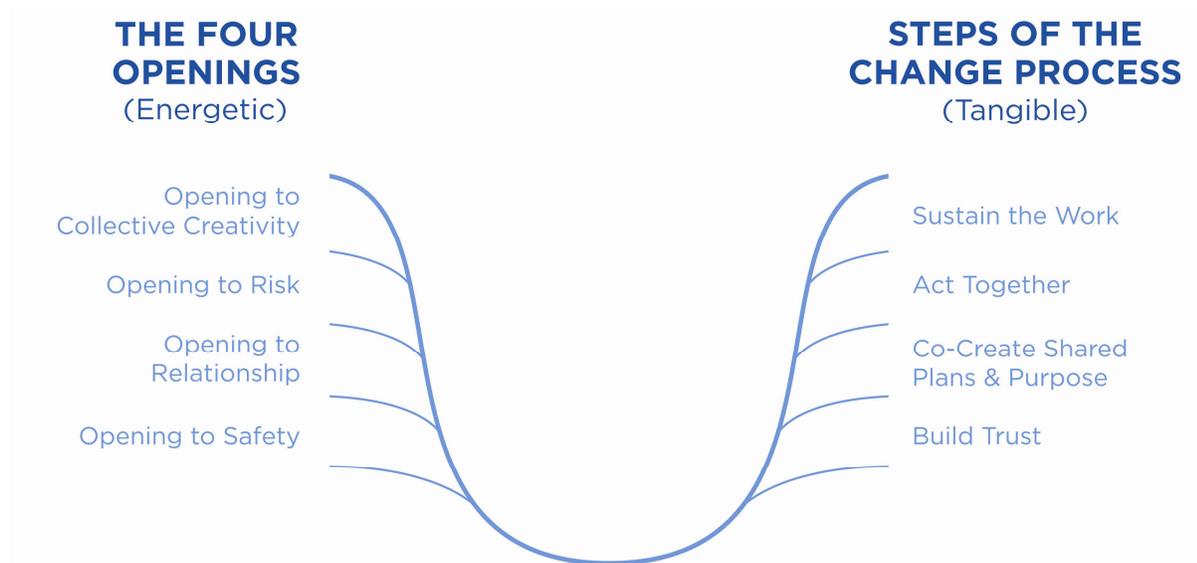


The Four Openings

Inside the container is the soft “V” shape that describes the change process. On the left side of the “V” are four openings: opening to safety, opening to relationship, opening to risk and opening to collective creativity. These are the *energetic states of a group* as it advances in its ability to listen more, judge less, hold uncertainty and lean into possibility. Delve into these stages in turn to go deeper with groups. Remaking the invitation to gracious space many times helps groups open and move along these stages.

On the right side of the “V” are the four steps of the change process: build trust, co-create shared purpose and plans, act together and sustain the work. These are the *concrete steps* groups need to take to advance the change process. The two sides are connected in that in order to do the change work, groups need to access the four openings. For example, in order to build trust, you must create safety. In order to co-create shared plans and purpose, you must develop strong relationships.



- 🕒 **Opening to Safety.** Safety is created by making things known: who is here, what they want, how the process works, what can be expected, what each person’s role is, etc. Without safety, a group will stall at the beginning and not progress. Building trust is critical. This stage typically applies when you wish to encourage people to show up and bring their ideas to the table without judgment, shaming or even violence. The focus is on creating safety, trust and buy-in for the change effort.



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- ④ **Opening to Relationship.** Relationships are the vehicle by which work gets done, and therefore stronger relationships make the change work more likely to succeed. Strengthening relationships helps to establish greater predictability and understanding, while simultaneously freeing members to bring their gifts and contributions. In this stage group members interact, learn to trust and work together, and jointly define the work that needs to be done.
- ④ **Opening to the Risk.** Many groups create safety and relationship but then fail to face the turbulence, discomfort or paradoxical nature of their work because they are not willing to risk the safety and relationship they have created. The paradox in change work is that true safety often lies in that which makes you fearful. Sometimes our actions or beliefs actually prevent us from getting where we want to be. To move from being stuck to a more powerful place, groups need to open to risk, face the discomfort, 'run toward the roar,' and explore the truth from multiple viewing points. This results in breakthrough thinking, which is not possible when the group stays on the level of safety and agreement.
- ④ **Opening to Collective Creativity.** At this stage the group is willing and able to be in an extended state of "not knowing," opening to uncertainty and new possibilities. Together they create something unexpected and more powerful than previously dreamed. At this stage, the group co-constructs the whole, and then determines the parts and assignments that flow out of it.



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The Change Process

The right side of the model demonstrates the main steps along a change process. It is important to remember that although represented linearly, these steps are actually cyclical. At the beginning while building trust, groups must also consider factors that will enable them to sustain the work later on. At any stage in the change process groups may need to revisit one of the earlier stages, for example when new members join the group or the understanding of the work changes.

- ④ **Build Trust.** The group gets to know each other, focuses on culture, history, strengths and challenges. Individuals share their values, gifts, resources, capacities and passions. The group agrees how to work together while honoring differences.
- ④ **Co-Construct Shared Purpose & Plans.** Together people understand the context and the data that informs what is needed in that context. The group develops a shared purpose that can hold individual passions and gifts. They create a roadmap/plan to advance the change work.
- ④ **ACT Together.** The group builds allies who can act in concert with the shared purpose. The group holds each other accountable for the commitments they have made to stay engaged and to continue learning. They implement the plan, adapting as needed.
- ④ **Sustain the Change Work.** The changes become a way of life that grows over time. The group creates the means and structure to keep people engaged and to welcome new partners. They adapt the work as they learn more about what works and what is needed.

What does this group need? Just as individuals ask which of the four Gracious Space elements they most need to get started, so the group must assess itself and determine where to begin in the change process. For example, often groups plunge in at the level of collective creativity. They are excited or challenged by the leadership to create something new, but then wonder why the process is mired in conflict, and realize they must back up to develop the stages of safety and relationship and capacity to engage with paradox.

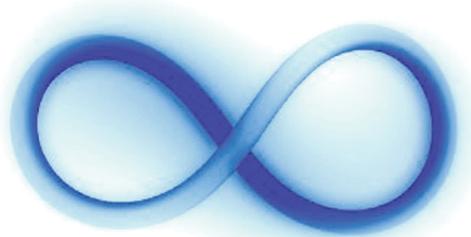
In this Gracious Space-infused change process, people develop deep and trusting relationships, work across boundaries and differences, share diverse perspectives, develop shared purpose, work through conflict, discover transformative solutions, carry out emerging ideas for change, and adapt as needed throughout the process. The four elements of Gracious Space - spirit, setting, invite the stranger and learning in public – can be revisited and reapplied throughout the process to deepen and sustain the work.

Practice of the Change Agent and Work of the Group

In the center of the model is the infinity sign, or a Mobius Strip that represents the inner journey of the individual and the outer work of the group. A Mobius Strip has only one side; it is created by taking a thin length of paper and making one twist, then taping the ends together. If an ant traveled along the strip it would walk on both sides and return to the starting point without ever crossing an edge. The two "sides" of the strip represent the distinct but connected and mutually reinforcing sides to the change work. Both individuals and groups must attend to their patterns to identify and transform limits to learning and growth.

The Inner Work

**PRACTICE
OF THE
CHANGE AGENT**



**WORK OF THE
GROUP**

- ⓐ **Practice of the Change Agent.** The quality of the change is a function of the intention and attention of the change agent. The change agent is always part the change. Pay attention to the spirit you bring to the effort, your preparation, your comfort zone in the context of change and the processes being used, assumptions about group patterns and your ability to facilitate within that dis/comfort. What might you need to let go of to be of service to this group or issue?

Masterful facilitation is an ongoing dance of skill, presence and inspiration. Outwardly your role is to help participants through the agenda in accordance with the purpose, principles and other articulated norms for working together. Inwardly, you remain centered and authentic, attending to what is emerging, inviting the group to move to a new stage of openness, standing in creative tension and ready to shift in a moment to best serve the group. How do you make the shifts that make transformational change more likely to occur?

- ⓑ **Work of the Group.** Groups working in change must attend to both task and process. Too often the process side of the work gets put aside in favor of being efficient. Using Gracious Space as a change model illuminates the inner work of the group. The group becomes aware of what is happening and noticing patterns of stuckness as well as learning opportunities to work better together. The group identifies what it must let go of in order to be of service to the change effort.



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The group needs to remain open and ever conscious of patterns and learning that are emerging. Holding ambiguity, questioning assumptions, making the implicit explicit, naming the “elephant in the room,” illuminating patterns, and identifying breakthroughs are all directions the group work could take. The process reshapes itself to hold the conversation that is ready and most needed to happen. The group pays attention to shifts in energy, disturbances and conflict, new flow after stuckness, moments of reflection to gather insights and opportunities for a transformative move.

Throughout the change process, change agents and group members can infuse the elements of Gracious Space – bringing the spirit, addressing the setting, inviting the stranger and learning in public – according to where you are in the process and what will most help the group open up and move forward.

Gracious Space Change Model

