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Overcoming the space between us: a multi-disciplinary approach to bridge building

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**OVERCOMING THE SPACE BETWEEN US:
A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH
TO BRIDGE BUILDING**

**A Research Project
Presented to the Faculty of
The Graziadio Business School
Pepperdine University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science
In
Organization Development**

**By
Kate Hanisian
July 2023**

This research project, completed by

KATE HANISIAN

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The Graziadio Business School in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: July, 2023

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Abstract

*We . . . made you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other,
not so that you may despise each other.*

- Qur'an 49:13

Facilitators in organization and community contexts (and other practitioners whose job it is to move groups of people forward together) are faced with the undercurrent of human conflict every day in meetings and gatherings around the world; often with limited access to an overarching tool to help prevent and manage conflict in most settings. The purpose of this paper was to uncover patterns in bridge building practices so that anyone who finds themselves in the role of facilitating conversations between people who are very different or do not like each other might lean into a set of practices that can aid in deepening trust among traditionally divided groups. The seven practices outlined here are intended for general use, although would most certainly require some form of adjusting depending on the specific setting, the nature of the conversation, the experience level of the facilitator, and the mindsets and readiness of participants.

Keywords: bridge building, multi-disciplinary, practice orientation

Dedication

This work is dedicated to Salem and Wylie Hanisian Ford. May they grow up in a world where more bridges are intact.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

This is for bridge-builders. And we are all engineers.

- Peter Block

The purpose of this paper was to uncover patterns in bridge-building – “improving relationships between people who are very different or do not like each other” (Cambridge Dictionary, (n.d.)) – by drawing insights across multiple disciplines, so that anyone who finds themselves in the role of facilitating these types of conversations might lean into a set of practices that can aid in deepening trust among traditionally divided groups. Facilitators in organization and community contexts (and other practitioners whose job it is to move groups of people forward together) are faced with the undercurrent of human conflict every day in meetings and gatherings around the world; often with limited access to an overarching tool to help prevent and manage conflict in most settings. This work aimed to provide practical guidelines, or a set of practices, that might support the facilitation work of those who aim to address polarizing divides in community and organizational settings. The practices outlined here are intended for general use, although would most certainly require some form of adjusting depending on the specific setting, the nature of the conversation, the experience level of the facilitator, and the mindsets and readiness of participants.

Background

The fundamental rule of our national life--the rule which underlies all others--is that, on the whole, and in the long run, we shall go up or down together.

- Robert Putnam

Human conflict and division are nothing new. From the dawn of civilization, humans have had to figure out how to live together (or destroy each other) amongst great difficulty. Whether studying the behavior of small groups or entire countries, history and research both show us there is an inherent tension between the needs of

any two or more entities (Chatman & Flynn, 2001). Furthermore, diversity complicates things. Multiple forms of diversity, or heterogeneity, are only successful in groups when people are able to manage conflict successfully and maintain clear and consistent focus on cooperative norms. When achieved, the group becomes more resilient. This resiliency becomes especially important when considering the survival of diverse communities, states, and nations. “Resilience is best understood as a characteristic of communities rather than individuals,” writes David Aldrich (2015, para. 3). In other words, if a group of human beings with lots of differences cannot figure out how to establish shared values and cooperative norms, their resiliency decreases.

This is true in America today, where the idea of shared norms and cooperation rarely supersedes the value of individuality, and therefore serves as a threat to our survival. Abortion law. Climate change. Gun control. Police reform. Increasing economic disparity. What all of these issues have in common is that they have been associated with increased fragmentation in our country (Dimock, 2020). Scholars and pundits alike have sounded an alarm: Democracy is in danger (Bump, 2022). According to a recent CBS News Poll, “more than half of Republicans and more than 40% of Democrats tend to think of the other party as ‘enemies’ rather than ‘political opponents’” (Cohn, 2021, para. 12). Research on historical trends teaches us that social capital, or the networks of relationships amongst people, increased around the turn of the century through the late 1960s, but then quickly declined. The many causes of this decline are interconnected, occurred for multiple reasons, and are hard to pin down to one or two specific starting points. However, societal changes such as increased urban sprawl, television, and pressures of time and money may have played a pivotal role (Putnam, 2001); not to mention the rise of social media use.

Whatever the cause for our increasing separation from each other, the outcomes of this divide are evident. As income inequality increases, as it has in recent decades, our trust in one another is eroded and gaps in society have widened (Gould & Hijzen, 2016). As trust erodes, so does our ability to maintain a sense of safety in diverse company. Trust, and its direct correlation to psychological safety, are two key indicators of a group's ability to successfully collaborate in groups (Earnhardt & Bateman, 2016). This is true both at the more *micro* team level within organizations as well as at the *macro* level across organizations, systems, and society. As Dr. Martin Luther King so eloquently put it, "I believe men hate each other because they fear each other and they fear each other because they don't know each other. They don't know each other because they don't communicate with each other and they don't communicate with each other because they are separate from one another" (King, 1962, para. 18).

All of these divides challenge organizations to become more inclusive, culturally adept, and simultaneously able to navigate widening political divides. While organizations are being tasked with designing organizational cultures that are authentically inclusive, they are also tasked with crafting better strategies to navigate the business effects of these cultural divides. In the face of this complex societal landscape, 94% of employers and workers say that their organization has made a commitment to advancing inclusion in the workplace (Fenelon et al., 2021). Generating authentic and ongoing inclusion in the workplace involves many factors, including the consideration of equitable approaches to gender, ability, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and race.

While organizations have grown in their dedication to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues, increasing diversity does not, by itself, increase effectiveness; what

matters is how an organization harnesses diversity and whether it's willing to reshape its power structure (Ely & Thomas, 2020). In other words, if racism (and other forms of exclusion) are not just interpersonal but are also systemic, then their eradication must involve us redesigning the systems themselves that demonstrate inequitable outcomes (Worley, 2021). Policy and practice reform are important, but organizations must also understand how various forms of systemic oppression, a key source of societal divide, are present in the very foundation of their system and must be undone (Winters, 2020).

The growing pressure that organizations face to deepen their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is often in direct opposition to current political and ideological points of view that seek to shut down this growing movement (López et al., 2021). For example, while some employees want increased attention paid to historical and current forms of systemic inequity, others may be actively pursuing strategies to deny the opportunity for these conversations to take place, such as in the case with the current movement to silence critical race theory (Lopez et al., 2021). All of this put organizations today in a tough spot or a balancing act that requires advanced skills in facilitation, conflict negotiation, political messaging, and culture-building.

Problem solving across differences is difficult, particularly when those problems are complex, seemingly intractable, and are closely tied to people's core values and belief systems that may be in conflict with one another. Humans tend to jump to their own conclusions quickly, causing all sorts of unintended misunderstandings and tension. This unconscious habit stems from our unique individual experiences and the narratives we have made up around them. These stories then inform our interpretation of the world around us, although the

interpretations may be far from accurate. This overreliance on human's own understanding of the truth is often referred to as the *ladder of inference*, and was first created by Chris Argyris in 1970 and popularized in Peter Senge's (2006) seminal work, *The Fifth Discipline*.

It is common for humans to jump from their observations straight to taking actions, without slowing down and understanding the multiple processes that have occurred in between those two points that could lead to a different conclusion and therefore action. This is especially common when people are under any form of stress, which impairs their decision making (Pabst et al., 2013). If people can slow down their process enough to understand that the data they have used are selective, they can then get closer to acknowledging that their perspective is not the only source of truth. Once this opening of mindsets has occurred and been discussed, teams are more likely to be willing to either work from the same narrative or have increased perspective on the narrative of the other.

Another way of describing this phenomenon is referred to as *stretch collaboration* (Kahane, 2017) which works to deal with the real problem in the room and find ways forward. While stretch collaboration may initially increase conflict, it also can genuinely increase connection amongst participants. This kind of collaboration requires that people accept their role and responsibility in the situation at hand, and, following that same vulnerable process, asks them to try actions and steps that may be unfamiliar and may not work. This work requires that participants move away from the idea of one *true* narrative and one way forward into an emergent space of possibility. And so, the majority of bridge- building conversations, or conversations that involve some level of complex conflict or difficulty, are not

accomplished in one moment. Instead, they lead to exploratory dialogue that can happen over multiple conversations or periods of time (Stone et al., 2010).

While all of this separation and polarization is increasingly tough to navigate and may threaten many people's sense of collective survival, a set of practices exists that teach us how to overcome these divisions and show that change is possible, even when we disagree. Because human divide and conflict have been around since the dawn of time, the good news is that there are many leaders, artists, doctors, peacebuilders, citizens, academics, and wisdom-keepers that have developed practices to bridge the collective separation that is inherent in the human experience. These ancestors and current leaders, and the study of their work around bridge building, exist throughout time and across silos in areas such as sociology, law, religion, art, government, social justice, organization development, and, arguably most importantly, in community contexts. Within these fields there are a great deal of methods and theories for transforming conflict and bridging relationships across differences, such as mediation, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, negotiation, appreciative inquiry, intercultural development, and various ancient and modern forms of wisdom circles.

General Approach

As part of this research, I searched the literature, across multiple fields of study, to identify common themes and potential gaps among these conversations and practices, and have shared those insights here in the coming chapters. It is my hope that this work can play a small role in equipping any that come across it with a bit of collected wisdom to lean into during times of community building and breaking, reminding us all that while there is no perfect way, there are many ways that have already been created and left us with a strong foundation to lean upon.

It is important to note a few caveats. The overlapping content in this work spans across nearly every discipline, culture, and history; and therefore, impossible to research or capture all. In addition, words matter, and the nuanced differences between terms and approaches will be naturally less clear and sacrificed in order to identify top-level, generalized commonalities that can work across widespread settings. Therefore, I will not be claiming that themes identified in this paper are completely true across disciplines. What remains clear however is that patterns do exist that can be identified in the various approaches; and therefore, provide opportunities to offer tried and true methods to organizational leaders, communities, and the divisive world we see today.

Lastly, it is important to note the need to specifically elevate the community building practices used by those who have survived and continued to thrive despite living under conditions of oppression. Community building practices from marginalized groups are historically undervalued, under credited, and understudied in mainstream circles, and their omission greatly inhibits any practitioner's ability to learn from non-dominant cultural methods (Paris, 2012). As Mia Birdsong (2020) reminds us, "People do not survive racism, xenophobia, gender discrimination, and poverty without developing extraordinary skills, systems, and practices of support. And in doing so, they carve a path for everyone else" (p. 29). Therefore, this paper elevated works from practitioners who may be less cited in academic journals (e.g., Mia Birdsong, Priya Parker) but who have demonstrated a powerful body of work in the field of community building.

The context we live in today is not duplicated in any other moment in time, and will require that old tools be adjusted or new tools be built. No one knows the future. But rather than starting from scratch without support or shared understanding









of that which has come before, we can harness the opportunity for leaders to learn from, and pass onto the next generation, wisdom that can help connect us to one another and build a shared future.

Literature Review and Model Building

Many disciplines have dealt with the complex work of bridge building throughout time, such as law, sociology, and religion. Therefore, to identify common themes among them, I gathered research on approaches across multiple fields, including organization development, community development, social justice, health, governmental, law, art, indigenous, and sociology. This literature review allowed me to identify articles, books, and other resources on related topics. Fields of study were chosen due to the significant roles they have played in building bridges across differences. I then identified popular, well-referenced, or particularly creative (in my opinion) frameworks, processes, and approaches. I noted key points of emphasis, tactics, and objectives, and looked for patterns, commonalities, and differences. Not every resource was dedicated solely to actionable tools and practices around bridge building, and so I pulled the relevant insights from each as I went along (see Table 1).

Table 1

Fields of Study and Frameworks Covered

RELEVANT FIELDS + PRACTICES REVIEWED FOR THIS STUDY							
 Governmental + Political	 Indigenous	 Artistic + Spiritual	 Legal	 Health + Science	 Community + Social Justice	 Organizational + System	 Sociology + Philosophy
Ex: International negotiations, peacekeeping tactics	Ex: Indigenous conflict reduction strategies	Ex: Conflict resolution for Education in the Arts	Ex: Principled negotiation and mediation	Ex: Group Psychological safety	Ex: Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation studies	Ex: Small group theory and methodology	Ex: Intercultural Development Inventory
Kahane, A., 2017; Lopez, et al., 2020; Paris, D., 2012	Lundy et al., 2022; Tuso 2016; Brown 2001; Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2014;	Cohen, C.E., 2020; Condon, P. et al., 2013; King, M., 1962; Parker, P., 2018; Shihab, A. & Emmett, C., 2006; Bang, A.H., 2016; Butler, M. et al., 2002; Hawes, D.L., 2007; Coleman, P.T. & Deutsch M., 2014; Riskin, L.L. 2004	Shonk, K., 2023; Stone, D. et al., 2010; Lawrence, C.R., 1987; Bowling, D. & Hoffman, D. 2000; Riskin, 2002	Sawyer, P.J. et al., 2020; Hamel et al., 2020; Pabst et al., 2013; Edmundson, A. 1999; Jamieson, 2017; Gallo, A., 2023; Golden, P.R. & Gross, J.J. 2010; Vygotsky, L.S., 1978	Birdsong, M. 2020; Ward, S. 2020; WK Kellogg Foundation, 2016; Johnson, R. & Ndefo, N., 2020; Brown, A.M., 2017; Brown, A.M., 2021; Block, P. 2008; Aldrich, D. 2015; Arao B. & Clemens, K. 2013; Ali, D. 2017	Worley, C. 2021; Schein, E.H. & Bennis, W.C., 1965; Cameron, K. et al. 2011; Bennis, W.R. & Shepherd, J.A., 1956; Cheung-Judge, M., 2001; Senge, P., 2006; Katz & Miller, 2018; Gurchiek, 2020; Rogelberg, S.G. et al, 2010; Reddy, B. 1994	Maybee, J.E., 2020; Hammer, M., 2012; Bump, P. 2022; Dimock, M. and Wike, R., 2020; Putnam, R. 2001; Gould, E. & Hijzen, 2016; Bennett, M.J., 1986; McGhee, H.C., 2020

Note. This diagram represents disciplines that were researched for this project, chosen for their historic role in bridge-building work, in addition to an example of one of the methods or approaches studied and citations for references studied in these fields.

Methodology

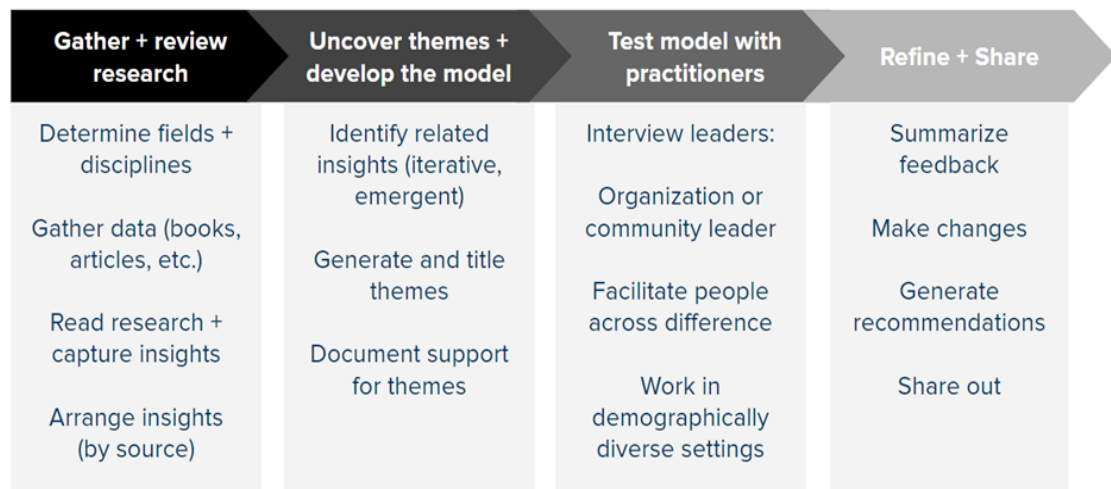
Any effort we make to effect change in the world will create discomfort, resistance, and opposition . . . we cannot avoid others whom we find challenging, so we need to focus simply on deciding, given these challenges, what we ourselves will do next.

- Adam Kahane

Broadly, the methodology for this study consisted of a literature review that searched for extant approaches to bridge building, developing a set of practices based on those approaches, gathering feedback on the practices from practitioners, and revising the model based on that input (see Table 2). Beyond this study, the content will be offered through blog posts, training, and other avenues for people who are interested in bridge-building practices.

Table 2

The Overall Research Process

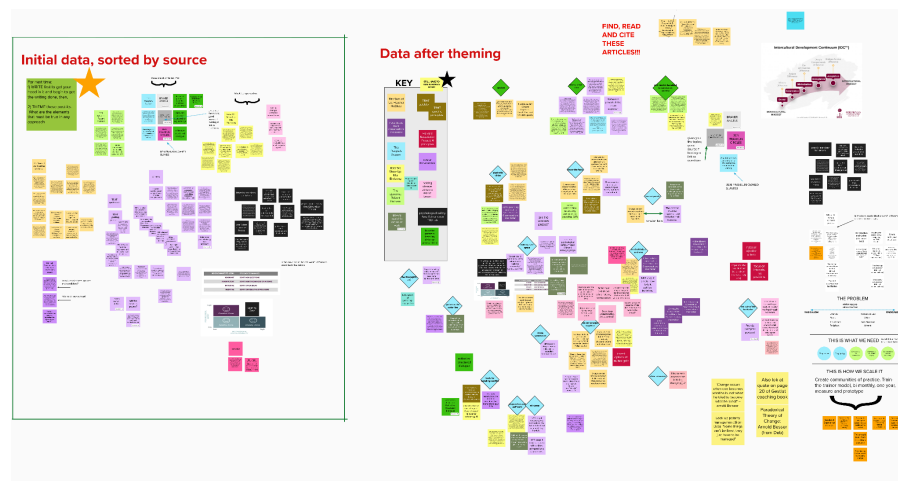


The strength of this approach lay in its multidisciplinary view that incorporated different ways of thinking about bridge building. The weakness of this approach is that it was impossible to read an amount that would be considered comprehensive on the topic; and therefore, conclusions could be missing useful or alternative methods.

Because the topic is broad, I often chose to study books and articles that incorporated and referenced multiple approaches (McGhee, 2021; Tusso, 2016). A full list of the books, articles, and other publications are provided in Table 1. As I read, I entered key quotes or methodologies into an online collaboration tool that allowed me to have a virtual wall of insights. In this way I was able to see the landscape of the data in one place. Because of the technology, I could move each data point around without losing track of which reference it came from. I put each insight on a colored post-it, and the color of each post-it directly correlated with a specific reference (see Figure 1). Once I had a critical mass of insights from the initial references, I then began to move them into themes. This process was iterative as I took time to consider patterns, dive further into the research, check my assumptions, rebuild them, and draw stronger conclusions before getting wed to a specific way of thinking about it.

Figure 1

Snapshot of Online Data Wall



Note: This image is not meant to be readable by the viewer due to the spacing available, but instead is meant to communicate visually what a portion of the process looked like.

The themes that eventually emerged would then inform a set of practices that could be used for bridge building by practitioners. While the process was more instinctive than scientific, the criteria I used to discern each post-its placement was

based on asking myself: Which other insight does this post-it re-iterate, if any? Is this a concept that should stand on its own or does it mirror others? To generate the theme titles, I asked myself: what commonly understood language could I use here that would capture the essence of what this body of Post-Its portrays? What theme title might communicate clearly to the audience without *watering down* the content? While I cannot completely account for my own bias and experience as a practitioner, I attempted to approach the data from multiple viewpoints to challenge my own thinking. Also, because I will have formal practitioners reviewing the set of practices, their feedback will help ensure that the themes communicate clearly and effectively.

Further, I wrote the themes out and began to create a set of working norms and practices that practitioners had used but might also lean into when seeking to build community and/or organizational cultures that can navigate difference and the tension it naturally produces. Through that process I noted commonalities amongst the literature as well as differences in order to identify places where practitioners might choose different approaches. After I identified commonalities and differences, I built a set of practices and accompanying visuals ([captured here as a slide presentation](#), see Appendix A and Appendix B) to share with a group of practitioners. I considered building a linear process tool (such as a step-by-step set of practices) rather than a grouping of generalized, non-linear practices, but determined that because the work is often non-linear in nature and is so reliant upon context, a sequential process would likely not be as useful.

I considered when and where these practices might be helpful and when and where they might not be most appropriate in order to begin to shape communication around the appropriate use and application of the tool. I also tapped into my 15 years of experience and knowledge as a way to guide my thinking. For example, when I

conducted my interviews to get feedback on this set of practices from other practitioners, I specifically asked them about when and where this set of practices may or may not be helpful to ensure other points of view were considered.

In the end, the seven proposed practices are believed to be the most helpful when working with people that are interested in bridge building across differences. While this paper incorporates many learnings from the fields of conflict resolution and mediation, and the set of practices can be applied to people who might be in disagreement, depending on the depth and nature of those conflicts, they may require a seasoned practitioner who is specifically trained in those fields.

Practitioner Interviews

Following the identification of themes and approaches and their assembly into a set of practices, I shared the content with eight practitioners, leaders, and colleagues that understand the complexity of this type of work and have experience navigating organizational and community conflict or differences. To get a diverse sampling, I reached out to practitioners across generational, political, racial, and gender identities that might use this type of content in their professional and /or personal settings and therefore, have direct insight and experience into the challenges and generative trends of how the set of practices might be used. I was able to reach into my personal and professional networks to identify participants that fit this mold. The specific criteria for their inclusion in the study required affirmative answers to at least one of the following questions:

- Do you identify as an organization or community leader?
- Do you facilitate complex spaces where people connect across differences?
- Do you work in demographically diverse settings?

These leaders would be prime candidates for using the proposed bridge-building practices and may find it useful in future work.

Following Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval, I sent an email to 10 qualified participants, asking for their voluntary participation in the watching of a 10-minute pre-recorded video and then a follow up 60-minute Zoom interview. The directions were to watch the video and then schedule an interview to answer a few questions about the set of practices proposed in the video. This asynchronous way of introducing the content allowed the participants to engage with the practices on their own time and also have time to reflect and/or pause the recording as needed. Potential participants were informed that the interview would not be recorded through zoom in video or audio format, and that the transcript of the interview would be recorded through separate audio transcription (otter.ai) to provide feedback on the set of practices presented in the video. The recruitment email included all details of the research, including information on the location, duration, consent, procedures, protocols, time commitment, and time frame of the interview process (see Appendix C). Upon hearing back from those interested, a consent form was sent to them to sign, verifying the qualifications of the candidate for the interview by asking the three questions noted above.

After recording a 10-minute video presenting the slides and explaining the set of practices, I emailed the eight participants that expressed interest, asked for a one-hour interview time with them within the next two weeks, and asked them to watch the video before our interview. I scheduled the interviews and, once the interview began, asked participants to join with their video function enabled to establish rapport. Participants were consented verbally before beginning the interview and provided feedback on the set of practices. I invited participants to ask questions

before starting the interview, reviewed all interview protocols as outlined, and stated that the interviewee could ask for a break at any time. Once the participant was comfortable, and in agreement with the protocol, the interview began. I used an AI-based tool (otter.ai) to write automatic meeting notes with real-time transcription, recorded audio, automated slide capture, and automated meeting summaries. I then proceeded to conduct the interviews by asking a series of questions and follow up questions to obtain feedback on the set of practices verbally (Table 3).

Table 3

Interview Questions

1. In your experience, does this overall approach resonate? Why or why not?
2. What elements of the approach stood out to you? Why?
3. Are the titles and descriptions of the themes clear/understandable? Why or why not?
4. In which circumstances do you think this content is useful? In which might it not?
5. What is the strength of this approach?
6. What changes/additions might you have about how to improve this approach?
7. Any other feedback you would like to provide?

After the interview, the notes and recordings were identified by an alias, and the master document that identified the participants by their alias was stored in a separate, password-protected file. Audio files were immediately deleted after transcription, and signed informed consent forms were placed in a separate password-protected file for retention. The data reported here were aggregated to maintain the confidentiality of individual participants. Once I completed the

interviews and summarized the feedback given to me, I adjusted the set of practices and content to incorporate their perspectives (see Interview Findings section).

Research Findings

The frameworks and approaches I sampled, whether from the perspective of an academic, Black feminist, business leader, lawyer, community builder, or consultant, have proposed a variety of bridge-building practices with a high degree of overlap. While there are absolute differences in the approaches and nuance in the word choice and tone that each field uses, the high-level thematic overlaps are powerful and repeated. These repeated themes inform the set of practices identified in this work. Unfortunately, some of the texts did not validate or reference practices outside of their discipline. There are exceptions to this of course, but the works were often written with specific contexts in mind. For example, in Adam Kahane's (2017) book *Collaborating with the Enemy*, his examples are sourced from the international conflict resolution space, most often around peacekeeping initiatives during times of conflict. While the specific and unique contexts of each situation, such as his, matter, there is still an opportunity for those working on bridge building to acknowledge the overlap in methodologies and offer learners a holistic, expansive, and multi-disciplinary approach. In addition, the variations in their set of practices offer a broadening of the view and could serve to strengthen the practices of facilitators in these spaces.

The starkest difference in the approaches is the tone, defined informally here as the general character or attitude of the writing, in which they are delivered. While a community health counselor's process might remind participants of clinical settings, a corporate consultant might create a formal tone, equipped with presentations and agendas. A lawyer facilitating a formal negotiation between two groups will likely

take a very different tone from a social justice facilitator holding a circular healing space. Indigenous conflict management strategies usually apply localized approaches to bridge building that are specific to context, while more professionalized approaches apply broader, more generic methods (Lundy et al., 2022).

Another difference among the set of practices is what audience they were designed for. Lawyers who work in the field of mediation are often working with civil cases (Bowling & Hoffman, 2000), or those conflicts involving two individual parties. Some of the methods studied were specifically tied to case studies of global conflict, and the tools proposed were used in conflicts across nations and war zones. The examples given by the social justice writers (Birdsong, 2020; Brown, 2017) often occurred in community spaces, and were geared toward conflict within social movement work itself, while organization development practitioners tended to use examples from corporate or professional life (e.g., reference). Consequently, while the foundation of many of the practices studied applied similar frameworks and practices, the tone and context of their usage differed greatly.

Initial Set of Bridge-Building Practices

Every facilitation process is a journey into the unknown. A possible future. A bright Black field of possibility. That's why we need facilitators as guides. Because it is not easy to face the death of how things have been and to open up to the vulnerability of how things could be. But we must.

- Alexis Pauline Gumbs

The initial model generated from the literature resulted in seven practice categories. They are presented in Figure 2 and represent the bridge-building practices identified in the extant literature. I first summarize each practice below and then, in more detail, describe where the practice came from and include recommendations for its application by facilitators.

Prioritize Self Work

This involves the idea that any facilitator or bridge builder, and ideally all participants, must incorporate work on understanding their own motivations, biases, and behavioral patterns in order to show up in the most useful ways (Birdsong, 2020; Brown, 2001; Brown, 2021; Bowling & Hoffman, 2003; Cheung-Judge, 2001; Condon, et al, 2013; Goldin & Gross, 2010; Jamieson, 2017; Katz & Miller, 2018; Riskin, 2002; Taylor, 2018;).

Figure 2

The Seven Initial Practices



Note: These seven practices are not meant to represent a comprehensive list of all bridge-building practices, but instead serve as a reference and guidepost for anyone interested in embracing a multi-disciplinary approach for their bridge-building efforts.

Invite With Intention

This was a common theme in the literature, whether that be a reference to the need for participant choice, the need to get clear on the purpose and communicate it, or setting a tone of inclusion from the very beginning (Block, 2008; Johnson, 2019; Kahane, 2017; Parker, 2018; Rogelberg et al., 2010; Sawyer et al., 2012).

Establish Clear Boundaries

This was a common theme and suggested that psychological safety is an important factor to consider when entering into bridge building, although the application of boundaries is complex and comes with inherent tensions (Brown, 2022; Cameron et al., 2011; Edmondson, 1999; Gallo, 2023; Gurchiek, 2020; Hamel et al., 2020; Lawrence, 1987; McGhee, 2021; Johnson & Ndefo, 2020; Putnam, 2021; Sawyer, et al. 2012; Schein & Bennis, 1965; Stone et al., 2010).

Move Into Brave Space

This reflects the other side of boundaries, in that bridge building requires us to step into some form of discomfort if we want to arrive somewhere different than we have been (Ali, 2017; Arao et al. 2013; McGhee, 2021; Reddy, 1994; Shihab & Emmett, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978).

Uncover Shared Possibilities

This was an element of all the approaches addressed that suggested a focus on shared humanity, future generations, and bold visions are core to successful bridge building (Bennis & Shephard, 1956; Birdsong 2020; Block, 2018; Brown, 2017; Cohen, 2020; Shonk, 2023; Tuso, 2016; Wheatley, 2006; WK Foundation, 2016;).

Try on Other Perspectives

This was a practice that highlighted the need to consider other narratives other than one's own in order to broaden the field of possibility (Brown 2017; Coleman &

Deutsch, 2014; Johnson, 2020; Maybee, 2020; Stone et al., 2010; Ward, 2021; Wheatley 1999;).

Go Beyond the Intellectual

This encourages practitioners to consider multi-disciplinary approaches in the design of their bridge building content and environments, such as art, music, and spirituality (Butler et al., 2002; Coleman et al, 2014; Hawes, 2007; Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2014; Riskin, 2014). It is important to note that not every author and approach studied had all these components, but all these components were present in at least three of the disciplines or approaches reviewed. These commonalities form the basis of the practices proposed here.

Prioritize Self Work

Transform yourself to transform the world. The only sustainable foundation for a changed world is internal transformation.

- Grace Lee Boggs

Bridge building is an art that requires facilitators who have a number of skill sets. Not only is it the facilitator's job to guide people towards a common goal and objective, but also to play a crucial role in helping people communicate their ideas and collaborate on new ways forward. For facilitators to be most effective in their roles, they must be able to understand their own values, biases, and perspectives so that they are aware of their own emotions and how to manage them in complex situations (which often arise as a result of facilitation). This can increase their ability to remain calm in the face of whatever elements arise in a room (Birdsong, 2020; Brown, 2021; Katz & Miller, 2018; Taylor, 2018). However, when a bridge builder does not have the ability to master the self, the work of bridge building can be compromised. For example, in studies around mediation, when mediators are in a state of mindlessness, are not very present in the room, and are not fully aware of

what is going on, their ability to facilitate effectively is diminished (Bowling & Hoffman, 2003; Riskin, 2002).

Facilitators can do this self-work in multiple ways. Mindfulness, meditation, and other forms of somatic practice are well-known for their ability to help practitioners regulate emotions, manage stress, and maintain empathy and open-mindedness (Condon et al, 2013; Goldin & Gross, 2010). Other forms of self-work that facilitators can lean into are using coaches or peers that can provide feedback to the facilitator on what their areas of difficulty might be in handling certain conversations, and then planning and developing new ways through them. Traditional approaches, such as counseling or therapy, also help the facilitator unpack their own experience of the world and make choices to react to those experiences in the most skillful way possible.

While the journey of self-work is never over, and therefore practitioners cannot wait until this work is complete to begin the work of facilitation, it is important that facilitators of any bridge-building conversation be able to navigate the complexities of human emotion while simultaneously navigating the process. The ability to balance these elements, particularly in conversations where participants might come from vastly different life experiences or identities (bridge building), requires a level of self-mastery that can maintain presence and vision in the face of difficulty. This level of mastery is only strengthened by a commitment to *self as instrument* (Cheung-Judge, 2001; Jamieson, 2017). This focus on the developed self for the role of facilitator is also echoed in Navajo practices through the role of *naataanii* (peacemaker), who “must have a reputation for integrity, honesty, and humanity” amongst the community (Brown, 2001, p. 303). In short, the community

must trust that the facilitator is skilled in their own ability to navigate complexity, and this skill requires an awareness of the self and how it manifests in a room.

Invite With Intention

A gathering begins at the moment of invitation. It doesn't begin when people walk into the room.

- Priya Parker

When holding any arranged conversation or activity with groups of people, particularly conversations where participants might not know or be in opposing camps from one another, it is important to pay special attention to the invitation to participate. This is often an overlooked part of meetings in the workplace, and even in social life, when invitations can take on a perfunctory, uninspiring role. Invitations play a crucial role in setting a tone of inclusion and clarity from the very beginning. This is true in professional as well as alternative settings. According to Rogelberg et al. (2010), who studied employee satisfaction with meetings, how the invitation is received can directly impact the level of engagement and participation from attendees.

If this level of attention is important for common workplace meetings, then it is doubly important for conversations that connect people across differences. When individuals from diverse backgrounds feel welcome, they too are more likely to contribute to the group's success. The alternative is also true. When invitations are not thoughtful, people may hesitate to bring their full selves, not knowing if they will be celebrated in their fullness.

According to Rae Johnson, a celebrated social worker, somatic movement therapist, and scholar/activist working at the intersections of embodiment and social justice, the most significant sources of our pain can be things we don't bring to certain situations because we don't feel safe or welcomed (Johnson, 2019). If we are not

invited and welcomed and encouraged to bring our own questions or multiple different identities, we lose the chance for everyone in the room to do the same.

The invitation to authentic dialogue that moves beyond transactional small talk requires not only a clear invitation and welcoming of diversity, but also a certain level of specificity that helps participants understand exactly what they are signing up for, why they may or may not want to participate, and why it might be a good use of their time. This can also be understood as an explicit communication of the gathering's purpose, that includes what to expect and the intended impact when the gathering ends (Parker, 2018).

Not only does a detailed and welcoming invitation help inform the participant and raise levels of safety, the invitation also offers participants a choice instead of a requirement. When we try to force what we think on others or make collaboration mandatory, those who do not want to participate or who think differently will push back and attempt to undermine the effort (Kahane, 2017). Or, as Peter Block (2008) advises, transformation happens when we choose, not when we are required. Because invitations can engage others in the design of an alternative future, it's important to consider how the invitation is crafted in a way that sets people up to fully participate.

Who is invited also matters. It is important in bridge-building work to recognize the harsh reality that not all bridges can or should be built, and that the farther away perspectives are from each other the more difficult the work becomes. Because of this inherent truth it is ideal, if not required, that the facilitator have an idea about who is in the room and what issues may arise. While it is impossible to predict this completely, the more information the facilitator has about participants and their level of comfort and readiness with the topic, the better experience the facilitator can provide. One tool that is used to gauge participant readiness is the developmental

model of intercultural sensitivity by Milton Bennett (1986), which outlines the journey one must take to reach the ability to bridge across differences. The model is made up of phases that move from ethnocentrism on the left (denial, defensiveness, and minimization) to ethnorelativism on the right (acceptance, adaptation, and integration) and describes the standard ways in which individuals experience, interpret, and interact across cultural differences. Phases include, from left to right on the continuum: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation and integration. The farther left on the continuum one is, the farther they have to go in terms of their ability to navigate bridge-building conversations. When thinking about participants, it is important to gauge, formally or informally, where participants might land on this continuum. This is another reason why the invitation is so important; because participants should have some sort of desire to grow in their capacity for bridge-building work. If they do not and/or are mandated into participation, they run the risk of perpetuating harm (Sawyer et al., 2012) and dismantling the work being done. While there is no science to it, those that fall in the *denial* or *polarization* category might need to begin their process at a different point than those farther along the continuum. In addition, the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity was built to gauge one dimension of diversity (cultural), and while it can be applied to other dimensions of diversity, it is only one example of how a facilitator might gauge readiness.

Facilitators of bridge-building conversations must thoughtfully consider the design of the content being shared in relation to those that will be invited. This required that the facilitator get very clear on the purpose of the event. Priya Parker advises, “Make purpose your bouncer. Let it decide what goes into your gathering and what stays out” (Parker, 2018, p. 31). She goes on to advise that “thoughtful,

considered exclusion is vital to any gathering, because over-inclusion is a symptom of deeper problems- above all, a confusion about why you are gathering and lack of commitment to your purpose and your guests” (p. 32). This clarity around the invitation is also important because it is the first boundary formed that can support psychological safety in the group from the very beginning.

Establish Clear Boundaries

Sometimes it is not ethical to build bridges with others that are denying others' personhood.

- Jen Bailey

In recent years, conversations across traditional divides (Republican/Democrat, Black/white, Pro-Choice/anti-abortion, etc.) have become increasingly divisive, making any conversation that aims to bridge these gaps more difficult and conceptually unsafe to attempt. For facilitators, there is the added tension of wanting to celebrate diversity of thought and opinion while simultaneously not perpetuating harm, particularly against those whom society has traditionally marginalized and excluded (Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, veterans, etc.). If this delicate balance is not well-managed, it runs the risk of furthering divides or causing a backslide on the historical progress made towards equality for all, in addition to alienating participants. It is crucial in these settings to avoid putting the comfort of the group ahead of facts, especially when purported “facts” run counter to reliable data and credited historical accounts.

This idea of drawing a clear boundary around historical fact resonates across multiple fields of bridge-building work (McGhee, 2021; Putman, 2020; Stone et al., 2010). Heather McGhee (2021) outlines five ways we can prosper together across the racial divide in her book, *The Sum of Us*. One of the five methods calls for a shared narrative before we can progress together. She writes, “it’s time for us to tell the truth,

with a nationwide process that enrolls all of us in setting the facts straight so that we move forward with a new story, together” (p. 271). Robert Putnam (2020) warns that in working to create a progressive world where more people experience greater prosperity and connection to one another, we must “never compromise on equality and inclusion” (p. 337).

McGhee (2021) is not alone in her call for creating boundaries before beginning the work to ensure that some amount of psychological safety is present in the room. Other disciplines refer to the need to create a space that can maximize peoples’ ability to participate as fully as possible (Brown, 2021; Edmondson, 1999; Schein & Bennis, 1965). Prentiss Hemphill describes boundaries as the way to “create and protect your life energy,” whether a facilitator or a participant (cited in Brown, 2022, p. 48). This is particularly important for employees who represent minority or traditionally marginalized groups in America, such as Black people and other people of color, indigenous people, those with disabilities, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, those who are experiencing poverty or the effects of generational poverty, and veterans. Their feelings of acceptance in society and the workplace is likely to be significantly lower than those who come from majority groups or those groups that hold greater amounts of formal and informal power, including White people, people whose income falls in the middle and upper classes, able-bodied people, people who identify as heterosexual people, and married people.

The concept of psychological safety is crucial in creating an environment where individuals feel safe enough to express themselves without fear of retribution, penalization, or embarrassment. This kind of safety is especially needed in bridge-building conversations, but is also typically difficult to come by in bridge-building conversations, considering the innate conflict of perspectives from the

start. The idea of *safe spaces* has gained prominence recently, particularly due to the work of Dr. Amy Edmondson, and refers to an ideal place where individuals can express their thoughts and feelings freely. Edmondson outlines that while it may be a psychological experience for an individual, it is an emergent phenomenon created by a group (Gallo, 2023).

Creating a psychologically safe environment is a core part of productive and constructive conversations across differences. In Google's search to figure out what it takes to build the perfect team, they determined that the most important factor to group success was psychological safety, or the belief that a team is safe for risk taking, and if taken, the individual will not be judged as incompetent, ignorant, intrusive, or negative (Edmondson, 1999). The idea of psychological safety has its beginnings in Schein and Bennis' (1965) work in group dynamics, where they concluded that individuals need to feel psychologically safe, or a feeling of reduced interpersonal risk, to feel capable of change. This striving towards what is safe and good is not only mirrored in small groups, but in the natural world itself. The *heliotropic effect* refers to the nature of all living things to avoid that which endangers and detracts from light (Cameron et al., 2011). If this is the case, then there must be a case for safety or lightness in our bridge-building work in order for our efforts to fall on fertile ground.

But creating psychological safety in a room is tough, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics across differences. Throughout history, Black people and other minority groups have been ridiculed, shunned, attacked, and even murdered for voicing their concerns and experience of oppression and so experience lower levels of psychological safety in bridge-building conversations. For example, almost 50% of Black human resources employees say they do not feel safe sharing their thoughts on

race-related issues (Gurchiek, 2020), and to this day, many Black Americans do not experience the same level of perceived and actual safety as do a majority of white Americans (Hamel et al., 2020). Therefore, bridge-building conversations cannot be entered lightly or with the naive assumption that all of us in the room are experiencing the same level of psychological risk by participating (Sawyer et al., 2012).

This is where the work of boundaries and norm setting within the group becomes crucial. Because the divides and differences between us are complex, it is impossible to fully understand another's perspective. It is important for facilitators to recognize this impossibility at the outset, setting the tone that the group is not responsible for tackling the impossible and cannot have every difficult conversation it comes across (Stone et al., 2010). N'Tanya Lee (2021, as cited in Brown, 2021) gives similar guidelines such as: "consider that this may or may not be the container that can hold all you need to bring . . . not every space is the appropriate place for every need we have to be met" (p. 62).

One way that boundary-setting can occur real-time is through sharing the difference between intent and impact at the beginning of a session. Harm and distrust can occur in bridge-building conversations through comments and dialogue that, often unknowingly to the speaker, perpetuate stereotypes or minimize the lived experience of others. Even if the speaker did not intend for their actions or words to cause harm, the impact of the words is what needs to be accounted for rather than centering the intent of the speaker (Lawrence, 1987; Stone et al., 2010). By teaching this difference at the beginning of any bridge-building conversation, participants are reminded that even if their intent feels good, it does not mean their chosen actions automatically land lightly. However, the session or conversation is framed, it is important to provide *exit ramps*, or opportunities for people to check in with themselves, decide whether

this is the right place for them to be, and, if not, excuse themselves (Ndefo, 2020).

The term *neuroception* describes how neural circuits distinguish whether situations or people are safe, dangerous, or life threatening. By tapping into our neuroception, we can determine how we feel in any given situation. We can ask ourselves: “Do I feel contracted and shut down? Disconnected? Hurried? Numb? Connected? At ease? Mobilized?”; and based on our response we can then decide “What needs to happen? How do I bring myself towards goodwill?”. This process helps to regulate and settle the mind, giving people the freedom and choice to step back in or back out at their own determination.

Move into Brave Space

When things aren't going well, we have to resist the temptation to fall back to the perceived safety of our old rigid structures. We know that the growth, the creativity, the opening up, the energy improves only if we hold ourselves at the end of chaos.

- Margaret Wheatley

While the idea of safe space and psychological safety has gained traction in some circles, it also has been challenged recently, particularly when it is called for in bridge-building conversations that may be challenging or uncomfortable (Arao et al., 2013). Educators Arao and Clemens (2013) noted that instead of overpromising a safe space, the term *brave space* should be used instead to recognize the inherent challenges in having any discussion around potential polarizing issues like racism, classism, abortion, gun rights, et cetera. As a facilitator of bridge-building conversations, it is important to think about balancing both the need for psychological safety (see “Establish clear boundaries”) and holding a consistent invitation to brave space.

Arao and Clemens’ (2013) study defined brave space in educational practice as having five core elements: controversy with civility, where varying opinions are accepted; owning intentions and impacts, in which students acknowledge and discuss

instances where a dialogue has affected the emotional well-being of another person; challenge by choice, where students have an option to step in and out of challenging conversations; respect, where students show respect for one another's basic personhood; and *No attacks*, where students agree not to intentionally inflict harm on one another. The risk of discomfort always exists in brave spaces but allows there to be both support in place for those who are typically most vulnerable and the opportunity for greater learning through extensive dialogue for all involved (Ali, 2017).

This same sentiment of finding a middle ground between total comfort and harm is reminiscent of the way other disciplines have described the place of balance within facilitation, such as Lev Vygotsky's (1978) work around the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development is defined as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky's, 1978, p. 86). This would apply to bridge-building facilitation in the following way: if participants stay too much in the place of comfort, their ability to build bridges across differences is not likely to grow; but if they go too far out of their comfort zone into a place where their stress response floods their ability to stay connected and present, there too they will not likely grow. In order for bridge builders to create the most opportunity for growth, they must keep their eye on this precarious balance; not only in the design of their experience but also in the balance of energy in the room.

The legal profession, equipped with its mediation and negotiation tactics, stresses this need to challenge people to successfully explore more difficult conversations as well. In their seminal work *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss*

What Matters Most, Stone et al. (2010) recommended that the facilitator must understand not only the words people are using with each other, but also uncover what thoughts and feelings lie below those words. They described the gap between what people are thinking and what they are saying as the most important part to uncover in difficult conversations, but also the part where the most possibility for healing and connection lies. This same sentiment is explored in small group theory and practice, often expressed by the concept of “going below the waterline,” which references the idea of an iceberg with only a small amount of its content visible above the water line (Reddy, 1994). In short, through meaningful and constructive dialogue, cooperation and mutual respect can occur by gaining insight into other’s true perspectives, motivations, beliefs, and fears (Shihab & Emmett, 2006).

While balancing in the brave space and going below the water line might be the most difficult part of bridge-building facilitation, it is also potentially the most fruitful and one that can be designed for from the very beginning. If the facilitator has set up the invitation with enough clarity (see *Invite with Intention*), participants will naturally expect some level of discomfort. They will naturally expect differences and anticipate the challenge of coming to alignment or agreement (McGhee, 2021).

Uncover Shared Possibilities

One reason I love futures is there’s a comfort that can come in talking about it. . . All of us belong there and all of us can take part in building the future if we are willing to both imagine and take action today.

- Vanessa Mason

The art of getting individuals or groups from differing points of view to step forward in some way together is a delicate one. However, there are many practitioners and academics who give us clues on how to navigate to the point where groups are able to move from discord and distrust to some level of alignment. Among many suggested practices for bridge building, the search for a common goal is arguably the

most important element to bring into the room, as it helps provide security and reassurance to group members (Bennis & Shepherd, 1956). When group members feel their own sense of security, they become in touch with their own sense of self-preservation, and when they are in touch with their own self-preservation, they are more likely to be open to change (Wheatley, 2006).

Practitioners from all the literature studied for this body of work all came to some version of the following conclusion: when we establish what we share in common, we can lean into the future and explore possibilities together. For example, in alternative legal approaches, such as The Harvard Negotiation Project, this practice shows up as identifying the underlying interests of the differing sides, such as basic needs, wants, and motivations. Once these interests are established, multiple options are identified that serve the interests of both sides, allowing for a vision where mutual gain is accomplished (Shonk, 2023).

Similarly, from an indigenous perspective, one of the twelve common features of the indigenous process of peacemaking is “common goals and community identity” (Tuso, 2016, p. 522) This call towards a future state is also echoed in racial healing work that seeks to build a world where all people feel a sense of belonging; particularly those that have been systematically marginalized due to race. As Dr. Gail Christopher says about her national work on *Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation*,

It's a powerful, liberating frame to realize that the fallacy of racial hierarchy is a belief system that we don't have to have. We can replace it with another way of looking at each other as human beings. Then, once you get that opening, you invite people to see a new way forward. You ask questions like "what kind of narrative will your great grandchildren learn about this country? What is it that will have happened? (Cited in McGhee, 2021, p. 287)

She articulates the need for vision further in her *Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Guidebook*, dedicating one of the principles of this work to the creation of a “clear and compelling vision” (WK Kellogg Foundation, 2016, p. 18).

In Peter Block’s (2008) book *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, Block argues that communities can transform when they focus on possibilities instead of problems. So instead of setting goals around specific problems, Block recommends that possibility is key when it comes to creating a sense of belonging and connectedness within a community, and he suggests that when communities focus on possibilities, they can shift from a reactive to a proactive mindset, which can then inspire further collaboration. This focus on an inspired vision is further echoed in Mia Birdsong’s (2020) work, *How We Show Up*, when she writes of the need for a vision that “brings us closer to one another, allows us to be vulnerable and imperfect, to grieve and stumble, to be held accountable and loved deeply” (p. 28), and in Adrienne Maree Brown’s work that refers to this process not as problem solving, but as “dreaming” (2017, p. 158). Practitioners from the arts spaces also suggest that communities can reimagine the future, even in the face of oppression and trauma, because the arts can suggest possibility and make ideas around hope and freedom salient (Cohen, 2020).

This focus on futures and possibility is one of the most foundational practices that bridge builders can embrace. It’s important for facilitators to recognize the need to balance boundaries and facts (see “Establish clear boundaries”) with the need for groups to move into a future-oriented state where they are creating together as soon as possible. While alignment around fact and history is important, it is impossible for a group to move forward into the future without exploring new ways of being together, new futures, or new possibilities.

Try on Other Perspectives

My dream is a movement with such deep trust that we move as a murmuration, the way groups of starlings billow, dive, spin, dance collectively through the air . . . each creature is tuned in to its neighbors, the creatures right around it in the formation . . . there is a right relationship, a right distance between them. Too close and they crash, too far away and they can feel the micro adaptations of the other bodies. Each creature is shifting direction, speed, and proximity based on the information of the other creatures' bodies. There is a deep trust to this: to life because the birds around you are lifting . . . imagine our movements cultivating this type of trust and depth with each other.

- adrienne maree brown

One of the elements that makes bridge building successful is the opportunity for participants to try on perspectives different from their own. This shift in viewpoint can, in turn, create greater openness of mind as participants realize the multitude of experiences and narratives that abound. Perspective can be shifted and problems can be reframed in ways that allow both sides of any conflict to choose collaboration over competition and discover mutually beneficial ways forward (Coleman & Deutsch, 2014). Bridge-building conversations by their very nature engage participants in the act of trying on other perspectives, by helping participants engage with different viewpoints, challenge assumptions and biases, and at times, generate empathy for the perspectives and feelings of others.

One such tool for shifting perspective is the introduction of the concept of fractals. As Margaret Wheatley (1999) explains, fractals are self-similar patterns that repeat at different scales, and they can be found in nature, art, and mathematics. Examples include sea shells, lightning bolts, snowflakes, and river deltas. Fractals can also be used as a metaphor for understanding the complexity and interconnectedness of human systems. Wheatley (1999) argues that by recognizing the fractal patterns in our lives, we can develop a deeper understanding of the relationships and interdependencies that shape our world. In bridge building, this concept can be a grounding force for centering on the group's purpose. When people gather in

authentic communication with one another in small groups or at small scale, they are practicing a fractal of what a future of human peace looks like (Brown, 2017; Johnson, 2020). This ability to “zoom in to zoom out” can shift the dynamic in a room and remind us that the work we are doing is simply practice for the world we want to live in.

Another form of shifting perspectives to bridge differences is to “begin with the third story . . . the third story is the one a keen observer would tell, someone with no stake in your particular problem” (Stone et al., 2010, pp. 29-30). Instead of trying to change the behavior or beliefs of others, this positioning invites the participants into the act of seeking to understand another point of view, loosening them from an argumentative stance or grip on their own narrative. At any given time in bridge-building conversations, a shift to curiosity and alternative narratives can be a useful tool for pivoting away from conversation that drives separation. In addition, a facilitator can remind participants that our stories aren’t random, and are often built in unconscious ways because we each take in different information and then interpret the information in individual ways (Stone et al., 2010).

This value of holding multiple perspectives at the same time is also present in the work of social justice icon Grace Lee Boggs. Boggs was a first generation Chinese American, growing up in a predominantly white world, who went on to marry an African-American activist. Through these experiences she had to navigate complex contradictions around inclusion/exclusion, Chinese/American identity, and general race relations in America. Instead of fighting against these contradictions, Boggs embraced them and wove them into her lifelong work of social change and bridge building (Ward, 2021). Her thinking was greatly influenced by G. W. F. Hegel, a 19th century German philosopher, who argues that everything is inherently contradictory

(Maybe, 2020). By accepting these contradictions as a necessary and potentially useful part of society, she provided the view that understanding alternative perspectives is actually a way of bringing us closer to understanding the whole.

Go Beyond the Intellectual

This is the power of art: The power to transcend our own self-interest, our solipsistic zoom-lens on life, and relate to the world and each other with more integrity, more curiosity, more wholeheartedness.

- Maria Popova

Adults tend to gather in ways that prioritize casual or professional speech as a form of connection over other forms, whether that's sitting around a conference table or sitting at a coffee shop. When it comes to physical movement in most social settings, adults are usually sitting in a chair or standing relatively still and using words as the primary form of communication (in addition to non-verbal communication). Adults often listen or participate in a verbal exchange of some sort, whether that be with a colleague, friend, boss, speaker, or stranger, and then respond either internally or through out loud processing. Occasionally adults take notes; but these notes usually take the form of words that explain or capture the data in as clear and linear a way as possible. And while all of this is nice and good, it limits our understanding of gathering to a very narrow way of being together.

Expanding the field of possibility is crucial to bridge building (see "Uncover shared possibilities"). To do this we must go beyond traditional methods of gathering and incorporate other, multidisciplinary ways for our bodies and minds to connect, process information, manage stress, and understand ourselves. Luckily, there are many different tools that bridge builders have used to create a more expansive gathering.

For example, the arts provide a myriad of ways to engage across differences, whether that be through movement, art, music, or other forms (Bang, 2016).

Transformative learning can occur through arts-based approaches, which in turn can help people engage more effectively around conflict and generate cooperative relationships (Hawes, 2007). When emotions and/or imagination is engaged through the arts, empathy ensues, which is a crucial aspect of bridge-building practice. In dance for example, synchronized activity contributes to resonance, or “a dynamic of shared energy, connection, and purpose within and between people and groups in a particular time and space,” which in turn can potentially foster cooperation through social bonds (Coleman et al, 2014, p. 6).

Another way to go beyond the intellectual and change the tenor of the room (and help groups enter into brave space) is by introducing alternative forms of communication and use of space. For example, North American indigenous populations often use what are generally called healing circles, talking circles, or peacemaking circles (Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2014). In this formation, people sit in a circle to discuss a problem or question, and begin with some sort of prayer led by an elder. A sacred object is held by the speaker, and no one speaks unless holding the object. Once everyone has spoken, it is complete. This formation helps people focus on deep listening and avoid overly reactive communication.

A third way to go beyond traditional intellectual approaches is through the introduction of spiritual approaches, such as prayer or meditation. Meditation has multiple known benefits, but when it comes to conflict resolution, meditation can encourage participation, increase ability to concentrate, develop self-understanding, and inspire empathy (Riskin, 2014). Other resources associated with spiritual behaviors, such as prayer, can improve problem solving through increased perspective taking (Butler et al., 2002).

While the number of possibilities to invite multidisciplinary approaches into the room is large, what remains true is that their presence, when applied specifically for the purpose of bridge building, can greatly elevate outcomes. Whether it's a simple intervention, such as having people get out of their seats and move around the room, or as complex an intervention as running a series of workshops on meditation and peacekeeping, bridge builders can and should weave in alternate approaches; not only to cater to different learning styles but to maximize their impact.

Summary

The intent of this body of work was to uncover patterns in bridge building across disciplines and develop a set of practices that could support and encourage successful bridge-building conversations. After completing the research and identifying and combining core insights, the patterns became clear and the overlap in methods and approaches was consistent and evident. None of the practices in the model described above appeared only once or twice; all were referred to in some way, shape, or form in at least three of the fields studied (and many were represented in the majority of the disciplines). Interestingly, #5, “Uncover Shared Possibilities”, was referred to in every field analyzed as a key component of bringing people together across differences.

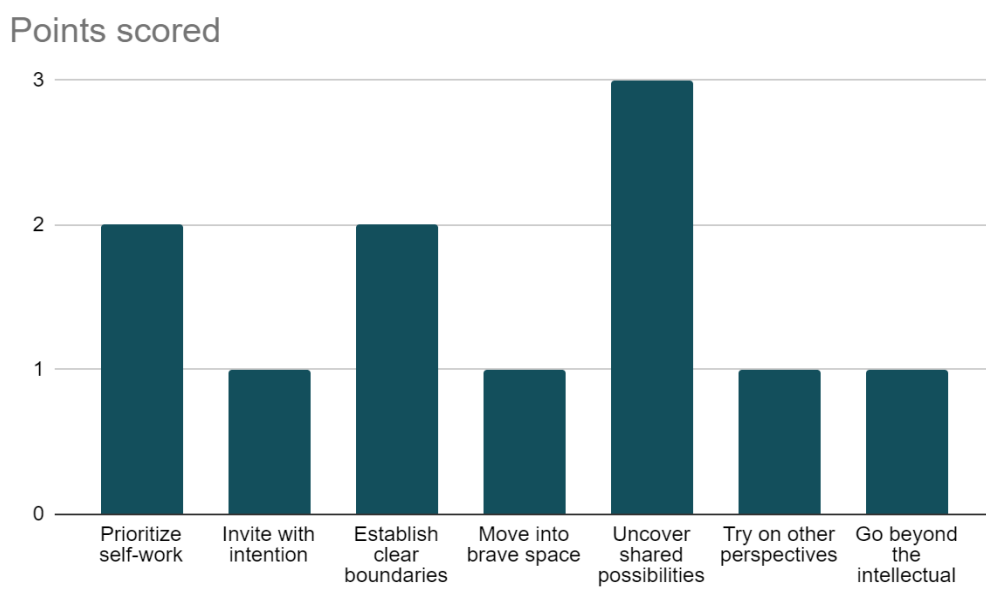
Interview Findings: Overall

The purpose of the interviews was to share this model with practitioners who identify as an organization or community leader, facilitate complex spaces where people connect across differences, and who work in demographically diverse settings. This purpose was met successfully as the interviewees came from various sectors, age ranges, gender identities, ethnicities, and races.

In general, the interviewees were very encouraging, as people were supportive and enthusiastic about the model. There was no pushback on the seven practices themselves; all of their comments related to ways to improve, build upon, or refine the work. Figure 3 shows the results of the interview feedback, beginning with a graph of the responses to the second question, “which of the seven areas stood out to you the most?” The interviewees identified those practices that seemed most important to the bridge building process. I then discuss five themes derived from the feedback interviews.

Figure 3

Practice Importance



Note: Some interviewees listed multiple practice

Theme #1: Keep and Increase the Ease of Use

It feels consumable. I could take any one of these pieces and take a bite out of it.
 - Interview 3

Of all of the feedback I received on the model as a whole, this was the most consistent. While the majority of interviewees expressed that the model was easy to understand and would be applicable in many situations, they simultaneously

suggested that there were ways it could be adapted to improve the user experience even further. And while all interviewees suggested simplification in one way or another, they did not agree on how to do it. Some of the ideas on making the model easier on the whole included:

- Alliterating the titles to make it more memorable
- Putting the steps in a hierarchical or linear order (or clarifying further if there is order required) to help people move through it more fluidly
- Reducing the number of steps
- Combining steps into two or three larger buckets
- Creating a check-box or scorecard for people to follow and/or for them to share with another facilitator to gauge their strengths and weaknesses in bridge-building areas
- Making them appeal to multiple learning types, not just the intellectual
- Suggesting use of or prioritizing just one or two practices (underscore the flexibility of the model and that elements can be used interchangeably)

Theme #2: Use it Everywhere: Make Sure It's the Right Tool at the Right Time

This framework provides a great deal of perspectives and guidelines that can be applied nearly anywhere.

- Interview 1

It's not always bridge building season; sometimes it's monsoon season. Sometimes we gotta march.

- Interview 4

The interesting part of this theme was the clear feedback that this set of practices could extend beyond general organizational and community settings, into bridge-building areas such as marriage or diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Simultaneously there was feedback that it might not always be the best model to use, depending on the context. One interviewee shared a helpful point about knowing the

role of this work in the broader movement towards a liberated and connected world:

It's just not for everybody. There are many different approaches in the movement space. There are people that are interested and convinced that we are going to have to come together. In the invitation, ask: do you want to participate with the intention to build bridges? If not, then you don't have to be part of it. I don't hear you saying this is the only right way to move justice forward. Sometimes we do need to meet with violence. I don't hear you saying these are THE tactics. There is a place for this that is necessary in moving the world forward. There are going to be some people who are drawn to bridge building and others who aren't. It's always about choice.

The broad message from most of the people I interviewed was that while it could be useful in nearly any setting or on any issue, the application and its need to be adapted depends on the specific circumstances and goal of that body of work or of those particular people.

Theme #3: Problem Solving or Just Bridge Building?

We are not coming to debate, to declare victory. There will be no winner. We are coming to see if there is a third way.

- Interview 7

If you want this model to deal with tough conversations, you have to deal with the problem that started the distance in the first place.

- Interview 5

The only strong point of pushback I received was under this theme from one interviewee, who suggested that while this set of practices is approachable and may be useful for simpler bridge-building needs, it does not deal directly enough with the problem that caused the separation. In all, three of the seven interviews spoke to this theme but the one interviewee suggested that if this model was to be used on something complex, such as racism, it would have to deal much more directly with the cause(s) of the disconnection. This particular feedback was especially helpful when paired with seemingly opposite feedback from another interviewee, who was adamant that this should *not* be a problem-solving process or a place where we are arguing about who is right, but a place to journey together to learn how to live with

each other and be useful. The implication here is that anyone using this model needs to be explicit about how it is, or is not, dealing with solving a problem. And, if they are using it for problem solving specifically, the model needs another practice that is geared specifically towards addressing the problem and managing the results of that intervention (see “Set of Practices 2.0”).

Theme #4: More Than Bridge Building

These are leadership elements. These are practices for how we all want to be together. There is nothing here that doesn't govern every time we show up. It is a way of welcoming the stranger. These are the ground rules of hospitality. To treat this narrowly as just bridge-building work does this work a disservice.

- Interview 7

Multiple interviewees gave feedback that while yes, this content can be used for bridge building, it also has much broader applications. This was surprising feedback as I had not thought about the content and its application beyond the scope of bridge building. One of the interviewees decided she was going to go home and apply it to her marriage. Another interviewee specifically identified this as the other side of activism, noting that this work puts the power in people's own hands to change, helping them reclaim their humanity. “This work is about liberation,” one said. The implication of this feedback is that there is an opportunity to frame this work as something other than bridge building, such as leadership development curriculum or community gathering principles.

Theme #5: Consider Cultural Differences

Some cultures might revere connectedness and vulnerability more than others. Consider: how does this approach honor those differences?”

- Interview 2

While this theme was only mentioned by two of the interviewees, it felt important to include. While many disciplines and authors were studied to create this

set of practices, the majority of them were written from a western perspective. Interestingly, one interviewer did say that the model felt very eastern, in that it was a circle (non-linear), and has many elements of both/and or di-unital thinking. This theme, in addition to earlier ones, suggests that any time these bridge building practices are used, it will be important to clarify their limitations up front, even in the invite, to avoid implying a one size fits all model of bridge building or assumes some level of homogeneity in the cultural backgrounds of the participants. Implications for the model from this point of feedback suggest changes such as explaining this limitation up front so participants understand that there is awareness of it, or adapting some of the language in the model to either fit specific cultures or make the approach generally more culturally-generic. In addition, practitioners could introduce the Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer, 2012) as a way to gauge readiness and appropriateness of content.

Interview Findings: Practice-Specific

In addition to interview findings that spoke to the models' overall relevance, each interviewee shared ways to strengthen each theme in the presentation, (described below).

Prioritize Self Work

Ideas to build upon this theme included the need for more explanation around self-work, noting that we cannot ever be truly unbiased mediators and that it is important to understand the concept of projection to not get hindered by other's views of you. In addition, there was discussion with two interviewees that maybe the self-work piece needs to come before or represents a context for the model, suggesting that facilitators should not enter into bridge building without this value and practice in place. However, through conversation, it became a both/and, as the

interviewees recognized that participants need to also be reminded of their need for self-work in any bridge building work.

Another interviewee linked the *Establish Clear Boundaries* practice to *Prioritize Self Work*, explaining that part of the self-work involves knowing our own boundaries. The final insight gathered from the interviews on this section was the reminder that the “self” is not separate from the community. The interviewee mentioned “It’s a myth that this is an individual’s journey versus a collective journey.” This feedback suggests that the self-work category should be clarified regarding its relationship to the model and the implications of the category to the facilitator and the participants.

Invite With Intention

Interviewees had several builds upon this practice. One to note highlighted the idea that invitation, while necessary, and no matter how thoughtful, is still not enough to ensure successful bridge building. Other interviewees mentioned supplemental benefits to this practice, such as the idea that when people show up, as long as you gave them the choice whether or not to attend, you can remind them that they chose to be there. In addition, the invitation, when specific, can help reduce tension before the conversation even starts, helping people know what to expect.

Establish Clear Boundaries

An interesting, although not unexpected tension arose naturally in conversations around this practice. In particular, the idea of power was raised, calling into question who decides what is harmful or not? Who decides which battles we want to pick as a group and which we don’t? As one interviewee reminded, “To me the word boundary has a lot to do with limits. When someone sets a limit, it can shut

down another person's personhood or experience. There is grief in that, and we often don't take time to honor that grief." One skillful interviewee provided helpful guidance on how to address this inherent tension, such as co-creating agreements together and discussing with the group the question: what do we want to do when someone feels unsafe? How do we want to handle it? How can we dissent with one another in ways that we can handle?

Another helpful reminder came from an interviewee who mentioned that the facilitator themselves must have boundaries and continually turn to the group for answers and not put themselves in the middle ("once I leave they still need to be able to talk to each other"). This same interviewee suggested that one way to prepare people for considerate action is to remind them "I can't harm you without harming myself." The implications of this set of feedback is that in order for the model to be most successful, particularly in this practice, it will be helpful to have specific tools and scripts for facilitators to lean into that are based in best practices and can assist them in explaining the nuances and holding the space successfully.

Brave Space

The idea of brave space resonated with all interviewees, and they gave thoughtful input on how to bring this concept into the room. Some of those concepts had to do with how the facilitator deals with brave space, such as affirming brave and vulnerable acts when they occur. Another is stopping at some point in the work and asking, "what courage is required of you now? What gifts are occurring in this room right now?" A final point of useful feedback was the idea that brave space increases once people have made meaningful connections with one another; and that time for this connection has to be prioritized. While no direct changes were suggested to this category, the fact that all interviewees voluntarily mentioned it and came back to it

suggests that there is an opportunity to possibly go deeper into this topic when using the model.

Uncover Shared Possibilities, Try Other Perspectives, Go Beyond the Intellectual

Uncover Shared Possibilities, try on other perspectives, and Go Beyond the Intellectual were all well-received by the interviewees. Therefore, these three practices are grouped together here because the interviewees' focused less of their comments on these areas. Included here are some of their *builds* and other comments that provided interesting insights that felt notable to share.

Uncover Shared Possibilities was the most popular in the interviews and also the one that showed up in every discipline studied, suggesting the innate power of future thinking and positivity in bridge building. While all interviewees appreciated the future focus, an additional element to this section was suggested by two interviewees who raised the importance of also focusing on the domains of coexistence and cooperation that are working now or in the immediate future, and not based too far out into the future. A thoughtful word of caution came from one interviewee on this one: "sometimes we promise a future that we can't attain, and there is a fatigue that builds up. Our ancestors built bridges that took more than their lifetime, but we read about them in a biography. So why would our work be any more successful, perfected, complete? We have to be able to work on furthering work that is not promising perfection."

Interviewees had great builds to try on other perspectives as well, such as the concept of co-creation and how the mere act of generating new ideas with others and observing their ways of working automatically helps us try on other perspectives. Another interviewee raised the point that it is not only important to have participants think about other perspectives but also take the time to put them in words and engage

in conversations they are not used to having with people we are not used to engaging with. A helpful reminder for any bridge building session came from another interviewee: “sometimes we can be standing on the same ledge looking at the same set of things and come up with two different realities.”

Go Beyond the Intellectual resonated very easily and clearly with all the interview participants. In particular, it brought up a lot of discussion on how alternative practices such as movement and art need to be woven throughout the entirety of any bridge building experience. One interviewee who is a somatic coach discussed the ways that the body is a form of intelligence and therefore must be listened to.

Discussion

Set of Practices 2.0

Broadly, the seven practices were validated by the interviews and so the main emphases of the approach are retained. However, the interviewees offered great insights into how to increase the presentation’s clarity, precision, and breadth, and these suggestions have been incorporated. Based on the feedback from the interviewees, I made multiple, but minor, revisions to the presentation that are all suggested in the above “Interview Findings” sections (see specific edits in Appendix B: Revised Presentation). All changes to the presentation have been highlighted in yellow. Although many of the changes were focused on minor, additional clarifications, two more substantial changes included the addition of a new slide entitled: “tips for use” and another graphic visual that communicates the model in a more creative, less formal way (see Figure 4).

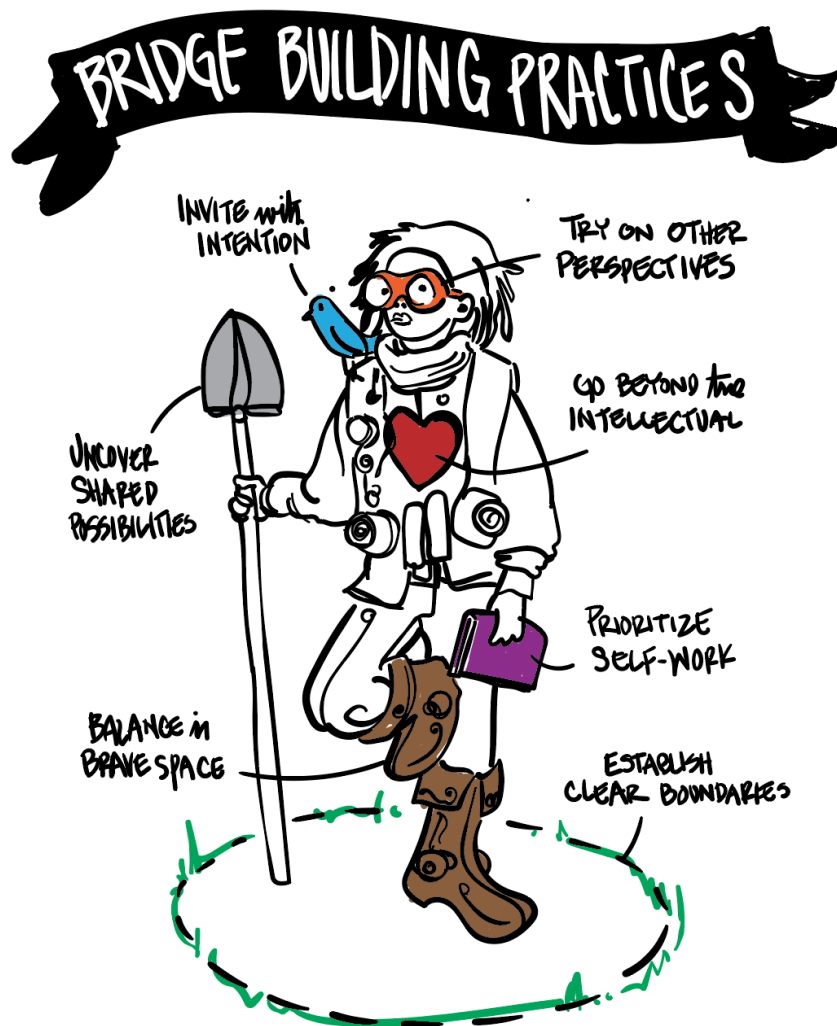
The slide *tips for use* was added because so much of this work depends on context. It became clear in the interviews that the facilitator must consider multiple

factors when using this model so that it can be couched in the presenting situation appropriately. Of these tips, the most important reads as follows: “Clarify upfront if you are using this set of practices to try and solve a specific problem or just desire to lean into a new future together. If it’s about solving a specific problem, create specific content that leaves room to deal with the problem, name it, and work on healing before moving towards the future.” This was the most important and substantial feedback that was provided, and so it felt important to call this out as the first tip a facilitator might consider. In the future, this set of practices could potentially add a circle and some accompanying content that could be used (or not) by the facilitator, specifically focused on problem-solving around complex issues.

The Bridge-Building Scout (see Figure 4) was added based on the desire to live out the intention behind the practice Go Beyond the Intellectual. This practice suggests that bridge-building content and approaches need to incorporate creative, somatic, or other alternative approaches that bring the content into other forms of being and therefore other forms of understanding. For that reason, artist Ramsey Ford (2023) decided to draw what he interpreted as the model and created Bridge-Building Scout to inspire those who might resonate more with a piece of art than a crisp, computer-generated model.

Figure 4

Bridge-Building Scout.



Note: Artwork created by Ramsey Ford, May 2023.

Limitations

The price one pays for pursuing any profession or calling is an intimate knowledge of its ugly side.

- James Baldwin

Any act of research, integration, and insight contains limitations. Here, I describe two of the more important areas of concerns: unintentional harm and inherent bias. Unintentional harm can occur in bridge-building work, particularly bridge-building work that puts populations that have been marginalized by society in

positions of re-explaining why their humanity and right to live freely matters. This can be re-traumatizing and cause greater suffering to those who have already endured loads of systemic suffering, and in this way bridge building work runs the risk of re-harming the people it might be trying most to support. Ways to reduce this risk, although it is impossible to mitigate completely, are outlined in the practices Invite with Intention and Establish Clear Boundaries. Although not all bridge-building conversations can be planned for, the invitation can and should be thoughtful about who is in the room and what level of individual or systemic trauma they might have experienced or how they might be triggered by the conversation. While this is impossible to fully predict, there are ways to mitigate this such as having conversations ahead of time with those who might be affected so they are equipped with as much information as possible before choosing to come, and providing exit ramps for people to take space from the conversation if needed. Even in unplanned bridge-building situations, it is important to teach people that having a bridge-building conversation needs to be consensual, meaning that both parties want to have the conversation. Instead of launching into divisive realms unrestrictedly, bridge builders can gauge interest in the topic by simply asking if the participant(s) is willing to have the conversation.

Establish Clear Boundaries also attempts to mitigate the risk of harm by considering psychological safety and group norms. One piece that can be added to boundary work is the clarification upfront on certain facts in the invite to *weed out* anyone who might not be meant for the conversation (for example: “This conversation requires either an authentic, humble curiosity towards, or existing awareness of, the harm that systemic sexism has caused throughout history and today”). While this kind

of boundary does shorten the distance that groups might be able to cross, it helps to reduce harm from the very beginning.

Another unintentional harm that can come from this work is the suffering and loneliness it can cause anyone who is trying to do it. As someone who has worked on bridge building in some form or another for over twenty years, I can say from experience that this point is often unrecognized but critical to understand for anyone devoting significant time to building bridges across differences. While all people will experience the work differently, this particular form of suffering has been written about by Carl Jung through the concept of individuation, or the ongoing process in which elements of one's personality gradually work together harmoniously, which in turn leads individuals to live in cooperation with others and also differentiate from them (Jung et al., 2020). This same paradox is also referenced by James Hollis (1993), as he writes "the paradox of individuation is that we best serve intimate relationships by becoming sufficiently developed in ourselves that we do not need to feed off others" (p. 99). Individuation relates to suffering for bridge builders in that bridge building can catalyze the individuation process as individuals must confront and reconcile the opposing aspects within themselves and the world around them, such as light and shadow or masculine and feminine. As Hollis (1993) explains the suffering, "the experience . . . is not unlike awakening to find that one is alone on a pitching ship, with no port in sight" (p. 94). While the union of opposites can eventually foster inner harmony and integration, the process of working internally as well as externally on bridge building, at the union of opposites, ensures bearing witness to suffering in oneself and others. A straightforward way to reduce this harm is to make the potential for suffering salient, bring it into conscious awareness, and manage for it, therefore making it visible and able to be cared for when rest or space is needed.

The other limitation to this study is my inherent bias and the bias that exists in the sculpting of any work. As does every human, I bring my own cultural and experiential bias to the table everywhere I go and in all that I do. While I continue to do work to uncover my own biases, it is impossible for me to account for them fully. For example, given my personal background and relationships, I acknowledge that the idea of bridge building as an interesting concept worth pursuing is an assumption born of my own lived experience. I also acknowledge the liberties I had to take with connecting dots between bridge-building terms and approaches. Each discipline studied in the research has its own set of terms and tools that contain nuanced but important differences. Therefore, in my codification and theming of terms in order to identify the seven practices, I limited the richness of the perspectives for the sake of simplicity. Another limitation around bias is that I was unable to connect with multiple practitioners to interview who identified as conservative. While I did not ask the interviewees their political identification, I assume that four of them would identify as liberal or progressive, three of them would most likely identify as moderate and one would identify as religiously conservative. Because of this limitation, the research, feedback, and therefore model may be missing a crucial point of view, considering the depth and breadth of the political divide today.

Recommendations for Future Research and Next Steps

In pursuit of this work, I realized quickly how much work has already been done in this space in terms of *how to*. Where the gaps seem to lie is in the need for broad, sweeping implementation of these practices. Many of them remain confined to academic journals, reserved for elite practitioners and consultants, or buried in the ancient past.

In order to reduce our current state of increasing ideological divide, the work of bridge building needs to be made accessible, easily digestible, and woven into the bones of what we teach and value in America today. This is no easy feat. With the newspaper headlines shouting the daily wars, it will take a movement of dedicated individuals, who are not buried too far in their own siloes, to build curriculum, cultural artifacts, and social systems that embed this work in our daily practice. I hope to become one such practitioner.

Another recommendation for future research is to understand to what degree bridge building is valued by different groups with shared identities (Ex: conservative Americans, Baby Boomers, or immigrant populations). To build bridges, there must be parties interested in doing so. If the idea of bridge building is only highly valued by certain identities, then the reach of the work is significantly narrowed. Research is needed to determine which groups might be more amenable to such conversations based on their shared values.

Another area of research that would be helpful are *accidental* ways that bridges have been built throughout history to understand the commonalities of those stories. The research for this paper only looked at intentional forms of bridge building; but history is riddled with stories of unlikely bedfellows, such as Anton Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsberg, who shared little in their deeply held values while sharing a deep and lasting friendship. There is something to be studied about how these cases came to be and what we might learn from them. Based on the concept of equifinality, or the idea that an end state can be reached by many different means, there are many ways that bridges can be built that may be outside of our typical line of sight, and therefore, worth studying further.

This bias that is inherent in this model is another area that could be studied further. Although the model was informed by some multicultural approaches, it is missing large swaths of research that may differ vastly from what has been proposed here. For example, not all cultures, or individuals for that matter, resonate with the idea of bridge building or connection across differences. It would be interesting to test the model across cultures to see how it might be accepted, rejected, or need to be adapted to successfully add value in specific contexts.

In terms of other areas of future research, there is room for further study around the relationship of this model to other leadership development, community development, or individual development practices. While some of the interviewees suggested this model could be used well beyond bridge building, this recommendation has not been tested or researched and could benefit from research and testing into some of these broader contexts. If the model has legs outside of the bridge-building space, it would be helpful to know where it could be used most effectively and how it could be altered to resonate in those fields.

Regarding next steps, I have already shared some of the content of this work with my Pepperdine MSOD cohort, and will also be sharing it in a voluntary leadership development opportunity that is available not only to our 1,200 employees at the YMCA of Greater Cincinnati, but also to 80 other YMCA organizations around the country. I hope to continue to adapt and change the work as I learn from and with it, knowing that there is no perfect way and that it is always necessary to consider the context that the conversations are taking place within and then adapting the content as it makes sense. I am excited about the possibility of building a curriculum out for each of the seven practices, including the development of a *train-the-trainer* model, and already have a list of potential activities, discussion questions, and experiences, as

well as funders interested in resourcing the expansion of this work. I also am interested in further adapting and growing that curriculum based on what I learn from its implementation. Because we learn best by doing, I know that once I begin to dig into sharing the curriculum, I will then figure out how to adapt it for its best and highest use. Just by sharing the ideas with my interviewees, I received many ideas for improvement and expansion. For example, I received the feedback from one interviewee about the need to go further into the problems themselves before moving towards the future, and then received the opposite feedback from others. This implies the benefit of creating additional curriculum around addressing root causes and healing that would be optional and allow the facilitator to bring it into the room or not, depending on the purpose and constraints of the moment.

Lastly, I think the work would benefit by dropping the threshold to entry as low as possible. Bridges are being built between people, unconsciously and in various ways, all around us every day. I am curious: how might we create more moments of delight and connection that don't require such a direct and intentional approach? How could we design our communities, our interactions, our buildings, our places of work, and our events, in ways that prioritize bridge building as a primary value of the user experience? Of our culture? What would that look like?

Conclusion

It has been an honor and privilege to immerse myself in this work. And, while bridge building is important, as one of my brilliant interviewees reminded me, sometimes we confuse the need to build bridges with the idea of eliminating bridges and making us all one big thing rooted in sameness. It is important to note that our differences are our beauty, and we all still need spaces where we can be completely ourselves, whether that's alone or with people that make us feel right at home in our

shared ways of being. But if we want to address some of the toughest challenges of our day, we have to find ways to come together on issues such as climate change, social media and technology ethics, the rising homeless population, and gun violence in schools. These issues can feel overwhelming to many of us based on their sheer size and complexity. But we can be inspired by many of the bridge builders that have come before us that tell us the importance of starting small. As Augusto Boal so brilliantly stated, “The smallest incidents of our social life contain all the moral and political values of our society, all its structures of domination and power, all its mechanisms of oppression” (Boal & Epstein, 1990). So, if we cannot change benefits policy to fix hunger in our schools, can we feed the neighbor kid who lingers too long in our backyard? If we cannot address the polarizing political news cycles rooted in fear, can we find ways to talk to Aunt Rose about our shared humanity? If we cannot fix the rage within us and around us, can we build peaceful places that anyone can access? In slowing ourselves down to consider our small interactions and choices, we get closer to modeling the world we hope to build.

Lastly, we must consider, as Cornel West (2011) famously noted, that “justice is what love looks like in public.”. One of the hardest parts of this work is staying rooted in love and acceptance while refusing to accept hatred in all its forms. Because of this tension, many of us, myself included, get paralyzed into silence. But for the sake of our collective future, we must begin to speak the hard things, even when we aren’t sure of all the facts, or how it will be received, or what might come of it. Yes, we can start small, but we have to start.

What is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my own mortality, what I regretted most were my silences; my silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid. If we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us. The speaking will get easier and easier. And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized you had. And you will lose some friends and lovers, and realize you don't miss them. And new ones will find you and cherish you. And at last, you'll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking.

- Audre Lorde

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Appendix A: Slide Presentation 1.0

BRIDGE BUILDING: A set of practices 1.0

Kate Hanisian
Pepperdine University, MSOD program
May 2023

1

DEFINITION

bridge-building (noun)
efforts to improve relationships between people who are very different or do not like each other

Cambridge dictionary

2

"We made you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other, not so that you may despise each other."
Qur'an 49:13

"Without community, there is no liberation."
Audre Lorde

3

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

- Uncover patterns in bridge building practices across disciplines
- Develop general guidelines that provide ways to move through the world as a bridge builder
- Deepen trust among traditionally divided groups
- Avoid further harm

4

OVERALL PROCESS

Gather + review research	Uncover themes + develop the model	Test model with practitioners	Refine + Share
Determine fields + disciplines	Identify related insights (iterative, emergent)	Interview leaders: Organization or community leader	Summarize feedback
Gather data (books, articles, etc.)	Generate and title themes	Facilitate people across difference	Make changes
Read research + capture insights	Document support for themes	Work in demographically diverse settings	Generate recommendations
Use virtual wall (by source)			Share out

5

BRIDGE BUILDING FIELDS REVIEWED FOR THIS STUDY

Governmental + Political	Indigenous	Arctic + Spatial	Legal	Health + Science	Community + Social Justice	Organizational + Systems	Sociology + Philosophy
Ex: International negotiations, peacekeeping tactics	Ex: Indigenous conflict resolution strategies	Ex: Conflict resolution for Education in the Arts	Ex: Principled negotiation and mediation	Ex: Group Psychology safety	Ex: Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation studies	Ex: Small group theory and methodology	Ex: Intercultural Development Inventory

6

RESEARCH REVIEWED FOR THIS STUDY

75 Books + articles	8 Disciplines	400 + Insights
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7

QUESTIONS

1. In your experience, does this overall approach resonate? Why or why not?
2. What elements of the approach stood out to you? Why?
3. Are the titles and descriptions of the practices clear? Why or why not?
4. In which circumstances would this content would be useful? In which might it not?
5. What is the strength of this approach?
6. What changes or additions might you have to improve this approach?
7. Any other feedback you would like to provide?

8


#2. Invite with intention.



- Set the tone of inclusion and purpose from the beginning
- Encourage people to bring their questions and identities
- Provide specificity (why, for whom, what will be covered)
- The bigger the distance between stances, the more difficult the work (thoughtful, considered exclusion is vital to any gathering)

13

#3. Establish clear boundaries.




"Sometimes it is not ethical to build bridges with others that are denying others' personhood."

—Rev. Jen Bailey

14


#3. Establish clear boundaries.



- Consider that psychological safety facilitates change
- Do not assume that everyone experiences the same level of psychological risk
- Hold the tension between diversity of thought and opinion while not perpetuating harm
- Set the tone that the group cannot have every difficult conversation it comes across
- Provide exit ramps, ground rules

15

#4. Move into brave space.




"We must establish a personal connection with each other. Connection before content. Without relatedness, no work can occur."

—Peter Block

16


#4. Move into brave space.



- Anticipate inherent challenges; avoid overpromising safe space
- Find the learning zone
- Lessen the gap between what people are thinking and what they are saying
- Go "below the water line"

17

#5. Uncover shared possibilities.



"One reason I love futures is there's a comfort that can come in talking about it. . . All of us belong there and all of us can take part in building the future if we are willing to both imagine and take action today."

— Vanessa Mason

18


#5. Uncover shared possibilities.



- Establish what is shared in common
- Lean into the future, sense of possibility.
- Acknowledge shared humanity, then you invite people to create a new way forward.
- "What kind of narrative will your great grandchildren learn about this country? What story should we build?"

19

#6. Try on other perspectives.



"No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it".

—Albert Einstein

20

#6. Try on other perspectives.

- Begin with a third story
- Shift viewpoints to create greater openness of mind; zoom in and zoom out
- Draw attention to the complexity and interconnectedness of human systems
- Accept contradictions as necessary and potentially useful (brings us closer to understanding the whole)




21

#7. Go beyond the intellectual.

"This is the power of art: The power to transcend our own self-interest, our solipsistic zoom-lens on life, and relate to the world and each other with more integrity, more curiosity, more wholeheartedness."


—Maria Popova



22

#7. Go beyond the intellectual.

- Use art to wake the imagination and give voice to emotion
- Encourage cross-pollination of ideas
- Allow time for silence
- Listen to the body, return to the body
- Use music to fuel bonds, create emotional responses



23

QUESTIONS

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7. Any other feedback you would like to provide?



24

(Note: click [here](#) to access the full document)

Appendix B: Revised Slide Presentation, 2.0

(Note: all changes highlighted in yellow)

BRIDGE BUILDING: A set of practices

2.0

Kate Hanisian
Pepperdine University, MSOD program
June 2023

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DEFINITION

bridge-building (noun)
efforts to improve relationships between people who are very different or do not like each other

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Read research + capture insights	Document support for themes	Work in demographically diverse settings	Generate recommendations
Use virtual wall (by source)			Share out

5

RELEVANT FIELDS + PRACTICES REVIEWED FOR THIS STUDY

Environmental / Political	Indigenous	Artistic / Spiritual	Legal	Health / Science	Community + Social Justice	Organizational + System	Sociology + Philosophy
Ex: International negotiations, peacekeeping tactics	Ex: Indigenous conflict reduction strategies	Ex: Confined resolution for Education in the Arts	Ex: Principled negotiation and mediation	Ex: Group Psychological safety	Ex: Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation studies	Ex: Small group theory and methodology	Ex: Intercultural Development Inventory
Kabana, A. (2017). <i>2020-2016: Review</i> . Cozz, et al. (2020). Park, D. (2012)	Lundy et al. (2012). Tao (2016). Cozz, et al. (2020). Park, D. (2012)	Chen, C.E., (2020). Cozz, P. et al., (2012). King, M., (2012). Rohlf, B. (2012). Shah, A. (2018). Shah, A. (2016). Baker, M. et al., (2012). Haines, D.L., (2014). Rohlf, L.L., (2014)	Shank, K., (2021). Stone, D. et al., (2010). Lawrence, C.R., (1987). Shank, D.A., (2002). Haines, D.L., (2014). Rohlf, L.L., (2014)	Shank, P.J. et al., (2021). Haines, D.L., (2014). Patel et al., (2013). Kempster, A., (1999). Jain, A., (2017). Cozz, P. et al., (2020). Cozz, P. et al., (2020). Cozz, P. et al., (2020). Cozz, P. et al., (2020).	Whitson, M. (2020). Ward, S. (2020). Ward, S. (2020). Whitson, M. (2020). Whitson, M. (2020). Whitson, M. (2020). Whitson, M. (2020). Whitson, M. (2020).	Whitson, M. (2020). Schon, E.H. & Spitzer, W.C., (1981). Cozz, P. et al., (2020). Cozz, P. et al., (2020). Cozz, P. et al., (2020). Cozz, P. et al., (2020). Cozz, P. et al., (2020). Cozz, P. et al., (2020).	

6

RESEARCH REVIEWED FOR THIS STUDY

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7

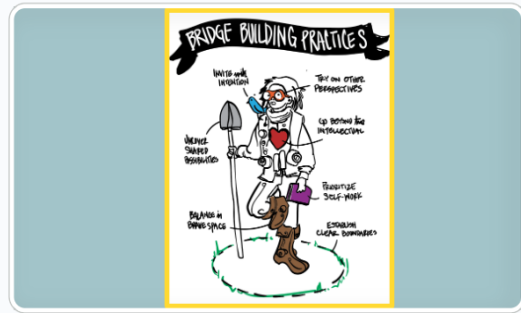
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8



9



10

TIPS FOR USE

- Clarify upfront if you are using this set of practices to try and solve a specific problem or just desire to lean into a new, connected future together. If it's about solving a specific problem, create specific content that leaves room to deal with the problem, name it, and work on healing before moving towards the future.
- It's not linear, so build your own flow.
- Develop a checklist: have I covered it all?
- Consider weaving elements of each throughout.
- This is not THE way, it is just ONE way (name the limitations).
- Take it beyond "bridge building"; use it in leadership and general life skills discussions
- Take care of yourselves; this work can be tough.

11

#1. Prioritize self work.

"Transform yourself to transform the world. The only sustainable foundation for a changed world is internal transformation"

-Grace Lee Boggs

12

#1. Prioritize self work.

- Uncover personal limitations, perspectives, triggers (acknowledge inherent bias)
- Develop real-time awareness of emotions and how to manage them in complex situations
- Practice mindfulness, meditation, yoga and other forms of somatic practice, coaches, peers, counseling, therapy
- Work on self as instrument, nootoonil (Navajo)

13

#2. Invite with intention.

"A gathering begins at the moment of invitation. It doesn't begin when people walk into the room".

-Priya Parker

14

#2. Invite with intention.

- Set the tone of inclusion and purpose from the beginning
- Encourage people to bring their questions and identities
- Reduce anxiety and tension ahead of time
- Provide choice, not mandate
- Provide specificity (why, for whom, what will be covered)
- The bigger the distance between stances, the more difficult the work (thoughtful, considered exclusion is vital to any gathering)

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"Sometimes it is not ethical to build bridges with others that are denying others' personhood."

-Rev. Jen Bailey

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#3.
Establish clear boundaries.

- Consider that psychological safety makes change more likely
- Do not assume that everyone experiences the same level of psychological risk
- Hold the tension between diversity of thought and opinion while not perpetuating harm
- Set the tone that the group might not be ready to have every difficult conversation it comes across
- Provide exit ramps, ground rules
- Name the loss when boundaries are drawn (reflect, honor, connect)
- Discuss power and co-create. Who decides and how?




17

#4.
Move into brave space.

"We must establish a personal connection with each other. Connection before content. Without relatedness, no work can occur."


-Peter Block



18

#4.
Move into brave space.

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 - Anticipate inherent challenges; avoid overpromising safe space
 - Find the learning zone
 - Lessen the gap between what people are thinking and what they are saying
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19

#5.
Uncover shared possibilities.

"One reason I love futures is there's a comfort that can come in talking about it. . . All of us belong there and all of us can take part in building the future if we are willing to both imagine and take action today."


- Vanessa Mason



20

#5.
Uncover shared possibilities.

- Establish what is shared in common
- Lean into what's working in the present and dream about what's possible (both the immediate and big picture future)
- Remember that change take time
- Acknowledge shared humanity, then you invite people to create a new way forward.
- "What kind of narrative will your great grandchildren learn about this country? What story should we build?"




21

#6.
Try on other perspectives.

"No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it."


-Albert Einstein



22

#6.
Try on other perspectives.

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- Shift viewpoints to create greater openness of mind; zoom in and zoom out
- Draw attention to the complexity and interconnectedness of human systems
- Accept contradictions as necessary and potentially useful (brings us closer to understanding the whole)
- Lean into co-creation




23

#7.
Go beyond the intellectual.

"This is the power of art: The power to transcend our own self-interest, our solipsistic zoom-lens on life, and relate to the world and each other with more integrity, more curiosity, more wholeheartedness."


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24

#7.
Go beyond the intellectual.

- Use art to wake the imagination and give voice to emotion
- Encourage cross-pollination of ideas
- Allow time for silence
- Listen to the body, return to the body
- Use music to fuel bonds, create emotional responses
- Weave methods throughout



25

QUESTIONS

1. In your experience, does this overall approach resonate? Why or why not?
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26

THANK YOU!

Further questions or ideas?

Contact:
Kate Hanisian
khanisian@myy.org

27



(Note: click [here](#) to access the full document)

Appendix C: Recruitment Email and Informed Consent

PEPPERDINE | GRAZIADIO
BUSINESS SCHOOL

Dear _____,

My name is Kate Hanisian, and I am an Organization Development Masters student in the Graziadio Business School at Pepperdine University. I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate as a volunteer study participant in my thesis research on bridge building across differences.

This commitment would require 10 minutes of your time to watch a video, 60 minutes of your time to participate in a zoom interview in May at a time and location that is convenient for you, and 5-10 minutes of time scheduling the interview and signing consent forms. The purpose of this video and interview is to share findings from my literature review around bridge building and get your feedback on a proposed multi-disciplinary model for facilitating bridge building in various settings. While many models of conflict transformation and bridge building exist across disciplines, there is a lack of synthesized practices that are informed by multiple fields of study. This study will be conducted to supplement existing research on the subject of bridge building across differences within organizations.

Your participation in the study will take place on Zoom and be audio recorded by otter.ai, but neither video or audio will be recorded on Zoom. Participation in this study is voluntary, and your identity as a participant will be protected before, during, and after the time that study data is collected. Strict confidentiality procedures will be in place during and after the study to mitigate the risk of confidentiality breach. After the interview, the notes and recordings will be identified by an alias, and the master document that identifies participants by their alias will be stored in a separate, password-protected file on the researcher's password-protected computer.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in this study, please reply to this email and contact me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Kate Hanisian
Pepperdine University
Masters Student in Organization Development (MSOD), 2023
khansian@pepperdine.edu
513-508-1678

*We are bending the future, together,
into something we have never experienced.
a world where everyone experiences abundance,
access, pleasure, human rights,
dignity, freedom, transformative justice, peace.*

We long for this, we believe it is possible.”

- adrienne maree brown