

## **Building Capacity for Collaborative, Inclusive Problem Solving**

In working with people of diverse communities to promote inclusion, I discovered that creating an inclusive space remains elusive, even for people who are committed to doing important work for social good. I offer a framework for building capacity for those committed to cultivating inclusive spaces.

Our well intentioned actions to help those less fortunate, when motivated by an unhealed state, may inadvertently shoot arrows at those we claim to defend from injustice. Though systemically oppressed people may develop the capacity to deflect these 'second' arrows and see them as unintended side effects of good intention; at some point, it is our responsibility as those who work for social justice to bring wholeness to our efforts.

*Jack joins a retreat planning committee and John proposes that the retreat be located at a beautiful country facility where the group can discuss matters of social injustice and oppression. Jack notes that this facility is remote and expensive, and wonders aloud whether people of limited resources may have difficulty accessing the retreat. John ignores this comment and reasserts his preference for the facility, as a long standing member of the community others do not express different opinions; it is decided that the retreat will be held at the expensive facility. Jack feels sad that those people from his community who may benefit from the retreat likely will not be able to join; he recognizes that he has received an unintentional arrow from an unaware "helper." He sits patiently and when he no longer feels fear or hurt, he asks John, "Why have you shot this arrow?" And John, who is unaware responds earnestly, "I did not shoot an arrow." As Jack sits patiently, John, whose identity as 'good guy' fighting against injustice, blinds him from seeing himself, becomes indignant and hears the statement of an alternative perspective as an accusation, John responds angrily, "I would never shoot an arrow. I am not an archer, I am a pacifist and I worked my whole life for social justice." Jack pauses, gently embracing the despair that touches his heart, as he encounters the same difficulty he faces daily this time expressed by the community who purports to 'want to help' and include people in his situation, and he says, "Yes, I understand that you are a champion of justice, that is why we are here together." Will Jack remain open to trusting John? Would you? What effort has John made to bring a capacity for inclusion to his lifetime of social justice work? Until we can fully embrace the truth of our wholeness, we may have difficulty earning trust of those who have been chronically oppressed in order to work together to end injustice.*

If we act in haste to challenge injustice, we bring our blindness, (we do not see ourselves in wholeness), deafness (we do not hear because we do not ask/listen) and arrogance (we ignore guidance from those we claim to help because we know better). Let us learn to be social architects, and together, I + U HALT injustice.

## A. Becoming Social Architects: Together, I + U HALT Injustice

As social architects, we create spaces that invite dialogue necessary to tackle difficult social issues, to heal legacies of injustice, to solve disparities, and to build together an inclusive future. Much like an architect trains to understand principles of design, materials, physics to build a new structure, we, as social architects, must train our capacity to facilitate the social change we envision. To hold a space that allows for diverse perspectives and promotes collaborative, inclusive problem solving takes effort. *Demonstrating our determination to participate in collaborative, inclusive problem solving, we prepare diligently by cultivating our capacity, so that I+U HALT injustice.*

Building capacity is not a destination; it is an ongoing process of intending, cultivating, deepening, and expanding how we are. The “I+U HALT” injustice framework<sup>1</sup> outlines six building blocks of capacity that support sharing our power. The list is not intended to be exhaustive, nor exclusive, rather it offers a starting point to build one’s capacity for inclusive problem solving. I+U HALT is an acronym for the qualities we need to cultivate: Integrity, Understanding, Humility, Awareness, Legitimacy, and Trustworthiness.

### 1. Cultivating Integrity

Cultivating the capacity for integrity means that we want to live in congruity<sup>2</sup> and embrace our wholeness.<sup>3</sup>

Congruity means to live in harmony such that one’s thoughts, speech, and actions align. This does not mean that one holds rigidly to any particular ideology at any cost, for example, when a person who opposes war on the grounds of pacifism protests using hate-filled language and acting with violence, s/he may be holding firmly to the ideology for ‘no war’, but the actions no longer align with the stated beliefs. *Thus, to aspire to live in congruity, one brings a determination to live in harmony with the truth of oneself, not holding to fixed views, rather open to what is happening in the present moment.* Congruity demands of us that if we want to condemn another’s conduct that we have the capacity to be honest about our

---

<sup>1</sup> This tool integrates insights and teachings of many. Primary influencing resources: Thich Nhat Hanh, Interbeing, Parallax Press; Joseph Schaeffer, The Stone People: Living Together in a Different World; bell hooks, Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope; and the inclusive role models and mentors: E. Nathaniel Gates, Nancy Nevelhoff Dubler, Hon. Maria-Elena James.

<sup>2</sup> With gratitude for the congruity concept to the inspiring, passionate, creative September Williams, MD, bioethicist, physician, filmmaker of “When We Are Asked.”

<sup>3</sup> See. Kate Ettinger, Reclaiming Wholeness: Passive Participation in Conflict under section War, Reconciliation, Healing.

conduct. This leads to the second aspect of integrity - the complement to congruity, which is a thirst to live in wholeness.

Cultivating the capacity to live in wholeness invites us to tell the whole story of who we are –who we say we are, who we are that we don't admit, and who we are that we don't see<sup>4</sup> - the dark side of the light chaser<sup>5</sup>, or 'shadow' work<sup>6</sup>. *To cultivate the capacity to live in wholeness means that we practice deepening our awareness of who we are in all aspects of our life and that we cultivate the capacity to see the things that we may fear and resist seeing in ourselves; wholeness demands ruthless honesty and transparency.* If we espouse that we 'stand' for a particular idea, we have the capacity to honestly reflect on our consistency to live with that idea.

Congruity and wholeness are mutually informing, complementary feedback loops, as we become more aware of our wholeness, we put more effort into strengthening our congruity and as we focus on living in congruity and attend diligently to our thoughts, speech, and actions, we deepen our view of ourselves – expanding our wholeness.

## **2. Cultivating Understanding**

Understanding<sup>7</sup> is a bi-directional activity comprised of four components: to listening deeply to another person; to want to hear and understand the other person, to want to share with another, and to want to be understood by the other person.

In order to offer understanding and listen to another, we must first be able to hear ourselves. Cultivating the capacity to listen to oneself is not something that we are taught to do; it requires not only the capacity to quiet the noise in our head, it also invites us to understand the noise in our head. If we can cultivate the capacity to hear the noise in our head and to see it – we can inquire what is this feeling? what does it want? what is it grasping? or craving? This way we increase our awareness about what motivates our actions and we may release the feeling for what it is – a fleeting thought<sup>8</sup>. Developing the capacity to understand the underlying motives of our thoughts may help us to catch habits early and to transform them. For example, if we see that we keep thinking about an event that created a lot of anger, we might inquire to that memory, why do I choose to return to this moment of being angry? Is it really anger or something else? What in that situation caused me to feel angry? What was I craving or grasping before I felt this kind of anger? I might discover, I wanted to receive approval, and I didn't receive it, so I became angry. The next time, I experience this sensation of anger, I might ask myself, was there something

---

<sup>4</sup> Imago Theory; including Getting the Love You Want, Harville Hendrix

<sup>5</sup> The Dark Side of the Light Chaser, Debbie Ford.

<sup>6</sup> The Four Fold Way, Angeles Arrien.

<sup>7</sup> With gratitude for hearing a "U" to my insightful, inspired colleague and friend Rhonda McGee, Esq., Professor, University of San Francisco School of Law, San Francisco, CA.

<sup>8</sup> Informed by Stephen Batchelor, Buddhism Without Beliefs. Riverhead Books.

here that suggests that I wanted approval. If it is a different cause, then I can repeat the previous exercise to deepen my awareness. If it is the same grasping for approval, then rather than dwell on the new experience, I can release it very quickly and not get stuck on it. Some people have the capacity to release the emotion, to see it for what it is and let it go. Others may feel stuck in a struggle to shake feelings of anger, hurt, or despair; self-empathy<sup>9</sup> can be a tool to overcome this kind of 'stuckness.' Using the non-violent communication model, one can seek to understand the need underlying the feeling, then ask oneself what one can do for oneself to meet that need. Having the capacity to hear, understand, and manage one's own noise enables one to be fully present with oneself, greatly facilitating the capacity to be present to understand another.

To cultivate the capacity to understand another, one must desire both to hear and to understand the other person. Listening deeply assumes that one has the capacity to be present for the other person with a quiet mind. For those who do not yet have the capacity to be fully present in deep listening, one can begin with a practice of listening for the layers- the layers of content, emotion, and identity.<sup>10</sup> For example, John shared he had worked for many years in social justice (content), he expressed his anger and hurt (emotion), he sees himself as a 'good guy' and 'fighter against injustice' (identity). To be shown a mirror that reflected that he acted in a non-inclusive manner threatened John's identity prompting his emotional response of anger and hurt. These are the layers that Jack hears and responds to in his final comment to John.

When one listens to another, it is easy to assume that we understand what the other is saying based upon our own experience, but when we are listening to understand, we make an effort to clarify to hear what the speaker tells us about his experience. When John says "I'm not an archer", John silences Jack's perspective. A response from a listener who seeks to understand might be, "would you share more about your experience?" Likewise, John's response "I worked my whole life in social justice" denies the opportunity to understand Jack's experience and assumes John and Jack have the same vision of social justice. Jack seeks inclusion of people suffering under social injustice and those who support them; John seeks a comfortable retreat place and chooses whom to include based upon his preference.

When we cultivate the capacity to understand, we prepare to engage in sensemaking<sup>11</sup>. Sense making assumes that we must "make sense without complete instruction in a reality, which is in flux and requires continued sense making". Sense making emphasizes the importance of "reaching out to the sense

---

<sup>9</sup> Workshop on NVC for Diversity: Race, Class, Gender 2005. Non-violent Communication, Marshal Rosenberg, Puddledance Press, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Stone D, Patton, B., Heen, S. Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most. Penguin Books 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Dervin, B. Chaos, Order, and Sense-Making: A Proposed Theory for Information Design. in Information Design. ed. Jacobsen, R. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1999.

made by others, in order to understand what insights it may provide into our continuing human dilemma.” Sensemaking is not rooted (as most calls for understanding difference are) only in a relativistic epistemology but rather in the assumption that *humans must muddle through together and that their usual tools assuming a wholly ordered reality are inadequate for making sense of all their experiences in a world that is both ordered and chaotic.*”

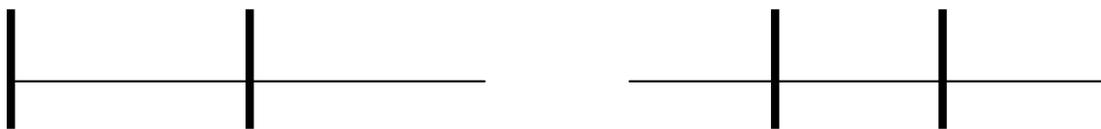
Cultivating understanding asks us to understand ourselves sufficiently to embark on a journey of understanding others as a bi-directional, dynamic and changing process that happens in the present moment. We realize that our lens on life is imperfect and incomplete, and we embark on a journey with the enthusiasm of a traveler exploring a new world.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Cultivating Humility

To cultivate humility in this context asks that we see the assumptions that underpin what we know and how we see the world; it asks us to recognize that others may have different views. We cultivate the capacity for cultural humility by examining our own perspectives, so that we may listen more effectively to different perspectives.

#### Diverging Perspectives and Variations<sup>13</sup>

How does your environment/experience influence your perspective?



(a)

(b)

#### Are the bold vertical lines the same or different lengths?

- (a) People acculturated to perspective see the right-hand line as longer than the left.
- (b) As background lines do not suggest a perspective, one can see the lines are the same length.

---

<sup>12</sup> Now let us shift... the path of *conocimiento*... inner work, public acts by Gloria E. Anzaldua

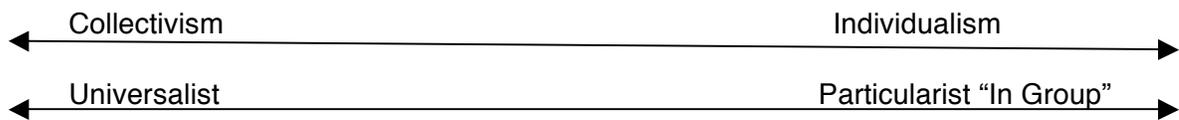
<sup>13</sup> Whitehouse, Roger. *The Uniqueness of Individual Perception*, in *Information Design*, ed. Jacobsen, R. MIT Press, 1999.

When have the capacity for humility, we step back from the things we ‘know’ and we do not assume to know another’s experience. We are able to recognize our assumptions, to question what we know without fear, and to hear/see fully the experience of another without defense.

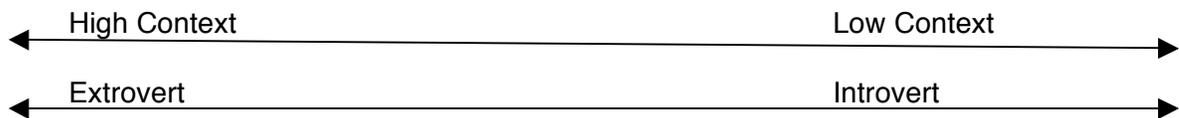
Below are continuums where perspectives are known to vary. It is important not to think of these variations in order to “categorize” people. Rather, these divergences provide an opportunity for you to begin to recognize the preferences that inform how you see the world. Applying this skill to the familiar aspects of your daily life is the essence of “cultural humility” and developing the ability to ask questions with open-hearted curiosity about what things mean to another person gives you the opportunity to become an explorer in the adventure of everyday life.

**Figure 2. Continuums that underpin conflict.** <sup>14</sup>

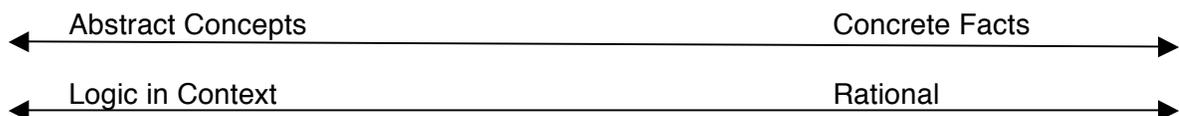
#### Variations that arise around **Social Structure**



#### Variations that may arise around **Communication**



#### Variations that arise around **Information**



---

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from Avruch K, Culture & Conflict Resolution, United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998. Chew PK, The Conflict & Culture Reader, NYU Press 2001. LeBaron M, Bridging Cultural Conflicts, Jossey-Bass Press, 2003. "Mapping Cultures: Strategies for Effective Intercultural Negotiations." In Second Track/Citizens' Diplomacy, edited by J. Davies and E. Kaufman. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.: 149-160. Moore, C.W., and Peter Woodrow. 2002. As well as Myers-Brigg Literature.



Applied:		<b>“Respect”</b>
Variation on approaches to <b>time</b> :	taking the time to listen (process)	being on time (outcome)
Variation on approaches to <b>power</b> :	recognizing age/authority/hierarchy (high distance from power)	treating someone as equal (low distance from power)
Variation on approaches to <b>information</b>	summarizing key concepts (preference for thinking abstractly)	restating specifics information (preference for facts)
<b>“Need Help”</b>		
Variation on approaches to <b>social structure</b> :	doesn't want to be burden (collectivist)	entitled to access resources (individualist)
Variation on approach to <b>communication</b>	expects implied understanding can't/doesn't explain their “needs” (high context)	expresses needs directly  (low context)
Variations around <b>power</b>	this is the way things are (fate) (external locus of control)	I have control over my destiny (internal locus of control)

*When we use the continuums effectively, we seek to include others with different experiences along the spectrum, not because they are “other,” but rather because their experience is part of our experience. If we look deeply, we may learn how the perspective shared by someone else seemingly ‘different’ enables us to see how that experience manifests within our lives. Thus, when we cultivate the capacity for humility, we use the continuums as a tool to deepen our integrity and understanding.*

#### **4. Cultivating Awareness**

We cultivate our capacity for awareness diligently. We recognize that we have the opportunity to deepen and expand it. As we cultivate awareness<sup>15</sup>, we begin to hear and see we are standing in a room filled with an orchestra that previously was invisible and inaudible. We had only heard perhaps, a hopeful harp or an

<sup>15</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, Peace is Every Step. Parallax Press; Thich Nhat Hanh, Being Peace. Parallax Press. John Kabat Zinn, Wherever You Go, There You Are

intermittently beating drum; yet as we practice growing our awareness, slowly step by step we begin to hear – strings, winds, horns, a piano, percussion – we hear a full orchestra. We realize that we can hear the symphony in its beauty, in its dissonance, and in its harmony.

*When we cultivate the capacity for awareness, we grow the ability to hold and to inform all the other capacities we diligently bring to our effort. We realize that we are in the midst of a symphony rehearsal, and we discover that we are part of the orchestra, we are part of the audience, and we are part of the music. So, we must practice, like a musician, diligently to play our unique instrument, the authenticity of our voice. We listen attentively to the instruments and rhythm that surround us. We listen both to appreciate the gift of the music and to calibrate our instrument into the melody of the orchestra.*

Cultivating awareness is like symphony orchestra practice; the more we deepen our awareness, the more beautiful the sounds we share, the better able we are to hear and play with other orchestra members, and the more harmonious is the music we create. When we practice well, we invite others who are unaware of the orchestra to be inspired to play, listen, and create harmony with us and we build inclusive spaces one movement at a time.

## **5. Cultivating Legitimacy**

Legitimacy is being able to embrace things as they are and to acknowledge the truth of multiple perspectives. Legitimacy reflects a commitment to truth, not the right/wrong truth of ideologies and principles, but a commitment to the ‘truth (that) is found in life... within and around us in every moment’<sup>16</sup>.

Cultivating the capacity for legitimacy reflects what we bring to an interaction – a commitment to truth and what we offer to that interaction – the willingness to consider another person’s experience as truth. To acknowledge the legitimacy of another’s experience, we have the capacity to allow them the truth of their experience – not denied by our guilt, nor shielded by our shame, nor attacked by our fear – rather we are fully present to the truth of their experience. In that space, we offer their experience room to be its own truth and it becomes a part of our truth.

We hear with compassion for ourselves and the other, and we realize that their suffering, their different opinion and perspective, does not have to threaten us, rather we have the opportunity to hear the other’s suffering in the fullness of their experience and to see it is part of our own. Consider the difference between John’s response to Jack’s perspective (angrily denying) and Jack’s response to John’s perspective (acknowledging and accepting). When we cultivate the capacity for

---

<sup>16</sup> MT2 of the 14 Mindfulness Trainings. Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing*, Parallax Press.

legitimacy, we can acknowledge the truth of our own and another's experience without being encumbered by protective emotions.

*To cultivate the capacity for legitimacy, we cultivate the ability to be present for the truth of our own and another's experience and we create the space to meaningfully share diverse viewpoints in order to better understand a situation and to determine effective, inclusive solutions.*

## **6. Cultivating Trustworthiness**

Cultivating the capacity for trustworthiness is the first, last, and constant step in cultivating the capacity to be the social architect of the space for transformative dialogue. *At the heart of trustworthiness is self love and self care.*<sup>17</sup> If we fail to be loving and mindful of ourselves, we cannot meet our obligations and thus, we cannot offer trustworthiness to others.

Trust is an ongoing (re)commitment to a dynamic process of mutuality and sharing. When we build the capacity for trustworthiness, we intend compassion with ourselves and others as well as diligence in our commitments to ourselves and others. We recognize the path to integrity, understanding, humility, awareness, legitimacy, and trustworthiness is challenging, and when we cultivate trustworthiness, we promise our diligent effort and compassion as we embark together on a journey. *Cultivating trustworthiness is essential to being a social architect for inclusive social change.*

## **B. Conclusion**

The I+U HALT Injustice is a tool offered to promote people's ability to share their power well in order to promote conscious, inclusive social change. These six building blocks of capacity are not sequential, they are dynamic and mutually informing. As we cultivate these capacity, we build the ability to share our power, which in turn supports collaborative, inclusive problem solving and conscious, inclusive action for social change.

If you want to cultivate your capacity, consider beginning your focus on a realm within your life in which you feel the most empowered – your work or your family. We all have much more power than we are aware of. As we deepen these capacities, we discover the power that we have..

---

<sup>17</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh on Self-Love. 9/11/2007. Radio interview from Los Angeles, CA; Thich Nhat Hanh, *Teachings on Love*, Parallax Press; Thich Nhat Hanh, *Cultivating the Mind of Love*, Parallax Press; bell hooks, *love trilogy; all about love*, HarperCollins, 2002.

If we do not create an inclusive problem solving space, then we will not be able to share our power with those we seek to benefit. When efforts to 'assist' others depend upon the 'others' being 'helped' or 'assisted,' then we are not transforming the environment. We say that we want social change, but until we effect social change in a way that shares power, we merely perpetuate inequities, disparities, and the status quo. We must be vigilant in our efforts to ensure that our efforts do not arise from a hidden agenda based on our unresolved needs.

When we commit to conscious, inclusive action, we release control over defining the problem, the strategy, and the solution. We let go of our 'notions' about what the 'right way' looks like and how things 'should be,' and we enter into a dialogue of learning. Most of all, we commit to being present for a change that will change us, and we show up for change that includes sharing our power, relinquishing our privilege, and releasing our role as the 'advocate/activist/care provider' – instead we become a collaborating partner.

It is my hope that this capacity building tool provides the means to support people to live the change as social architects - to be collaborating partners in learning and to create inclusive problem solving spaces. As you discover the power that you hold, you can use the Mind the Gaps framework to further share your power for the benefit of all.