



Deep Collaboration for Deep Change

NASCEE and IPASA hosted the Deep Collaboration for Deep Change Dialogue on 30 June 2021 for their members. This dialogue, which had its origins in a brainstorming session in 2020, and a subsequent discussion paper titled [“Deep collaboration for deep change. Rethinking collaboration in South Africa during and after the COVID-19 pandemic”](#), explored concepts like collaboration, co-creation, partnership, collective intent, and shared value, and included discussions on deep collaboration models and their relevance and potential use in the philanthropy and education sector.

Introductions and presentation

Following introductions by [Sarah Rennie](#) and [James Keevy](#), and participant check-ins in smaller groups, led by [Rooksana Rajab](#). A quick poll on how participants’ felt about collaboration showed mostly positive attitudes and optimism regarding collaboration. See Figure 1 below.



Figure 1: Results of poll on how participants felt about collaboration

Presentation “Thinking about deep collaboration for deep change”

An exploratory discovery discussion was guided by a presentation from [Robyn Whittaker](#). View the multi-media presentation here [link](#) - The videos in the presentation can be accessed here: [link](#) (Woodwide Web) and here: [link](#) (Starling Murmuration).

Some of the thoughts shared in the presentation include the spectrum of collaboration, ranging from contact to convergence; the anatomy of social networks; what needs to be paid attention to for collaboration to happen and for functional and impact systems to evolve. Other key ideas shared were around co-creation, the importance of relationships, and how Theory U can be useful in enhancing performance by operating from the whole. The four levels of responding to change according to Theory U was discussed, and participants used a practical exercise via Jamboard (see Figure 2 below) to reflect on how they are currently responding to change (red), compared to how they think they could or would like to respond to change (blue).

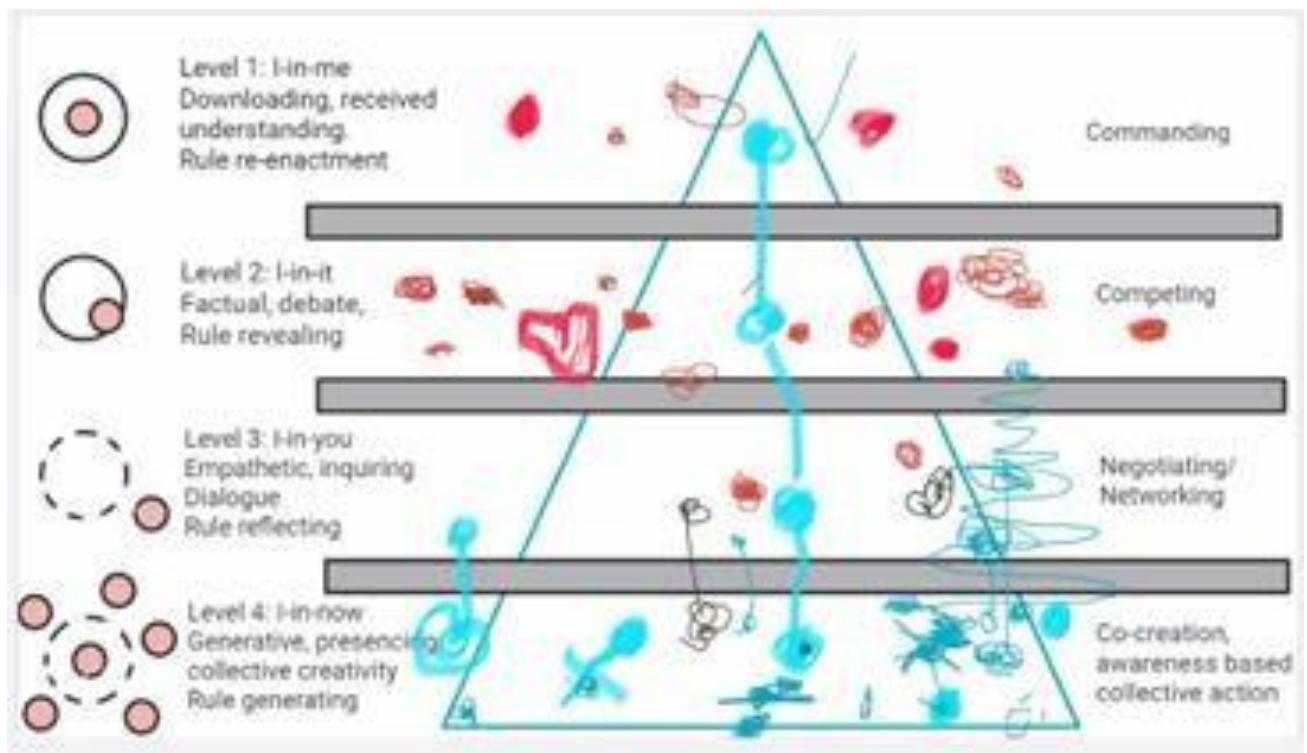


Figure 2: Participants' Jamboard reflection on their current and desired responses to change

After the presentation, participants were invited to look at clusters of concepts through the lens of “What is essential?” in breakaway groups. This was followed by sharing reflections in the whole group.

Summary of discussion and insights

Some of the insights that emerged during the breakaway group discussions and in the whole group reflection are:

Individual agency, relationships, networks and systems are important

- Individual agency is important, and the question arises: “What can we each do to build a strong voice?”.
- At the same time, relationships are highly important, given that systems are made up of people. Key questions here are “What are the activities that would effectively build a strong relational substrate?” and “How do we galvanise strong relationships?”
- We need to understand our network connections on a deeper level, which also involves understanding the “rules of play” better, and how organisational structures influence these.

More dialogue but also moving to action is needed

- There is a real desire to move deeper into conversation. At the same time there is some uncertainty regarding how to move beyond “nice words” to “real action”.
- When engaging in co-creative and collaborative work there is a need to move towards convergence and an action point. Questions arise regarding how to pull together and move in the same direction?
- The first brave step has been taken to enter into this conversation. There will be value in having a space for regular dialogues in follow up of this one, which will be a process of moving participants to a space where they can operate from a Level 4 approach¹, which can allow the system to act together for deep change.

Change and ambivalence may be the discomfort needed to spark generative change

- The (general South African) tendency to collaborate “against” something has to be overcome, and we need to learn to mobilise as effectively for constructive purposes.
- Ambivalence also emerged through anxieties about the time commitment needed for this work, and risk aversion to move into deeper conversation, while at the same time, realising the difficulties of “letting go of ego” and shifting our own perspectives are essential in moving the conversation forward.
- The need to support on a basis of mutual respect instead of competition is evident, and overall there is hope for collaboration amidst some measure of cynicism and fatigue.

Taking the dialogue further

This dialogue was the start of a generative dialogue, an “initiation space”. This dialogue will develop further in an organic manner, guided by the appetite of participants for ongoing conversation. Closing comments from the facilitators reminded participants that “the magic goes with the continuity, commitment, connecting regularly, sharing regularly and building relationships.”

¹ See references to Theory U above and in the attached presentation.