

The Terre des hommes
Handbook of
**Relational
Needs-Based
Organising**

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Terre des hommes
Helping children worldwide.

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Handbook of**

Relational Needs-Based Organising

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Foreword

There are moments in our work when we pause – not to solve, but to listen. Not to fix, but to understand. This Handbook was born from such moments of reflection, humility, and connection.

At Terre des hommes, we hold a deep belief that meaningful change begins in relationship. Through CLARISSA, a participatory action research project, funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), we had the privilege of walking alongside communities in Dhaka, Bangladesh. In doing so, we witnessed not only the challenges of poverty and exclusion, but also the quiet strength with which people navigate complex realities – with dignity, care, and resilience.

This Handbook brings together the learning from two bold and compassionate pilot interventions. The first, CLARISSA's Social Protection Plus (SP+) in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and the second, WorkFREE, implemented in Hyderabad, India with support from the European Union. Both initiatives explored the transformative potential of unconditional support – financial and relational – and laid the foundation for Relational Needs-Based Organising (RNBO): an approach that centres human connection, shared needs, and the belief that every person deserves to be seen, heard, and supported without conditions.

We offer this Handbook as an invitation to rethink how we engage with communities – not as experts or practitioners, but as fellow human beings. It encourages us to move beyond technical solutions and toward relational processes that honour complexity, encourage trust, and build collective strength.

We are deeply grateful to the communities who shared their lives with us, to the teams who carried this work forward with courage and creativity, to the researchers who led it with passion, and to the partners and funders who believed in the possibility of doing things differently.

We hope this Handbook supports thoughtful, relational approaches to community organising – rooted in care, connection, and collective strength.

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About this Handbook

About the team

This Handbook is a distillation of the learning gleaned over the course of a five year-long journey - a journey taken by two teams of researchers and practitioners who designed, implemented, and evaluated CLARISSA Social Protection Plus (SP+) and WorkFREE; two major social interventions pilots in Dhaka, Bangladesh and Hyderabad, India. Funded by the UK and European Union respectively, SP+ and WorkFREE partnered with communities living in urban slums to explore the developmental potential of unconditionality by combining monthly unconditional cash transfers with an unconditional approach to social work and community organising that we call 'Relational Needs-Based Organising' (RNBO).

The authorship team of this Handbook comprises four people:

- ▶ Dr Joel Lazarus - I work as a lecturer and researcher in the Department of Social and Policy Studies, University of Bath, UK. From 2020 to 2024, I worked as Project Manager and Qualitative Research Lead on WorkFREE. In these roles, I co-designed and supported the implementation of the RNBO intervention. As a researcher, I conducted qualitative research on both WorkFREE and SP+.
- ▶ Dr Neil Howard - I am a Reader in International Development at the University of Bath. I was the Primary Investigator for both the SP+ and WorkFREE pilots. I have worked on and in international child protection for two decades. I advocate for political, participatory approaches that place people front and centre and seek to challenge systems of inequality.
- ▶ Ms Maria Franchi - Ms Maria Franchi – I have decades of professional experience in community organising, facilitation, and training. As a doctoral researcher, I contributed to the development of the community-based practice in relation to the WorkFREE project, training and supporting the practitioners and facilitating the co-production of the practice described in this Handbook.
- ▶ Mr John Michael - I currently serve on the Asia-Pacific Regional Council of the Basic Income Earth Network (BIEN). I was Research and Programme Coordinator of WorkFREE at the Montfort Social Institute, supporting community organising work. I work with waste pickers and am part of the Dalit movement, engaged in urban and ecological justice. I believe in the RNBO approach and bring it into my movements and UBI work across Asia-Pacific.

Beyond this immediate authorship team, this Handbook could never have been written without the contributions of literally thousands of people: the researchers and practitioners who designed, implemented, monitored, analysed, and evaluated these two pilots, and the individuals, families, and communities who participated in them. Through their participation, intelligence, wisdom, and creativity, each person made a unique contribution to the understanding and articulation of the theory and practice of RNBO.

Who is this Handbook for?

If you are frustrated by the dominant ways of thinking about and practising community organising, social work or, for that matter, any type of social intervention then this Handbook is for you!

We assume you have found our Handbook because you already have your own frustrations with and possibly your own ideas for and even experiences of making community organising more effective, democratic, and empowering. However, even if you are a total newcomer to the world of community organising, we hope and believe that this Handbook can serve as a useful tool for your thinking and your practice.

We do believe that this Handbook is for everyone and can be used in all cultural contexts.

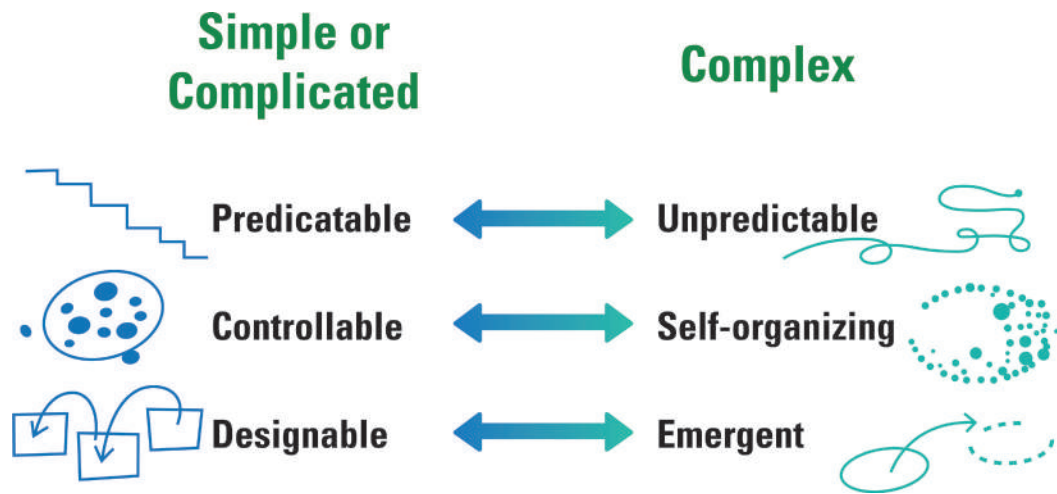
Though we recognise and celebrate the wonderful diversity of communities, cultures, and contexts, we also recognise and celebrate what we all have in common, what makes us human beings. This affirmation of universalism is expressed in our Relational Needs-Based approach to organising. We see all human beings as relational beings all experiencing the same needs. Our specific personal and social contexts will mean that we respond in different ways, but we can all respond effectively to the same needs. So, whoever you are, wherever you're from, wherever you work, we do believe that this Handbook can be of help to you.

What this Handbook is (and is not)

This Handbook is a handbook! It is not a manual.

Why is this distinction so important to us? As per Figure 1, we believe it is essential to distinguish between the complicated and the complex. For us, manuals are technical guides to completing practical tasks or solving technical problems; tasks or problems like: how to build a wall, how to fix a toaster, or how to audit accounts. We see such tasks or problems as complicated: building a wall or fixing a toaster, even making a particle accelerator, may require multiple materials and practical steps, but if you have those materials and can reproduce those steps you can complete the task or solve the problem by following a linear sequence of steps. According to this logic, just as when I press a particular key on my keyboard (input) I get a particular desired outcome (output), I can also enact a particular social intervention and be assured of a particular social outcome.

Figure 1: Complicated versus Complex



Human beings, like all living systems, are not complicated; we are complex. We cannot be built, programmed, fixed, or audited. Instead, only we can change ourselves and, though we can set and achieve planned goals, since we live in a complex and chaotic environment, we ultimately change in unpredictable and emergent ways. Consequently, in this Handbook, we have sought to navigate the line between planning and emergence by offering a practical guide to planning for emergence; whilst our **RNBO journey** guides you through a five-stage facilitation process, at all stages, our emphasis is on the facilitator's role of supporting participants' own specific experiences, feelings, needs and their own emergent visions of and actions for change.

How to use this Handbook

This Handbook is made up of four sections. You don't have to start at Page 1 and follow it through to the end. There is a logic and, hopefully, a benefit in doing that, but if you prefer to you could get stuck right in and jump straight into **Section Two: Putting RNBO into Practice**. To help you decide how using this Handbook can best meet your needs, allow us to describe briefly what is in each section:

Section One: The RNBO worldview - We explain how our RNBO approach differs from the mainstream 'Salvational Problem-Solving' approach to community organising; we introduce our core underlying philosophical concepts; and present our Theory of Change.

Section Two: Putting RNBO into Practice - We take you step-by-step through the journey of the RNBO model. For each stage we set out the functional objectives; the main participatory methods and facilitation tools; and example activities. We share case studies and quotes from implementers and participants of SP+ and WorkFREE to provide evidence of the journey's efficacy.

Section Three: RNBO Resources - We offer a list of the core principles that we believe encapsulates our RNBO model. We then present a toolbox full of facilitation methods and tools for you to adopt and adapt to your own requirements. Finally, we share a list of inspirational theories that we have integrated either explicitly or implicitly into our RNBO model with links to learn more about them.

Section Four: Final Reflections - We identify the big challenges that we have faced and we suspect you will face in implementing RNBO. We reflect on the lessons we have learned. We offer some thoughts about the challenges and opportunities for sustaining change.

This RNBO Handbook is the product of over five years of intellectual and practical work. As teammates, we have shared the highs and lows of working on large experimental and radical pilot projects with communities experiencing poverty and precarity in the context of a turbulent world. We have learned so much together! We have much to share with you! Let us begin, then, with comparing what we call the Saviour Problem-Solving with the Relational Needs-Based Organising approaches to community work. We hope you enjoy the journey.

The RNBO Worldview

Introduction

This Handbook focuses on the theory and practice of two forms of social interventions - social work and what is often called 'community development' or 'community organising'. Here, we use the term 'community organising'. Whilst social work generally centres on visits by one or two individuals to particular households, community organising, as the name suggests, involves organisers bringing the wider community together to support its efforts to improve the lives of its residents.

The RNBO model we present in this Handbook is our attempt to develop an alternative, an antidote to what we call the mainstream, dominant 'Salvational Problem-Solving' (SPS) approach to community organising and social work.

From Salvational Problem-Solving to Relational Needs-Based Organising

Whether conscious or not, every attempt to make change is informed by a theory of change. In turn, beneath every theory of change lie deeper assumptions about how the world works. Thus, the shift from SPS to RNBO is not a merely practical one, but a journey that calls us to see the world itself in radically different ways. Therefore, we first compare the core elements and outcomes of RNBO versus SPS before introducing the five fundamental philosophical concepts that underpin and inform the theory and practice of RNBO. Finally in this section, we combine all these concepts into our RNBO Theory of Change.

All too often contemporary social work and community organising interventions fail to achieve positive outcomes. They are characterised instead by their disciplinary, punitive, conditional nature. We argue that the shortcomings and failings of contemporary social work and community organising derive from the logic and practices of 'Salvational Problem-Solving'. Take a look at Table 1 below that sets out the antithetical core aspects and outcomes of the SPS versus RNBO approaches. We'll walk through an overview of them together here before going into more detail in the specific sub-sections.

Table 1: Salvational Problem-Solving versus Relational Needs-Based Organising

Development work approach	<i>Salvational Problem-Solving</i>	<i>Relational Needs-Based Organising</i>
Role of development worker	Saviour	Partner
Theory of Change	Linear (input/output)	Complex (emergent)
Organising focus	Actors and outcomes	Relations and processes
Measures of success	Quantifiable preset targets and indicators	Unpredictable improvements in need-satisfaction
Way(s) of knowing	Intellectual (Mind)	Intellectual, Physical, Emotional (Mind, Body, Heart)
Quality of relationships	Conditional Transactional Objectification	Unconditional Relational Subjectification
Outcomes	Unintended negative consequences	Unpredictable positive outcomes

Salvational Problem-Solving

In the SPS approach, development practitioners start out with preconceived notions of the nature of the communities they are working with, the social problems they face and, consequently, the appropriate solutions that should be enacted to solve those problems. This approach generates the following logical steps:

- ▶ First, we set ourselves a challenge of *solving or fixing*.
- ▶ Second, we deploy *linear thinking* that ascribes a basic cause and effect logic and applies an input/output mechanism to social change. We see communities, for example, just like we might see a machine - they are complicated (rather than complex) but fixable.
- ▶ Third, we focus our attention on particular entities - e.g. wells, schools, clinics, roads, individuals, social groups - to work with or work on and ascribe quantitative targets for and indicators of developmental success. Such definitions and measures of success express a rationalism that sees only the logical, rational mind as capable of knowing and, consequently, only information that it can access as valid or useful.

What are the consequences of the SPS approach?

- ▶ First, if the desired outcomes of an intervention are already predetermined then the supposed beneficiaries of your intervention become objects either supporting or impeding those outcomes and therefore objects to render compliant. This '*objectification*' expresses a deeply paternalistic and even authoritarian ethos. We are *saviours* and they are *victims*.

- ▶ Second, in processes of attaining compliance, participants in your intervention become people to transact with, i.e. to exchange resources or favours with. *Relationships stay transactional.*
- ▶ Finally and ultimately, since we are not problems to be solved or machines to be fixed but highly complex and ever-changing living *becomings*, there seems to be a general law that SPS interventions generate *unintended consequences* that are suboptimal at best and often very harmful at worst.

***When the will to power is in charge,
the higher the ideals, the lower the results.
Try to make people happy
and you lay the groundwork for misery.
Try to make people moral
and you lay the groundwork for vice.***

(Lao Tze, Dao de Ching)

As the ancient words above of Chinese sage Lao Tze demonstrate, nothing we say here is new! There are millions of words written and actions taken in countless fields of scholarship, community work, activist, and spiritual practices that challenge what we call here the Salvational Problem-Solving approach. But, it doesn't change the fact that this is the starting point of our journey and a place that, despite our best intentions, we keep revisiting!

Relational Needs-Based Organising

Beginning with our diagnosis of SPS, we have developed our RNBO model as its antidote as we pursued our journey on SP+ and WorkFREE from developmental saviour to partner. Unsurprisingly, then, the core elements and potential outcomes of RNBO are the mirror image of SPS.

First, an RNBO approach is informed by *complexity and systemic thinking* that acknowledges and embraces the essential and eternal uncertainty of social realities and incorporates unpredictable *emergence* into planning and action.

Second, an RNBO approach focuses not on entities and outcomes, but on *relations and processes*. Such a process-orientation sees the world composed not of separate static entities, but as a place of 'dynamic, unfolding relations' (Emirbayer 1997, p. 281).

Third, the concept of *needs* is fundamental to our RNBO approach. We believe that beneath our often ephemeral wants, preferences, opinions, and interests lie our essential needs and that our needs cannot be ascertained through intellectual inquiry, but can only be felt in our bodies. Consequently, our RNBO approach opens us up to ways of knowing and sources of information far *beyond logic and reason*.

Furthermore, whilst we may judge others for their preferences and opinions, understanding others' needs moves us beyond judgment and creates conditions for *unconditionality*. Thus, RNBO opens possibilities for integration through unconditional practices that invite and support participants to identify, articulate, and satisfy their own needs. This is this process that we see as a process of *subjectification*; of becoming more fully and authentically who we are.

It is the possibility of creating relations of unconditionality and processes of subjectification that endows RNBO with the power to help stakeholders move *from saviour/victim relationships to partnerships*.

If this brief comparative description of SPS versus RNBO is enough for you, feel free to move straight on to the next section: **Putting RNBO into Practice**. If you would rather engage with the worldview informing RNBO more deeply, please move ahead to **Process and Relations**.

Process and Relations

We believe that behind or beneath the rationalistic logic of SPS and the linear, mechanistic theories of change they inform lies a deeper worldview that is so ingrained in us that we invariably don't even see it let alone question it. It is a way of seeing, and therefore creating, the world as a place made up fundamentally of separate entities: from particles to atoms to molecules to inanimate objects to microorganisms to plants to animals to human beings.

As this list of substances or entities suggests, there is an evolutionary hierarchy at play here informing and legitimising a colonialist thought that generates all the binaries that structure such thinking: self/other, human/nature, mind/body, good/bad, civilised (developed)/uncivilised (underdeveloped). Thus, we believe that the fundamental way of understanding SPS is as the practical expression of this 'substantialist' mechanical, divisive worldview.

Whilst we do not deny that, on one level of reality, we are all separate beings, we recognise a deeper 'non-dual' unified reality; a reality made up primarily not of separate substances, but of process and relations.

In brief, from a process-oriented perspective the world is an unfolding event of dynamic flux and interdependence in which human beings are more accurately human *becomings*. Put most succinctly, from this perspective 'relationships do not merely shape reality; they are reality' (Wilson in Halle-Erby 2022, p.4).

***Theoretical principle No.1:
Life is a relational process!***

Complexity and Emergence

The relational approach to community organising is one that really begins with an acknowledgement and embrace of complexity - that not just our society, but each and every single one of us, are far too complex to reduce to merely having or being problems to fix. We are nested living systems, each of which

is interacting, changing and being changed by each other. Figure 2 below illustrates this understanding of nested systems. It shows this nesting reaching from biosphere to individual. However, the nesting doesn't stop there, of course; within each of us are more complex interacting nested systems, e.g. our digestive, respiratory, and nervous systems. We could go all the way down to the sub-atomic level!

Figure 2: We are complex nested systems



A second core concept underpinning a relational approach to development work is that of 'emergence'. Emergence describes the nature of change in a complex world - the phenomenon of a living system generating qualitatively new and unpredictable properties or capacities through iterative interactions between its parts. These properties and capacities are qualitatively new because they cannot be predicted or explained simply by quantitatively adding up the sum of the system's total parts. Emergent change creates a 'whole [that is] something more than its individual parts' (Kempton 2022, p.5). We can give the examples of a termite cathedral, a murmuration of starlings, or the formation of everything from snowflakes to civilisations. Life itself is emergent!

Here are two ways of thinking about emergence, one or both of which may resonate. For philosopher Daniel Schmachtenberger, emergence is 'the closest thing to magic that's actually a scientifically kind of admissible term'.¹ A more prosaic interpretation comes from biologist Michael Levin who understands emergence as 'basically just the measure of surprise for the observer' and 'how much extra is the system doing that you, knowing the rules and the various properties of its parts, didn't see coming'.² Whether we see emergence as 'magic' or 'surprise', we are in the realm of understanding and appreciating change as unpredictable. We will offer real-world examples of emergent change later when we bring findings from SP+ and WorkFREE to illustrate our RNBO journey.

Since any person or collective is a complex systemic web of historical, unfolding relations, change must be understood as an unpredictable and emergent quality of a system. What this all means for us as social workers is that we must recognise that, whilst we cannot change others, we can cultivate the social conditions conducive to emergence. We present our approach to doing this in the next section.

[1] See Daniel Schmachtenberger's talk at Emergence - YouTube. <https://youtu.be/eh7qvXfGQho>

[2] See Michael Levin: Consciousness, Biology, Universal Mind, Emergence, Cancer Research - YouTube. <https://youtube.com/watch?v=c8iFtalX-s&t=5845s>

***Theoretical principle No.2:
Since life is complex, change is emergent.
As development workers, we cannot make change,
but we can cultivate the conditions for positive change to emerge.***

Needs

Why needs?

Allow us to offer five reasons for why needs are so vital for our thought and practice.

1) *The essentiality and universality of needs*

We believe that one essential condition common to all living creatures is that of experiencing needs. These needs are first to survive and then to flourish. As human beings, our needs are therefore not just physiological; they are also psychological, emotional, and spiritual (Maslow, 1971, 2017; Max-Neef, 1991; Kaufman, 2020).

2) *Distinguishing needs from 'satisfiers'*

The needing experience can be broken down into the three phases of feeling, interpreting, and responding to our needs. The first two aspects of this experience - feeling and interpreting - are purely internal. The last aspect - responding - calls us back out into the world to devise and enact plans aimed at meeting our identified needs. Following this process requires making a clear distinction between our needs and what Manfred Max-Neef (1991) called the 'satisfiers' - the objects, practices, organisations, and institutions - we use to meet them.

It was Max-Neef who defended the universal nature of needs whilst highlighting the historically, culturally, and economically particular nature of satisfiers. We believe that it is this vital distinction that allows us to embrace both unity and diversity. The particularity of satisfiers aligns with decolonial visions of our world/s as a 'pluriverse' (Escobar, 2018), whilst the universality of needs reminds us of the ultimate oneness of humanity and of life. It is this distinction that allows us to claim a universal relevance and applicability for our RNBO framework.

3) *From scarcity to abundance*

So often we see ourselves as being in situations of scarcity, compelled to defend our positions and advance our interests. Such fear-driven responses will only reproduce fear, scarcity, and division. SPS development work often contributes to this by framing poverty in scarcity terms - to be poor is to lack resources and opportunities. On one level, it truly is. However, seeing the world through eyes of fear blinds us to many options any community might creatively devise to meet their needs. By helping a community move beyond fear by connecting with their needs, we can help them begin to see the world as a place of potential abundance.

4) *Reintegrating mind and body and other binaries*

It is crucial to state the obvious here: we cannot know our needs with our minds alone; we must feel our needs in our bodies. When we fall silent so that we can feel what we are needing we connect to an essential layer of experience that enables us to access vital information for helping us clarify our goals. We can then devise more effective strategies to meet those goals. It is therefore in our bodies that our RNBO practice must begin. Only once we have felt our needs can we then use our minds to interpret and respond to them.

We see needs-centred practices helping us break down or reintegrate conceptual binaries. This begins with reintegrating the separation of our minds and bodies, and therefore also humanity and nature, through body-centred practices. Such practices also reintegrate and equalise expert forms of knowledge with experiential knowledge, thereby helping us overcome the saviour-victim trap of SPS development. Finally, whilst we might overlook or deny others' interests or oppose their demands, it is much harder to ignore their authentically expressed needs. In this way, needs-centred relational work can help us move through conflict through a restorative recognition of our shared humanity.

5) *Subjectification, individual and collective*

Change can only come from within. To put this in the language of needs we might say that the experience of feeling, interpreting, and responding to our needs can only be a subjective experience. We hope and believe that participation in RNBO practices can support personal and collective processes of subjectification - processes of realising our potential, of becoming a fuller or truer or greater version of ourselves. This process of subjectification is centred on the process of recognising and responding to our needs.

We understand subjectification not just as an individual, but as a collective process. If we can support a group to listen to each other and to itself deeply enough, each member of that group - and the group itself - can come to take what Otto Scharmer and Eva Pomeroy (2024) have recently called a 'Fourth Person' or systemic perspective. In short, there is a collective subject and whichever group or system we are part of we can access this collective or systemic perspective.

Table 2: Understanding the needs of/as the collective subject

Level of ontological perspective	Level of awareness	Level of awareness of needs	Developmental question
1st person	Intersubjective	Egoic	What are my needs?
2nd person	Intersubjective	Empathic	What are your needs
3rd person	Intersubjective	Solidarity	What are our needs?
4th person	Transpersonal	Systemic Unity	What is needed?

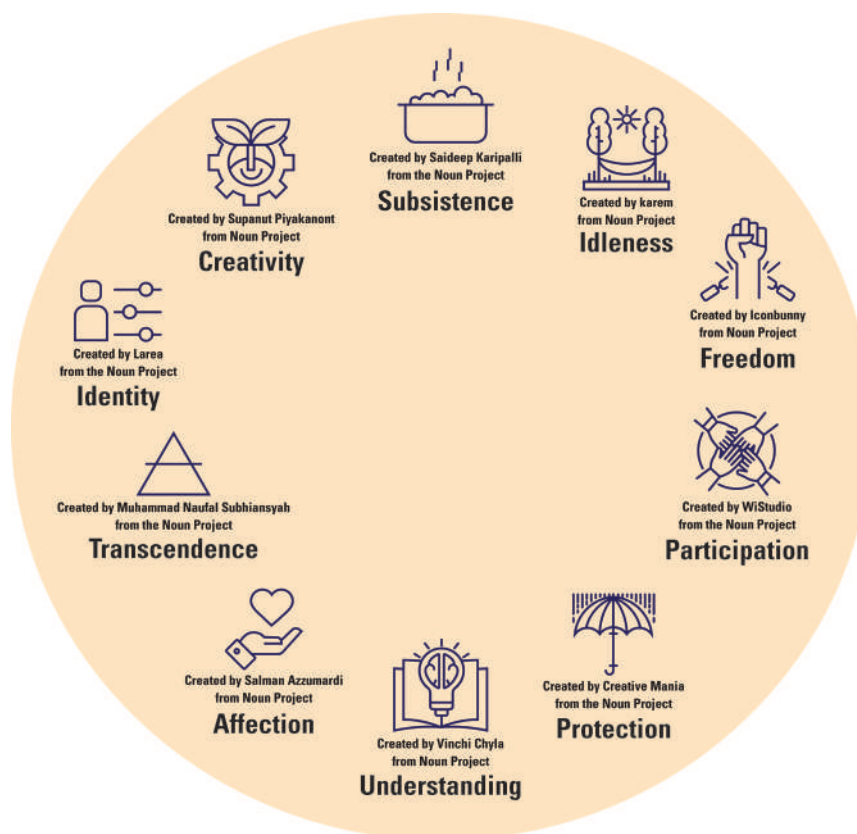
The more fully we can bring our conscious awareness to the present moment the more perspectives we can access - from the perspective of individual self to that of what we call 'systemic unity'.

Which Needs?

When it comes to practically applying a radical alternative to SPS in development work, the question ‘How do we create conditions for emergence within this community?’ sounds too abstract. ‘Which needs must we help participants meet to help them enact their own changes?’ is a question we can work with.

There are multiple needs frameworks out there that specify our needs. Most come from the world of psychology and therefore focus on our psychological, emotional, and spiritual needs. Manfred Max-Neef (1991) offers us a more holistic list of ten ‘fundamental human needs’ that cover both immaterial and material realms (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Manfred Max-Neef’s Wheel of Fundamental Human Needs³



In our **Theory of Change**, we make specific reference to these frameworks and the needs they specify. Here, however, we wish to emphasise that, however invaluable these frameworks are, they can never serve as a prescriptive or fixed menu from which to select. Rather, our focus must always be on the subjective experience of needing and the clear and undeniable emotional response that follows when we truly recognise the needs we are feeling.

[3] Thanks to Patrick Barry for creating and allowing us to reproduce this version of Max-Neef’s wheel here.

Theoretical principle No. 3:
To be alive is to need.
Human needs are physiological, psychological, emotional, and spiritual.
Only we can experience our own needs.
Our needs are first to survive and then to flourish.
Through this process we grow as subjects -
individual and collective - and can transcend separation.

Trauma

Unresolved past is destiny;
it repeats until we have the courage to work together to face it.
(Thomas Hübl 2020, p.25)

So far we have set out how we understand the world and how to think about changing it. Now we have to cover what we see as the greatest challenges to serious change. The first of these is trauma.

Contemporary research into epigenetics is showing us that trauma is not purely individual, but is collective and intergenerational (Banushi et al, 2025; Dajani et al, 2025; Dubois & Gaspare, 2020). We understand trauma as the painful physical-emotional legacy of a previous overwhelming experience. This legacy freezes the development of the affected areas of our nervous systems until we are able to heal ourselves by bringing our conscious awareness to this trauma and the often immensely painful feelings it comprises.

The hurts get passed down until someone is willing and able to feel them.

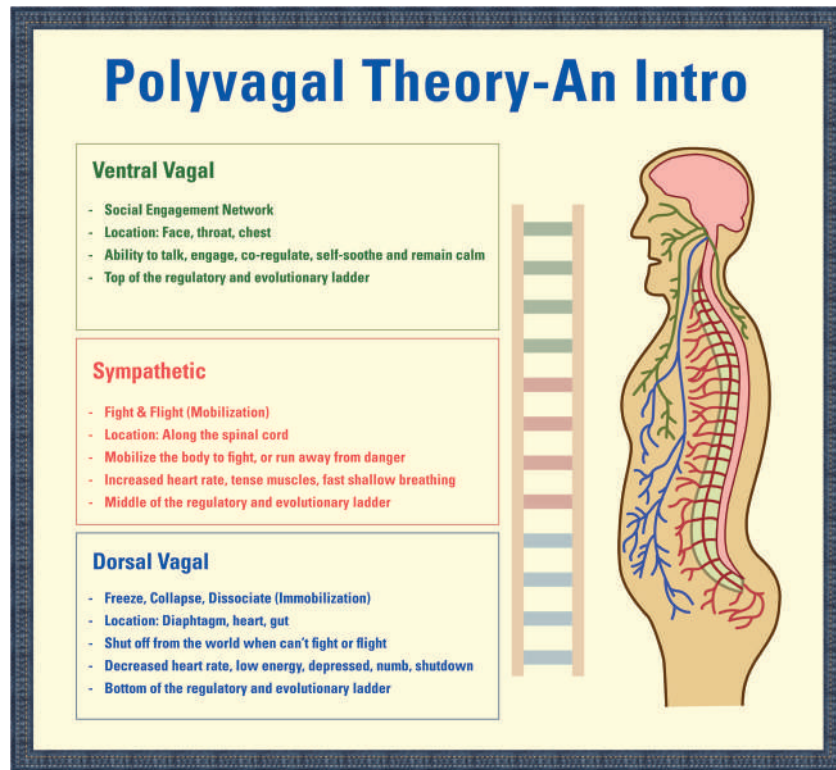
To paraphrase Gloria Anzaldua (2015)...

We can't heal our wounds, but our wounds can heal us.

We therefore see trauma as both *the greatest obstacle and gateway to real change*. In our work, we have sought to find a middle line between falsely claiming professional expertise on the one hand and excluding the crucial issue of trauma from our RNBO approach on the other. This middle line takes the form of what is today called a 'trauma-informed practice'.

Alongside a basic understanding of the nature, effects, and symptoms of trauma, we recommend a basic understanding of how our nervous system works. Here, we have studied neurobiologist Stephen Porges' (2017) work. From Porges we learned how our nervous systems function to regulate our basic experience of the world through our fear and safety responses (See Figure 4). Very simply put, when we feel extreme fear it is our dorsal vagal system that makes us freeze. When we feel stress it is our sympathetic system that triggers us into fight or flight mode. When we relax it is our ventral vagal system that is activated.

Figure 4: Polyvagal Theory - An Intro



But our nervous system is not just a one-way autonomic system; we can consciously do things to calm ourselves down and stimulate our ventral vagal system. We provide examples of these practices on the **Relating** page of our Putting RNBO into Practice section.

We have found that this understanding of the nature and effects of trauma combined with a basic understanding of how our nervous systems function can have an empowering and transformational effect on social workers and participants alike. We cannot overstate how important such an understanding is. Stephen Porges (2017, p.51) insists that 'the range of emergent behaviour and psychological experience is limited by autonomic state'. We interpret this to mean that it is the condition of our nervous systems that ultimately determines who we can become! When we feel scared and unsafe we cannot imagine and enact positive change! All we will do is reproduce our trauma by 'taking the road behind us, placing it in front of us, and calling it the "future" (Hübl 2020, p.14).

We are convinced that without incorporating practices into our community organising that help our participants to activate their parasympathetic systems and feel relaxed and safe, no serious sustainable change toward greater freedom and justice can happen. This is because, whilst fear may be the gateway to the transformative change we need, it can never be its driver.

***Theoretical Principle No.4:
Trauma is the greatest obstacle and gateway to change!***

Power and Empowerment

Countless volumes have been written about power. Within these volumes we can find myriad conceptual forms of power - hard power, soft power, visible power, invisible power, symbolic power, and many more. Here, we simply want to strip all this back to consider the role of theory and practice in an RNBO approach to empowerment. We see power as the second great obstacle and gateway to change. Consequently, as community organisers and social workers, the issue of power can never be too far from our minds in order to guide our words and actions.

The first thing to say with regard to power itself is that *power is always political*. Therefore, we insist that any process of genuine empowerment requires a theoretical component which helps us conceptually understand the nature of structural or systemic power in our societies, communities, and households.⁴ Engagement with this theoretical component is central to the process of what Paolo Freire (1970) called 'conscientisation'. It is this component - this explicit engagement with 'a critical understanding of power' - that a recent review of the academic literature on 'empowerment' reveals to have been largely erased over recent years and decades (Klein & Howard 2024, p.7). This rendering invisible of structural power paves the way for a narrow individualistic and economic theory and practice that limits the definition of empowerment to our access to markets as workers, consumers, and debtors. Against this trend, the RNBO approach centres on the conscious mobilising of collective economic and political power.⁵

The RNBO approach to power centres on:

1. Helping participants to think about who has 'power over' in their households and communities and how we might develop our use of 'power with' instead;
2. Helping community groups to raise their consciousness by exploring structural forms of power;
3. Helping participants, both by participating in meetings and taking effective individual and collective action, to reclaim their power by meeting their Security psychological needs for Safety, Connection, and Self-Esteem.

A final word about power is one of sober realism. When we explore the systems that structure our power relations we realise how deeply entrenched they are. Though we can certainly point to evidence of women's empowerment in Bangladesh and India, we cannot say that levels of violence enacted by men on women have diminished. In the case of Bangladesh, the highly repressive political climate in which the SP+ pilot took place greatly constrained the field of possible collective action. Conversely, a more permissive political context in India made it possible for participants to work alongside our partner NGO to establish the Hyderabad Garbage Collectors Collective to struggle for recognition and improved pay and conditions for garbage collectors.

Finally, let us also recognise that those entrenched structures are generally disrupted and reconfigured *gradually*, one small step at a time. Hence, there is value and beauty in every intervention, every session, every conversation.

***Theoretical Principle No.5:
Power is political
Empowerment involves conscientisation
RNBO enacts power as power with.***

[4] Our inspiration here lies in theories and practices of 'conscientisation' as pioneered by the likes of Paolo Freire (1970), bell hooks (1994), Anne Hope and Sally Timmel (2014), and Adrienne Maree Brown (2017, 2021)

[5] In the Raising Consciousness stage of our RNBO journey we offer just a small selection of tools for conscientisation

Change begins within

As we have stated before, this Handbook is a handbook not a manual. We deliver and practise workshops not trainings. RNBO is something that cannot be taught; *it must be experienced*. This truth means that, ultimately, the extent to which we can facilitate RNBO work for the individuals, households, and communities we seek to support will be determined by the extent to which we ourselves have done the internal work necessary to let go of our deeply entrenched Salvational Problem-Solving tendencies and integrate a relational and needs-oriented way of being, seeing, and acting.

Theoretical principle No. 6:

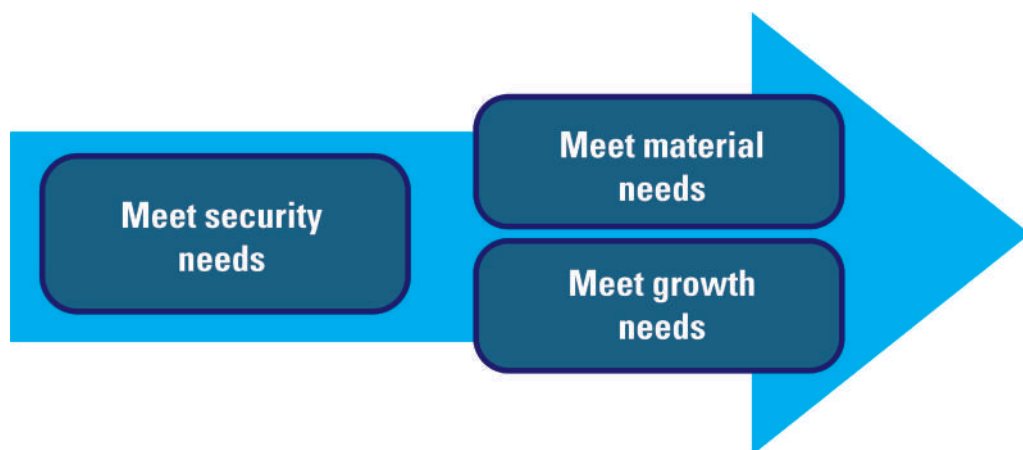
Transformations start from within.

The extent to which we can help participants journey from victims to partners is determined by the extent to which we ourselves can shift from saviours to partners

The RNBO Theory of Change

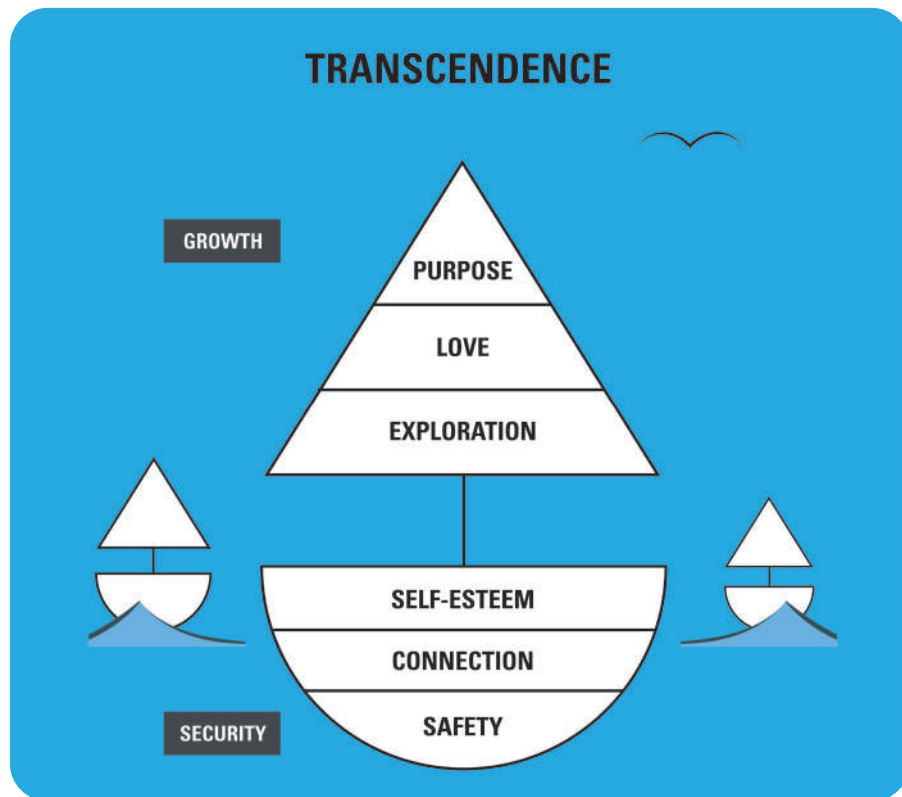
Our Theory of Change is really quite a succinct articulation of our RNBO worldview:

Figure 5: The RNBO Theory of Change



To explain it briefly we must complement Manfred Max-Neef's wheel of fundamental human needs, **set out earlier**, with Scott Barry Kaufman's more recent sailboat model.

Figure 6: The 'Sailboat' model of human needs (Kaufman 2020)



In his groundbreaking book *Transcend: The New Science of Self-Actualization*, Kaufman describes the 'sailboat' that we use to set sail on life's journey. First, the hull of our boat must be strong, i.e. our psychological Security Needs must be met. We can then open our sails and pursue meeting our Growth Needs. Like Abraham Maslow before him, Kaufman (2020, p.6) points to Transcendence as our highest or deepest need, defining it as 'awareness...expanded beyond the self' and having 'a deep sense of who [we are] and what [we are called] to contribute to the world'.

Having introduced both Max-Neef's and Kaufman's framework, we can now share our RNBO Theory of Change. We see the practice of RNBO development work as helping participants to meet their psychological Security Needs through the relaxation of their nervous systems (Porges, 2017; Dana, 2018), thereby creating a strong platform for action aimed at satisfying those material needs that are the usual focus of development interventions. Finally, we propose that in the very process of pursuing these strategies participants meet their higher Growth Needs. Let us consider the example of a group living in a community that suffers from poor drainage and flash floods. As initial meetings help the group to feel more safe, connected, and confident (Security Needs) it develops its capacity to work together to improve the drainage system on their streets (Material Needs). Through undertaking this collaborative, communal work the group learns more, deepen bonds between them, and find more purpose (Growth Needs).

Visually, we think our RNBO practice looks like this:

Figure 7: The RNBO practice as DNA double helix

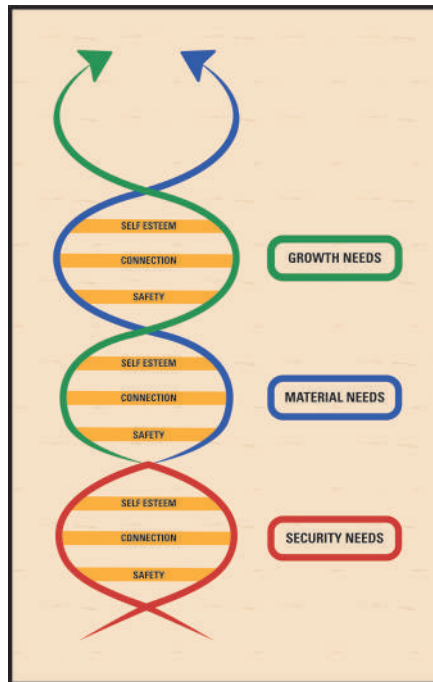
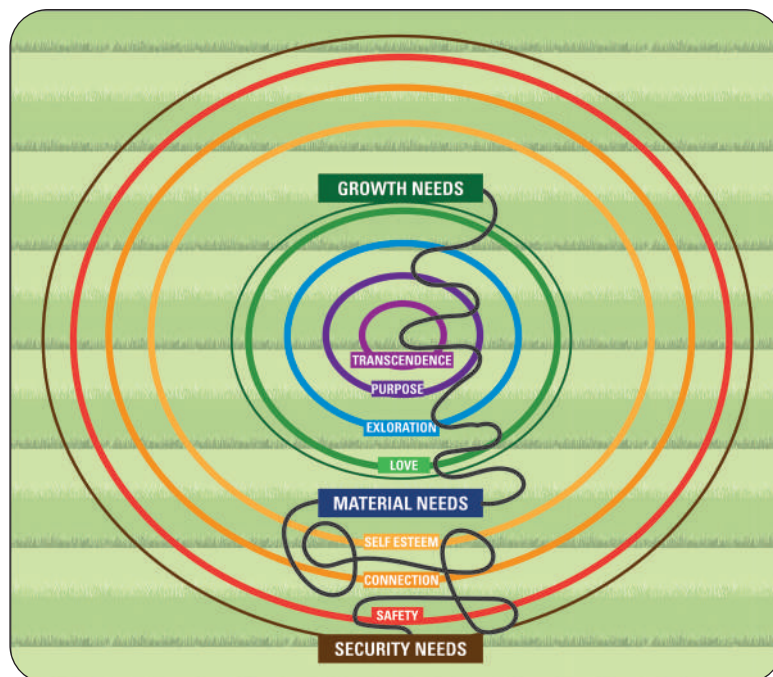


Figure 7 represents our Theory of Change in the form of the DNA double helix. We chose to represent the bonds holding the structure together as our Security Needs to emphasise how the work to cultivate safety, connection, and self-esteem is not just foundational but ongoing. A second way to visualise our RNBO practice takes the form of a hill...

Figure 8: The RNBO hill



Imagine the image in Figure 8 as a birds-eye view of a hill; each circle is a contour line on a map indicating a climb as we move inward and upwards from the outside to the centre, from the bottom to the top. The hill is the RNBO journey; the journey of moving relationally from saviour/victim to partners through a development process. This is primarily achieved by helping participants: to feel safe, connected, and confident (Security Needs), but also through becoming able to understand and transform existing relations of power and to make effective consensual decisions.

Moving to a subsequent need involves not leaving behind but building on the previous need. The loopy nature of the paths indicates the non-linear nature of the journey in reality. The gap between the Security Needs and Growth Needs is a plateau meant to represent the robust platform for effective action established when we meet our Security Needs. It is in the process of pursuing the satisfaction of our Material Needs that we meet our Growth Needs (Love, Exploration, and Purpose).⁶

***The RNBO Theory of Change:
Meet Security Needs to meet Material Needs to meet Growth Needs***

Having set out our RNBO worldview and Theory of Change, we are now ready to turn to the task of **Putting RNBO into Practice.**

[6] A brief word on Transcendence. If we understand Transcendence as ‘awareness...expanded beyond the self’ and Safety as a relaxation of our nervous systems then we can actually recognise the inextricable link between Safety and Transcendence. Psychological safety is attained through connection with self and other, thereby allowing us to transcend our fear to ‘expand’ into wider and deeper perspectives and possibilities. The second definition of Transcendence as having ‘a deep sense of who [we are] and what [we are called] to contribute to the world’ aligns here with the peak of our hill. We use the word ‘peak’ here as a reference to Abraham Maslow’s (1971, p.35) interest in transcendent ‘peak experiences’.

Putting RNBO into Practice

RNBO in Practice

In the **previous section**, we set out our RNBO worldview in detail and presented our RNBO Theory of Change. This Theory of Change can be most succinctly expressed as:

Meet Security Needs to Meet Material Needs to Meet Growth Needs

In this section, we share how we propose putting our Theory of Change into practice, describing our RNBO approach not just to community organising but to social work too. Though we present this RNBO practice in a more linear form, we should emphasise that, in real life, the process is usually non-linear in the ways that we may often need to revisit earlier steps. With that said, we will now take you through the journey of this RNBO practice step by step. This journey is divided into five stages:



The journey begins with Relating. Here, the facilitator's role is to help the group meet its Security Needs. Reconnecting involves helping the group understand its needs and the satisfiers currently used to meet those needs (or not). The role of the facilitator here is also that of helping any conflicts to be expressed and resolved. In the Raising Consciousness stage, the facilitator invites the group to identify the obstacles blocking progress from their current reality toward their envisioned future; that is, the main obstacles blocking the satisfaction of the group's needs. Since these obstacles tend to be structural, this stage helps the group move beyond blaming itself for its poverty and suffering by taking a wider historically and politically-informed systemic perspective. In the Reimagining stage, by using practices of meditation and visioning, the facilitator invites the group to let go of the psychology of

fear and scarcity that strangles imagination and let come visions of a brighter, emergent future. The order of the two stages of Raising Consciousness and Reimagining can be fluid. You may find yourself in a group where a critical understand of the factors impeding need-satisfaction is the priority. In this case, go for Raising Consciousness first. Alternatively, you may feel that your group would benefit more from breaking out of the shackles of the scarcity mindset in which case you may choose to do some Reimagining work first. Finally, in the Responding stage, the facilitator supports the group to plan and pursue new satisfiers aimed at meeting their needs more fully and effectively. At each stage of the journey, we set out the following:

- ▶ The *functional objectives* of this step;
- ▶ The kinds of practical *frameworks (participatory methods and facilitation tools)* best suited to meeting these objectives (for both community organising and social work);
- ▶ Two or three *example activities* to use at this stage of the journey.

Doing so, we can produce the following table:

	Functional objectives	Practical Frameworks	Participatory methods	Example activities
Relating	Meeting Security Needs (Safety, Connection, Self-Esteem)	Nonviolent Communication Kaufman's Sailboat	Play Active Listening Meditation Singing	1.The Chick's Challenge 2.My Typical Day 3.The Chairs Game 4.4D Meditation
Reconnecting	Reconnecting with self and group to understand needs and evaluate current satisfiers Allowing surface or underlying conflicts to be felt and resolved	Nonviolent Communication Human-Scale Development Conflict Resolution	Meditation Active Listening Storytelling Role Play	1.What are our needs? 2.P.I.N Mountain 3.Thoughts and Feelings about Conflict 4.Conflict Resolution Mediation Practice
Raising Consciousness	Identifying the structural obstacles that deny or limit the satisfaction of our needs	Pedagogy of the Oppressed Theatre of the Oppressed Human-Scale Development	Active listening Storytelling Role Play Sharing theories, concepts, and factual information	1. Identifying and mapping current satisfiers 2. Understanding Power 3. Generative themes and codes
Reimagining	Letting go of a psychology of fear and scarcity. Letting come an emergent vision of a better future	Theory U	Meditation Visualisations Social Presencing Theatre	1.Nine Questions 2.Ancessor Exercise 3.Visualisation exercise 4.The Stuck Exercise
Reimagining	Planning and pursuing new improved satisfiers	Diamond of Participation Convergent Facilitation		1.Diamond of Participation 2.Examples from SP+ and WorkFREE

Ritual

Before we move to the first stage of the journey, Relating, we wish to share a few words about the vital role of ritual in this work. The group space is a sacred one and the transition from the realm of the mundane to the realm of the sacred and back again must be marked by a ritual; one that centres on meeting participants' Security Needs.

In our work in India, the ritual that emerged for our facilitators and participants was to begin and end each and every community meeting with a game and/or a meditation and a sharing circle - inviting each participant to share a few thoughts and feelings. This is what we recommend here; any session facilitated at any stage of the RNBO Journey should open and close with a game and/or meditation and a sharing circle. The opening circle invites each participant to share how they are feeling *in this moment*. In this way, it begins the process of helping the group to bring presence. The closing circle invites each participant to reflect on and share their feelings about the session.

Games, meditations, and sharing circles meet all three Security Needs, helping everyone to feel more safe, connected, and confident. Whilst playing games raises energy levels, inviting participants to sit in a circle and practise meditation or take turns to share their thoughts and feelings calms energy levels. We leave it to your senses of intuition and discretion to determine the appropriate order for any given session.

Stage One: Relating



	Functional objectives	Practical Frameworks	Participatory methods	Example activities
Relating	Meeting Security Needs (Safety, Connection, Self-Esteem)	Nonviolent Communication Kaufman's Sailboat	Play Active Listening Meditation Singing	1.The Chick's Challenge 2.My Typical Day 3.The Chairs Game 4.4D Meditation

Simply showing up regularly and doing so with open ears signified to participants that they mattered. Transcripts of interviews with participants are replete with examples of how 'consistently "showing up," listening deeply, and speaking with respect' imbued a sense of 'dignity' within participants.

(Howard et al., 2024, p. 12)

The functional objectives of the Relating stage of the RNBO journey

The Relating stage of the RNBO journey is all about helping the group to meet its Security Needs as a foundation for subsequent effective collective action. Bringing Kaufman's Sailboat model to mind, the objective of meeting Security Needs can be understood as helping a group to build their 'boat'. We must always understand this as an intrinsic objective in its own right. If we think about it too instrumentally, i.e. merely as a means to the more important ends of meeting Material Needs, then we may be inclined to rush this step and move on too hastily toward more action-oriented steps. This may in due course backfire when we realise that individuals in the group do not feel safe enough to commit to co-operation. Just as building strong foundations of a house takes time but ultimately allows for faster and more effective construction of the edifice itself, time taken building your boat is rewarded by the establishment of a robust platform for effective subsequent collective action.

Methods for achieving the objectives of Relating

To feel safe and connected means to feel heard and seen, respected, valued, and cared for. We can help a group to achieve this for all through the following general participatory methods:

- ▶ **Play** - Play should not be the exclusive domain of children. Playing games brings joy and laughter which helps us to feel safe and connected with others. If the game involves movement, it takes us out of our heads and brings us back into our bodies. It allows us to connect with and display other, often non-intellectual forms of our intelligence. Games, especially co-operative games, offer low-stakes opportunities for all to succeed and grow in confidence. Play meets our needs for Safety, Connection, and Self-Esteem.
- ▶ **Active (or Deep) Listening** - Active Listening refers to a quality of listening in which one receives another with open mind, body, and heart; bringing one's full and complete attention not just to the words but to the non-verbal sentiments conveyed by the speaker. Active Listening creates a deep relational field between speaker and listener. With regard to social work, we are listening, first and foremost, simply to help the individual or household members we are

working with to feel fully heard and seen. With an eye on future action, we are also listening for the needs being directly or (more often) indirectly articulated. With regard to community organising, to establish a deep relational field within the group as a whole, it is best to start with Active Listening practices in pairs, building up in terms of both numbers and seriousness of the topic being discussed. If you find yourself in a group that for whatever reasons doesn't want to play or meditate, don't worry and don't force it. It indicates a level of unsafety that is currently felt that has to be respected and worked with. Just remember that we don't need to be conscious of our nervous systems to help them relax. Facilitating practices of dialogue that intentionally ensure the inclusion of all voices is itself a tool for cultivating Safety, Connection, and Self-Esteem.

- ▶ Meditation - By 'meditations' here we mean practices that intentionally bring our awareness to the present moment of experience, often by grounding ourselves in our own bodies. Meditations can help individuals to feel safe and grounded. Sensing into the collective field that the group comprises can cultivate a sense of group connection and belonging, meeting our needs for Identity and Transcendence too. You can use any meditation you like, of course, but feel free to use our **4D meditation here**.

A lot of individuals who were shy and found it difficult interacting with us in the communities really opened up, especially since they now had a chance to speak with us at a more personal level.

(SP+ Community Mobiliser)

Example activities for this stage of the journey

The first two activities - The Chick's Challenge and My Typical Day - are particularly recommended for the first session with a new group.

1) The Chick's Challenge

The *Chick's Challenge* exercise is taken from the Partners Companion to Training for Transformation (2001, p.25). The deceptive simplicity of this exercise hides its depth. The exercise is broken down into three components and the whole exercise should probably take around 45 minutes.

- ▶ Introduce the series of pictures below and ask the group what they see happening (10 minutes). You will need to ask follow-up questions to ensure that everyone understands that the chick has peeked hopefully out of its shell, felt afraid, and has tried to retreat back inside its now broken shell. Then ask why they think the chick has acted this way.



- ▶ Introduce the input: '4 Fears in a New Groups' below (Hope & Timmel 1999, Book 2, p.6).

I. 4 FEARS IN A NEW GROUP

Four common fears that many people have when they are in a new group for the first time are -

- **Will I be accepted?** When a person is new to a group they may be looking at others wondering what they are like and saying to themselves - 'Will I fit in with these people? Will they accept/reject me?'
- **Will I understand?** Another worry people can have is that they won't understand what people say or mean, - 'maybe I am not as educated, or haven't had the same experience, maybe it will all be over my head'.
- **Will I be able to perform?** People in a new group are often asking themselves 'If I am asked a question will I know the answer? If we have to do something will I make a fool of myself? Will I stand out by doing things differently to everyone else? Maybe I won't be as 'good' at the task as other people'.
- **Will it be relevant/interesting?** As adults we need to feel there is a value in what we are doing. So people might ask themselves 'Is this course going to be of any use? Will it just be a waste of time? Maybe I will just be bored and won't be able to use any of it afterwards'

- ▶ Invite everyone to spend 10 minutes in pairs taking turns to talk about how the pictures and input relate to their experience of new encounters, especially new groups. Pairs should practise active listening where one person at a time speaks whilst the other actively listens (10 minutes).
- ▶ Pairs feedback to the whole group (5 minutes)
- ▶ Lead a whole group discussion to generate ideas and an agreement on how the group can work together to help everyone feel safe, welcome, and eager to keep coming to meetings (20 minutes)
- ▶ *An alternative to the Chick's Challenge exercise is the 'Hopes and Fears' exercise where each member of the group is invited to share their hopes and fears for participating in the group.*

2) My Typical Day

The *My Typical Day* exercise has two main objectives. First and foremost, it is about getting everyone to practise active listening: to help everyone cultivate the capacity for active listening and allow everyone to experience being truly heard and seen. It also serves the secondary purpose of beginning the process of 'Raising Consciousness' by helping members generate a sense of shared problems and solidarity and begin to think more critically about their daily lives (30 minutes)

- ▶ Introduce and explain the exercise (5 minutes)
- ▶ Invite group members to get into pairs and take 15 minutes to tell each other about their typical day. The speaker telling their story should be as specific as possible. Rather than a conversation, the pair takes turns to speak and listen. The person listening should help the person articulate not just their thoughts but the meaning of what they are saying through exercising full attention and genuine curiosity. They might do this by reflecting back what they heard, asking curious questions, checking their own understanding (15 minutes).
- ▶ Invite the pairs to feed back to the whole group – what is the overall effect of speaking and

listening to an account of your day? What are your thoughts/feelings? What helped/hindered the exercise? (10 minutes)

3) The Chairs Game

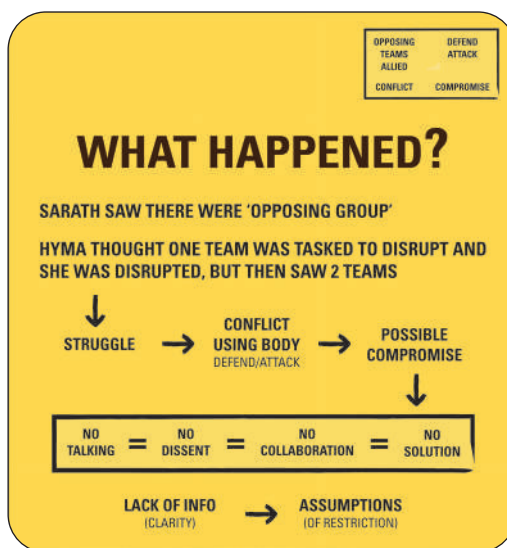
The Chairs Game is a wonderfully inventive and playful exercise for helping new groups not just bond, but begin to reflect on and develop effective ways of approaching problems and communicating, thereby increasing group self-esteem. It does, however, assume both the availability of chairs and the literacy of group members. That said, there are creative ways around both these conditions (e.g. bricks could replace chairs and symbols could replace words) (30 minutes)

► **Preparation:**

- You will need to come having already written down three separate instructions on small pieces of paper, each piece displaying one of the three instructions:
 - Arrange the chairs in a circle
 - Place the chairs in a corner
 - Stack the chairs on top of each other
- Fold up the pieces of paper so that their words cannot be read.
- The number of pieces of paper displaying each instruction should be relatively equal.

► **During the meeting:**

- Each person takes a random piece of paper. Tell everyone not to read its contents until you say. Tell them that they cannot show anyone else what their piece of paper says.
- Sit back and watch for 5 to 10 minutes
- Debrief – what happened? Was this a competition/conflict or was there a way for everyone to achieve their goal? (The answer is that everyone could achieve their goal - the chairs could be stacked in a circle in a corner)
- Invite the whole group to reflect on the exercise, their performance, and how the lessons they learned might be applied to how they will work together as a group.



4) The 4D Meditation

This meditation guide is inspired by Thomas Hübl's '3-Sync Meditation'.⁷ It invites us to gently bring our conscious awareness, first, to our physical or embodied experience (1), then to our emotional state (2), then to our mental state (3), and finally to the energetic field collectively constituted by the whole group. Thomas Hübl (2020, p.18) describes it as both a powerful 'interior hygiene practice' and exercise for 'collective awareness and co-regulation'.

Guide

Allow yourself to sit comfortably. Take some deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth. Be here and now. Nothing else to do. Nowhere else to go. Throughout the meditation, if you notice your attention wandering, that's fine. Just bring your attention back to the present moment. You can't do it wrong!

Imagine your mind as a boat sailing on the ocean. The waves on the surface are the thoughts continuously arising and disappearing in your mind. Maybe the waves right now are gently lapping against your boat. Maybe they are stormily crashing against your boat, causing your boat to toss and turn.

Body awareness

Let's leave the surface of the ocean behind, throw our anchor overboard, and journey with the anchor down beneath the surface and deep, deep down, all the way to the very bottom of the ocean. As we do, we journey within all the way down to our feet.

Let's bring our full awareness to the experience of our feet's connection with the ground and ultimately with the Earth. How does it feel? We can notice changes in pressure, temperature, energy flowing. (Stay here for 30 secs or more)

Now we can bring our awareness up to our ankles, our shins and calves, our knees, our thighs, our pelvis, hips, and buttocks, our lower back, middle back, upper back, shoulders, upper arms, forearms, and into our hands.

We can now bring all our awareness to our hands, sensing again all the endless, delicate changes in sensation, energy, temperature, pressure. We might even notice one particular finger or even the gaps between our fingers.

Now let us bring our awareness to the experience of being in a body, from head to toe; the experience of being embodied. How does that feel?

Emotional awareness

Having grounded ourselves in our bodies, now we can bring our awareness to our emotional state. Let's feel into those centres that hold our strong emotions: our stomach, our solar plexus, our chest, our heart, our throats. Can we notice without judgment or analysis? Can we welcome the feelings, be they pleasant or unpleasant? How am I feeling today?

Mental awareness

Let's now bring our awareness back to the boat on the surface, our minds; this time perhaps with more of a sense of distance. We can ask ourselves: how does my mind feel? What's the physical experience of my mind right now?

[7] See Guided Awareness Meditation | Point of Relation Podcast with Thomas Hübl. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozGiErEAXII>

Collective/systemic awareness

We have journeyed from a bodily awareness to an emotional awareness on to a mental awareness. Now, finally, we can bring our awareness to the world outside of us and feel into all the other people here. Even more, we can actually feel into the energetic field that all of us here are part of. See what you can feel. Again, you can't do it wrong. If you don't feel much or even anything, that's fine. Just notice that. If you do feel something, bring your full awareness to what you are feeling. (You can spend as long as you feel appropriate here)

Ending the meditation

Let's take some final deep breaths and, when you are ready, you can open your eyes. Maybe we could look around the group and give each other a lovely, warm smile.

***We find you like our relatives
We feel that you are our family members
You can just take the money out of the equation completely and
we still feel a lot of relation to you.***

(SP+ and WorkFREE participants)

Stage Two: Reconnecting



	Functional objectives	Practical Frameworks	Participatory methods	Example activities
Reconnecting	Reconnecting with self and group to understand needs and evaluate current satisfiers Allowing surface or underlying conflicts to be felt and resolved	Nonviolent Communication Human-Scale Development Conflict Resolution	Meditation Active Listening Storytelling Role Play	1. What are our needs? 2. P.I.N Mountain 3. Thoughts and Feelings about Conflict 4. Conflict resolution mediation practices

The functional objectives of the Reconnecting stage of the RNBO journey.

We call this stage of the journey ‘Reconnecting’ because the work here centres on helping participants to (re)connect with their underlying needs. This practice has two or three main functions depending on whether the group has a shared past or not. Assuming that the group does have a shared past, these three functions are as follows: first, the practice itself entails each individual and the group meeting their Security Needs more deeply; second, it helps the group to make visible and reflect on its shared journey thus far; third, it helps the group to clarify the needs that they have before moving on to the next three stages that involve critically identifying the current obstacles or challenges to meeting those needs (Raising Consciousness), envisioning alternative satisfiers for meeting those needs (Reimagining), and planning actions to implement those satisfiers (Responding). Central here, then, is a process that helps everyone in the group understand the crucial distinction between our needs (internal experience) and the satisfiers (objects, social practices, organisations, institutions) used either to meet or violate our needs.

Though it can and will occur at any (and possibly every!) stage of the RNBO journey, we have included exercises on conflict resolution here because we believe that conflict derives from the experience of unmet needs.

Methods for achieving the objectives of Reconnecting

To help participants reconnect with their feelings and underlying needs we present exercises that help us: distinguish between our needs and the satisfiers we use to meet our needs; learn ways to make decisions and resolve conflicts that centre our attention and energies on these underlying needs. Key here are methods centred on meditation, dialogue, active listening, and role-playing.

Example activities for the Reconnecting stage

1) What are our needs? (100 minutes)⁸

Resources needed: flipchart paper and pens, post-it notes

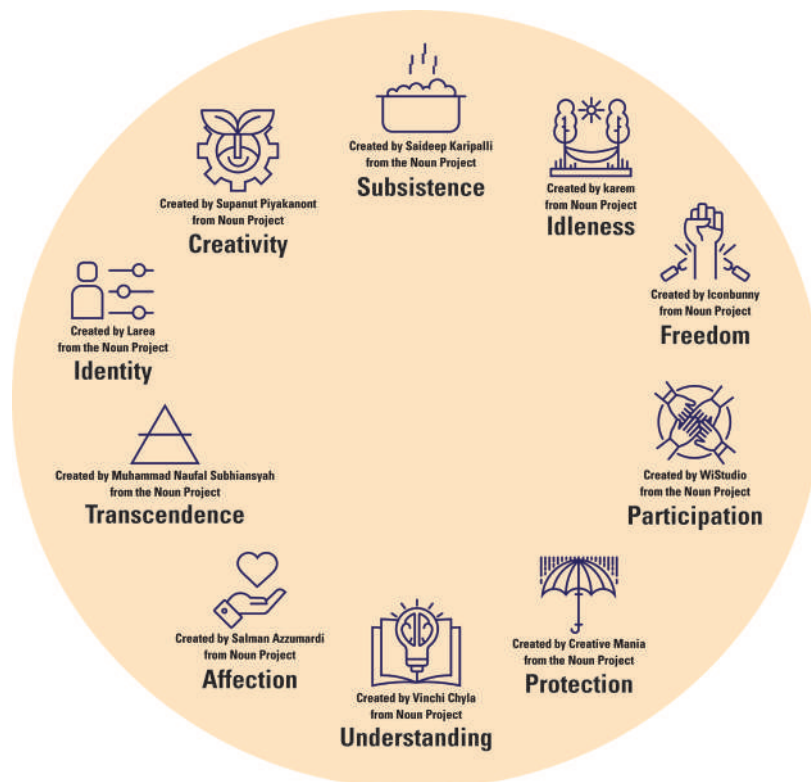
- ▶ Hand out the post-it notes to each member of the group. Show them a piece of flipchart paper with ‘What do we need to live a good life?’ written in the centre. Invite everyone to write as many answers to this question as they like on the post-it notes, one answer for each note. Ask them what they notice about the nature of their answers. They will notice that: a) there is a lot

[8] We acknowledge with the deepest gratitude and appreciation the work of **Inez Aponte** in designing and teaching us this invaluable exercise

of overlap/similarities and b) their answers are modest in nature. If you have time, you could invite everyone to group their answers around emergent themes, but this isn't necessary (10 minutes).

What Do We Need To live A Good Life?

- ▶ Input on needs: Introduce Manfred Max-Neef's Wheel of Fundamental Human Needs.⁹



[9] In his original presentation of his Human Scale Development framework, Max-Neef (1991, p.27) suggested that Transcendence was a need that may well grow in significance as humanity evolved. Contra Max-Neef, we believe that humans are spiritual beings who therefore always have and will have the need for Transcendence. In line with Max-Neef, we see our need for Transcendence as growing in historical urgency.

To practically include or exclude Transcendence in your wheel of needs for this exercise is your call. Note that in the picture below we have included it but outside the main circle. If you think you are working with a group for whom it will be readily understood and for whom the idea of a good life is inconceivable without a source of spirituality, include it. Feel free to change the name of it from Transcendence to perhaps Spirituality. If you would rather exclude it then feel free to use **this alternative wheel**.

- For the second part of this exercise see *Identifying current satisfiers* in the Raising Consciousness section below.

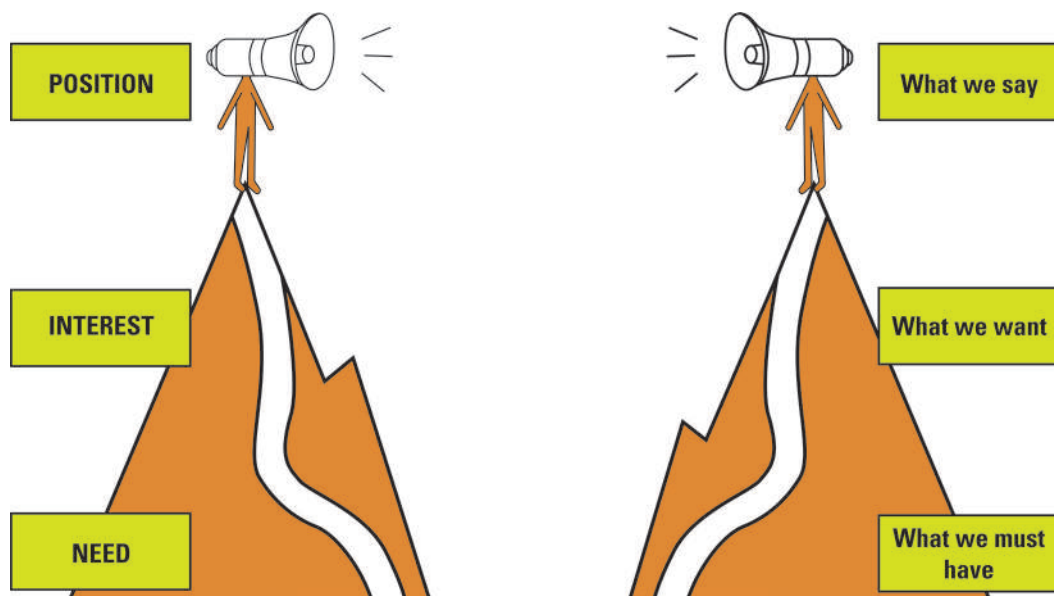
*I really helped to ask questions as well as to ask: once you have subsistence, etc. what other things do you feel you need for a good life?
When participants gave examples of their own needs, they covered all the categories.*

(SP+ Community Mobilisers)

2) P.I.N Mountain (80 minutes)

This is an exercise that we use so much at any stage of the cycle really, especially when there is disagreement or even conflict in the group. However, it is a wonderfully helpful exercise for helping people get beyond what they say and want to what they really need.

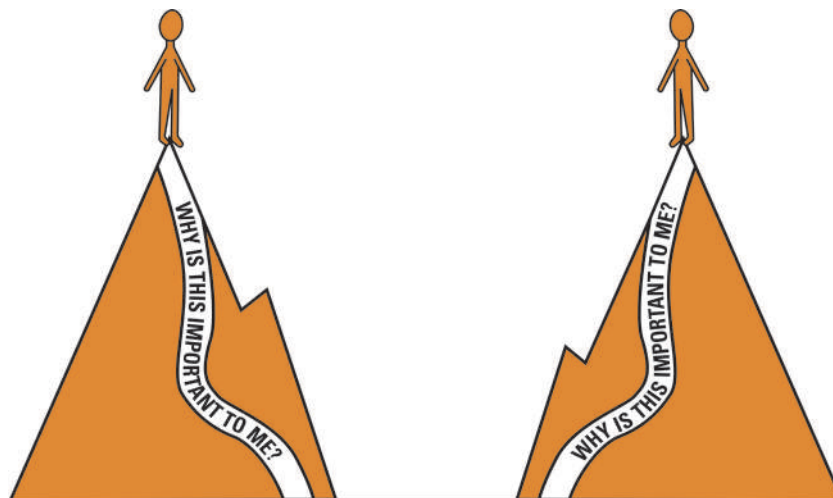
The Mountain of Position-Interest-Need (P.I.N Mountain) looks like this:¹⁰



Two (or more) people are at the top of differing mountains shouting at each other. They are in a place of disconnection and attachment; disconnection from other *and* from self and attachment to a particular outcome. Let's take an example of husband and wife arguing about what to spend their money on. The wife is insisting that they should get a loan so that she can buy a motorbike. The husband is insisting equally definitively that they should not borrow the money. They both feel like they are in a zero-sum conflict with only a winner and a loser and that the world is a place of scarcity creating these binary options.

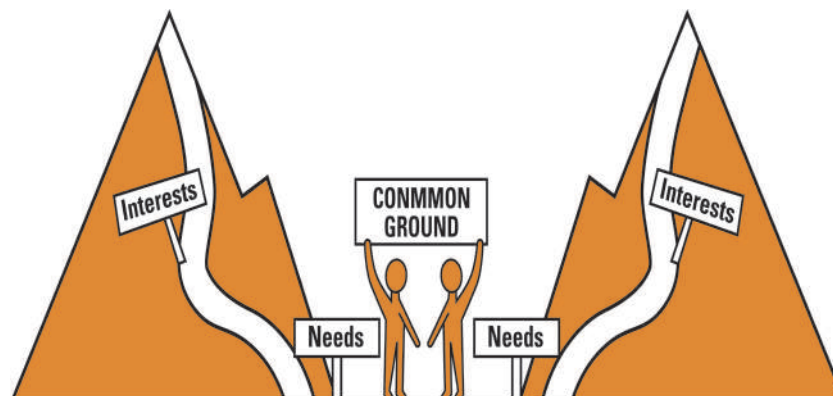
What if they were able to take a breath and a step back and ask themselves and then each other 'Why is this important to me/you?'

[10] We express our gratitude and appreciation to Perry Walker at **Rhizome Co-op** for giving us permission to use the P.I.N Mountain illustrations.



By asking this 'why' question, usually several times, we can invite ourselves and each other to move beyond our 'Position' (what we say) and connect with our 'Interests' (what we want). The wife might want to use her motorbike to expand her social and business opportunities. The husband might not want to borrow because he is afraid of taking on more debt or of his wife getting hurt or worse in a traffic accident. Sadly, it might also be because he wants to control his wife's movements.

If both parties have their Security Needs met enough to be open to going further, by asking that why question a few more times they can get to the deeper level - what they are really needing.



The wife's needs may well be for greater Freedom and Participation, for Exploration and Purpose. The husband's needs may well be for greater Safety and Self-Esteem. We can only speculate. The point is that the path down the mountain - from the summit of scarcity to the valley of abundance - is through a dialogue centred on active listening. If they can meet in the valley and really encounter each other's full subjectivity and humanity then a world of alternative options will open up where no one has to lose. We are not saying that all our needs can always be met, nor are we saying that deep structural (e.g. capitalist or patriarchal) antagonisms will be overcome by just following this exercise. We are saying, however, that the process of connecting with our needs itself meets many of our needs and cultivates a deep willingness within us to let go of our initial attachments to find new, exciting, and mutually satisfying solutions.

- ▶ Introduce an issue that is of importance to the group, but not one that is deeply controversial or sensitive for them. Facilitate a 10 minute discussion about this issue (10 minutes)
- ▶ Input: The P.I.N Mountain - Explain the P.I.N Mountain by drawing it as you explain on a piece of flipchart paper. Invite questions and reflections (20 minutes)
- ▶ Input: Using a needs framework - You could use Max-Neef's Wheel or Kaufman's Sailboat here to help people identify their needs. Alternatively, another wonderful tool to use for English-speaking groups is Seed of Peace's wheels of feelings and needs. This can be printed out and participants can be invited first to connect to the feelings words that resonate and then the needs words, so that they can construct the sentence: 'I feel X because I need Y.'
- ▶ Invite people to get into pairs to explore the issue using the P.I.N Mountain. Emphasise the need to avoid conversation and use active listening and the 'why is this important to you?' question. Each person speaks for up to ten minutes (20 minutes)
- ▶ Bring the whole group back together and get feedback from each pair, first on the experience of their dialogue and then on the content of it. Write down on flipchart paper both the experiences and, separately, the content (15 minutes)
- ▶ Invite the group to reflect on the utility of connecting with our needs and the P.I.N. Mountain as a tool to achieve this (15 minutes)

3) Thoughts and Feelings about Conflict (40 minutes)

Invite participants to reflect on four interconnected themes: (a) what is conflict, (b) what is evoked in mind by this concept, (c) what images are brought forth by this concept, (d) and what you are feeling through such evocation and images. The exercise is done in pairs with each person taking five minutes to speak and to listen. The exercise is followed by feedback and a debrief.

Participants will raise issues such as:

- ▶ the intense painful emotions that conflict provokes - anxiety, anger, embarrassment or even humiliation and shame;
- ▶ the worst aspects of our nature such as cruelty;
- ▶ how conflict ruptures connection and can destroy friendships, families, communities, societies and how, conversely, resolving conflict can repair connection and allow remarkable healing;
- ▶ how power can often be abused in situations of conflict;
- ▶ how seemingly opposing interests drive conflict.

The key learning points are that:

- ▶ Conflict is inevitable.
- ▶ Conflict is often both the obstacle and the gateway to effective collaboration and collective power.
- ▶ Therefore, conflict is not a problem to be solved nor should conflict be suppressed. Instead, it should be allowed to be surfaced and processed, so that it can lead us to positive new outcomes.
- ▶ This requires the group to cultivate a strong sense or field of safety to be able to hold all the intense emotions that will arise and need to be felt and expressed.
- ▶ Fundamental to resolving conflict is understanding that it derives not from opposing needs, but from opposing strategies aimed at meeting those underlying shared needs.
- ▶ Power dynamics is another integral part of any conflict. Power is fundamental in any social relation. How we resolve conflict depends on how we engage with power. How we navigate conflict within power and inequality is crucial for our understanding

***Those of us who received the intensive Nonviolent Communication training,
everyone says that they have got a new life.***

(SP+ Community Mobiliser)

4) Conflict resolution mediation practice¹¹

In any mediation process, two basic elements will be the following:

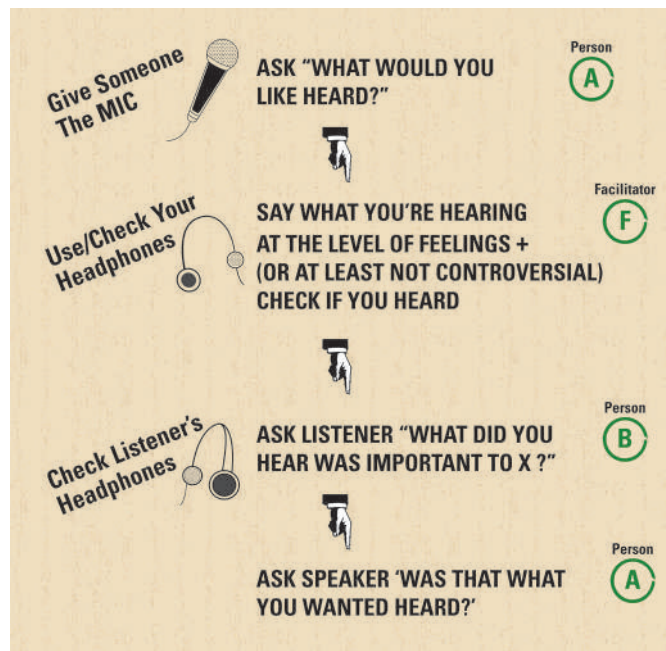
- (a)** Checking if I - the mediator - have heard what is being said correctly; and asking the speaker if what I have heard is what he/she wanted to say
- (b)** Asking the listener what he/she has heard and checking with the speaker if this is what he/she said

Listening to what is being said is very crucial in the sense that it builds up connection and trust. This helps the speaker to open up as he/she will clearly see that someone is listening carefully to what he/she is trying to say.

This exercise is for anyone wanting to practise and develop their mediation skills for conflict resolution.

- ▶ Three people participate in this exercise. One person is designated as Person A and another as Person B. The third person plays the role of mediator (this is designated with the letter 'F' for 'facilitator' in the illustration). The figure below illustrates the basic process of mediation.

[11] We acknowledge our gratitude and appreciation to Paul Kawahatte of Navigate for allowing us to share his wisdom here.



- ▶ First, Person A shares an issue in the mediation circle whilst Person B and the mediator listen. Next, the mediator repeats what she heard and reflects that in terms of Person A's feelings and needs. At the same time, she asks Person A to verify whether her reflection is accurate. Person A confirms that it is right or clarifies further. The third step is for the mediator to ask Person B to say what he has heard from Person A that is important to them. Person B says what he has heard from Person A, again based on their feelings and needs. Again, the mediator asks Person A if this is what they wanted to say. When Person A confirms that this is what she wanted to say, then the basic loop of mediation is done.

The key learning points are:

- ▶ In a conflict situation, getting each other to hear each other takes a lot of time. In other words, getting both persons to an agreement on what is being said takes a lot of back and forth.
- ▶ Very often the listener does not want to listen but rather want to tell his/her own narrative of the events
- ▶ It is very often difference of opinions about certain facts that prevent us hearing the deeper feelings and needs beneath these opinions
- ▶ As mediators we often have to check our own urge to intervene and give solutions
- ▶ The perspective of the mediator is certainly not to be partial, but nor is it to be impartial; it is to be multi-partial - supportive of all parties in the conflict.

The goals of the mediator are:

- ▶ To create conditions that support the participants in:
 - hearing/being heard in a transformative way
 - mutual care and connection
 - taking responsibility

- ▶ Helping participants to transform the blocks in their relationships
- ▶ Agree transformative action, at all levels, that really works for everybody and is based in caring about everyone's needs

We sit and talk and discuss many things. There is a lot of change among us with the help of meetings. Initially, we used to fight a lot but, now our relationship has improved, we don't fight like before.

(WorkFREE Participant)

[SP+] is trying to bring about environmental change. Some changes have occurred. Now, when conflicts arise, two people sit down and discuss to find a solution. I have been here for twenty years. Even if [the CMs] leave, I will continue with these practices as long as I'm alive. We have been learning these things in the group for a long time. What we have learned will stay with us.

(SP+ Participant)

Stage Three: Raising Consciousness



	Functional objectives	Practical Frameworks	Participatory methods	Example activities
Raising Consciousness	Identifying the structural obstacles that deny or limit the satisfaction of our needs	Pedagogy of the Oppressed Theatre of the Oppressed Human-Scale Development	Active listening Storytelling Role Play Sharing theories, concepts, and factual information	1. Identifying and mapping current satisfiers 2. Understanding power 3. Generative themes and codes

Regardless of the money I am attending these meetings because I am learning new things which I don't know and I feel happy about it, so that is why I keep attending.

(WorkFREE Participant)

The functional objectives of the Raising Consciousness stage of the RNBO journey

The word 'consciousness' can mean a lot of things! Here, we are using the traditional socialist and feminist definition of consciousness as a critical understanding of our lives in the context of our own wider history and society in order to change both ourselves and our society.

The task of the Raising Consciousness stage of the RNBO journey is to help the group to develop their own critical understanding of the intersecting political-economic-cultural factors both facilitating and impeding their capacities to meet their needs. These factors are, *of course*, out there, but they are also *in here*, i.e. within the group, the community, and the hearts and minds of each group member. This makes the practice of raising consciousness a fraught and sensitive one. This is because opinions and perspectives are never detached from identities. Raising one's consciousness is ultimately about changing one's identity and this can make us feel very unsafe. Participants becoming defensive or aggressive, angry or withdrawn is direct evidence of them feeling unsafe. At this moment, we must go back to Relating - meeting Security Needs - and Reconnecting - resolving conflicts - before returning to the work of Raising Consciousness.

Another pitfall in Raising Consciousness work entails focusing too much on the negative so as to obscure the existing or potential attributes that individuals, groups, and communities can maximise. In the language of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), these take the form of tangible and intangible assets that communities must cultivate in any effective development. Tangible assets include such things as savings, buildings, or land. Intangible assets include such things as time, community solidarity, and experience and skills.

It is certainly worth gauging your sense of where people in the group and the group as a whole are at in terms of their levels of consciousness. A useful heuristic device here can be found in Anne Hope and Sally Timmel's Training for Transformation (1991, Book 4, p.78):

- ▶ **Closed or broken consciousness** - Naive, Dependent, Alienated, Suppressed

- ▶ **Awakening consciousness** - Alert, Rebellious, Critical of people and events without questioning the established system
- ▶ **Reforming consciousness** - Start of struggle to improve the current system's functioning
- ▶ **Liberating/transforming consciousness** - Deep questioning of old values, Creative development of new types of structures, Recognition of freedom as never achieved once and for all

The participatory methods/facilitation tools for Raising Consciousness

The participatory methods and facilitation tools used for consciousness-raising are central to the broad approach to community organising and empowerment that has come to be known as Participatory Action Research (PAR). As the name suggests, PAR processes bring communities together (Participation) to understand their situations (Research) in order to change them (Action). They often involve collaborations between communities, NGOs, and academic researchers.

The consciousness-raising exercises presented below are informed and inspired by the tradition widely known as Critical Pedagogy. This is a tradition often traced to the pioneering theories and practices of Brazilian teacher Paulo Freire; a tradition that has proliferated and been immeasurably enriched through its encounters with Indigenous, anti-colonial, Black liberation, and feminist theories and practices worldwide. The common strand weaving through all approaches to Critical Pedagogy is *dialogue* and the teacher's role not as instructor or informer, but as gentle, loving questioner and even provocateur. The foundational spirit and motive of the critical pedagogue is love for and faith in all people.

The methodologies developed from Freire's seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* were profoundly enriched by fellow Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal whose *Theatre of the Oppressed* used performance techniques to enliven and, crucially, embody consciousness-raising processes. We add Manfred Max-Neef's Human Scale Development to ground our consciousness-raising work in a needs-based framework.

Example activities for the Raising Consciousness stage

We strongly encourage you to access Anne Hope and Sally Timmel's (1999) four volumes of *Training for Transformation* to support your Raising Consciousness work.^[12] We particularly recommend their *Training for Transformation in Practice* of 2014 (Hope & Timmel, 2014).^[13] We share here a few of some of *Training for Transformation's* excellent exercises here.

Our Raising Consciousness work begins with identifying and mapping current satisfiers; that is, how our needs are currently un/met (identifying) and who and which organisations are involved (mapping). It then moves on to thinking critically about the nature of power, specifically in the relationships we have mapped. This leads us to utilise a Freireian exercise (Generative Codes) to start to think critically about the wider and deeper factors creating or reproducing poverty in our community.

[12] Available here - <https://practicalactionpublishing.com/book/2208/training-for-transformation>

[13] Available here - <https://practicalactionpublishing.com/book/2213/training-for-transformation-in-practice>

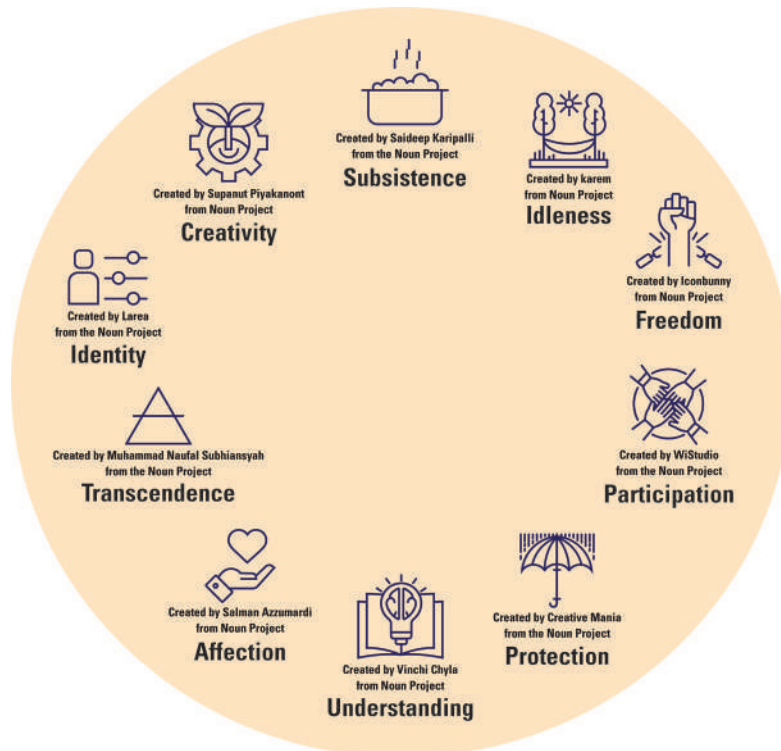
1) Identifying and mapping current satisfiers (120 minutes)

- ▶ Step one: Identifying current satisfiers
 - Input: Categories of satisfiers - Teach the group that Max-Neef identified four categories of satisfiers (5 minutes)

SATISFIERS ARE:

- Inhibitors** ○ *Inhibitors* are satisfiers that meet one or more needs but inhibit the satisfaction of others. For example, overprotective parents meet their child's need for safety whilst inhibiting her need for freedom.
- Violators** ○ *Violators* are satisfiers that violate one or more needs. For example, prison may be seen as a violator of an individual's need for freedom, whilst war violates every need.
- Pseudo-satisfiers** ○ *Pseudo-satisfiers* are satisfiers that generate a false sense of satisfaction in us., but longer-term violate our needs. Max-Neef (1991, 35) gave such examples as charity, faddish fashion, formal democracy, and the exploitation of our natural resources.
- Synergic** ○ *Synergic satisfiers* are satisfiers that simultaneously meet multiple needs.

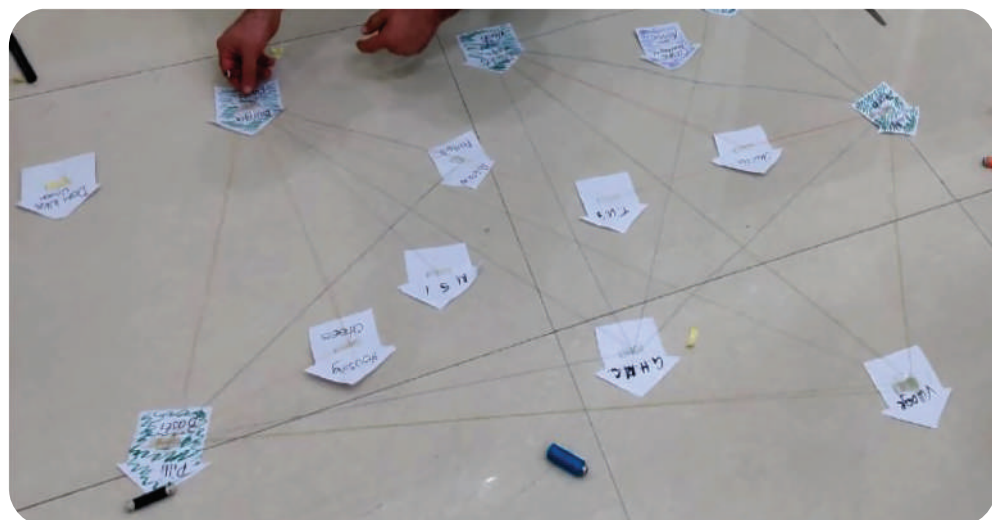
- ▶ Small group discussions (15 minutes) - Put people into groups of four or five and invite them to go through all of Max-Neef's needs and discuss whether each need is being met for them and the satisfiers currently involved. The goal here is not (yet) to ask why. Instead, it is to help people identify their needs and the current satisfiers and whether those needs are being met and, therefore, whether the satisfiers involved are working or not.



- ▶ Invite each group to feedback and fill in the following table with the satisfiers they identified (20 minutes)

Needs/ Satisfiers	Idleness	Creation	Understanding	Participation	Identity	Freedom	Subsistence	Affection
Positive								
Positive								

- ▶ Whole group discussion (30 minutes) - What have we learned? Which of our needs are being met? Which are not being met?
- ▶ Step Two - Mapping the satisfiers. The objective here is to co-produce a map of the network of relations involved in producing current satisfiers. For this exercise you can use any materials available to you to make your map. We particularly like using string and tape, but you could use pens and paper or even a finger in the sand or dirt if need be.
 - Invite the whole group to brainstorm a list of all the key organisations involved in the satisfiers they have identified (10 minutes).
 - Now ask the group to use the materials available to map out the network of relationships between them and these organisations (20 minutes)
 - Use the final 20 minutes to reflect on the learning from this exercise (20 minutes).



2) Understanding Power (80 minutes)

- ▶ Brainstorm - Throw in ideas on:
 - Who gets listened to in society?
 - Who doesn't get listened to in society? (5 minutes)

- ▶ Question: What can we do as a group to make this a space in which everyone is listened to and respected?
 - Invite people into small groups to discuss (15 minutes)
 - Invite everyone to feed back into the whole group and generate a list of principles and actions they can do to practise power with in the group

- ▶ Input - Introduce the concepts of 'power over' versus 'power with' (5 minutes)

- ▶ Create inner and outer circles of people, one within the other facing each other so that a pair of people are facing each other. Pairs work with each other for five minutes, each taking half of the available time to speak. Then the people in the inner circle rotate so that new pairs are formed. Those pairs then work together for a further five minutes before another rotation happens. Continue for a few rounds.
 - Take it in turns to listen to your partner talking about:
 - A time when someone had power over you and you felt unable to do anything about it.
 - A time when you had power over someone else and used it badly
 - A time when you had power and used it well (20 minutes)

- ▶ Feed back as a whole group and draw out common themes (10 minutes)

- ▶ Question: How do we currently work together to challenge power over us in society? What more can we do to challenge power over us in society?
 - Invite people into small groups to discuss (15 minutes)
 - Invite everyone to feed back into the whole group and generate some key ways in which they can develop strategies for challenging power over (20 minutes)



3) Generative themes and codes

Generative themes are key issues concerning poverty, inequality, and oppression affecting a given society and community. They are called 'generative' because, to paraphrase Paulo Freire, these are the themes that will generate emotions within a group that can be channeled into motivations to learn about and ultimately challenge these issues. Facilitators should always be listening out for the generative themes raised by their group.

Generative codes are 'codes' that depict these generative themes. They can take the forms of photographs, paintings, drawings, maybe a video clip or even a programme or film. They serve to depict to the group a perspective on an issue that personally affects their lives *without presenting or referring to them directly*.

The selection of generative themes and the creation or selection of codes depicting them can only be made once the facilitators know a community - their daily lives and challenges - well enough. Chapters 2 and 3 of Book 1 of *Training for Transformation* provide a detailed, comprehensive guide to the process of identifying generative themes and producing generative codes (Hope & Timmel, 1991, Book 1, pp.53-120).

Using a generative code (50 minutes)

- ▶ Present the generative code to the group. First, ask them: 'What is happening here?' Facilitate a group discussion (15 minutes)

- ▶ Next, ask: 'Why is this happening?' (15 minutes).

- ▶ Now ask: 'How does this relate to our own lives?' At this stage, invite the group to break into smaller groups, inviting active listening, to discuss and then feed back to the whole group (20 minutes)

What are the causes of poverty? (80 minutes)

- ▶ In small groups of three or four people, invite the group to brainstorm their answers to the question: What are the causes of poverty? (20 minutes)

- ▶ Invite the whole group to come together to share their feedback (10 minutes)

- ▶ You could use the following exercise from *Training for Transformation* (Book 1, p.108) if you think it appropriate:

CAUSES OF POVERTY

The following is a list of major causes of poverty. Please **place a "1"** beside the one you consider to be the most important cause, and then **place a "2"** beside the second most important, and so on, on the left side of the paper.

Individual Ranking		Group Ranking
A. _____	Unemployment	_____
B. _____	Unfair land distribution/shortage of land	_____
C. _____	Drought/lack of rain	_____
D. _____	Lack of technology (e.g. tractors, electricity)	_____
E. _____	Lack of suitable education and training	_____
F. _____	No decision-making power for the poo	_____
G. _____	Women and children deserted by fathers	_____
H. _____	No trade unions or ineffective unions, so low wages	_____
I. _____	National debt and economic structural adjustment programs	_____
J. _____	War and unrest	_____
K. _____	Over population	_____
L. _____	Lack of personal initiative	_____
M. _____	Wealth and power concentrated in the hands of a few	_____
N. _____	Low prices for exports, expensive imports, and unfair terms of trade	_____
O. _____	Corruption	_____
P. _____	Banks and multi-national companies which export profits	_____
Q. _____	Capitalist model of development (new machinery, not jobs, for people)	_____
R. _____	Production of cash crops for exports, not local use	_____
S. _____	Destruction of the environment (trees, soil, water level)	_____
T. _____	Other: _____	_____

- ▶ Finally, ask: 'What are the obstacles that would need to be overcome to improve this situation?' Write down on flipchart paper the group's ideas (30 minutes).

I feel that the women here are very thoughtful and now they have got the confidence, and I feel that now they will come out and they will fight for their needs, for their rights.

(WorkFREE Participant)

Stage Four: Reimagining



	Functional objectives	Practical Frameworks	Participatory methods	Example activities
Reimagining	Letting go of a psychology of fear and scarcity. Letting come an emergent vision of a better future	Theory U	Meditation Visualisations Social Presencing Theatre	1.Nine Questions 2.Visualisation exercise

The functional objectives of the Reimagining stage of the RNBO journey

Having identified the main negative satisfiers violating or limiting the group’s capacities to meet its needs, the next obvious step is to help the group to reimagine - to envision and articulate alternative satisfiers, alternative ways to meet their needs.

To allow ourselves to reimagine, to let go of our emotional attachments and loosen what William Blake famously called our ‘mind-forged manacles’¹⁴ takes courage and therefore a great degree of safety, connection, and self-esteem. If we feel unsafe, isolated, and/or unconfident then, rest assured, we will see our future through traumatised eyes and all we will end up doing is, to quote Thomas Hübl (2020, p.14), ‘take the road behind us, place it in front of us and call it the “future”! Consequently, we strongly recommend preceding these exercises with a grounding meditation. Feel free to use the **4D meditation script** we provide.

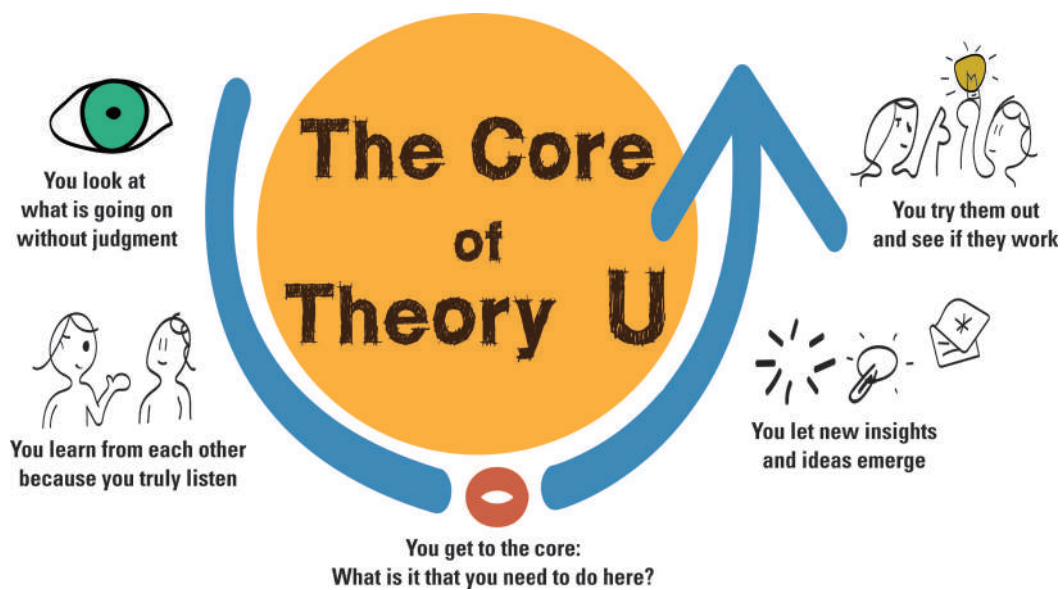
[14] Read William Blake’s London - <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43673/london-56d22277e969>

In an important way, the Reimagining stage is the antithesis of the Raising Consciousness phase - the yin to its yang; the right brain hemisphere to its left brain hemisphere. The Reimagining stage invites us to suspend our critical analysis and just ask 'what if' - What if everything was possible? What if there were no barriers to a better world? What if all our needs could be met? What would that look like? What would it *feel* like? That said, the Reimagining exercises also help the group and all its members to envisage the first steps they might take in building a bridge from where they are to the world they imagine.

In sum, the Reimagining stage invites participants to *let go* of what no longer serves them and to *let come* what is emerging or wanting to be born from within them.

The participatory methods/facilitation tools for Reimagining

We draw here on the remarkable framework and movement Theory U developed primarily by Massachusetts Institute of Technology scholar Otto Scharmer.¹⁵ Theory U invites individuals, groups, and organisations to go through a U-shaped journey that begins with suspending old judgments and letting go of unhelpful attachments in order to create space within for allowing what is new and needed to emerge.



The Reimagining exercises here are designed to help individuals and groups move from the base of the U and begin the journey up its far side.

Example activities for the Reimagining stage

Here, we share some example activities from Theory U to support a generative Reimagining experience. This is skimming the surface of the fantastic exercises that Theory U offers. We really encourage you to check out more of their brilliant content.¹⁶ We want to emphasise again that these exercises can and should only be done within a group with a strong boat, i.e. where trust is deep and the group feels like a truly safe space.

[15] See <https://www.presencing.org/theoryu> for an overview of Theory U.

[16] See <https://www.u-school.org/resources>

1) Nine Questions (60 minutes)

This first exercise, adapted from Theory U, is a more conventional invitation to reflect and imagine. It takes everyone through a series of nine questions and invites everyone to write down their own personal answers to each question. After this, you can invite the group to get into pairs to share their answers before reconvening the whole group. When you invite people to feed back to the whole group make it clear that they only have to share what they feel comfortable sharing.

Here are the nine questions:

1. Over the past days and weeks, what has been wanting to be born within you recently?
2. What is wanting to be born within the collective/community?
3. What in your current working life frustrates you the most?
4. Where in your life do you feel happiness?
5. At the current stage of your life's journey, what is it that you're really trying to make happen?
6. At the current stage of its journey, what is it that your collective is really trying to make happen?
7. What key questions come up for you now?
8. Recall a specific moment when you were younger and were anticipating a journey, a new opportunity. What if that person, that younger self, walked into the room now? What would they say in terms of your achievements, your concerns, your plans?
9. Imagine we are facing the threshold of death. If you could stop and turn around and look back at the whole of your life, what is it that you would like to see?

2) Visualisation Exercise (60 minutes)

This exercise can be practised by itself or can follow on from the Nine Questions exercise. Invite everyone to get as comfortable and relaxed as possible and then close or lower their eyes and take several deep grounding breaths, in through the nose and out through the mouth, maybe holding the breath for a few seconds between each inhale and exhale. You then invite the group to really visualise the story you will tell them. Here is a loose script of the guided meditation to lead the group through:

You are walking through a forest on a beautiful day. The temperature is perfect - not too hot, not too cold. There is a gentle breeze caressing your skin. You can see the sunlight and shadows playing on the trees and leaves. You can hear the sound of birds calling to each other in the canopy. Everything is right with the world. You feel safe, happy, and deeply connected to nature, to the forest, to the Earth. You are walking on a clearly marked path, so you have no worries about getting lost. Any time you like you can just turn around and follow the path back from where you came.

You walk on deeper into the forest without a care in the world, simply present in the moment, noticing all the wonders of the forest. After some more time, you come across a clearing in the forest. You enter the clearing, take off your shoes and let yourself feel the soft, gentle touch of the grass. There is blue sky above you and a ring of trees all around you.

You now notice that in between two of the trees is a door. What a strange, remarkable place to put a door! Surely, it must be some kind of magical door!

What does the door look like to you? Is it large or small? Wide or narrow? What is it made of? What colour is it? What shape and style does it have? See that door. Walk towards that door.

You are now standing right in front of the door now. You see its handle and you reach out to take hold of the door's handle. You realise that this door is a portal to a dream world, an ideal world and when you open it you will get access to a vision of a transformed future for your community (can change this to be organisation, town, city, etc). In just a moment, I will invite you to open the door and step through into this ideal world and encounter this transformed future. Then I will be silent and give you the time and space to really take it all in.

Take hold of the handle, open the door, and, when you are ready, step through...

- *What do you see?*
- *What do you hear?*
- *What do you smell, taste, touch?*
- *Who is there?*
- *What are they doing?*
- *How do you feel here?*

Allow five minutes for everyone to experience this ideal vision of their community...

It is time now to leave this ideal world, so take a final look and then step back through the door, close the door, turn around, leave the clearing and find your way back to the forest path. You can walk back down the path back to where your journey began, taking some final moments to really enjoy the beauty of the forest one last time. When you are ready you can open your eyes...

Questions for the group after the visualisation - Invite everyone to write down the answers to their questions if possible. An alternative is to invite the group to draw a picture of what they saw. They can then share their written answers, their pictures, or just their memories with another member of the group. You could easily make art the centre of this exercise and invite everyone to share their pictures. The questions to ask really are just the questions you asked during the guided visualisation, but in the past tense:

- *What did you see?*
- *What did you hear?*
- *What did you smell, taste, touch?*
- *Who was there?*
- *What were they doing?*
- *How did you feel there?*

From these sensory questions we can start to create the first steps on the path of moving from our current reality to that transformed reality by asking:

- *What future are you called to bring?*
- *What is the highest possibility you can sense for your community?*
- *Letting go - If you would fully commit yourself to making this happen, what do you need to let go?*
- *Letting come – Where in your direct environment do you find the seeds of this future?*
- *Prototyping the idea: Write down one or two prototyping ideas that you could do over the next month or two*
- *Who are the nearest people to help you make this happen?'*
- *Action: What are the micro-actions that you could take in the next few days that would move you from contemplating the future towards realising it?*

They asked us to close our eyes and think about whatever comes to our mind. They asked us all 'what did we see?' At that time, I saw that in our basti we had a good road.../ liked it. We don't have anything here.

(WorkFREE Participant)

Stage Five: Responding



	Functional objectives	Practical Frameworks	Participatory methods	Example activities
Responding	Planning and pursuing new improved satisfiers	Diamond of Participation Convergent Facilitation	Meditation Visualisations Social Presencing Theatre	1. Diamond of Participation 2. Examples from SP+ and WorkFREE

We learned that as women in this community, we can achieve what we want for ourselves and this community together

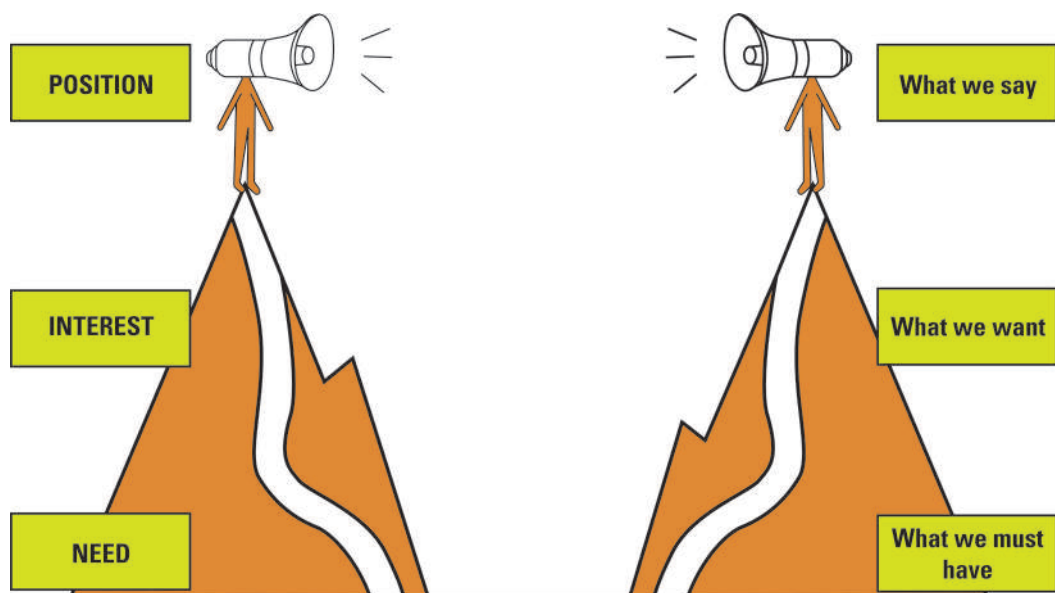
(WorkFREE Participant)

The functional objectives of the Responding stage of the RNBO journey

Enacting a Relational Needs-Based approach to community organising means relinquishing preconceived solutions; throwing out all notions that we know what is best for participant communities. Consequently, the goal of the *Reimagining stage* is to support communities to envisage their own new strategies (satisfiers) for enhancing community resilience and flourishing. When it comes to the Responding stage, however, what we can offer are useful, practicable ways to help communities make decisions.

The participatory methods/facilitation tools for Responding

What we would like to share with you here is a practical framework for understanding and practising a more optimal, needs-oriented method for achieving consensual collective agreements over important strategic decisions. We are not saying that this method should be used to help the group decide whether to break for tea at 10am or 11am! We are sharing it to help you support groups through the process of achieving consensus concerning important decisions that require consensus to maintain group unity.



Here is not the place for setting out our views in detail on the differences between consensus, consent, and compromise.¹⁷ However, what we will say is that compromise is invariably a false economy. It leaves us either feeling resentful that we have conceded too much or guilty that we won too many concessions. Very often, it even leads us to accept an outcome that no one ever really wanted in the first place. If you recall the two parties in conflict standing atop the two mountains in the P.I.N exercise, what happens if both parties agree to meet in the middle? They both find themselves in mid air soon to fall to the valley floor! Here, then, we guide you through the Diamond of Participation.

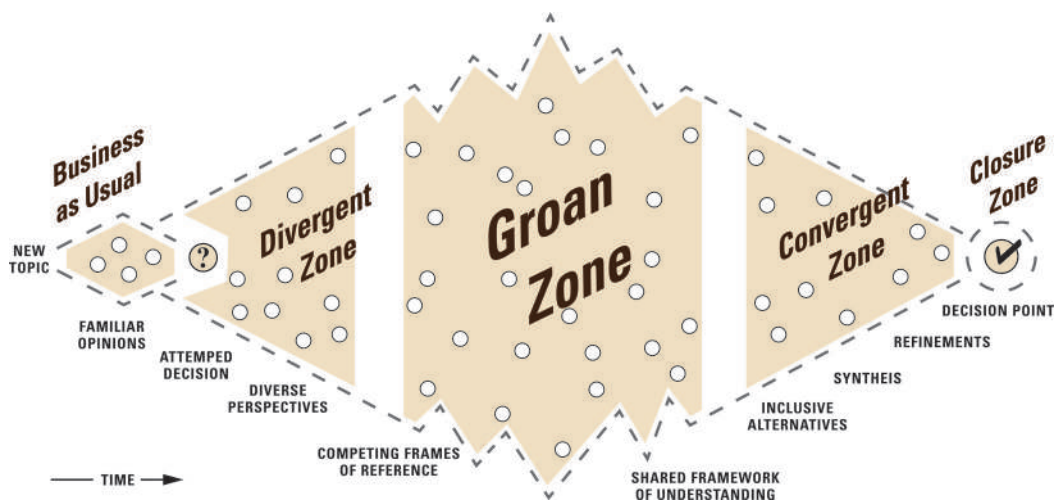
[17] You can find more on this question in our **RNBO resources** section.

Example activities for the Responding stage

The Diamond of Participation

The figure below presents the Diamond of Participation by Sam Kaner (2014). Before we offer you a potted guide through the Diamond, let us first consider the usual approach to making collective decisions. The first step is generally the proposal - someone presents a proposed course of action. The next steps are generally: gauging initial responses to that proposal which leads to its rejection or its provisional acceptance; if accepted then a subsequent discussion centred on developing or refining the proposal. This includes efforts to overcome all major reservations. Consensus may sometimes be achieved. Compromise with opposing camps is often the outcome. What if we reversed this process?

In reality, beginning with a proposal has a huge limiting effect on creative imagination. Crucially, it also greatly impedes the potential for dissent that creative imagination needs. In short, in our thirst for convergence we deny ourselves the experience of the initial *divergence* - of feelings, opinions, and ideas - necessary for generating an abundance of possible outcomes. The Diamond's approach offers us this initial divergence...



The diagram begins on the left-hand side where a group trying to take on a new topic in the same old ways finds itself at a dead end. An alternative approach is to enter the 'Divergent Zone' by suspending any concern for outcomes and opening up a process that invites every person to connect with and share their thoughts, feelings, and, crucially, underlying needs regarding the issue - in short, to Relate and Reconnect.

It is in the Divergent Zone that ethics and efficiency meet. We work hard to ensure that every single person is seen and heard in this process not just because it is the right thing to do to respect each individual and deepen group relations, but because the group comprises a living system whose flourishing depends on the free flow of information and each person constitutes a part of that system with invaluable information to share.

The Diamond's central area is named the 'Groan Zone' in recognition of the fact that the journey of moving from generating divergence to achieving convergence can often be arduous, painful, and non-

linear as we have to take steps backward to address new concerns that may belatedly raise their head. A wonderful tool for helping us navigate this Groan Zone has been developed by Nonviolent Communication (NVC) pioneer Miki Kashtan (2021). Kashtan's Convergent Facilitation framework invites groups, first, to name the underlying needs beneath their feelings and, then, to compile a list of criteria that any potential proposal for action would have to satisfy to be acceptable to all participants. She calls these criteria 'non-controversial essences'; a name that captures how facilitators must be able to help participants articulate the essential attributes of any potential new satisfier in ways that do not controversially exclude or impose upon any particular individual or group. For example, rather than saying 'any decision cannot include Sarah because she is a bully', our requested criterion might be stated as 'any decision must safeguard against bullying behaviour in order to meet my need for safety'.

The goal is to approach the Convergent Zone with a comprehensive list of essential criteria. The Convergent Zone can then become an energised process of imagination and creativity (Reimagining) as the group brainstorms and then refines ideas for actions that satisfy the criteria. Kashtan highlights how because such a process includes all members it cultivates a wealth of willingness on the part of individuals to let go of stubborn attachments for the benefit of the group (and, ultimately, themselves).

How a group or community then actually implements the action agreed at the culmination of the journey of the Diamond is, of course, another vital matter of consideration. However, our focus in this Handbook has been on making the case for and specifying a relational and needs-based approach to helping communities reach the position of being able to take effective collective action. Suffice to say here that, whilst there are many models out there for organising effective implementation, it is the depth of relations within the group and the focus on personal and collective needs that will ultimately determine implementation efficacy.

Another final point is to emphasise that it is vital that we begin with small steps, small wins to build up the group's confidence and capacities. If the objectives are larger, an extremely valuable practice is to trial prototypes and refine and scale up from them.

Examples from Social Protection Plus and WorkFREE

An alternative practical approach to facilitating Responding comes from CLARISSA SP+. Here, the project's team of Community Mobilisers (CMs) conducted an initial month-long needs-based analysis they called 'Connect, Inform, Learn'. This was conducted primarily through household visits during which CMs would use NVC listening practices to relate and (re)connect with participants (Connect) in order to ascertain the needs of individuals, households, and the wider community (Learn). The CM team then came together to analyse the data they had generated and themselves decide their next practical steps for responding to these needs. Their responses took the forms of a combination of practical direct action and the creation of thematic working groups for community members to join. Regarding direct action, responding to obvious and widespread health-related needs, CMs worked with local charitable health providers to establish monthly health camps that offered free consultations and basic medication to over one hundred individuals each month. CMs also set up small-scale savings and loans groups in participant communities to help households mitigate against economic shocks. With regard to thematic working groups, responding to participants' own identified priorities, CMs established working groups on the themes of parent-child relations, neighbourhood cleanliness, and recreational youth activities, each of which led to visible improvements in the relations and environments of participant communities (Howard et al., 2024, pp. 31-2).

In the case of WorkFREE, the practical actions that characterised the Responding stage took both the form of more organically emergent and NGO-initiated responses. Examples of emergent responses are participants organising to establish savings groups and a local kindergarten. The main example of an action initiated by our partner NGO responding to knowledge of participants' needs concerns the creation of the Hyderabad Garbage Collectors' Collective (HyGCC), effectively a trade union for local garbage collectors. Though the process of establishing HyGCC was initiated by the NGO, in stark contrast to typically NGO-dominated processes in India, the launch event was attended by around five hundred people with women particularly vocal. Indeed, it was women who had participated regularly in WorkFREE Plus meetings who came to be voted into a majority of places on the HyGCC organising committee.

Whilst these two examples may seem to differ from the Diamond of Participation we present, they actually align with it in the sense that, rather than beginning with a closed proposal, the work of SP+ and WorkFREE began with listening and opening to the feelings and needs of participants (Divergence) in order to understand and effectively respond to these needs.

Everyone in the neighbourhood who is a part of the group has some rough plans for carrying out these tasks after we leave... It won't be an easy task, but we are determined... have both the desire and the courage to work.

(SP+ Participant)

The RNBO practice of social work

The RNBO practice of social work does not drastically differ from the five stage journey presented above. It begins with Relating - deep relational work between the social worker and their partner individuals and households to meet the Security Needs of all. It may well involve a great deal of Reconnecting work in the form of conflict resolution. The Raising Consciousness stage centres on helping individuals and families recognise the structural factors at play in their lives to understand that they are not to blame for their poverty, ill-health, or other sources of suffering, nor, equally, are they powerless victims of the system, but, instead, they are agents capable of transforming their lives, especially when working alongside others in their community. The Reimagining stage invites individuals to release themselves from the shackles of the psychology of fear and scarcity to envisage a better life for themselves. Finally, the Responding stage involves the social worker supporting individuals and households to make and pursue concrete plans for transformation. Through this process the relationship between social worker and households itself transforms from that of saviour-victim to one of partnership.

I would say [my Community Mobiliser] saved my life... [She] understands all my problems, listens to me with patience, and tries to find solutions. There is no one else in my family whom I can tell my innermost thoughts to ... And I saw [her] praising me everywhere. I got a lot of confidence because she believed in me that I could do it ... and I now know that I can stand on my own feet in life if I want to It was a life-changing event for me to be able to go back to school because of her.

(SP+ Participant)

Such a beautiful relationship I have with [my CM]. He is like my son to me ... I can't express in words how important it is to me the compassion with which he looks at me. And even if I say it, you won't be able to express it in your writing ... I learned from [my CM] that blood relations are not all.

(SP+ Participant)

The RNBO Toolbox

In this section, we offer our RNBO Toolbox. We first introduce the multiple traditions and frameworks that we have drawn on in developing each stage of our RNBO approach. Here, we offer a brief overview of each and then provide links to websites with more information and lots more practical activities to use. We then provide a few more example activities for each stage of the RNBO cycle.

This RNBO Handbook is inspired and informed by a rich variety of distinct traditions and frameworks. We introduce them here alongside links to websites where you can read and learn more about each of them and access hundreds of excellent activities to try out.

Relating: frameworks and resources

Nonviolent Communication

Of all the frameworks we used to develop our RNBO approach the most essential is Nonviolent Communication. Nonviolent Communication (NVC) was pioneered by American psychologist and mediator Marshall Rosenberg. Rosenberg was deeply influenced by positive psychologist Carl Rogers.

As Rosenberg (1993) himself put it, NVC gives us an invaluable 'language of life' and, we would argue, a language *for* life. Nonviolent Communication is not non-violent (note the hyphen); that is, it is not just *not* violent. Nonviolent Communication is an active expression of nonviolence in the ancient Indian sense of *Ahimsa* - a way of being that sees and respects the divine nature of all living beings. When we practise nonviolent communication we practise what Mahatma Gandhi called *Satyāgraha* or 'truth force' - we express the deepest truth force which is love.

Here is not the place to train readers in NVC.¹⁸ Instead, we offer a simple introduction to its core insight and practice. Understanding its core insight and practice will allow you to better understand the following activities in this section.

NVC's core insight is simple to state: violent communication (conflict) derives not from competing needs, but from unmet needs and competing *strategies* aimed at meeting those underlying unmet needs. Therefore, nonviolent communication is enacted by connecting with, expressing, and making requests to help us meet those underlying needs.

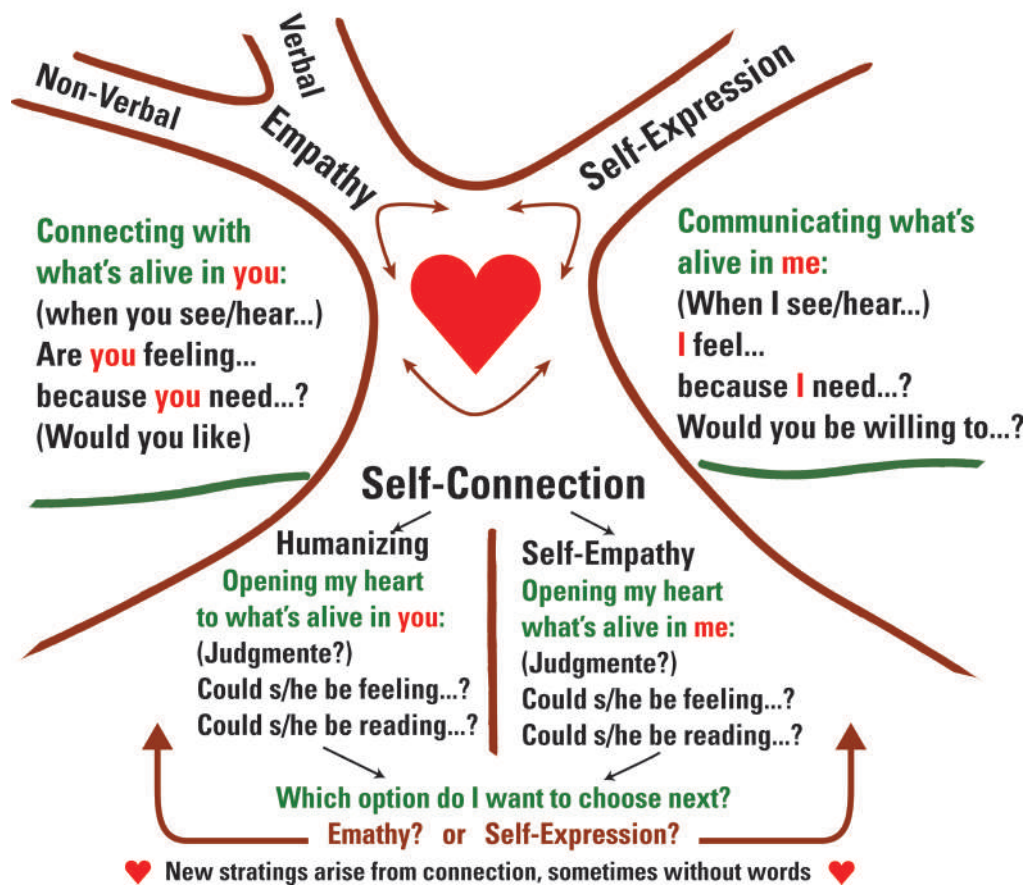
The NVC Tree represents the four-steps of practising Nonviolent Communication:

1. Observation - Observing what is happening in a given situation *without judgment*
2. Feelings - Connecting with one's present feelings, recognising that the actions or words of others may be the stimulus but never the cause of our feelings
3. Needs - Discerning the unmet needs that lie beneath our feelings
4. Requests - Making positive, practicable requests of others aimed at meeting those underlying needs

[18] Please visit **RNBO resources** for more resources on learning and practising NVC.

The NVC Tree of Life

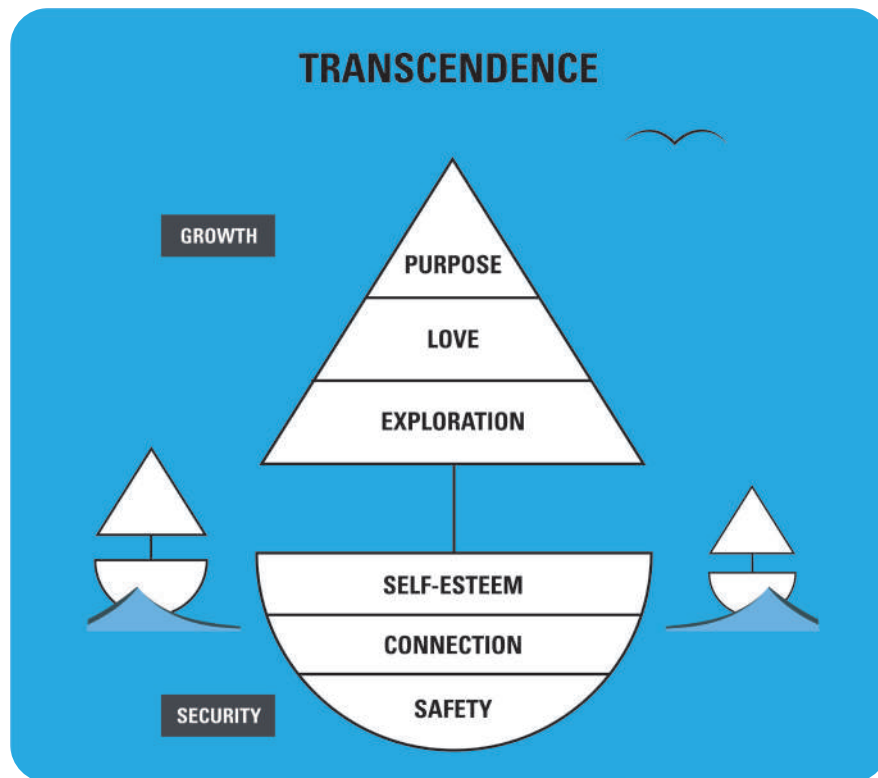
Three Focus Options for Connection



The NVC process begins with *Self-Connection* - coming within ourselves (represented by the tree's roots beneath the ground) to sense our feelings and needs. Having offered ourselves *Empathy*, we are then able to offer the same to others - to listen to and understand their feelings and needs. This then allows the other person to subsequently offer us the same and receive our *Self-Expression*. The process concludes with mutual requests for future actions.

Kaufman's Sailboat

Like Marshall Rosenberg before him, Scott Barry Kaufman is a psychologist working in the tradition of positive psychology. Kaufman's great inspiration is Abraham Maslow and Kaufman's research builds on and updates Maslow's work on human needs. In his recent book *Transcend: the new science of self-actualization*, Kaufman combines cutting-edge neuroscience and clinical psychology to create a model of a sailboat to depict our fundamental human needs.



This is the sailboat we use to sail through our life's journey. First and foremost, we must ensure that the hull of our boat is strong, i.e. that our psychological Security Needs are met. We can then open our sails and pursue meeting our Growth Needs. Like Abraham Maslow before him, Kaufman (2020, p.6) points to Transcendence as our highest or deepest need, defining it as 'awareness...expanded beyond the self' and having 'a deep sense of who [we are] and what [we are called] to contribute to the world'.

Kaufman's sailboat is remarkable because it is both produced from the findings of contemporary scientific research and is so beautifully simple and intuitive to understand. The picture of a simple sailboat makes it almost universally culturally accessible.

Intergenerational and Collective Trauma

By Intergenerational and Collective Trauma we refer to the (increasingly scientifically evidenced) understanding that, whilst our trauma is always deeply personal, it is also always ultimately intergenerational and collective. Trauma is intergenerational in the way that it is passed down from generation to generation until someone is willing and able to feel and process that pain. Trauma is collective in the sense that just like all forms of violence are ultimately expressions of systemic oppressions (e.g. racism, capitalism, patriarchy) so too is the trauma that this violence creates. What this means is that when we are able to process our trauma we do so not just for ourselves; we do it for our ancestors, our community, our society, and ultimately for humanity.

Unlike the previous two frameworks, there is no single founding author to get acquainted with here. Above all, we acknowledge the remarkable contributions of Indigenous cultures here. Though it may be deeply buried, every culture holds the wisdom seeds of healing. We refer you here to a selection of contemporary wise souls pioneering powerful synergies of timeless truths and scientific research.

Resources

Nonviolent Communication

Visit the Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC) - <https://www.cnvc.org>

Kaufman's Sailboat

See Scott Barry Kaufman's own website for more information and resources -

<https://scottbarrykaufman.com/books/transcend/>

<https://scottbarrykaufman.com/sailboat-metaphor/>

Intergenerational and Collective Trauma

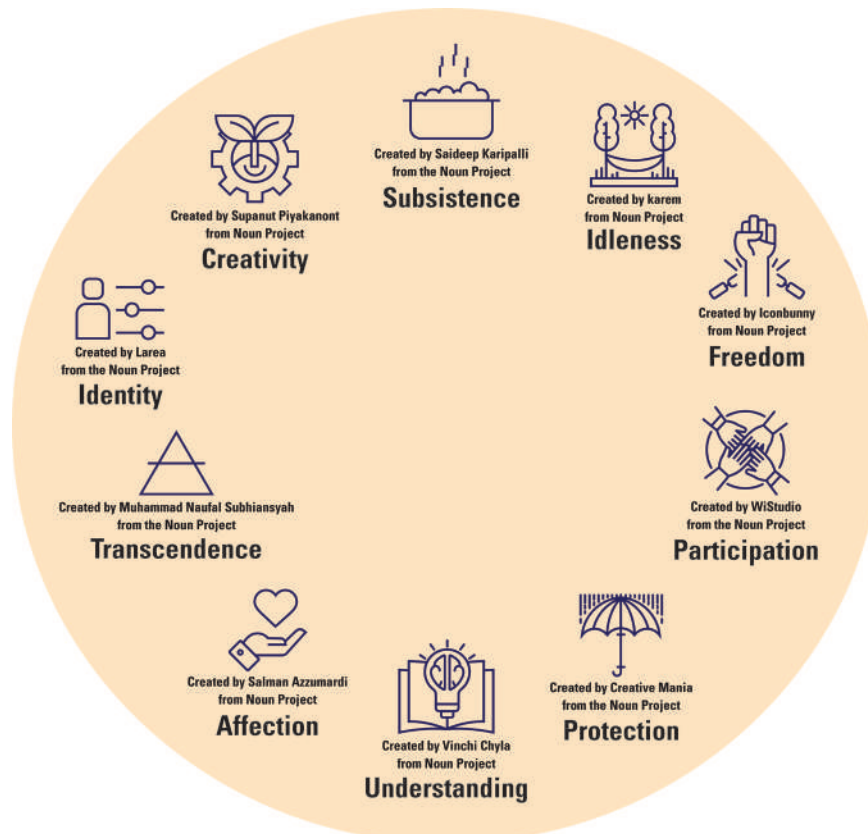
See the websites of the following researchers and writers:

- ▶ Dr Joy Degruy - <https://www.joydegruy.com/post-traumatic-slave-syndrome>
- ▶ Thomas Hübl - <https://thomashuebl.com>
- ▶ Dr Bessel van der Kolk - <https://www.besselvanderkolk.com>
- ▶ Dr Gabor Mate - <https://drgabormate.com>
- ▶ Dr Resmaa Menakem - <https://resmaa.com>

Reconnecting: frameworks and resources

Human Scale Development

Human Scale Development is the name coined by Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef for his framework for development centred on the satisfaction of the ten fundamental human needs he identified through his research. Though concise, Max-Neef's list reveals the rich depth of our needs from the physical to the spiritual.



Max-Neef's invaluable contribution was also to distinguish between our needs and their 'satisfiers' - those objects and economic, social, and cultural practices and institutions we use to satisfy them. This distinction led Max-Neef to categorise satisfiers as either positive or negative (violating or infringing the satisfaction of our needs). He recognised how negative suboptimal or deleterious satisfiers tended to be imposed exogenously, e.g. by a state or aid agency, whereas positive satisfiers tended to be developed endogenously by a household, community, or society itself. He noted how endogenously developed satisfiers tended to have synergic properties, i.e. be able to meet multiple needs, often at a fraction of the cost.

Conflict Resolution

The field of conflict resolution is graced by very many diverse traditions and frameworks. Like trauma work, however suppressed they may be, each culture naturally has its conflict resolution traditions and practices. The ones we are best acquainted with are needs-based frameworks; those derived from NVC alongside the Restorative Circles approach, pioneered by Dominic Barter in Rio de Janeiro's favelas in the 1990s. The essential insight behind these frameworks is that conflict derives from unmet and often unconscious needs and psychological attachment to particular strategies (satisfiers) pursued to meet them. It follows, therefore, that the indispensable step toward resolving conflicts is to enable those in conflict to identify their actual needs, thereby opening a space for considering alternative satisfiers that may also meet the needs of all parties in the conflict. The resolution of conflict must also entail the restoration of relation, central to which is the full acknowledgement by all parties of the consequences of their actions.

Resources

Human-Scale Development

Inez Aponte is a long-time pioneer in applying and developing the Human Scale Development framework - <https://growinggoodlives.com>

For Spanish speakers, another resource is the Max-Neef Foundation's website - <https://fundacionmaxneef.org>

Conflict Resolution

The Restorative Circles website has many invaluable resources - <https://www.restorativecircles.org>

The Nonviolent Communication website has a great introductory guide to conflict resolution using NVC - <https://nonviolentcommunication.com/learn-nonviolent-communication/nvc-conflict-resolution/>

Raising Consciousness: frameworks and resources

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Pedagogy of the Oppressed is the title of a truly seminal book written in 1970 by Brazilian educator, writer, and activist Paulo Freire. Freire's book had immeasurable influence on every continent, particularly throughout the Third World. His core message was simple: education can only be a means to empowerment and liberation when it is dialogical; when the people themselves can come to 'read their own world and write their own history'. Only such education can serve the vital human task of *conscientização* or consciousness-raising. Freire's ideas were necessarily and fruitfully critiqued by Black, Decolonial, and Feminist scholars who integrated his essentially Marxist ideas into radical, exciting intersectional pedagogies. Today, this broad tradition is better known as 'Critical' or 'Radical Pedagogy'.

Theatre of the Oppressed

In the 1970s, having read Freire's work, Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal began to integrate Freire's revolutionary pedagogical principles into his dramatic techniques and practices and practise them with working class communities. What emerged was a coherent theory and practice of theatre as a tool for consciousness-raising that Boal called *Theatre of the Oppressed*. Through practices such as Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, and Invisible Theatre, ordinary people are invited to use their bodies and voices to disrupt the status quo, reimagine their lives and their world, and even rehearse revolutionary possibilities. Boal's theatre reintegrates Freire's focus on the intellect with the knowledge and wisdom of the body.

Resources

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

For those interested in more theoretical works, we recommend Freire's (1970) original *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* alongside his many other works. We also recommend bell hook's (1994) *Teaching to Transgress* and Adrienne Maree-Brown's (2017, 2021) *Emergent Strategy* and *Holding Change*.

Though they are decades old now, we still consider Anne Hope and Sally Timmel's (1991) remarkable *Training for Transformation* volumes an indispensable source for practising community organising. They are so full of hundreds of fantastic exercises, several of which we share in this Handbook.

You can find all Training for Transformation books here - <https://practicalactionpublishing.com/book/2213/training-for-transformation-in-practice>

The facilitation co-operative Rhizome have also put together an easily accessible repositories of facilitation activities here - <https://commonslibrary.org/facilitation-tools-and-techniques>

Theatre of the Oppressed

Boal's (2019) original book *Theatre of the Oppressed* remains an enlivening and inspirational read. The wonderful and much missed Bernie De Koven's website hosts both Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* and many more exercises and games alike.

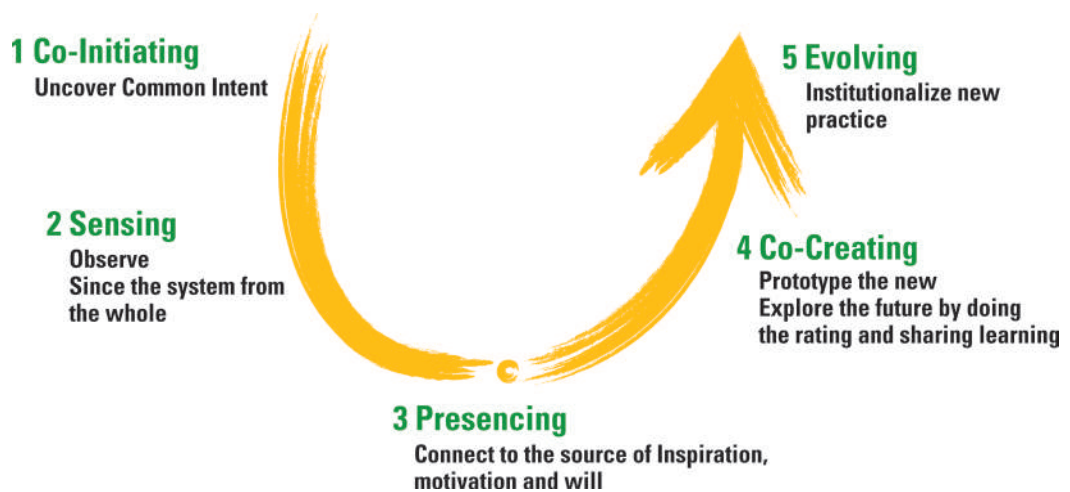
For *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* see here - <https://www.deepfun.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Games-for-actors-and-non-actors...Augusto-Boal.pdf>

For Bernie's website see - <https://www.deepfun.com>

Reimagining: frameworks and resources

Theory U

Theory U was developed primarily by Massachusetts Institute of Technology scholar Otto Scharmer. Theory U invites individuals, groups, and organisations to go through a U-shaped journey that begins with suspending old judgments and letting go of unhelpful attachments in order to create space within for allowing what is new and needed to emerge.



The concept of emergence is central to the theory of Theory U. The idea is to quieten the mind to allow the knowledge of the body and the heart to be heard and to stop *thinking* about the past or future to bring our full awareness to the present moment and who it calls us to become. In Theory speak this is called 'presencing'. In this way, Theory U is a curious integration of modern management studies with ancient traditional wisdom practices.

Resources

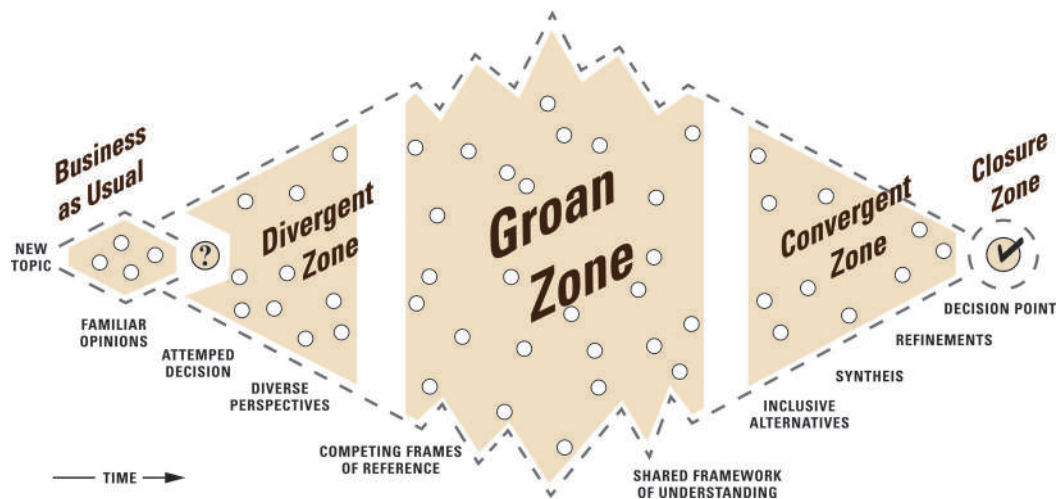
Like RNBO, Theory U's journey is one of five stages. There are multiple exercises to practise at each stage.

The Presencing Institute's website offers a wonderful resource page - <https://www.u-school.org/resources>

Responding: frameworks and resources

Diamond of Participation

We have already written a little about why we value Sam Kaner's (2014) Diamond of Participation so highly. We would just like to add a few words here on why it, in our eyes, is so indispensable to reject approaches that begin any decision-making process with a proposal and try to gain consensus for it or a revised version of it (Convergence) in favour of models like the Diamond that begin instead with what everyone involved is thinking and feeling about the issue at hand (Divergence).



Who is most likely to bring their proposal to a group - the most or least powerful? Who is likely to feel most able to challenge or critique that proposal openly - the most or least powerful? How, then, is starting with a proposal conducive to overcoming power imbalances? Beginning with thoughts and feelings is clearly not enough to overcome problematic power relations and practices but it does invite the group into an open dialogue where all can be seen and heard. Surely, we want to begin a decision-making process by opening ourselves to maximum divergence - discovering the full extent and scope of what everyone is thinking and feeling about an issue. That's what the Diamond allows skillful practitioners to facilitate.

We write these words at a time where models such as Sociocracy and Neighborocracy that begin with proposals are very popular across all kinds of organisations, sectors, and geographic regions. These models have their strengths, but we suspect that their popularity can be ascribed primarily to the fact that they offer off-the-shelf tools and procedures; technical solutions to relational problems. Our message is clear: if you want to use them you have to get the relations right (meet Security Needs) first!

Convergent Facilitation

Kashtan's Convergent Facilitation framework invites groups, first, to name the underlying needs beneath their feelings and, then, to compile a list of criteria that any potential proposal for action would have to satisfy to be acceptable to all participants. She calls these criteria 'non-controversial essences'; a name that captures how facilitators must be able to help participants articulate the essential attributes of any potential new satisfier in ways that do not controversially exclude or impose upon any particular individual or group. For example, rather than saying 'any decision cannot include Sarah because she is a bully', our requested criterion might be stated as 'any decision must safeguard against bullying behaviour in order to meet my need for safety'.

The goal is to approach the Convergent Zone with a comprehensive list of essential criteria. The Convergent Zone can then become an energised process of imagination and creativity (Reimagining) as the group brainstorms and then refines ideas for actions that satisfy the criteria. Kashtan highlights how because such a process includes all members it cultivates a wealth of willingness on the part of individuals to let go of stubborn attachments for the benefit of the group (and, ultimately, themselves).

Resources

Sam Kaner's original *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making* can be found here - <https://communityatwork.com/our-publications>

The Convergent Facilitation website is the place to go to learn about and practice the Convergent Facilitation method - <https://convergentfacilitation.org>

Final Reflections

In this final section of the Handbook, we first distill our learning in the form of eight RNBO Core Principles. We then share a list of the main challenges we have faced and suspect you will face in practising RNBO in an SPS world and offer some lessons we have learned in facing them.

The RNBO Core Principles

Here, we present what we have over time identified as the core principles behind the RNBO approach. We set out each principle and offer a brief description and justification for it.

Figure 9: The RNBO Core Principles



1) Get to the needs

Beneath or beyond our interests, preferences, and wants lie our needs. The process of needing involves: first, feeling our needs; second, interpreting our needs; and, third, responding to our needs. Our needs are:

- ▶ Essential - they constitute a deeper, more essential layer of experience;
- ▶ Integrating - because we need our body to feel our needs and our minds to interpret and respond to them, the needing process integrates mind and body
- ▶ Beyond Judgment - Needs are beyond language and reason, beyond morality, and, therefore, beyond judgment
- ▶ Interdependent - Our needs reveal our ultimate interdependence. Our greatest ultimate need is for each other
- ▶ Systemic - Our needs are the needs of living systems; systems that are nested within us (e.g. nervous, lymphatic, respiratory systems) and systems that we are nested within (a family, a community, a society, a species, a planet).

2) Not solution, but relation

We let go of solutions, outcomes we are attached to and focus on process and relations. Once people's needs are heard and relations are restored, we can act as 'stewards of the whole' serving the common good (Miki Kashtan, 2021, p.135).

3) Cultivate safety

As organisms, it's the condition of our nervous systems that ultimately determines our potential. Only when people feel safe can positive change happen.

4) Bring presence

By bringing 'presence' we are talking about bringing our full, conscious awareness to the present moment. We do this through practices such as meditations and active listening. The practice of bringing presence restores us and reintegrates our fragmented ways of being. It creates the conditions for 'emergence' - for positive new possibilities to emerge from the person, the household, the group, the community.

5) Difference makes the difference!

Change requires new perspectives, ideas, and strategies. Consequently, change requires us to dissent from the status quo. Generally speaking, for those of us feeling powerless, we will not dissent unless we feel safe. For those of us feeling powerful, dissent can be a way to block change when it threatens us. In the case of the former, dissent shows us that there is sufficient safety in the group. In the case of the latter, dissent shows us what really matters and what the nature of our disconnection is. The conflict that dissent generates is therefore a gift that holds an incredible source of energy to work with...very carefully!

Welcome dissent! Work with conflict! Difference makes the difference!

6) Everyone matters!

It is not just on ethical grounds that everyone's voice in a household or a community must be heard. If we take a systemic perspective then we can see that each part in a system has invaluable and unique information to contribute to our understanding. Ethics and efficacy align!

However, the principle 'Everyone matters' does not mean that at every moment every voice must be heard. It means that every need should be given space to be felt and aired and included into important decisions. Therefore, as social workers and facilitators, we must do whatever it takes to find a way to reach those who are not speaking. They hold a unique and indispensable piece of the puzzle!

7) Love is precision

If our needs are prior to or beneath language and conceptual thinking, we must be as precise as we can when experiencing and communicating our needs.

- ▶ Not speech but voice - This means that we initially invite participants not so much to speak about what they think, but to give voice to their feelings and needs.
- ▶ Not words but meaning - Our first pronouncements tend to articulate our position on an issue - our preferences or wants. If we keep asking why people hold those positions we can invite them to connect with their underlying needs, to connect with a deeper meaning. Miki Kashtan (2021, p.131) has encouraged us to 'follow a trajectory of meaning'. We find that framing a dialogue centred on needs makes that trajectory clear for all.
- ▶ Not conversation but dialogue - Conversation involves a free, organic exchange of feelings and thoughts. Speaking is the central element. Dialogue, however, as the name suggests, involves people taking turns to speak and listen. In a dialogue, listening is the central element. Otto Scharmer has defined dialogue as the system sensing and seeing itself.¹⁹

8) Rekindle imagination

Perhaps the greatest poverty of all that we face is our poverty of self-belief and imagination, for we can achieve nothing before we first imagine it. Asking 'what are our needs?' and 'how can we meet them?' begins the process of rekindling our imagination. Note here that our focus is not on rekindling hope, but imagination.

9) Be playful

Play isn't just for kids. Kids play because it's the joyful way to learn and experience life. Play opens space for transforming self and relations. Playfulness involves curiosity, experimentation, and hacking (taking things apart and putting them back together in novel, creative ways)

Lessons we have learned in practising RNBO

The worlds of social work and community organising - and our world in general - are dominated by the logic and practices of Salvational Problem-Solving! In fact, it goes deeper than that - the SPS world isn't just out there; it's in here. It's deeply ingrained and habituated within our own minds and bodies. What follows then are five lessons we have learned and responded to in implementing RNBO in an SPS world.

Lesson One: Preparatory and ongoing training and support are indispensable

[19] See <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/epale-interview-otto-scharmer-change-system-you-have-have-courage-step-unknown>

When working with a team tasked with carrying out an RNBO approach to social work or community organising, we must begin with the recognition that this new approach will bring real conceptual and emotional challenges. The successes of both the CLARISSA and WorkFREE teams was centrally down to the intensive initial and regular ongoing support they received. The WorkFREE team came together to learn from and with the project's designers from the University of Bath for one whole week. The CLARISSA team spent two weeks together. Subsequently, regular team meetings gave them the opportunities to consolidate learning, process trauma, and reflect and learn as a team.

Lesson Two: Internal organisational backing is vital

In this Handbook, we have juxtaposed SPS and RNBO as two opposing binaries. Whilst we believe they essentially are, we also recognise that in many organisations aspects of both can coexist. That said, NGOs carrying out social work or community organising projects inhabit a wider ecosystem of policymakers and donors who most certainly do maintain the logic and practices of SPS and impose these on NGOs in the form of predetermined targets and expected metrics of success. This means that, whilst those leading NGOs may support more RNBO-informed projects in principle, the pressure to stick to the tried and tested SPS ways can be overwhelming in times of stress - which can be all the time!

It takes courage and perseverance to support something radically different in such contexts, but that is what it takes. The success of any RNBO intervention will greatly be determined by the level of internal organisational backing.

Lesson Three: Their transformation will be determined by our transformation

Learning to practise an RNBO approach is not a technical task. This is not a manual! There is no training! We learn experientially through immersive workshops, practising the very same exercises and activities we subsequently use in our communities. Consequently, the extent to which a team can effectively deliver an RNBO intervention and support transformation in individuals, households, or communities will be determined by the team's internal capacity for self-transformation.

Lesson Four: Care for each other

What Lesson One intimates is that RNBO work can be emotionally tough. The implementing team needs to create a safe container for each member to be able to confide in others and process the trauma they can experience when working in this way. Care for each other and for self is at the heart (pun intended) of this work.

Lesson Five: Surrender!

When working with marginalised, impoverished people living in fraught, insecure, even dangerous conditions, there will be constant challenges. When people we work with and care for suffer it is the most natural thing to want to step in - like a parent caring for a child - and try to fix their problems. In short, it is so easy to fall back into SPS mode! To be clear, the issue isn't necessarily trying to fix someone else's problems; the issue is the relational basis on which it is done. As the name suggests, the Salvational approach happens when we reproduce saviour-victim relations. In contrast, if we already have established a relational sense of partnership with someone else and they request our practical help this is a very different relational basis.

There will be times where we will lapse into salvational problem-solving mode. That is when we need to work together to realise what is happening, reiterate our commitment to doing things differently, and surrender to the discomfort and uncertainty of sticking to our RNBO principles even if this means seeing people we care about suffer and struggle. It doesn't mean abandoning them; it means standing and working with them in solidarity to support their own processes of empowerment and transformation. It can be really challenging and it is those shared team spaces for stillness, reflection, and dialogue that make it possible.

Thank you!

Dear reader, thank you so much for investing your time in reading our Handbook! We are not claiming that we have found the answer to effective social work and community organising. Indeed, this Handbook integrates many various traditions and frameworks in these fields. What we have tried to do as succinctly as possible is to: name the problematic dominant model and describe its logic and practices; set out a worldview that critiques it and identifies the properties of the alternative; share a practical model for implementing that alternative; and share some key lessons we have learned whilst trying.

Our final word concerns sustaining change. How well are the changes we have supported through our work sustained by our partners? We cannot fully say. There are so many factors in the life of an individual, a family, and a community that will determine the sustainability of change. We believe that all of us need ongoing support throughout our lives to sustain and continue growing and evolving. The harder our circumstances the more support we will need. Many of us need a depth and continuity of ongoing support that might not be possible to provide. That's what makes it so hard sometimes to walk away when our time working with our partners is up. What we can say is that we believe wholeheartedly that this support should be provided according to the **relational and needs-based principles** we have developed in this Handbook. We will continue to apply and learn from these principles. We encourage you to do the same.

If you want to talk to us about anything related to this Handbook, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact Joel Lazarus at jl3779@bath.ac.uk





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