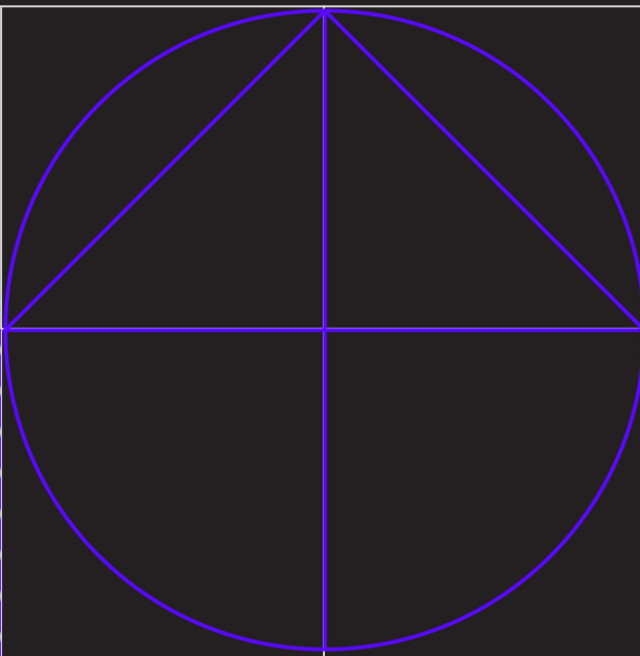
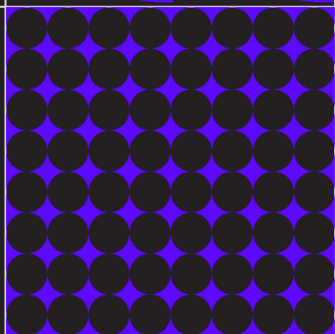
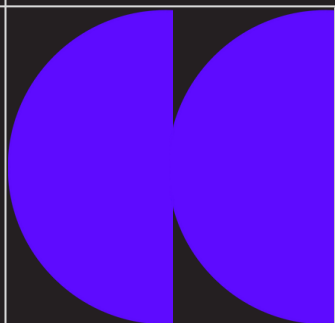


INNOVATION NORTH



Session 18 Key INsights:

COLLABORATING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE



INsights From Part 1

In part one of this session, we engaged in a role-playing exercise where various stakeholders, each with unique expertise and interests, had to collaborate to develop a robot aimed at enhancing manufacturing quality and efficiency.

Collaborations are complex: The collaboration presented difficulties as participants often didn't openly share their interests or constraints, seeking to gain an advantage in negotiations. This lack of transparency posed a challenge to the collaboration. Additionally, even after understanding the different interests and areas of expertise, meeting those diverse needs remained a significantly difficult challenge. As a result, the groups experienced a range of outcomes. Some groups had no outcome, while others developed detailed collaboration and implementation plans, including key milestone delineations. This array of outcomes highlights the complexity of collaboration, which often appears simpler than it actually is. Many assume they understand collaboration intuitively, which can be a barrier to effective collaborations.

Understanding each other is important: In the collaboration process, having time to build relationships and understand each other's motivations ahead of time would have made the process easier. In at least some of the groups, as the process went on, tensions arose as people's true objectives came out. One participant went so far as to say, "We didn't know we hated each other until we started the discussion about our objectives."

Communication styles can vary due to contextual factors: One's mode of communication may not only be a personal trait but also influenced by contextual factors. For example, many participants portraying Borasky, the most vulnerable and powerless character in the role play, tended to adopt a debating style. People often view the four modes of talking and listening as skills that can be acquired through learning, and if someone can't, it's because they're not paying attention. However, the observation with Borasky demonstrates that it's not as straightforward as that.

When facilitating a collaborative systems innovation project, it's important to consider how the group can better engage with the perspectives of marginalized actors within the system.

INsights From Part 2

In part two of the session, practice partners brought up some of the collaboration challenges that they are facing in their organizations and Adam Kahane offered his perspectives. Some of the challenges in collaboration involved working with individuals who are not inclined to collaborate and establishing trust with collaborators in the presence of significant mistrust.

Seeing others not only as actors or parties but also as kin: When you're working with other people to get something done, we can see ourselves and others through three lenses:

- **Actors:** those playing a role, like representing an organization or larger group
- **Parties:** those playing a role but more immediately governed by their own personal interests, identity, and motivations, like retaining their job, earning income, being perceived as successful
- **Kin:** people with whom we're cohabitating and who we exist alongside in *unchosen* relationships, as with family

Often, our tendency is to lead with our interests and positions. However, it's crucial to reconnect on a personal level first, seeing others as kin and acknowledging their humanity. Building connections and understanding how people form relationships is essential.

Viewing others as kin begins with small gestures: Then how can we view each other more as kin? It can begin by intentionally setting aside time to connect, embracing the idea that we are all connected in some way. This mindset makes us more receptive to collaborative efforts that are genuinely supportive and beneficial for everyone involved. One of the most effective ways Adam has done this in his work is by asking people to find the person in the room most different from themselves and simply going on a walk together. The walk can provide an opportunity to talk about diverse experiences, viewpoints, and values among individuals, leading to mutual understanding and learning. It allows us to understand others' perspectives rather than simply trying to persuade them. By initially connecting as individuals, we become more open to changing our opinions or approaches. While problems remain, broadening and deepening our perspectives through informal, equal interactions enhances our flexibility and creativity.

Balancing needs in a collaboration: In organizations, there's often a strong emphasis on the interests of the "whole." However, it's rare for everyone in an organization to have interests that perfectly align with those of the entire entity. We can't ignore the fact that there are other "wholes" within the larger "whole" of the organization, such as teams and individuals, each with their own unique interests. It's not sufficient to simply converge around what's good for the organization as a whole and for individuals; we must also reflect the diverse interests of all actors within the organization.

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