and imagination. How, then, were we to address what was essentially an individual-by-individual issue in a way that could ultimately help them work together better?

The obstacles within myself became obvious when I was living and writing in a small cabin in Montana, without the excuses of a busy life and too many responsibilities keeping me from being able to address them. I realized that I was missing a sense of connectedness to the Larger Whole (God, the Divine, Earth) that could enable me to be resilient in times of despair and disconnectedness – personal or about the state of humanity and our planet. I gradually found a source of connectedness from the large stretches of time I spent in the wilds of the mountains there, living through the radically changing seasons, among the remarkable trees that offered such solidity and comfort and the diverse animal population of the Greater Yellowstone region.

Yet it took some time – and participating in a number of guided wilderness retreats – to understand how the long process of seeing and gradually overcoming these obstacles in myself could be relevant to Synergos' larger mission of overcoming poverty through working

in inclusive partnerships. My forthcoming book, *Out of Time*, written over the subsequent two decades, chronicles my efforts to more fully realize myself in order to be able to facilitate others to overcome their inner obstacles.

Connecting to purpose and overcoming fear

We were greatly helped as an organization to begin making this connection through our work with Generon (specifically Joseph Jaworski, Adam Kahane, Susan Taylor, Joe McCarron and Tom Rautenberg) and some colleagues to whom they introduced us (Michael Rennie of McKinsey and Paul Collings, an independent consultant). We started to work together on two fronts: the first was a joint engagement with Unilever and UNICEF to build a large-scale partnership to reduce child undernutrition in the State of Maharashtra, India. The second was the design and execution of what became a cornerstone of Synergos' inner work focus: a series of week-long retreats, initially for members of the Global Philanthropists Circle (and later to include members of our staff, board, civil society networks and a few others). These enabled participants to step back from their daily lives to reflect on their deepest purpose in life and to work from there to become their most effective selves.

The personal purpose retreats were similar to that in which the stakeholders in the India Bhavishya partnership participated, so we had a chance to see their impact in both professional and personal settings. The impact on the individuals was the same in both cases; but the one that built trust and common ground for reducing child undernutrition in the 100-million-population state of Maharashtra added a dimension beyond personal develop-

ment. It created a network of people who extended their relations of trust and collaboration beyond their current jobs and the districts of the state where they were working at the time. This led to the end result of a decrease in severe stunting of children under five statewide from 39% to 23% over the six years of the initiative. This was an impact far greater than we could have hoped for when the project ended with only four pilot projects in five districts of the state.

As our work offering these retreats advanced, we were joined by able guides from Animas Valley Institute[1] as well as the diverse and able contributions of other guides.[2]

Looking back over the work that Synergos has done in facilitating inclusive partnerships and building capacity of bridging leaders, it is now easier to see the relationship between the attributes I describe at the beginning of this paper and the eventual scalable success that resulted from these initiatives.

The Synergos approach: Building trust works

A recent experience from our work in Ethiopia illustrates the power of this integrated approach. Program delivery unit members of the federal and regional governments participated in a learning journey to a remote and highly conflicted northern region of the country, designed with the objective to better understand the causes of child under-nutrition by immersing themselves in the shared context.

The situation was so dire that some participants seemed to be walling off their feelings about it. On the other hand, their trust in the skilled Ethiopian facilitators allowed them to participate in the exercises designed to connect them to those very feelings as a way of inviting shared vulnerability in the face of such tragic circumstances. And the faith that the Ethiopian facilitators had in the capacity of their Namibian counterparts helped to extend what we call "chains of trust" to them as well. What our facilitators demonstrate is a deep love and commitment to the work and the people they serve.

So when they led an exercise called "Standing in the Shoes of the Other," one man's breakthrough led to a melting into feelings of the entire group, which resulted in the group bonding, trusting and becoming more creative and committed to the work ahead.

The man related that he had grown up in the community the group had just visited, which had not been in such dire circumstances when he was living there. He was fortunate to have been able to pursue his education and secure a position in the government to join a new initiative to address problems of malnutrition.

At this point in his narrative, he broke down into tears, "standing in the shoes" of the woman in his home community with whom he had spoken the day before, telling her story. And

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1   Annie Bloom, Bill Plotkin, Peter Scanlan and Jade Sherer
2   Tony Weller, Barry Walker, Hannibal Anderson, Guibert de Marmol and Barb Holliday

the rest of the group, including the facilitators, broke down with him. This changed the nature – and the potential – of this learning journey and improved the likelihood of success for addressing the problem in the future because of enhanced trust within the group and commitment to finding creative solutions.

But this exercise was not the only key element of this carefully facilitated process. Part of the problem in the first place was that groups across the border between neighboring regions had been in violent conflict with each other, which had rendered the area virtually inaccessible to outside support.

Synergos' Country Director Abera Tola, himself an exemplary bridging leader with credibility in several regions of the country, took advantage of this visit to invite the presidents of each region to attend part of the workshop. In the course of their presentations, it became apparent to each that the serious nature of the problems each local population was facing was in fact exacerbated by the conflict and that they actually had a mutual interest in signing an agreement to cease hostilities and collaborate on finding solutions to the high rate of poverty and malnutrition.

It is not rocket science to see why the trends I mention on page 17 could break down the social structures that create safety for families and communities as well as the trust and sense of belonging that are the social glue for well-functioning societies. People who don't feel safe with each other are less likely to allow themselves to show vulnerability to others; hence they seem less authentic and are, therefore, less likely to be trusted, thereby precipitating a vicious

cycle of social breakdown.

People living in fear are less likely to surrender to the wonders of beauty, feel curiosity as they explore options, or have access to feelings of gratitude or love beyond their innermost circle. They are more likely to "circle the wagons," closing out all but family, clan or most trusted friends. Fear does not stimulate the use of imagination or greater creativity. It is much more difficult to be fully present under these circumstances. Religious or spiritual beliefs can provide immense comfort and make drastic circumstances more bearable. But they do not, by themselves, solve problems relating to poverty, social injustice or planetary degradation.

To address these kinds of problems, trust must be rebuilt across all the different kinds of divides that are created when there is scarcity and conflict.

This means finding ways to create safe containers in which people can encounter each other outside the immediate circumstances that divide them[3] – witness the afore-mentioned example from Ethiopia.

We have found the following sequence of activities, taken together and not necessarily in any particular order, to allow for such a rebuilding of trust. The overall sequence of activities listed below is an elaboration of the U Process.[4] We initially used this process in the successful

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3   This was the critical factor identified by Robert Putnam in *Making Democracy Work*, which explored why Northern Italy functions so much better than Southern Italy. The defining correlation between the higher "social capital" and success of Northern vs. Southern Italy turned out to be the greater number of choral societies and soccer clubs in the former. These enabled people to come together in social gatherings, thereby building trust in each other across barriers of class, religion or ideology. And this, in turn, made it easier for them to resolve problems when conflicts or difficulties arose.

4   C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges*, (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009); Peter

Bhavishya Alliance with Generon, and subsequently with Otto Scharmer and members of the Presencing Institute to reduce maternal and child mortality in Namibia and to improve government capacity to improve livelihoods and productivity of small agricultural producers in Ethiopia.

- Identify the potential or already realized bridging leaders from all relevant sectors who are stakeholders in the problem at hand and provide them with the opportunity to think together systemically about the nature of the problem; in particular, to visit best- and worst-case examples over a period of days during which they are likely to see and appreciate the nature of the problem through each others' quite different perspectives. Time spent in these learning journeys also contributes to building trust among the stakeholders.
- Over the course of the problem-solving initiative, provide opportunities for the identified stakeholders to enhance their skills in bridging across divides through workshops and reflective exercises that allow them to recognize their inner obstacles to being effective and to better understand the external societal, political or economic factors that work against the resolution of the problem.
- At some point during the initiative, take the participants on a retreat that allows them to step back from the problem at hand and reflect on their own purpose in life. These retreats further strengthen the bonds of trust and sense of safety among the participants. This, in turn, allows them to risk becoming more vulnerable and authentic with each other.
- The deep dive into a guided solo self-exploration lasting several days, in the context of a

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M. Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers, *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*, (New York, Crown Business, 2008).

safe group, allows participants to sink into stillness and presence, which gives free rein to their imagination and creativity.

- The field of trust and love that is created as the group comes back together allows for brainstorming from the heart as well as the mind, enabling the group to reach mutually agreed upon solutions.
- The core group members then engage in the complicated process of getting buy-in from their respective constituencies; which leads to an iterative spiraling out of the original process to more and more people, thereby allowing for scaling the results.
- It is the trust and mutual support that the stakeholders develop among themselves that enable them to withstand the challenges they face in extending what they have learned to others.
- And it is the personal growth and self-realization that give them the patience and empathy to bring others through the difficult process of confronting their own inner obstacles.
- Synergos' forthcoming case study series on successful examples of inclusive partnerships in which bridging leadership played a key role will provide rich comparative data on how this process has played out in widely different cultures around different kinds of problems.

This process is laid out in a simplified and, to some extent, idealized way. There are always challenges in each phase. There are cultural differences that require adaptation. But with thirty years of experience filled with trials and errors, we now feel closer to proof of concept for Synergos' four integrated strategies which, together, lead to scalable, sustainable solutions.

And it is much clearer to us now what the relationship is between the inner work required to allow people to realize their full potential and become good bridging leaders, on the one hand, and the facilitation of successful, large-scale inclusive partnerships that successfully impact complex problems of poverty.

Our next steps will be to refine, monitor and evaluate the efficacy of each of these strategies and their impacts in order to improve our ability to strengthen the capacity of individuals and organizations to employ these methods in an integrated fashion in their own work.

Our gratitude goes out to all the partners who have worked with us to get this far.

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