

**We equip people  
to create change  
together.**

**fit**  
ASSOCIATES



**You see it can be better, and you've gone to work.**

We've met you. You're tackling something tough. You're determined to improve life for your community, or the impact of your organization for the people it serves. For years perhaps, you've been helping an institution move from its old ways—no longer good for the world—to take its place in a sustainable and equitable society. There's a vision, a sense of what could come to life.

**But this stuff is hard.**

This isn't just a project. It's going to take a long time. It means getting people together who don't see eye-to-eye, who might not like or trust each other. It means facing complexity, making space for honest conversation and purposeful alignment, and learning to create together over the long haul. It means taking care of yourself and each other along the way.

**We equip people to create change together.**

We wrote this booklet as a way of saying, "You're doing work that matters, and we'd like to help."

# what we do

## **Through courses and workshops,**

We help people and groups get better at collaborating creatively across differences.

We introduce them to potent approaches to long-term systemic change.

And we help them acquire the personal and relationship skills they need to succeed at these things.

## **Through long-term programs,**

We support organizations and  
multistakeholder initiatives in...

listening to the system,

hosting conversations that matter,

growing their leadership capacity  
and the capabilities of their team,

structuring their approach to  
emergent change.

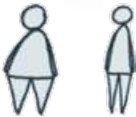
# our view of change

Our work is based on the view that the scales of change are entangled with one another. We shape the world we participate in, and in turn are shaped by it.



## **Small groups are the front lines of transformation.**

All change includes work in small groups. The future is created one room at a time, one gathering at a time, as we learn to make each gathering an example of the future we want to create.



## **Good relationships are the building blocks of transformation.**

Both in the moment and over the long term, the relationships between people are the “material” from which group collaboration and creativity are made. New patterns of relationship are a source of large-scale change.



## **Small acts and explorations can add up to transformed systems, communities, organizations.**

Lasting change emerges through many collaborations, conversations and experiments. We can learn to design and nurture these efforts, sensing the possibilities and supporting the pioneers, networks, and communities of practice from which new ways of life are born.

## **The world's transformation is entangled with our own.**



Change in the world is intimately tangled with change in ourselves. As we shift our own story, make space for our own development, refresh our sense of purpose and tap into our creative fire, we are better able to participate in the work of change.

The following pages describe the ways in which we are learning to help people, groups, and organizations equip themselves for change at the four scales: group, relational, individual, and systemic.

### Small groups

# Host gatherings that matter.



Where does the future come from? It is created one gathering at a time. The small group is where transformation takes place, and for that reason, each gathering needs to become an example of the future we want to create together.

The way we structure our gatherings—who we include, how we collaborate, the process through which we explore our way into something new together—is as critical as the issue or vision that brought us together.

**We expand your palette of concepts, methods and skills for gatherings that matter: how to make profound invitations, set the conditions for open conversation and collaboration, and how to nurture alignment of purpose and facilitate co-creation.**



“The key to creating or transforming community is to see the power in the small but important elements of being with others. The shift we seek needs to be embodied in each invitation we make, each relationship we encounter, and each meeting we attend.

What this means is that theory devolves down to these everyday day questions out of which community is actually lived: Whom do I choose to invite into the room? What is the conversation that I both become and engage in with those people? How do we create a communal structure that moves the action forward?

Peter Block

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How do we get people together across differences of view and social experience?

How do we use our time together in ways that engage every voice in understanding, aligning, and creating?

How can we make room for difference and dissent, while deepening the conversation from debate to generative dialogue?

How can we set the conditions for collaboration that moves from transactional problem-solving to the emergence of new patterns of relationship and behavior?

An example of teaching good gatherings and dialogue

# Learn to invite and host conversations that matter

## A program of workshops and practice

Learn to host conversations that move the status quo. Become able to hold group sessions where power is shared, vision is co-created, and creativity is cultivated.

### Host your first group session

The ideas, short assignments and coaching in this series culminate in your first experience in hosting a session of group understanding, dialogue, and co-creation.

	New perspective	Building blocks	Conversations that matter
Learning	Thought as a system, levels of dialogue, the debate/create fork in the road, and the conditions for open honest curiosity	Using time, furniture, roles, and materials to engage all voices, open minds, and deepen the conversation	Invitations that matter; methods for seeing situations together, reflecting and framing, aligning intentions, creating together
Practice	Listening practice, left/right column reflection; readings in dialogue practice; choose lab group	Make group agreements; listen to your lab group; immerse in Liberating Structures materials	Interview results: reflection and sense-making; craft an invitation, immerse in Art of Hosting

“The most beautiful moment was seeing two of the seniors walk hand-in-hand across the street after our event. They became friends in those two hours. Words cannot explain just how heart-warming that moment was, as we stood there, tears in all our eyes. This is why we do what we do, and this experience made me realize that this is what design should be. This was my first facilitation experience, and I cannot wait for the opportunity to do it all over again.

Student

“The facilitation work taught me about engaging with people. I never thought I could interact with strangers that deeply: interviewing people from different religions, inviting them to our activity and facilitating their conversation. I always thought I am a unsocial person.

Student

Session design	The skills of holding space	Tool kit for difficulties
The arc and pace of good sessions, matching method to purpose, handling power and inclusion, key techniques	Hosting vs. facilitating, letting go of control while defending the conversation, the inner game of hosting	Working with difficult people, strong emotions, conflict, power and privilege, divisions, disagreement, etc.
Draft facilitation guide; refine with ProAction Cafe, Troika Consulting or other wise-crowd method	Revise facilitation guide; host your first full session! Reflect and debrief with your team	Create a learning agenda for your continuing development as a host of conversations that matter

Good relationships



# Grow your relationships.

Our relationships mirror the patterns that playing out in the world: who has power, whose voice matters, who needs to listen, who gets to decide, whose needs matter most.

When we relate unconsciously, we run the risk of replicating the world as it is. The work of creating together across difference invites us to build relationships that embody the world we want to live in, a world filled with diversity, dissent, honesty, healing, care, and creativity.

**We introduce you to skills and practices that will support your group's capacity to build respectful relationships that can stick together over the long haul.**

“It is part of my job, and my greatest challenge, to look for points of unity and connection with difficult people. Some of them have values that are harmful for the world. In the past, I would have defined myself in opposition to them. Now it’s my job to be in community with these people, with beliefs that are personally abhorrent, so we can move the whole conversation and community forward.

Church leader

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**How do we forge conscious relationships that celebrate our interdependence and seek each other’s wellbeing?**

**How do we welcome conflict, stay present within it and allow it to change and surprise us?**

**How do we create relationships where we can risk being our full selves and not rejected for it?**

**How do we build trust? How do we repair ruptures and heal together?**

An example of teaching healthy relationship

# Building Your Relational Capacity

**Become able to create strong relationships of equals, that continue to grow and learn through the ups, downs and challenges of creating together.**

In this work we struggle together, and we must learn to stay connected, and to love and respect each other as best we can. This course brings theories of healthy relationships and communication together with the opportunity to practice different ways to show up in relationship with one another.

This course works well when a group of collaborators takes it together.

	Healthy relationships & communication	Unpacking what we bring to relationships	Listening and working with what's in the way
Learning	Characteristics of healthy relationships and communication	Privilege, power, conflict styles, and anxiety as a system dynamic	Thought as a system, four levels of listening, judgment and other enemies of listening
Practice	Create intentions, agreements and practices to support this learning journey	Privilege walk, power exploration activity, taking power up and giving it away	Practice active listening, practice working with judgment

“My father and I were not speaking about what matters for several years now. During this course I took what we learned and told him I need to practice my school work with him. Doing these exercises with him transformed our relationship. I feel so grateful.  
Student

“We were stuck in a cycle of blaming another, yet unable to have the honest conversation. Some of us felt disempowered and unseen. Now that we could talk honestly about this, I can see how I am contributing to creating this unhealthy group culture. And I have practices that will help me show up differently.  
Workshop participant

	Compassionate communication	Repairing relational ruptures	Components of trusting relationships
	Ladder of inference, four steps of nonviolent communication	From a punitive to a restorative mindset, characteristics of a sincere apology	Seven characteristics of trust-building relationships
	Use writing and role play to practice before trying these tools in difficult situations	Practice self-forgiveness, work toward reparation where harm was done	Building a trusting relationship with oneself, remembering your own integrity



## Personal transformation

# Become skilled in your personal development.

Organizational, community, and societal change is entangled with personal change.

- Our inner state influences the results of our work.
- Working for change challenges our personal capacity for good relationship with ourselves and others, and asks for our own creative fire.

The only place we have genuine agency to change anything is within ourselves. When we engage in our own change, we can learn to cultivate what we feel is lacking in the world: more peace, more creativity, more connectedness. As we become good at making space for the difficulty of being human, as we learn to access what is wonderful about being human, we can help others do the same.

**We help you try techniques, explore and work through difficulties, and learn practices that can support your growth and development as a practitioner and leader of change.**



“ A key element of transformation: the people in the relationship and community are committed to their own self-transformation. We see ourselves as microcosms of the world, and work to shift oppressive patterns in our bodies, hearts, minds, speech, interactions, liberating ourselves into purpose, liberating our communities into new practices.

adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy*

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**How do I live an unapologetic and full throttle life? A life that challenges, heals, delights and inspires?**

**How do I become skilled in working with inner difficulties of self-doubt, fear, conflict avoidance, cynicism, habits of judgment,...?**

**How do I become able to work with challenging people and circumstances through daunting complexity and long-term uncertainty?**

**How do I become still so I can access the deep wisdom that sustains me?**

An example of teaching individual transformation

# Practices for Personal Transformation

## A program of workshops and daily practices

Become able to show up, speak up, and participate in shaping yourself and your world, while remaining open to being shaped by life.

During this eight-week course, you are invited to be your own social lab, where you gain understanding of the process of transformation and learn tools and practices.

	<b>Cultivate Presence</b>	<b>Shift the Story</b>	<b>Be with Discomfort</b>
<b>Learning</b>	<p>Non-judgmental awareness</p> <p>Cultivate a compassionate response to what arises</p>	<p>Question your beliefs</p> <p>Become aware of the story that drives you and learn to watch and question it</p>	<p>Feel and express emotions</p> <p>Learn what you can feel; learn skills to be with strong emotion</p>
<b>Practice</b>	<p>Making a pain diary; welcoming what arises</p>	<p>Practice questioning your beliefs; practicing mindfulness</p>	<p>Practice feeling and expressing, practice holding space</p>

“My intention is to redesign the school system in Mexico. Before this class I thought I would learn all this great things at CMU and be the macho man that takes it back and teach others ‘the better way.’ Now I feel humbled. I understand more about how deeply complex this work is and I have more tools to invite people to experiment towards a better future with me.  
Student

“As a male, I’ve been taught to know, decide, lead. But this class showed me how to listen, be still, be open and vulnerable. I’m going to keep practicing this.  
Student

Integrate the Past	Rest, Reflect, Listen	Respond Creatively
<p><b>Privilege and past pain</b></p> <p>Express and integrate, understand and shift shame, reframe your story</p>	<p><b>Replenishing yourself</b></p> <p>Learn skills to rest, replenish, get still and ask for wisdom</p>	<p><b>Conditions</b></p> <p>Conditions for creativity, separation of making and critique</p>
<p>Making art about past pain, and “healing circle”</p>	<p>Practice stillness, surrender, and deep listening</p>	<p>Practicing self-replenishment and creative response; work with your inner critic</p>

Systems, communities, organizations

# Learn the fundamentals of systemic change.

A big transformation grows from many smaller shifts. You can't control that process directly, but you can learn to serve and support the emergence of intentional change. You can make invitations that matter, to everyone. You can tend the conditions for creative collaborations that loosen the grip of the old stories and bring new stories to life. You can embrace approaches that address the invisible patterns of relationship and behavior that underlie the visible symptoms.

**We introduce you to the fundamental approaches of long-term systemic change: models of change, real-world approaches, frameworks for management, and useful methods and tools.**



“To create an alternative future, we need to advance our understanding of the nature of communal or collective transformation. We know a good deal about individual transformation, but our understanding about the transformation of human systems, such as our workplaces, neighborhoods, and towns, is primitive at best.... The core question, then, is this: What is the means through which those of us who care about the whole community can create a future for ourselves that is not just an improvement, but one of a different nature from what we now have?

Peter Block

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**How do we work together with methods of emergence, so the surprising new appears from our combined gifts?**

**How do we maintain relatedness and engagement through the long-term process of change?**

**How do we nurture and connect a series of gatherings so it affects the larger community or system?**

**How do we do this with people who have different experiences and priorities, engaging with the difficulties of power, conflict, trauma, inclusion and equity?**

An example of teaching the fundamentals of systemic change

# Introducing social complexity and the fundamentals of working with emergence

## A series that opens doors, expands horizons, and offers a new lens

Once we've learned to see the world through the lens of complexity and emergence, it will never look the same. And through that gaze we discover new ways of working, new ways to evaluate our work, and a fresh sense of our own place in transformations both great and small.

## Developing literacy: the foundation for further learning

Become able to discern complexity, sketch participation strategies, and work from basic familiarity with the current generation of systemic, participatory, emergent approaches.

	<b>Complexity and models of change</b>	<b>Listening to the system, working with emergence</b>	<b>Systemic, participatory approaches and social labs</b>
<b>Learning</b>	The Systems Game, Cynefin framework, complexity and emergence fundamentals, two models of change	Survey of approaches to sensing systems and intentional engagement with emergence	Survey of approaches that convene across a system or community, and work toward a shift in social patterns
<b>Practice</b>	Cynefin-related group facilitation, field assignments in seeing systems and emergence	Reading and reflection assignment; Optional: Host a "What's going on?" workshop	Interview an experienced practitioner; explore the tenets of transition design

“The emergence game rocked. It was really cool to see things go crazy and see the ripple effect between people and changing elements. The metaphor was pretty jarring and really placed us in the realm where social reality is hard to grasp ahold of. It wiggles around and resists prediction. And then we ask, ‘Well, then how do we work?’

Student

“What excited me was a practical approach towards understanding how to approach groups with various levels of authority, in a way that enacts real participation and engagement.

Student

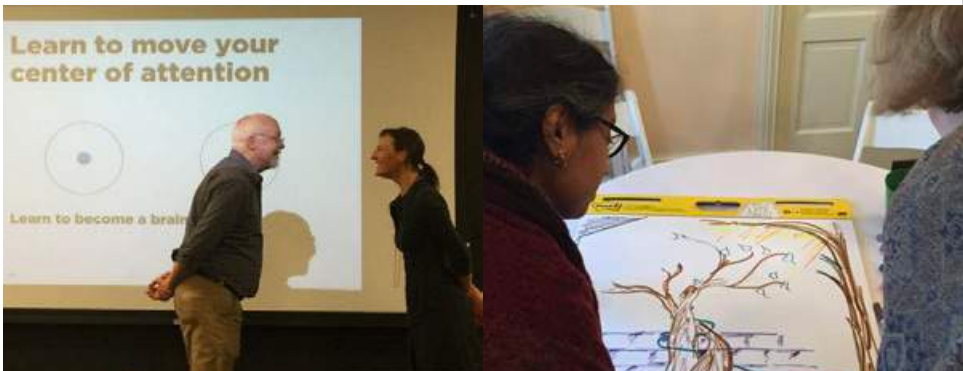
Systemic power and privilege, conflict, trauma, inclusion, equity, and justice	Developmental and principles-focused evaluation	Participation strategy and the long view
Introduction to issues of systemic oppression and trauma; considerations for the work of transformation	Introduction to evaluation methods suitable for working with emergence in social complexity	A visual language for planning long-term participatory work, what it takes to engage in long-term transformation
Readings on reflection on successful social movements; optional: host a dialogue session	Draft principles and barriers for your situation	Sketch a participation strategy and bring it to peer review; create a personal learning agenda

# Serious play

**You get a rich mix of powerful ideas, practical methods and practices, sandbox exploration, and tenderness toward the challenge of internalizing new learning.**

You will learn through lecture, conversation, theater-style activities, art-based reflection, writing, and field assignments to keep things lively and move the learning from head to heart and hands.

**Learning is grounded in theory,  
internalized through experience,  
deepened through dialogue,  
and made habit through practice.**





## You enter the door into a community of learning and practice.

We're not teaching "our method" or any particular dogma. By giving you a firm grip on the fundamentals and the resources you need to keep learning, we're plugging you into a community of practice that's growing around the world.



# Getting started

Let's talk about how best to grow the capacity of the people in your world. Here are some examples of what this might look like.

## **Organizations**

- » We are working with a group of non-profits to build their capacity to collaborate, and to include their larger community in that collaboration.
- » We frequently host and facilitate conversations and creative efforts that span organizational levels and silos, often focused on difficult but critical questions.

## **Events**

- » We've taught theater-based workshops on "Honest Communication" in partnership with the Pittsburgh Comedy Festival.
- » We conducted workshops on difficult conversations and shifting oppressive dynamics at the Summit Against Racism and the Union Project in Pittsburgh.

## **Leadership retreats**

- » We hosted and facilitated a three-day conversation among corporate design leaders who came together around the challenge of fostering open creative cultures
- » We've brought our methods and facilitation experience to many institutional leadership retreats and workshops

## **Universities**

- » We teach "Principles, Approaches and Methods of Social Innovation and Transition" in the Carnegie Mellon School of Design.
- » We teach "Fundamentals of Design for Social Innovation" in the Design for Social Innovation MFA at the School of Visual Arts.

**To learn more**

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**To contact us**

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# Who we are

**We've been at this a while.** We came together after a lot of crazy career, then spent eight years pulling together what we're offering now: the harvest of many many people's knowledge and wisdom. The content and learning activities have been refined through teaching in two graduate programs and numerous client engagements.

## **Marc Rettig**

Through his work at Fit Associates, Marc helps people connect creatively to one another, to the people they serve through their work, and to their common purpose. Through his writing and teaching (at Carnegie Mellon School of Design and the School of Visual Arts), he is working to advance the practice of creative collaboration in the challenges of social and cultural complexity.

With a diverse career that spans 38 years, an impressive list of clients, and a reputation for intelligence, depth, good humor and care, Marc knows how to get a group aligned and creating deeply together.

**Hannah du Plessis**

The shape of Hannah's work was forged in South Africa under the political system of apartheid. For the last three decades she has pursued the question, "How can we create a life-affirming world?" She has done so as community leader, design professional, researcher, facilitator, professor, improviser and artist. She enjoys helping groups of people make invisible aspects of life and work—beliefs, power and purpose—both tangible and practical through art, theatre and facilitation.

In order to create a world that works for more people, for more life, we have to collaborate on the process of dreaming and visioning and implementing that world.... The more people who co-create the future, the more people whose concerns will be addressed from the foundational level in this world.

adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy*

In any dark time, there is a tendency to veer toward fainting over how much is wrong or unmended in the world. Do not focus on that. Do not make yourself ill with overwhelm. There is a tendency too to fall into being weakened by perseverating on what is outside your reach, by what cannot yet be. Do not focus there. That is spending the wind without raising the sails. We are needed, this is all we can know.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes

[The] future is not just about firefighting and tinkering with the surface of structural change. It's not just about replacing one mindset that no longer serves us with another. It's a future that requires us to tap into a deeper level of our humanity, of who we really are and who we want to be as a society. It is a future that we can sense, feel, and actualize by shifting the inner place from which we operate. It is a future that in those moments of disruption begins to presence itself through us. This inner shift, from fighting the old to sensing and presencing an emerging future possibility, is at the core of all deep leadership work today. It's a shift that requires us to expand our thinking from the head to the heart. It is a shift from an ego-system awareness that cares about the well-being of oneself to an eco-system awareness that cares about the well-being of all, including oneself.

Otto Scharmer

The gift you carry for others is not an attempt to save the world but to fully belong to it. It's not possible to save the world by trying to save it. You need to find what is genuinely yours to offer the world before you can make it a better place. Discovering your unique gift to bring to your community is your greatest opportunity and challenge. The offering of that gift – your true self – is the most you can do to love and serve the world. And it is all the world needs.

Bill Plotkin, *Soulcraft*



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