HUMAN SYSTEMS DYNAMICS INSTITUTE

Generative Engagement

Description of Generative Engagement

Generative Engagement sets conditions for people to create mutual learning and transformation. It opens shared space so each person has what they need to participate in and contribute to the full functioning of a whole group. Every generative engagement is unique, because it emerges to fit patterns in the moment. We have found, though, that shared identity, a balance of power and influence, and shared voice are conditions that can usually shape patterns of Generative Engagement.

— Generative Engagement —

identity · voice · authenticity · generative engagement · reciprocity · justice · power

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What?

Generative Engagement, as a model, is a way of thinking about how you make moment-by-moment choices to interact with others to create generative space between you. It asks that you consider three conditions* in your interactions to shape patterns of generative engagement.

► You stand together, sharing identity. You come together, across your differences to work toward a shared goal or purpose. You don't give up who you are, but you do seek to see the others' perspectives.

► You share power in the system by allowing for mutual influence. You work to

* For more information, visit www.hsdinstitute.org.

Nothing is intractable.

influence others, and you allow them to influence you. Getting things done is not about bullying or pushing. It is about coming together to decide what's to be accomplished and to share expertise, energy, skills, and resources to get it done.

► You grant and generate voice. You listen deeply without judgment. You share in ways that others can understand and accept.

So What?

The Generative Engagement model is not intended to paint a picture of a utopian world where everyone holds hands and sings about peace. It is, rather, about the moment-by-moment decisions and choices you make in every exchange. Either consciously or unconsciously, you choose behaviors that either move toward more generative relationships or away from them.

When you set the conditions of Generative Engagement, you increase the chances that you will generate over-arching patterns of coherence. Consider how a Complex Adaptive System functions to generate system-wide patterns.***** Generative Engagement assumes that if you set these conditions, then the dominant patterns that emerge will be characterized by:

► Reciprocity, an equitable giving and taking, sharing responsibilities and benefits in the system.

► Authenticity, patterns of people experiencing the safety and freedom to bring their "whole selves" into the work of the relationship.

► Justice, patterns of access to energy, services and support, and other resources are equitably disbursed across all parts of the system.

The critical factor here is to remember that this is not **the** path to generative relationships at home, at work, or in the community. The Generative Engagement model is offered as one path that, if these conditions are set, are likely to influence generative patterns of action and decisions.

Now What?

Use Generative Engagement to:

► Engage with others in open and productive ways.

► Invite others to engage with you in Generative Engagement.

► Take wise action to more toward greater coherence and sustainability.

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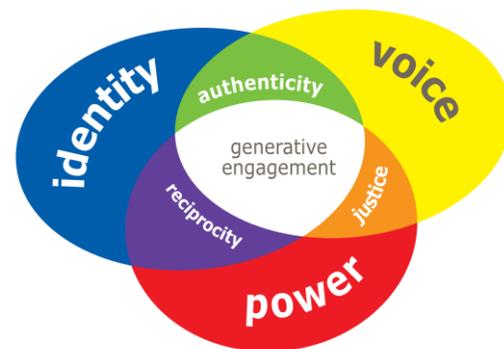
Generative Engagement

What is the Purpose of Generative Engagement?

Generative Engagement is a configuration of personal and organizational conditions. Participants can interact in ways that increase the chances for patterns of encouragement, support, open dialogue, and inquiry. The model informs each individual's actions to build relationships of mutual respect and freedom. When you and those around you engage this way, you can be, do, and say what is necessary for you to participate fully in group, community, or organizational work.

Generative Engagement was developed by Mary Nations and Royce Holladay, who recognized the unresolved tension of navigating difference in families, organizations, and communities. Traditional methods for diversity and inclusion were sapping energy and creativity from individuals, teams, and whole systems. They believed there had to be a more effective way for individuals and groups to reach across the differences that divide them. They believed finding an answer to that challenge would help release tension and allow the system to be more responsive—to build adaptive capacity.

Earlier equity models approached diversity issues in various ways. Approaches were about everyone standing together, or they were about building strong relationships to challenge traditional power and privilege. Yet others were about knowing traditions and expectations of various cultures and framing interactions around those.

None of those models, however, consistently allowed individuals to explore the underlying dynamics of equity challenges and issues. HSD offers a language and a set of understandings that allow a deeper exploration. Based in Pattern Logic,***** Generative Engagement names a set of conditions***** that have the potential to shape new patterns of

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interaction and decision making.

► Using shared identity to contain or hold the system together is about standing together as a group and engaging around a shared goal or purpose. You see yourself and others reach across differences to focus together. Shared identity does not ask that you give up any part of your own identity; only that you find ways to identify with and have empathy for the other.

► In human systems, power is a critical difference, and how it is used sets patterns for individuals and groups. In Generative Engagement, shared power is about mutual influence. When people move past traditional power-based roles, they focus on influence instead. Rather than using privilege or manipulation to force or coerce others, they engage together in shared work. They mutually share data, perspectives, and questions in open dialogue. They listen carefully, considering others' data, perspectives, and questions in open dialogue. Again this does not mean that anyone gives up whatever authority or accountability that may have been assigned. What is does mean is that everyone involved listens and engages in organizational or group discourse.

► Shared voice is about granting and generating "voice" as members of the system share information, energy, and other resources. You grant voice when you listen to others, observe their actions and behaviors, and receive their offerings and gifts without prejudice or judgment. You work to hear and understand others at all scales. At the same time, you generate voice that others can hear when you speak to their ability to listen and understand, behave in ways that are not offensive to them, and share your assets and gifts respectfully and honorably.

So What Benefit Does Generative Engagement Offer?

Using Generative Engagement sets conditions that have the potential to generate powerful patterns that bring people together to build adaptive capacity.

► People who use Generative Engagement move the system toward patterns of reciprocity. When people stand together to work toward a shared goal or direction, they work together more effectively. When they are open to mutual influence, individuals and groups come to know others' strengths and needs. They respect collective and individual roles and responsibilities. People in the system know what they can contribute, and each is allowed to contribute what they can. They access the intelligence of the system from all points. This contributes to the ability of the system to respond in creative and innovative ways, increasing adaptive capacity.

Nothing is intractable.

► Generative Engagement allows people to participate fully in the shared work of the system. They grant and generate voice with each other, standing together without judgment or fear. They can ask questions; they can say what they know. They can say what they believe and what they need. This level of authenticity between and among the members of a team builds adaptive capacity, as they take risks and contribute together.

► When people step away from traditional roles of power and privilege, they are better able to grant and generate voice. Stereotypes and arbitrary judgments fall to the wayside as they engage in open dialogue. Those conditions can help the system open up. People feel heard and know their voices matter. People are treated with fairness and have access to what they need in the system because others are listening to understand. Justice is the overarching pattern that emerges. It also contributes to adaptive capacity.

When the dominant patterns of a system approach reciprocity, authenticity, and justice, the tensions that constrain it can be released. People can work together to resolve shared challenges. They are able to rely on each other and can take risks to innovate and create. Individuals and groups have access to what they need in the system to respond in times of stress. Using the Generative Engagement model requires, but it also can build, adaptive capacity.

Now What Can You Do to Create Generative Engagements?

There are two ways you can begin to set conditions for increased adaptive capacity based on Generative Engagement.

► You can make conscious choices to move toward generative relationships. You can take action to set conditions that shape generative patterns of reciprocity, authenticity, and justice. At whatever level of influence you have in a system, you can engage in Generative Engagements.

► While you cannot "force" someone else to engage across difference in generative ways, you can invite them to step into the challenge with you. You can talk about ways to set the conditions. You can model the behaviors that set the conditions. You can reward/recognize when others participate in Generative Engagements.

The point to remember is that a generative system is not a destination. It is a set of patterns that you and others generate in every interaction. It is a life-long journey of creating the patterns that build resistance and coherence every day.

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