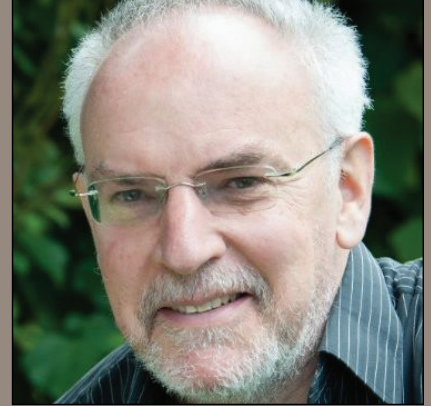


The Art of Facilitating Transformational Fields

A White Paper from Mobius Transformational
Faculty member, Robin Alfred



As a facilitator, I have become increasingly interested in how to create a field, or atmosphere, in which transformation happens. I have noticed that in some groups synchronicities appear, relationships heal, insights arise, an almost magical, mystical experience unfolds, seemingly by itself. How does that happen? What is the difference between the atmosphere in that group compared with other groups where the experience is more limited and less generative? In this article I inquire into such questions and reveal some of the processes that support the creation of a highly charged, potent and magnetic field in which transformation can occur.

It is something of a cliché to say that we are in times of unprecedented change and volatility, and that we are needing to navigate ever more complexity. However, it is also true. Whether we choose to call these VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) or BANI (brittle, anxious, nonlinear and incomprehensible) times, the need for highly skilled facilitation of complex dialogues has never been greater.

WHAT IS THE FIELD?

We start our inquiry by understanding the nature of the field. It has become fashionable to look at organizations and topics through a systemic lens. That's wonderful and also limited since the system is embedded in something deeper which we call the field.

For example, there are eleven **individual** members of a football team. Together they make up a **system**

which we call a team, and that team is embedded in something deeper – the **field** of the football club – the atmosphere or culture of the club.

When we enter a cathedral, or a space that feels sacred to us, we often sense something more. That atmosphere is comprised of the energy of the prayers and the intentions brought into the space by thousands of people over hundreds of years, alongside our own intention and the energy that we bring into the space. Together these create a field effect within the cathedral.

A third example: Let's look at the word *group*. It comprises six **individual** letters. Together they make up a **system**, the word we know as *group*. That system is embedded in a piece of paper. The paper is literally the **field**: that which holds the system.

The field, then, can be tangible or intangible and has a constant impact on our experience. So, how can we create transformational fields? When we do so we invite a realm charged with magnetism, presence and coherence that allows the future to arise and, with the most generative of fields, the past to be healed and integrated.

Group Coherence

When a group is coherent, rather than a fragmented gathering of disparate parts, it “makes sense” as a meaningful whole. A coherent group comprises individuals who are imbued with a strong sense of *presence* and where each person, and the facilitator, brings a shared *intention* into the setting.

Written by the author for the Mobius Strip magazine.

Presence doesn't mean simply turning up. Fully embodied presence includes having an inner awareness of how my body feels, the feelings and emotions I have, the movements in my mind, and my connection to my creativity. We might call this four-level awareness: body, heart, mind and creativity (or spirit).

On the deepest level presence also entails sensing that what is present within me includes my ancestral lineage, layers of cultural conditioning, and even a sense of the future that is calling to me. All this can arise in true, deep presence.

Imagine a group where everyone is practicing and embodying such a presence! How charged that field will be with attentiveness, aliveness, and curiosity. What this also means is that every time we "check out" by thinking about something else, daydreaming, or picking up our phone, we diminish our own presence. This, in turn, diminishes the coherence of the group.

In addition to presence, a shared intention helps to produce group coherence. Sometimes a group convenes and it is unclear as to why its members are there. This is likely to lead to a degree of frustration and fragmentation in the field. A shared, stated intention builds coherence.

Contemporary mystic Thomas Hübl suggests we might see *intention* as being like a vertical line

on a page. Everyone who comes to the group adds their line of intention, making it more pronounced. Identical lines drawn on top of each other thicken and amplify the line of intention. And these lines start being drawn as soon as the idea of the group meeting is hatched.

For example: I have an idea to convene a group. Metaphorically, one line is drawn. I send out an invitation. Another line is drawn. Somebody reads my invitation and decides to come. Another line is drawn. They send an email saying that they are coming. Another line is drawn. And so it continues, each person adding their intentionality to the field. Groups always form well before the members arrive into the room itself or into the Zoom call. When we clarify from the outset the specifics of that intention and the purpose for which we meet, we build the group's coherence.

Intention works on many levels. For example, we may be carrying an overt intention to meet to learn more about a new IT system, but we may also be carrying other intentions, consciously or unconsciously, e.g. to raise our profile and visibility in the business, or to make new friends. There is nothing wrong with carrying multiple intentions but the clearer we are about the overarching, shared intention of the group meeting, the more coherent the field. In addition, there may be a higher intention that nobody is consciously aware of and where the question 'What is this group brought together to do?' has relevance.

Group coherence does not mean having no disagreements. Disagreements may be signposts pointing the way to important work the group needs to do. A coherent group field can hold a diversity of perspective by not polarizing and "othering" but being curious about different perspectives contained within it. Robust disagreement within a coherent field can be extremely energizing. Where disagreement polarizes, turns us away and cuts the relationship with the other person, the group will experience fragmentation and the conflict is likely to be experienced as wounding and damaging.

Symptoms of incoherence include participants speeding up; experiencing jarring feelings and emotional discomfort; checking out, boredom and

Group coherence appears with:

- ▶ Sensations of connectedness (not necessarily harmony)
- ▶ Awareness of our own and others' emotions in the group
- ▶ Awareness of where we feel numb or disassociated
- ▶ Authenticity and vulnerability in the space
- ▶ The quality of the WE field appearing
- ▶ I appear in you and you appear in me – we are one field

absencing; wanting a break; agitation or flatness where the energy is not smooth and fluid; a heavy, stuck feeling; cycling and repetitive processes.

A lack of group coherence is not a problem to be fixed but something to be noticed as a powerful indicator that something wants to be brought into awareness.

The Role of the Facilitator – Less Doing, More Being

As Bill O'Brien, former CEO of Hanover Insurance, noted: *"The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener."* And so the question becomes: how is the facilitator *being*, rather than what is the facilitator *doing*? This is critical. We need to practice presence, entering into the nature of time, noticing triggers and staying connected to a higher source of intelligence.

1. Practicing Presence

Am I aware of what is happening within me as I facilitate? Do I have sufficient self-contact to notice the movements in my body, heart, mind? Do I feel connected to a higher source of intelligence or creativity while facilitating? How much am I trying to get the group to do something or be something or arrive at something and how much can I allow the group intelligence to emerge? Do I experience myself as part of the group? Does the group feel close or far away, warm or cool? Do I sense the group wants to be led or that the natural movement is self-organizing and evolving?

Having sufficient inner spaciousness to host these reflections as we facilitate will build the power of our interior condition and emanate a sense of safety and coherence into the group.

2. Entering into the Nature of Time

When we are in deep and radical presence, we also experience a collapsing of time. The past is not yesterday. The past is that which has not been integrated. In presence we have an opportunity to integrate and therefore heal the wounds and trauma of the past. Similarly, the future is not tomorrow. The future is that which is fresh, new, inspiring and creative. It arrives in presence. In the full *now* we experience a collapsing of linear time, the onboarding

We build group coherence by:

- ▶ Clarifying intentions
- ▶ Practicing sensing each other 'I feel you feeling me'
- ▶ Inviting people to feel into the group field – its groundedness and embodiment; emotional flavor; energy; relationality; connection to the Light and higher consciousness
- ▶ Playing 'connecting' games to open the relational space
- ▶ Pausing to check in internally: using four-state awareness of body, heart, mind, creativity
- ▶ Naming and framing what is happening
- ▶ Inviting, and modelling vulnerability
- ▶ Suspending any idea of what a group 'should be like'

and integration of the past and the capacity to receive inspiration from the future. So, when we are facilitating from a space of embodied presence and connect with a sense of less linear time, not only will we be sensitive and responsive to that which is arising in me and the group, but we are also enabling a healing field and a field that can hear and respond to the call, the whispers, of the future. We feel a sense of quiet, wise knowing and our facilitation is likely to be experienced as connected, centered, spacious and impactful.

3. Noticing Triggers

I will want to notice what triggers me in a group. Where do I become afraid? How do I work on myself in the moment where somebody irritates me in the group? When I am triggered by someone in the group, I am likely to move up into my head and tell myself all sorts of stories about the person and what is happening. In doing so I disconnect from the person and create fragmentation in the field. The opposite direction is going to be more helpful i.e. dropping down into my heart and noticing what emotions and

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body sensations I'm experiencing. If I can do that in the moment, while retaining connection to the person or source of irritation, insight and a new movement may arise in me. The field retains its coherence and the intelligence it carries can reveal itself to me.

4. Staying Connected to a Higher Source of Intelligence

It will also serve both me and the group to stay connected to something beyond my rational, thinking mind. If, as a facilitator, I come with a plan and some tools and intend to apply them, without resting in a higher source of intelligence that wants to feed me the inspiration and creativity that I need in the moment, my facilitation is likely to be experienced as formulaic and I am unlikely to sense what is needed, and emerging, from me and within the group.

What is my practice for staying connected to a higher source of intelligence and allowing something fresh to arising me? As Thomas Hübl, once said: *'The minute I think about what I'm going to do next, I am lost as a facilitator'* Why? Because I am no longer present. I am thinking about a strategy and am therefore disconnected from the group energy field and the source of inspiration that will put the right words on my lips and the right tools into my hands.

Trauma-Informed Facilitation

One more element to consider is the impact of trauma. Trauma can be defined as *the response within an individual or a collective when facing a situation which is utterly overwhelming.* (Pocket Project) Trauma exists on three levels.

1. Individual, such as *attachment trauma* through early childhood deficit, or *shock trauma* through biographically impactful events

2. *Ancestral trauma* passed on through epigenetic transfer so that, for example, the refugee trauma of my grandparents lives in me not just through the stories I have been told but on a cellular level
3. *Collective trauma* – the seas in which we swim including patriarchy, racism, the impact of the Covid 19 coronavirus, and many others

The interconnection of individual, ancestor and collective trauma will be present within myself and in the groups that I facilitate. We are conditioned to remain unaware of the impact these trauma fields are having on me and on the group – like the frog that hasn't noticed the temperature rising toward boiling point.

Having a trauma-informed perspective doesn't mean turning every workshop into a trauma-focused one, but it does mean understanding that there will be numb and frozen parts of myself and the group that we cannot access; that there will be dynamics that are naturally adaptive patterns and that these are behaviors that help us to navigate trauma. We are always experiencing reality through cracked lenses and not seeing things as they really are.

It is important that facilitators be trauma-informed to carry an awareness of the trauma fields within oneself and the group, and to have the capacity to lend a soft compassionate awareness when trauma symptoms manifest. A warm relational field starts to thaw frozen trauma and release the energy, insights and wisdom held within them.

One simple step we can take to remain compassionate is to look at the things we take for granted in groups or teams, the 'givens', and become curious about whether they are 'normal' (something that occurs in many of us) or 'natural' (what becomes

SUPERVISION AND INTERVISION

For even the most experienced among us, it can be complex to facilitate the coherence of a group field – intervision and supervision are two ways we support our process.

Intervision means meeting with a peer to provide a point of reflection, digestion, and integration of one's experience. Intervision can take place before, during or after a piece of work. I may contract with somebody in advance to hold an awareness that I am facilitating a group; check in with them during the process of facilitation when something arises that I would welcome some reflection on; and, for sure, I will check in with them afterwards to share my experience. This often takes the form of a shared, free, mutually supportive arrangement.

Supervision tends to be paid for and undertaken with somebody more experienced. It is an important place to gain insight into how I have experienced the facilitation I have just undertaken. As I revisit challenges I faced I not only learn from them through the dialogue with the supervisor but, because we are all part of an interconnected field, it will also have an impact on what might have remained otherwise unhealed or unintegrated for the other people involved.

possible in supportive, healthy environments). Normal behaviors include competition, a feeling of insecurity in a new group, a belief in scarcity of time or resources, experiencing cycling, disconnected and repetitive processes, but these may not be the 'natural' flow of unhindered energy and movement. Instead, they may be conditioned, trauma-informed responses and, as we become more and more aware of this, we can become softer and warmer in relation to these behaviors and thus allow new possibilities to emerge.

Facilitation as a Dialogue with the Self-Organizing Principle of the Group

When we regard facilitation not as something we do to a group, but as a dialogue we are enabling, we notice what we might call 'the self-organizing principle' of a group as it manifests.

A group comes together for a purpose. Its members have been called together for a reason. The group has a natural movement, an evolutionary impulse, that wants to happen, like the acorn that wants to grow into an oak tree. The group wants to become something. Part of the facilitator's job is to be alive

to that. What is the next movement that is arising in the group and how can I stay in contact with that and support it? It's like catching a wave when surfing. The wave is coming, and I need to join it. Similarly, the group movement is arising, and I need to meet it. Anything less will feel clunky, lead to a degree of fragmentation in the group and will not support the natural evolution of the group.

This requires a lot of letting go from the facilitator. How many times do we come with an intention to get the group to have a certain experience or to get the group to 'go somewhere' or 'be something'? As facilitators it is helpful to bring an intention but to hold it lightly as, when we meet the group and sense its energy and movement, something else might be needed.

This does not mean that we can never facilitate towards an outcome. Sometimes we are employed to, for example, support the group to make a decision by 5 pm on Friday. Our practice is to notice how I and the group respond to this. Is there a sense of expectation? Do I feel a sense of pressure as a facilitator? How do I soften and breathe into that to create a sense of spaciousness? What happens

within me if a decision is not arising by 5 pm on Friday? Do I force one onto the group anyway or do I acknowledge that the group field is not yet coherent enough for a decision to arise? Forcing may well lead to fragmentation in the group and to decisions that don't 'stick'. How wedded am I to 'getting a result'?

Conclusion

As facilitators we are often employed to support a group to accomplish something specific – a decision that needs to be made, a strategy that is waiting to be developed; a change that needs to be implemented. To do this effectively, we first need to create the right conditions, both within myself and within the group – a transformational field of group coherence.

My internal coherence means that there is congruence between my thoughts, words and actions; my body, heart and mind are synchronized

and I am engaged in an ongoing, moment-by-moment practice of presence.

The group's coherence is a product of clarity of intention and collective and individual presence. To support group coherence, we will need to stay alive to the nuanced movements within the group; the presence of fragmenting forces and those that build cohesion; the higher self-organizing principle that informs and shapes the group movement; and we will need to be able to catch the wave of the naturally arising group momentum.

To do all this, while simultaneously holding an intention, lightly but clearly, to allow the purpose of the meeting to be achieved is an art, requiring simultaneous self-awareness and group-awareness, spaciousness into which insight can land, and intimacy with the higher orchestrating intelligence. It is the art of facilitating transformational fields. ■

ROBIN ALFRED worked as a trainer, educator and social work manager for 15 years in London, before moving to Scotland in 1995 where he founded the Findhorn Consultancy Service and then later, Open Circle Consulting. He has extensive experience of leading and developing groups and individuals across all sectors – corporate, public, and third sector.

For more than 25 years, Robin has facilitated groups of all sizes, from 6 – 600, in all sectors. He was a registered facilitator for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and was part of the design and facilitation team for the 2013 UN Global Compact in New York. Robin is trained in a wide variety of approaches to personal and organizational development including: Appreciative Inquiry, the Frameworks for Change Coaching Process, Process Work, Spiral Dynamics and Tools for Corporate Transformation. His facilitation work draws on these processes as well as Open Space, World Café and other innovative processes to maximize the group's collective intelligence.

Robin's clients include BP, the National Health Service, ABN-AMRO Bank, RBS, Tasweeq Qatar, BAE Systems, UN, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, CDP, Weleda and the UK Cabinet Office. Robin also spent 15 years as an Associate with Olivier Mythodrama, working with Shakespearean stories and Jungian archetypal psychology to develop high level leadership in many of the world's major corporations.

Robin is a Senior Student of contemporary mystic, Thomas Hübl. He offers coaching and trainings in Trauma-informed Leadership and the Art of Facilitating Transformational Fields. He also serves as a Mobius Transformational Faculty Member and joined us in October 2022 to guide a week-long, highly experiential track on Leading from the Future at the Annual Gathering of the Next Practice Institute.

Mobius is delighted to sponsor Robin's 3.5 day training in The Art of Facilitating Transformational Fields, in Findhorn, Scotland, September 19-22, 2023.

For more information visit: www.opencircle.live | robin.alfred@opencircle.live