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Process Oriented Psychology

From wonder into wonder existence opens.
Lao Tzu

I was blown away the first time I saw Process Oriented Psychology in action in 1992. It was as if I had been moving sand with a teaspoon, and someone gave me a shovel.

More than twenty years later, I am still in awe of the transformative power of this lens. I value how it helps me name dynamics as they unfold moment by moment in ANY group context, and how seeing more clearly has guided my actions at home and at work. Indeed, I use this lens on a daily basis, and consider it one of the most versatile and potent in the book.

It is also a lens that has worked on me, calling me to be more curious and present to the mystery of life. It has helped me to be comfortable with being uncomfortable, and to reap

a thousand gifts and rewards that have come when I turn towards people, situations, and feelings I would rather run from.

Its clarifying and empowering perspective informs everything from my efforts to grow as a person to how I engage as a global citizen. Perhaps it will be as fundamental for you.

Origins

Arnold Mindell has long been charting the territory of individual, group, and societal "processes." Since the mid-1970s, his Process Oriented Psychology (POP) has been especially helpful for understanding the dynamics of power, marginalization, and change.[56]

Mindell's theoretical framework, often called Process Work, is rooted in Taoism, Physics, Jungian Psychology, and more recently, Shamanism. It is a big picture way of seeing – positing that the patterns of behaviour at the group level are also played out at the individual level and at the level of society and humanity as a whole, and moreover that these different levels are not separate at all, but rather richly inter-penetrating. ⊕

Process Oriented Psychology

POP's central focus is on *process*, defined as the constant flow of information. What is trying to emerge in this moment? What is unfolding? What dynamics are in play?

Would you like to understand what happened at the meeting yesterday? Would your group be wonderful if you could
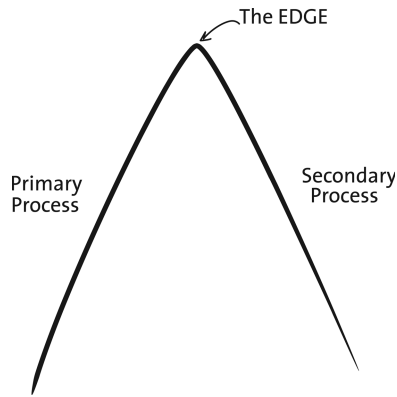
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56 Many other people have been integral to the development of POP theory and practice. Foremost among these is Amy Mindell, Arnold's wife, for naming "metaskills" – compassion, patience, loving kindness, etc. – as crucial complements to the analytical framework and concepts described in this chapter.

just get rid of one person? Is your organization sluggish or stuck? Do you repeatedly notice ageism, sexism, intellectualism, or some other form of social ranking?[57]

Process Work is rich with concepts to help you understand and navigate in groups, and also in your personal life. The most fundamental of these is the distinction between primary and secondary process.

Primary and secondary process

Primary process is what we identify with. It is how we like to see ourselves and how we want others to see us. The secondary process, moment by moment,[58] is that which we experience as "other": what we don't want to see in ourselves or have others see in us.

Some examples can be helpful.

For the most part, in North American society, the primary process is rational and scientific. A typical secondary process is intuitive and emotional. At the group level, by and large, male, white racial values and perspectives are primary, and female, indigenous and/or visible minority values and perspectives are secondary. At the individual level, being neat and

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57 Process Work is not against rank, or power. It supports the voices that want us to be more aware of rank and of power, and to be more conscious in their use.

58 "In a sense, your secondary process doesn't really exist. It is a process. It is fluid and changes. Talking about a secondary process is a momentary description of a momentary experience. It is a snap shot." Email communication with Stanford Siver.

well-organized might be primary, and being lazy and confused might be secondary.

The natural tendency is to bolster our primary process: we resist or marginalize what is secondary, since by definition what is secondary challenges or disturbs us.

A key goal of Process Work is to help individuals and human systems to be more aware of their secondary processes. For example, I identify with being logical, practical, and effective. I disavow my spontaneous, wacky side. Process Work helps me be more aware of what I am marginalizing and supports me to cut loose and have more fun.

Similar to the distinction between figure and ground on page 10, we will *always* have a primary and a secondary process. We cannot avoid it. No matter how much we grow and develop, there is always what we identify with and what we experience as "other." When we identify with failure, we marginalize success, and if we embrace success, we marginalize failure, and so on, and on, and on.

The goal is not to get rid of the secondary process (much as the primary process would like to). The goal is to be ever open to where life is taking us – and therefore open to it taking us over the "edge" between our primary process and the secondary process in this moment, and now in this moment, and again now in this moment. ↻

Doing this connects us to the current of what is most vital and life-sustaining. This may not be comfortable but it feels right.

The edge

The *edge* is the boundary between the primary and secondary process. When I am well inside the edge on the side of primary process, I am in the familiar territory of what I consciously

identify with as being me. At the edge, I am likely to exhibit what Mindell calls "edge behavior."

People have different responses to the edge, (and the same people have different responses at different times). Some go silent and withdraw, while others talk incessantly or joke around. Some get very irritable, blaming, and aggressive, and others get weepy, hysterical, or spacey. The constant is some degree of discomfort, often with a "hot potato" dynamic: energy looking for an outlet.

It is very powerful, both personally and for work with others, to be more aware of the edge and the patterns of edge behaviour. Being able to name the dynamic, "I think we are at an edge," can help us ride the waves of awkward silence, high emotion, or swirling thoughts. Simply knowing that I have an unexplored spontaneous side helps me slip over into new territory when I reach that frontier.

Signals

The main way to be aware of secondary processes and edges in yourself and in a group is to pick up on what Mindell calls "signals."

Signals convey information about a process, drawing our attention away from the comfort zone of the primary process, and indicating that there is something else going on. They may occur internally in the form of gut feelings, intuitions, inner voices, or the body's sensations and spontaneous movements. They may also occur externally in the form of body language, tone of voice, synchronicities, and relationship dynamics.

Signals are often subtle. They are easy to miss. However, when we choose to pay attention, it gets easier to notice them. The best way to become better at picking up signals in group contexts is to be aware of our personal primary and secondary processes. That helps our receptors to be uncluttered and open,

and helps us get our personal agendas out of the way so we can better see/sense what is trying to come through.

Signals can come on multiple channels: through speech, body language, dreams, and intuitions. There can also be signals from the wider field: a phone ringing, a bird at the window, a snippet on the radio, a passing siren.

The most important signals to look for are double signals – where there is incongruence between what a person or group says or stands for, and what else is going on. A person might say, for example, "I'm delighted to meet you," but there is a double signal if their arms are crossed tightly across their chest. The primary process is delight; the secondary process might be fear, distrust, or anger.

If you notice a double signal in yourself, in another person or in part of a group, get curious about it. Mindell says, "Behavior makes sense." ⊤ Trust that there is a good reason for the double signal, and bring warm, curious awareness to the situation. This will help people be more aware of the process, which in turn helps the process to unfold in positive ways.

The field

Another concept central to Process Work comes from physics: the *field*.

Imagine a handful of iron filings scattered on a piece of light cardboard. Now imagine that you bring a magnet to the underside of the cardboard. If you did this in school, you will remember how the iron filings moved into a symmetrical arching pattern around the poles of the magnet as shown in the image below. Move the magnet and the iron filings move too, revealing the "field" created by the magnet.
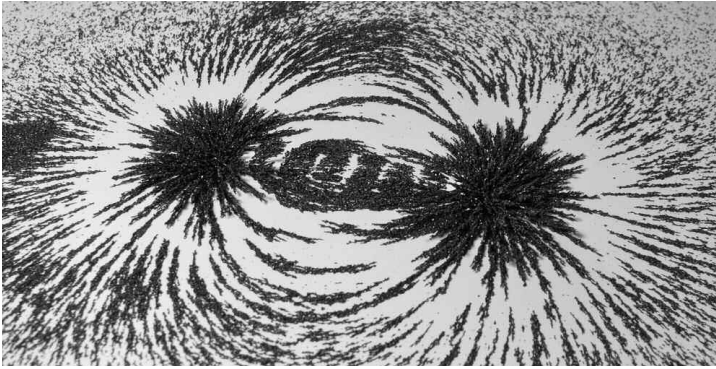
Photo credit: Windell H. Oskay, www.evilmadscientist.com

Relationships, groups, and societies also exhibit field dynamics: shift one aspect, and other factors in the field shift too, in patterned ways. Change the physical environment, and group dynamics shift (as noted in Trust Theory.) Remove the leader of a group and the remaining people jockey around until the leadership vacuum is filled.

Roles

Mindell uses the concept of roles to help explain what happens in the field. A magnetic field pulls iron filings into different positions. A human field pulls people into different roles.

Have you ever had the feeling with a family member or intimate partner that you are being taken over by an energy vortex? If one person is occupying the role of *successful* and *together*, that can leave you with some variation on *confused* and *hopeless*. Perhaps you are sucked into the role of *abandoner* due to your partner's deep-seated story of being the *abandoned one*.[59]

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59 Process Work also invites us to go a layer deeper. If your partner remains stuck in the role of "abandoned one," it can be as if your partner somehow abandons you – s/he is not fluidly moving out of the role, and so is not fully available to engage with you in your relationship.

One person strongly playing out any specific role, will act like the magnet – creating a field that pulls other people into different complementary roles. The field does not "make" people take on certain roles, but it does create a tendency for those roles to be expressed. Which group member takes on a given role depends on each person's characteristic or momentary proximity to the role and their level of awareness.

Process Work maintains that you cannot really say where the dance of roles starts. You cannot blame it on the one person who first expressed a particular role, although that may be where you first noticed a process. From Mindell's perspective, it is as if a more complex process created a certain atmosphere in the relationship field, and then people started to dance with the atmosphere and were pulled into different roles. Moreover, each of us is influenced by multiple overlapping fields in every moment, based on our backgrounds, life circumstances, and current context.

The intent of Process Work is to increase our awareness of what is. The more we can remove the filters of blame and judgment, the better we are able to see. ↺

Stepping in and out of roles

Our language is revealing: people "step into" the leadership role. It is like putting on a costume, or accepting a role in a theatrical production. Stepping into any role calls us to perceive, feel, and behave in prescribed, almost formulaic, ways.

Classic roles identified in process work include *listener, appreciator, oppressor, victim, marginalizer/excluder, terrorist,* and *saboteur*. Each of these roles has a "field" because it has been played out in human societies for millennia. By implication, when a person steps into the role of victim (or victimizer) they are swept into patterned ways of seeing, being, and behaving that have been created and reinforced by human societies. This can

be momentary, or long-term, depending on circumstances and awareness.

An aware person is able to resist the pull of a field in order to make conscious choices about how to be and what to do in a group context. Being aware of field and role dynamics, and speaking about them explicitly can burst their thrall, and free individuals in a relationship, group, or organization to choose their responses more consciously.

> ## Formal leader versus leader as role
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> Process Work distinguishes between the designated leader, such as the boss or CEO, and leadership as a function that can move around in a group. For example, if someone speaks against the designated leader's misuse of power, that person is also occupying the leadership role, at least momentarily.

Roles are not bad. They are like gravity. We cannot avoid them. Roles become problematic if people are unconscious about them and in them. Ideally, in Mindell's view, we have the awareness needed to move fluidly between roles: stepping into and dropping roles as circumstances change.

There is also a natural fluidity to roles. Expressing one role shifts the field, and can pull others into different roles. Oppressors become oppressed by their oppression of others. Caregivers become needy of care. "Role switching" is an organic part of most processes.

Disturber and elder

Mindell's work highlights two roles for special attention: *disturber* and *elder*. The disturber is the one who challenges the primary process in a group, implicitly calling the group to embrace a secondary process it would rather not think about. As such, the disturber role is very important to the overall health and wellbeing of our relationships, organizations, and

societies. At the same time, like an auto-immune response, the primary process in groups will usually do its best to block or get rid of the disturber.

The *elder* role cares for the wellbeing of the group as a whole and everyone in it. One common form of eldership is to stand for the inclusion of people and perspectives that are marginalized. At the same time, this very important contribution of eldership is only part of the picture. According to Stanford Siver, an experienced Process Work practitioner, "Eldership sometimes means: supporting, momentarily, one-sided exclusion; supporting the dominant group, culture, or members; and even occasionally an elder might support her own momentary one-sidedness. 'Yes to hearing the voices of the marginalized group but No, not like that.'" Process Work is a refreshing challenge to formulaic political correctness.

The more awareness there is in a group, the more likely it is that different people will take turns playing the role of disturber, or expressing the disturber role for different issues and aspects of group life. Similarly, the eldership role will move around or can be held by multiple people in different moments, based on their different backgrounds and sensitivities.[60]

Field theory helps us understand how a disturber vacuum can draw others to disturb the status quo in the same way that a leadership vacuum can draw others forward into a leadership position. Healthy groups have disturbers. Indeed, if the disturber role is temporarily suppressed or blocked, groups will become less effective and more tense or "edgy" due to unexpressed secondary processes. ⊤

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60 All roles are non-local, in that they move around from person to person(s). A role does not only appear in one person … even if it might seem so in the moment.

Rank and privilege

Another core concept in Process Work is *rank*. Perhaps thanks to our animal ancestry, humans tend to rank themselves and others in a complex web of pecking orders. Social ranking is part of every human system, and is implicit in the distinction between primary and secondary processes. Different cultures and sub-cultures rank the same things (wealth, weight, education, etc.) in different ways. Universally, though, we give higher rank to what is primary – internally, in our hearts and minds, and externally, in our relations with others.

How you rank in a specific context will be the sum of different kinds of privilege. For example, you might have structural privilege, by virtue of being the boss, or you might have psychological privilege in that you greet each day feeling optimistic. Other main categories of privilege identified by Mindell are: social (education, connections), economic (income, wealth), health (weight, fitness), and spiritual (sense of belonging, inner peace).

Each of us is a mixed bag, ranking higher on some aspects and lower on others. For example, a person might be well-educated (ranking high), but have a mental illness (ranking low). A person might have a strong sense of identity (ranking high), but live in poverty (ranking low).

The blessing in these multiple dimensions of privilege is that each of us has a window into the dynamics of rank. In the areas where we rank lower than others, we have personal experience of what it feels like to be "second-class."

Think of your own situation: where do you rank high (according to the standards of your culture/sub-culture), and where do you rank low? What differences do you notice between these two positions – for example in your overall well-being, your sense of belonging, or your awareness of others?

Privilege-induced blindness

Mindell observes a significant consequence of the way we are wired for ranking: "Privilege makes you blind." For example, when you are white in North America, you are relatively blind to your own privilege, and to the experience of people of colour. Instead, your attention tends to focus on other white people. Or when you are an adult at a party, you tend to visit with other adults, skipping over youth or children as irrelevant to your needs and wellbeing. The criteria might change, but not the process of seeing some as higher and others as lower, and of being relatively blind to what you define as "lower."

The blindness due to privilege means people and dimensions with lower rank (as in whatever is secondary in a group) often bring critical missing perspectives to social systems. ↺ Think of the biting commentary of teenagers. We often have acutely good vision when we feel that others with higher rank are not using their privilege well.

This is not to say that people with lower rank see the whole picture. While they have an ability to see parts of the whole field missing from the mainstream's view, they also have their own edges. For example, marginalized people often feel powerless and may not appreciate how powerful they actually are, and marginalized people can themselves be ageist, sexist, classist, etc.

Rank and privilege in groups

Privilege-induced blindness is a key factor in group dynamics. Take this classic scenario of "turning a blind eye":

- Individuals in a group politely raise a disturbing issue, bringing a group's "secondary process" to the table.
- When other individuals ignore the issue, it is marginalized by the group's "primary process."

- Individuals politely raise the secondary process issue again.
- The primary process again ignores the issue.
- The secondary process raises the issue more forcefully.
- The primary process can no longer ignore the issue, but turns a blind eye.
- The secondary process stridently raises the issue.
- The primary process says that it will only listen to the secondary process if it presents the issue in a "reasonable" manner – that is, politely.
- If the secondary process raises the issue politely, the primary process ignores it.
- And so on, until individuals continue to escalate, amplifying the secondary disturbance to the point where there is a shift in the system.

This is a very human dynamic. It plays out in all the nooks and crannies of society, and at all levels: in individuals, relationships, groups, organizations, societies and the whole human field.

Deep Democracy

Matching the scope of these dynamics of privilege, in the late 1980s Mindell began to explore and define a guiding principle that he called "Deep Democracy":

> *Unlike "classical" democracy, which focuses on majority rule, Deep Democracy suggests that all voices, states of awareness, and frameworks of reality are important. Deep Democracy also suggests that the information carried within these voices, awarenesses, and frameworks are all needed to understand the complete process of the system. Deep Democracy is an attitude that focuses on the awareness of voices that are both central and marginal.*[61]

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61 Deep Democracy Institute, www.deepdemocracyinstitute.org/deep-democracy-explained.html, used with permission.

Deep Democracy calls us to embrace what is secondary, not only in terms of social groups and their issues, but first and foremost in ourselves! The more we bring awareness and acceptance to our secondary process, the more we can be present to the primary and secondary processes of the group (i.e. relatively free of having an agenda for things to go one way or another). From here, Deep Democracy calls us to be present to and to embrace all the ways a human system receives signals about what the secondary processes may be. This includes listening for and valuing different states of consciousness, synchronicities, dreams, body sensations, and "those voices that seem to come from beyond space and time."[62] ↺

Other ways of seeing

Separately and together, the concepts described above offer rich perspectives on group dynamics. The Mindells have other great concepts, such as time spirits, ghost roles, and metaskills. Please see Mindell in Further Resources if you would like to delve more deeply into the Process Oriented Psychology framework.

The following reflections were written by Lane Arye, a therapist steeped in Deep Democracy and Process Work, as a contribution to the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement.[63] The "story" is longer than most as different

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62 Stanford Siver, "Deep Democracy," http://stanfordsiver.net/deep-democracy/

63 The Occupy Wall Street movement developed in the summer of 2011 in response to an article in Kalle Lasn's Adbuster Magazine suggesting that America needed its own Tahrir Square (a reference to the recent Arab Spring protests in Egypt). Before the actual occupation began on September 17, 2011 in Zucotti Square, close to the Wall Street financial district in New York City, the movement had agreed to use general assemblies to make decisions rather than typical leadership/spokespersons models. A key slogan was, "We are the 99%," as distinct from the wealthiest top 1%. The main prompts were the increase in income inequality, especially in light of bank bailouts following the 2008 financial crisis, and the extent of corporate influence on the democratic process. By October 9, there were "Occupy" protests in over 600 communities across the US, and in dozens of cities around the world.

parts speak to different people, and there is nothing I want to cut. As you read it, see how its gems of wisdom apply to your current context(s), including family, classroom, workplace, or community.

Process Work in action

A Therapist Talks about the Occupy Wall Street Events

Last night I [Lane Arye] was talking with a group of activists/organizers from around the country about their impressions of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement. They were curious how the insights of a therapist and conflict facilitator schooled in Worldwork[64] (which was developed by Arnold Mindell) might be useful to folks in the movement. After our teleconference, the activists encouraged me to write this.

First off, OWS is surrounded by a host of critics, from long-time social change organizers to mainstream media. We can learn from critics in at least two ways. They can help us improve by pointing out what we genuinely need to change. Paradoxically, they may be criticizing us for something we actually need to do more congruently. Seen from this angle, critics may be highlighting strengths we don't yet know we have.

Take one criticism: The General Assemblies (GAs)[65] lead to a kind of individualism of people wanting to be heard and contribute, unaware of the impact on the thousand people listening. In one recent GA, a small group of

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64 Worldwork is a body of work within Process Oriented Psychology which says that to understand the psychology of individuals, it is important to under-stand their wider context – including the "world" issues of racism, homopho-bia, economic and social marginalization, sexism, etc.

65 See Footnote 63. The OWS "General Assemblies" (GAs) embodied a radically different way of organizing. Instead of decision-making by a few top-down leaders/designated spokespeople, all decisions were made by consensus at daily GAs. This was both a tremendous strength of the movement, and a great challenge. The GA experience is relevant for any group or community that seeks to be authentically inclusive of all voices. See the Conscious Co-Creation chapter and the Coda for more thoughts on how to help groups make decisions and achieve unity of purpose in a timely way.

frustrated men hijacked the meeting, cursing and physically threatening the entire assembly. Even in less dramatic situations, most GAs are filled with judgment, fracturing statements, and individuals repeating each other just so they can get themselves heard.

From one point of view, the criticism is valid. Yes, Western individualism can be very problematic and it is always a good time to learn to be more communitarian. But perhaps there is also something beautiful about this individualism. People have the sense that they can finally speak up about the economy, that their voice is important, that they do not have to shut up and listen to talking heads who supposedly know better.

It can be useful to think about this in terms of roles. (Just as an actor plays many different roles, we all play different roles in our lives, sometimes without awareness.) Individuals wanting to be heard at a General Assembly might be in the role of someone who wants attention. "Pay attention to me! I have something to say!" For years, our "democratic" system has ignored these voices. They have been excluded by money, a political system that merely offers citizens a chance to vote, and a financial system bent on inequality. But now this role is finding a public voice.

This role is talking to another role that does not listen. Many bankers, politicians, media and others are part of the role of "not listening." In essence the voice says: "Shut up! I am not listening to you!" (Though they have learned to be more subtle: "I wish the protestors had a single message.")

There must be a third role here – the listener, who holds the space and receives what someone is offering.

Perhaps facilitators, organizers and activists could benefit from knowing that these three roles are around. For example, when someone is talking a lot at a General Assembly, the facilitator could echo back what the speaker is saying, getting to the essence of it so the speaker knows

she/he is heard, and perhaps so the speaker knows what she/he is trying to say.

I have seen this work around the world. During a forum for reconciliation in the Balkans soon after the war there, a Bosnian Croat would not stop speaking, holding a virtual filibuster, despite the impassioned pleas of his fellow participants. When I echoed back what I thought he was trying to say, he thanked me and sat down. When people feel heard, they stop demanding the time to speak, because filling the missing role of the listener addresses the core need of the one who has something to say.

Of course, doing this can be challenging. Everyone wants to speak, but who can really listen? In Worldwork we say that the elder is the person who can listen to all voices, who supports everyone to speak and be heard, who wants the best for all sides of a given conflict. OWS, like the rest of the world, needs more elders.

Another way to make this useful is to think that probably everyone needs to be heard, and everyone needs to cultivate the listener. Having large groups move into pairs or groups of three people who can actively listen to one another about a given topic might be one way to meet this important need. Occupy Minneapolis used this with huge success during a consensus process that had been routinely blocked. After pair-sharing, the group was able to move forward. Or Aussie facilitator Holly Hammond has found value in "asking people to raise their hands in response to some questions e.g., 'Raise your hand if this is your first General Assembly' (very useful information!); 'Raise your hand if you camped at City Square'; 'Raise your hand if you were present at the eviction', etc." Both methods let people know that someone was listening to them, interested in them, and that they were an important part of what was happening.

This is one reason, by the way, that the spokescouncil model can be effective. In that model there are affinity groups – embedded small groups so everyone can speak –

and they each send representatives who sit at the spokescouncil, like spokes of a wheel. Each spoke can consult with its affinity group and the whole process is done in public so it marries transparent representation and participation.

Similar to the listener is the appreciator. At some GAs people are attacked when they step into new roles of leadership. How much more exciting it could be if these brave souls were cheered when they took the risk to lead. One OWS activist came up with a different solution: put up a large chart where people can leave anonymous (or signed) messages of appreciation for people in the camp. It is another way to model that people are hearing!

The one who wants attention is related to the role of the one who wants to contribute. Even long-time organizers may find themselves not knowing how to contribute to this movement that has its own culture, that may not seem to them to be strategic or sustainable. They might feel disempowered as well, and feel they have to adapt to the General Assembly culture and the rules that have been set up by the OWS organizers. And those who anticipate that the long history of oppression will be repeated yet again may feel that their voices and contributions will not be as welcomed.

When we notice the companion role, the one who receives someone's contribution, then we find ways to work with this dynamic. For instance, facilitators might again try getting people into small groups, and having folks take turns saying what they personally feel they have to contribute to this movement. The other people in the small group can draw them out, and encourage them to find ways to bring their unique gifts. Many people want to contribute, but do not know how. It is important to support people to find their strengths and fulfill their need to contribute. This can prevent people from feeling discouraged or disempowered (and thus prevent harmful consequences like deciding not to return, or discouraging others from engaging with the movement). It also

breathes new life into a movement by bringing new ideas and energy from the grassroots.

When I mentioned this point to the social change organizers, they put it to immediate use. One young woman of color from New York was talking about her frustration that, while People of Color have shown up, their contributions have often been minimized. She felt that OWS needs just the opposite – to value and prioritize these contributions in order to continue expanding and diversifying the movement. Another Philly organizer of color drew her out, asking how she imagined making a difference. Her initial hesitancy was transformed into excitement as he appreciated and received her great ideas. Then he asked if she would like coaching on one point, which she welcomed. A week later she facilitated a 100 person POC [Person of Colour] meeting, as well as a media training for POC/women, teaching them to better find their voice, initiate interviews, and speak up in the media. She also had other projects/contributions in the pipeline. As she wrote, "My mind and my heart are a-whirlin."

Here was one great example of what I imagine are a multitude of potential contributions that could be supported to come forward if we notice and fill the various roles in the field.

Let's not forget that the man who wanted to hear her ideas also made a contribution of his own. Filling the role of the receiver was itself a contribution!

He had been one of those experienced organizers who had not found a way to be of use to the OWS movement. He had at various times tried to give advice to OWS facilitators about how to have better GAs and create a more sustainable movement, without having had much impact. Now he realized he had been stuck in the role of the one who speaks (one of the many well-meaning people who turn into advice givers) rather than being an elder. That is when he decided to try something different. (It is important to note that after listening to her, he asked if

she wanted coaching, then waited for her feedback before offering his own ideas.)

Another way to look at all of this is through the lens of a criticism that has been leveled by the mainstream media at the OWS movement – that it has so many heads and no unified message. Rather than looking at the truth or falsehood of this criticism, let's see if there is something good about it! If OWS is a creature with many heads, then anyone can be the head. When so many heads are singing beautiful songs, it is up to each of us to both listen, and to sing our own song. The most beautiful and compelling ones will be heard. From this perspective, we are all potential leaders of this movement.

According to Mindell's idea of Deep Democracy, when all voices and roles have a chance to be heard and interact, the wisdom of a group or community can arise. Perhaps the many-headed creature that is OWS needs our particular song, our particular direction. The world is trying to express itself. It is using us. By believing in our own voice, in our own special part, and by actively listening to our peers, we can help the wisdom and power of the movement to develop.

Process Work, as the above story illustrates, has much to offer groups and organizations of all types. Who, for example, has not been part of a meeting where many want to be heard and few are listening? Who has not, at one time or another, wanted to contribute but not found a way to do so?

Through key concepts such as role, field, and secondary process, Process Work helps us to be more aware and to make choices that support enlivening unfoldment in our relationships, groups, organizations, and societies.

To be masterful with the Process Work lens takes years of dedication. Even so, there are countless benefits from getting your feet wet with the concepts and ideas in this chapter. Try sharing them with a buddy from work or a significant other

to quicken your understanding. In doing so, you will cultivate sensitivity to unfolding processes in yourself and in groups. Whether you go for mastery or for basic knowledge, here are some finer points and possible pitfalls to be aware of.

Finer points

- We might not understand why a person or group behaves as they do, but Process Work says we can take it on faith that if we better understand their context, the field, their primary and secondary processes, etc., even violent and destructive behaviour will "make sense." ⊤ For example, if a sub-group has been marginalized or ignored whenever it uses due process and official channels, it has little recourse but to escalate to more "disturbing" behaviours. I value how this lens has helped me look more closely and open more fully in challenging situations.

- The basic stance of Process Work is curious, compassionate, fierce, and courageous. It has both a receptive "yin" of acceptance and acknowledgment of what is, and an active "yang" of standing for inclusion of all voices and perspectives, even if what is marginalized is the perspective of an elite! Process Work is too big for a "politically correct" box. Rather, its allegiance is to the mystery of the all-embracing and ever-unfolding process of life.

- Process Work calls us to be mindful when defining agendas and priorities for group endeavours. Too often, issues are framed in ways that exclude secondary processes. It is best when the agenda is truly inclusive, for example, of the issues frontline workers have with how things are going as well as the CEO's agenda.

Possible pitfalls

- Avoid the tendency to judge yourself harshly when you become aware of your edge to a secondary process. Instead *appreciate* yourself for being willing to acknowledge what you had previously stuffed out of sight as unacceptable. Taking yourself up to and over an edge is like rocking your own boat. It shakes up your identity, in a good way, and can make you more humble. Remember that every one of us ever and always has edges. You cannot not have secondary processes. And the more you open to what is secondary, the more you will be in flow with all of life.

- It is edgy to talk about the edge. If you introduce a group to the concepts of primary process, secondary process, and edge, there is a good chance this will take the group to an edge. Some people or one person might be confused, agitated, compelled to crack a joke … A minor pitfall is to miss this great opportunity for group members to reflect together on how the energy feels in that "edge" moment.

- It is a misunderstanding of Process Work to say that we should always cross an edge. Maybe it is too much to cross the edge at this time, or maybe it is enough just to peek over the edge. Some edges should not be crossed (for example, if you have an edge to being violent). Others are long-term processes, for example, where we approach the edge, maybe put a toe over it, and come back to breathe and reflect on the whole scene before feeling our way into what is next. Toastmasters is successful at helping people becoming public speakers in part because it identifies a gently graduated sequence of steps to take (or edges to cross) in one's own timing.

- Naming a person or group as the disturber can lead to scapegoating: "Everything would be fine if we could just get rid

of JJ." Our very human desire to block what upsets our primary process can lead us to misuse the framework. We take the concept of "disturber," together with the general agreement that disruption is "bad," as justifications for excluding or blocking an individual or group. This is the opposite of what Process Work intends. Process Work calls on us to get curious about what disturbs us, trusting that it offers us the gold of greater aliveness, freedom, and effectiveness. If you see scapegoating starting to happen, consider stepping into the role of disturber yourself. By bringing out your own personal expression of the energy, even momentarily, you can diffuse the group's impulse to scapegoat "JJ."

- Do not misunderstand Process Work as always calling for us to keep "JJ" in our group. "Divorce" is a process also. What Process Work does recommend is that we deal consciously with the energy carried by JJ, since s/he simply picked up on a role that emerged from the field. For example, suppose the disturbance is neediness. How might the energy of neediness be useful to the group? In addition, it may be that if other group members acknowledge their own neediness, JJ will be freed up to move out of that role. If JJ continues to be a problem despite the group's best efforts to integrate her or his message, it may be that JJ's process is to go in a different direction.

- If you sense that your contribution is a disturbance for the groups you are part of, there is the very real possibility of being "killed" by the primary process, in the form of exclusion, humiliation, sidelining, ridicule, excommunication, and more. Here are a few tips for this possible pitfall.

  o Go into situations with your eyes wide open. Do not expect people expressing the primary process to like you.

  o Do not take things personally. Different fields are influ-

encing everyone. You and others are playing parts in multiple wider dynamics.

- o Set an overarching intention: "May I contribute to the group's process in ways that serve the highest."

- o Be mindful of what is primary and secondary for you personally in the situation, moment by moment.

- o Be humble. Know that you have been on the other side of this dynamic in another circumstances. Sometimes you are the one "killing" what is secondary!

- o Take time to get to know people as people, one-on-one if possible. Reach across the divide by choosing loving kindness over righteousness or aggression.

- o Get creative about supporting others to see what they are disavowing. Use questions that invite them to see your perspective.

- o Be curious. Have no idea what will unfold. Do not hold others in specific roles. Allow space inside you for things to unfold in unexpected and non-linear ways.

- Our privilege makes us blind, and what is in our blind spot is likely among the most generative and transformative elements of the picture. ✛ An antidote is to ask ourselves, "In what way am I blinded by privilege in this situation?" Two other great options are to work with a colleague to help each other see blind spots, and creating practice opportunities for each of you to step momentarily into unfamiliar roles.

- Spiritual rank can be associated with subtle possible pitfalls. Take for example this common stance by people who are consciously on a spiritual path: "I am above all this; I have graduated from being consumed by coarse emotions and material matters; I am well on the way to enlightenment." The very real benefits of spiritual practice are often closely linked to this kind of arrogance. Instead of supporting

greater love and compassion for all that is, some spiritually privileged people use their insight to keep themselves separate and disconnected from other people and other species.

Links to other chapters

Process Work is an all-encompassing lens. There are *always* multiple layers of unfolding processes, including within an individual, at the micro level of a single conversation, and all the way up to the macro level of international relations. As such, Process Work brings depth to every other lens in the book.

For example, Process Work shines light on Trust Theory's spectrum of fear and trust: as we open, thanks to higher levels of trust, more of what has been secondary comes forward. Trust Theory's emphasis on being "role free" adds an important nuance to Process Work's articulation of specific roles in the field. Both lenses call us to be conscious of roles and to avoid being stuck in one role, but they get there in subtly different ways.

In Generative Dialogue, Process Work calls our attention to marginalized voices, and to body sensations and synchronicities. This helps us to be more conscious of what is taking place, and therefore more able to strengthen the container in ways that deepen conversations.

The next framework is Ken Wilber's Integral Theory. Like Process Work, it is a big picture lens, richly comprehensive and insightful for work at all levels and in all sorts of contexts. There are dozens of ways that Process Work complements Integral Theory and vice versa. Read on so you can discover these for yourself.

Questions

- In this moment, what is primary and what is secondary – in me, and in the group?

- Can I sense the field? Am I being pulled into a particular role? Are others being pulled into roles unconsciously?

- Are we at an edge? Is this a hot spot?

- Is there a disturber? If so, can I get permission from the group to unfold the disturbance? Is the disturber also speaking for me, at least in part? Can I own and express my part of the disturber role?

- What do I take for granted? In what ways am I blinded by privilege? (These are important questions no matter what our life circumstances!)

- Is there a need for eldership? Can I value all voices?