More Perspectives, New Politics, New Life:
How a Small Group Used
The Integral Process
For Working On Complex Issues

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Abstract: This article reports on a small research project with citizens who wanted to address their community's chronically adversarial behaviors and atmosphere. It complements a longer research report on the same project, which is also published in this issue of *Integral Review*. The project used a structured public discourse process, The Integral Process For Working On Complex Issues (TIP). This article supplies background on TIP's origins, then focuses on two areas. First, it explains the process steps used in the project in conjunction with the issue that participants developed by using them. Second, using examples from participants' experiences of transformative impacts from their work in the project, it reports on two themes that underlie the main impacts and outcomes. The group worked on an issue about how its own intentions and tones needed to be chosen carefully if participants wanted to improve the adversarial local culture. The article includes links to "products" the group created in the course of its work. The themes were about dissolving "us versus them" mindsets and behaviors, and the liberation of being able to use multiple perspectives (as compared to only one point of view). This article is aimed at a diverse audience of individuals and organizations interested in promoting healthy individual and social change by addressing complex public issues and relationships. A brief epilogue sketches how TIP embeds criteria of integral theory.

Key words: action inquiry, complex issues, deliberation, decision-making, group process, political culture, public discourse, public relationships, replicable, The Integral Process For Working On Complex Issues, transformative.

Introduction

When a small group of citizens used a structured public issues discourse process to identify and begin to address a local issue of concern, the outcomes were productive, hopeful and even transformative. As a small group of volunteers in a research project, they chose to dig into their concerns about the adversarial climate of the local community, using "The Integral Process For Working On Complex Issues" (TIP).[1] During and after the six-week project, they experienced significant insights into the issue. These insights and the outcomes of their work had valuable implications for the community's future. They also had meaningful and in some cases transformative impacts on other areas of participants' lives. This article highlights the main steps involved in launching work on a complex issue by discussing this specific case. Because the

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steps are replicable, I hope to indicate how they apply to a broad range of other issues and contexts in addition to those in this case example.

Audiences that might have a practical interest in what happened during this project may include citizens and citizen-activists, public officials, public agencies, non-profit organizations, and foundations with missions to address public issues and/or public relationships. Practitioners and consultants in the fields of deliberative democracy, group dialogue, conflict resolution, and public policy may also find it of value.

As an introduction to the project and some of its findings, this article focuses on the TIP steps the group used, and how those steps enabled participants to select an issue of their choice and work on it productively. That work took place within the context of a small research project I conducted. Although this public issues version of TIP is designed for community-wide use, the project had limited research goals that did not include community-wide implementation. They were to: (a) find out what changes, if any, participants experienced that could be associated with their participation in this structured public issue process; (b) learn about the issue that participants would select, analyze, develop, and deliberate during the project; and (c) study what happened within the culture of the small group of participants. This article complements my longer qualitative research report,[2] which does not discuss the process and methods in detail.

To tell the project's story, I begin with some background information on the experiences and observations that led me to develop this process for working on public issues. Then I introduce three of the project's dimensions. One of those is the set of process steps and their purposes, to show how they function in complex issues work. Another is the local issue that participants selected to work on, concerning their community's adversarial political culture. These first two dimensions intertwine, so I discuss them together. Those foundations need to be set before I, thirdly, introduce two of the major themes in the transformative impacts that participants reported. In the conclusion, I briefly summarize the project outcomes and suggest some of the implications of the project that may be relevant to this article's audience.

An Introduction to the Process

This section provides some brief historical background on TIP and my motivations for having developed it. About 20 years ago, I was at a stage in my life when I could begin to invest energy in my local county's civic affairs and issues. The most fascinating and troublesome feature I observed was that the same knotty issues and concerns were talked about year after year, even from one decade to another. As is true everywhere, different issues concerned certain populations more than they concerned others, and the large range of issues was much the same as people throughout the U.S. and other Western countries talk about. Some of those issues were localized concerns, some were regional, and some were at state and national levels. People who were talking about these issues included citizens on the street, those who participated in ongoing

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[2] A more comprehensive research report is included in this issue of Integral Review, entitled *Perspectives On Troubled Interactions: What Happened When A Small Group Began To Address Its Community's Adversarial Political Culture*. That report includes traditional research elements of literature review, theory, methodology, etc. This qualitative research with human subjects used an informed consent process and obtained signed, informed consent forms from each participant. It gathered data through the six weekly sessions as well as individual interviews with the participants both before and after that series of sessions. The project took place in a small city in Ohio. The eight participants ranged in age from 31 to 57 years and had a wide variety of educational backgrounds.

community leadership programs, local officials in villages, townships, and county offices, social service agencies, and active members of the business community. Despite all the talk, virtually nothing happened to address those perennial concerns. I did a lot of listening to the *nature* of that talk as well as the issues. I began to analyze what was going on and why, imagined what needed to be different to shift the chronic inertia, and experimented with my early ideas.

When I spent a number of years associated with Kettering Foundation as an independent action researcher, I learned that people in communities around the U.S. were talking about their issues and concerns in ways that were similar to communities in my county. I estimate that I have worked with and listened to more than a thousand citizens over all of these years, and the same patterns have shown up across all the talk about public issues. When my association with the Foundation began in the early 1990s, some of its folks were in the early stages of sharing how they helped people talk about issues. They had found that it was important to "name and frame" public issues so that citizens could deliberate about public policy concerns and other "wicked problems." Concurrent with ongoing volunteer work in my local area, I did both short- and long-term action research and extended workshops with groups of people from over a dozen communities that the Foundation attracted to its community politics program. The processes to name and frame issues were messy and frustrating affairs for many of these citizens, and the results of trying to have community deliberations about the issues were often unproductive.

Informed by my independent studies in several disciplines and my ongoing analyses of public issues, I pursued my own theoretical and action research agendas to develop and test methods for working on complex issues. I wanted to use the familiar patterns of issue-talk and transform them through orderly, comprehensive, and productive methods. My larger goal has been to help people give complex issues and questions the kind of attention and systemic action they need.

My years of experience taught me that the Kettering Foundation is right. Issues do need to be named and framed. Yet, through my research on and analyses of the nature of public issues and the usual patterns of issue talk, I developed three convictions. One is that those tasks need to be approached and performed far differently than Kettering's method. This seems most important if the goal is to produce the multiple, high-quality issue frameworks that foster real deliberation and decisions about action at each phase of serious work on issues. Another is that additional steps need to identify the layers of complexity within typical public topics. There is more involved than often meets the eye, and those layers need to be treated as the nested issues they really are, and get addressed as such. The third conviction is that truly deliberative decision-making is essential to develop the scope of systemic action that complex issues and questions need. It has an important role in organizing, adjusting, and evaluating action. All of these are essential—that is, *integral*—to the thoroughness of efforts to address complex social systems. With these prerequisites met, I hypothesize that we should see some meaningful social transformations—in our issues-talk, communities, organizations, and more—because we will have the tools and insights we need to address the issues and questions we are concerned about. This is the overall purpose of TIP.

The process itself had previously been through field-testing, and this project was for implementing it to a limited extent. Its unique issue-framing process, which can be used as a standalone task, has been used a number of times over recent years. This project was the first time since field testing that I implemented the sequence of TIP's steps up to and including its approach to issue-deliberation. Since this project was done with only one small group rather than in a community-wide setting, this implementation did not extend beyond the deliberation.

Deliberation is often called "weighing carefully." This is a process of oscillating back and forth to carefully consider the pros, cons, and implications of multiple options. The oscillations take place inside and among individuals. If we are looking for them, they may be observed as zigzags within individual thoughts and focused, deliberative group discussions. This oscillating dynamic is a universal quality of decision-making. Indeed, we reach decisions by deliberating. Deliberations are intermediate points within processes to address complex issues: they are not end-points. This is because, if we are serious about addressing their roots and remedies in earnest, most issues require that the *polis* is engaged and involved over time—not as a one-shot deal. That includes individuals, groups, and institutions or agencies that have anything to do with a particular issue: those that support its existence, those who are affected by it, and those who can change the factors that have sustained the issue as a problem.[3]

For these reasons, TIP is designed for replicable, widespread use. It can also be tailored to organizational settings, where complex issues and questions have the same core qualities as public issues, and often need the same kind of systemic attention. It is beyond the scope I have set for this article to discuss the processes involved to scale and implement TIP in these and other contexts.

The Process Steps

This section begins with a brief orientation to the five main steps that were used over the six weeks of the project. Following that overview, in one sub-section per step, I discuss the step and the issue-work the group did in it. Each sub-section begins by repeating the general description of the step, and then describes the step's purpose and outcome before introducing the group's work. For some steps, I provide a narrative about the group's work. For others, I allow the group's work to speak for itself by providing a link to an actual product or incorporating a product into the article. Due to its limited size and purpose, this project did not use all of TIP's steps or all of the processes within them; however, it did include the most essential ingredients for beginning to work on any issue.

Orientation to the Steps

This section conveys that TIP's basic structure is sequential. The sequence goes progressively deeper into issues so that their many facets can be identified, understood, and addressed. This is a valuable orientation to keep in mind: TIP steps go vertically deeper in order to achieve meaningful focus and effectiveness. This is different than processes that move horizontally from problem identification to solutions. This reflects TIP's assumption that (a) the nature of complex issues means that there are no quick fixes to them, and (b) that many distinct facets need tailored attention if an issue is to be addressed at its roots, i.e., systemically.

This project used the following steps.
-   Identify all the topics of concern within the bounds that the group has set for itself, e.g., community, region, organization, etc. Map how they interconnect and impact each other. Select a topic to focus on first.

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[3] The subjects of *why* and *how* to engage and involve the polis are critically important and they warrant a full discussion in a separate writing.

- Identify the issues that are components of that topic. Select one of those issues. Identify the internal and external factors that support that issue's continued existence.
- Identify all the possible reactive and proactive actions that could have positive impacts on the issue and that can be done by an array of diverse individuals, groups, and institutional actors. Select one of the actions that has high potential to make a meaningful change in the issue and that will require decision-making before it can be implemented effectively.
- Develop several viable, diverse approaches toward deciding upon that action, using the template provided to include all competing perspectives toward each approach. Produce a brief issue booklet about this question that needs deciding.
- With the aid of the issue booklet, deliberate all the pros, cons, and real world consequences and trade-offs involved with each approach, and articulate priorities, decisions, and the reasons for them.

The selection activities within the first three steps are illustrated in Figure 1. Its dotted images are intended to convey that at each step, a group selects one facet to work on at a time, out of many possible facets. This is like selecting one ingredient out of a stew. Figure 1 implies that a lot of diverse efforts are involved to work on all the ingredients of an issue. An issue's complex make-up requires a lot of activity to dismantle it—just as a lot of collective activity has created and sustained the issue in the first place. The TIP steps are designed to unpack the ingredients that go into creating

Step 1. Select a topic to work on.

Step 2. From within the topic, select one of its issues.

Step 3. From the actions list, select one for decision-making.

Steps 4 and 5

Figure 1: Selection activity in steps 1 – 3.

an "issue stew" so that people can be methodical, realistic, and thorough about their social change efforts. Ideally, many people work to address different ingredients, and TIP assumes at least some levels of concurrent activity in all of its steps except the first one. To stay within this article's focus, I do not give these levels of concurrent activity more attention beyond this acknowledgement that they are important for effective social change efforts and that TIP assumes them.
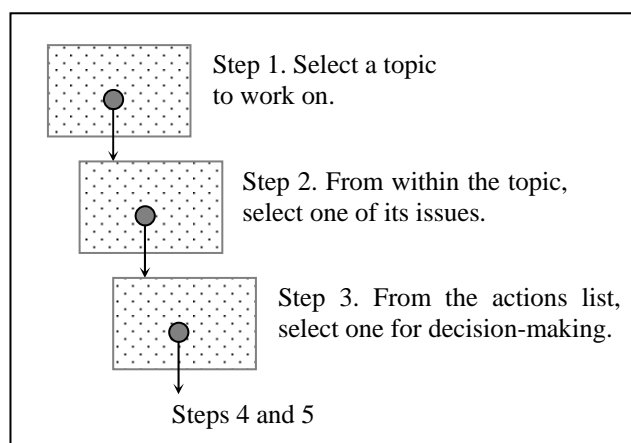
The Main Process Steps

Step 1

The first task in this step is to identify all the topics of concern to the group, or group of groups, that convenes. Once that is done, several simple processes map people's perceptions of the topics and their understandings of how the topics connect and affect each other. The purpose of step 1 is for a group to make a well-considered selection of one topic to focus on first.

In the first part of the step, the group in this case identified 39 topics as concerns. In my combined role of facilitator and recorder, I wrote on the wide flip charts whatever they mentioned. I did not edit any statements, nor did I invite or permit any discussion, for example, to find out if everyone agreed that something was a concern. The principle here is that all

concerns are legitimate and have to be included, even if someone in the group does not agree with what someone else contributes. A concern is a concern and cannot be negated. This group seemed quite homogenous as people energetically cited their concerns. These centered on land-use and growth-related topics, many facets of the troubled communications and behaviors within the community, and some other social issues. Once they believed that they had reached the point of identifying everything, we did a brief process to notice different qualities that the topics had, based on how they were described thus far. The participants considered if the topics were about peoples' attitudes or values, and/or about human behaviors, and/or about how the community's systems or institutions were (or were not) functioning. Later, when we had moved to a process to cluster the topics, we noticed that the troubled communications cluster was weighted more heavily with attitude and behavioral qualities, and the land-use and growth-related cluster was more weighted as community system qualities.

To prepare them to do that clustering, participants first had to consider and identify which topics were interconnected with others. The simple connections that need to be identified at this stage are usually two basic types: cause and impact, i.e., one topic that is a problem contributes to another topic that is a problem. This was a thoughtful, though quick, linear process for the group to complete, with me drawing arrows to and from whatever topics they told me to connect. The outcome of identifying these interconnections was a map of the territory that concerned them. It indicated which topics were causing more problems than others. Such maps can show people that serious attention to one well-chosen topic of concern can affect many other concerns. This is usually helpful to note, so that the map does not seem to be overwhelming. Instead, people can use it as an ongoing reference tool that they update as they address their concerns; it can provide a meta-view of improvements, changing conditions, and adjusted priorities.

In their initial, raw form, such maps are usually a messy spaghetti-weave to look at, and this group's was no exception. Yet, that mapping needed to inform the group's choice of which topic to select. Thus, the next task helped to sort out the mapped topics by developing visual clusters or "icebergs." The group identified which topics were more like the tip of an iceberg, and which topics were more like an underlying base of support. The topics that are in the base of the iceberg will normally provide a practical range of starting points to choose from because they tend to represent causal factors rather than symptoms. This exercise is not for analyzing topics with any depth; it is a light-touch method to facilitate choosing a first topic to start with. Figure 2 illustrates the general approach to developing iceberg clusters.
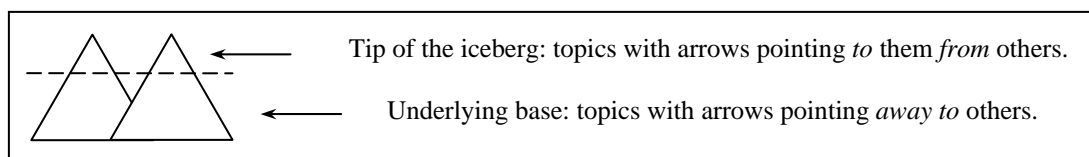

Figure 2: Developing topical iceberg cluster(s).

As they discussed which topics were more like the tip of an iceberg, people in this group distinguished the three clusters mentioned earlier. Step 1 does not require or invite participants to identify or analyze the relationships between clusters. In this case, the group had a catalyst to try to analyze the relationships. One person observed that the cluster of land use-related topics reflected consequences and symptoms of recent years' changes in the growing community's former status quo. Another person observed that the other cluster, associated with the strains that characterized local public life, reflected issues of process: "how we get the job done, relate, and

communicate, how we do things, how things are working or not working." Once these characterizations were in the conversation, participants seemed to feel impelled to figure out how to name the gap between the clusters: What *was* the missing link that would transform one cluster's strains *so that* the iceberg of symptoms and consequences in the other cluster could get whittled down? The group could not figure out the answer to that question, but it did identify that the missing link would need mutual education of officials and citizens, and that it was hard to make the connection between the clusters when there was such a lack of communication in the community. This group ended its step 1 work when it selected its topic. Since these seemed to stand in the way of addressing all the topics of concern, participants selected: "the troubled interactions between the government and the people." (Click here to view the outcome of the group's work in step 1).

Step 2

Once a topic is selected, the next step begins with identifying the issues that comprise that topic. From among them, one is selected as a specific issue to address in earnest. Methods in this step help people identify all of the factors they can about what sorts of things support that issue's continued existence. Step 2's purpose is to develop a thorough understanding of the issue. Its outcome is a summary issue description that orients the next steps of work.

In the first part of this step, people articulate why the topic specifically concerns them and how it matters to them at all. Then they unpack the ingredients of the topic. There is no *single* way to describe why a topic is a problem that should be addressed, because it is really made up of a collection of causes, influences, and problematic impacts. These separate ingredients in the topic's stew need to be specifically identified, because each of them is usually an issue unto itself that needs attention.

In order to sort through the causes and impacts of troubled interactions between government and citizens, participants in this case needed to tell some of the stories of their experiences. This was because the topic held quite a "charge" for some of the participants, given their very difficult history in the community. Once it finished this task, the group had deepened the topic of troubled interactions by identifying that "the issue, the problem with that is that citizens are unaware, frustrated, and therefore powerless, uninvolved, and misinformed." This became the temporary working title of the overall issue they wanted to address. Their summary issue description (below) would further develop it and explain the reasoning that led from the topic to this issue.

The next task was to identify all the factors that held that issue in place *as* an issue that needed attention. The group worked with three basic elements to develop its understanding of the problem, and members of the group included themselves in these. The first element was all the attitudes, assumptions, and biases that different individuals and groups of citizens, officials, and public servants had, or seemed to have, about each other. The next element was all the concrete behaviors that supported the issue; in other words, all the things that people were doing that kept it propped up as a problem. These included behaviors of individuals, cliques of citizens, and government policies and administrative actions, and of course, they related to many of the attitudes in the first element. The third element was to identify the things that individuals or the government did *not* do—but *could*—that supported the issue's existence by their absence. Those included behaviors and policies, too. All together, those elements gave the group a vivid understanding of why their issue was a legitimate public issue. Step 2's work ended with the preparation of a neutral, non-blaming summary issue description, as follows.

*How do we improve interactions between government and people in ways that
reduce frustration, increase information exchange, and
foster citizen participation and cooperation in their government?*

The nature of the problem. The government and some of the people of the city and the surrounding area are increasingly alienated and adversarial. People who are troubled by this relationship, and the interactions that characterize it, are those who tend to be active in civic affairs. There is a long history of mistrust and conflict between groups, which has gone unaddressed.

Why this is a problem. For many active citizens, this adversarial relationship has a major negative impact on their quality of life. Active citizens need to feel at home in their community, rather than shut out of meaningful participation in civic affairs by their own government processes. As citizens of a democratic nation, they need to be involved in the rule-making and decision processes that impact their investments in their quality of life. Those investments include relationships, property values, and concern for the welfare of the whole community in the near and long term. Adversarial dynamics destroy relationships and entrench beliefs that "who ever does not agree with me, is against me." In a civilized 21st Century community, it is a public problem that citizens are feeling and acting like enemies toward one another.

Effects of the problem. Some active citizens end up feeling trapped in frustration, anger, or confusion. Some feel unaware of things they need to know. Others drop out of active engagement in civic affairs to avoid the frustration. Others spend large amounts of time and money to get their views included on the public decision-making agenda. Some fear retribution for getting involved in issues or for having views that differ from local officials and other citizens. Some are discouraged that the situation will not get better. There is risk of inconsistent and less effective official decisions when processes do not build in time to consider the full range of short- and long-term impacts. Such decisions can deepen divisions, and cost time, effort, and tax dollars to address their "fallout." Such unintended consequences have included lawsuits, ill will, lost trust, and small problems becoming big problems. In the adversarial atmosphere, viable solutions can go unexplored or be torpedoed if the wrong persons offer them. Mutual mistrust results in behaviors that widen the existing divisions. For example, some citizen requests for public information go unfilled, some feel the need to have a witness to certain conversations, some people quit speaking to each other, and some people who are not on "the right side" fear and/or have experienced a range of unfavorable treatments by city employees or official groups serving them at taxpayer expense. These cumulative effects result in some exemplary elements of the city government's mission going unfulfilled.

Causes of the problem. Both the processes of government and the attitudes of citizens—outside of and inside government—need to evolve, because both have trapped the community in troublesome patterns. Both government and citizens operate in ignorance of what all the "others" deal with and are concerned about. The community does not know how to handle its inherent diversity in non-adversarial ways.

Step 3

Once an issue has a clear summary description, it is ready for step 3's task to identify all the possible reactive and proactive actions that could have positive impacts on the issue. These amount to an action-system that would need diverse individuals, groups, and institutional actors to implement it. The purpose of this step in a larger setting is to do the first layer of organizing, launching, and coordinating action to address the issue. That includes volunteer activity and policy work, and starting work on at least one initial issue question that will need public, deliberative decision-making.

In this small project, the outcome of this step was confined to selecting one of the actions that would have high potential to make a meaningful change in the issue *and* that would require deliberation. For this group, the purpose of deliberating was to give them several experiences. They were: (a) to go through the process to prepare an issue for deliberation in step 4, (b) to have the experience of deliberative decision-making in step 5 *as if* they were the community,[4] and (c) to begin imagining how such deliberations could benefit the larger community and its issues.

The summary issue description, above, served as the basis and inspiration in step 3 to brainstorm all the possible actions of every kind that could address the issue. Its three pages' worth of diverse actions at all levels of the community revealed to the group that there were no magic wands involved to address the issue: just a lot of well-tailored actions of the right kind— inventive, mundane, and technical—by enough diverse players. The actions needed to add up in two ways. They needed to add up to ending the multitude of supports that held the issue in place. They also needed to include a comprehensive array of new actions and policies that would add up to proactive supports for a more positive political culture and system for public business. This potential action-system indicated a wide variety of voluntary actions that individual citizens, groups, and the government could take. At the same time, there were a significant number of proposed changes to public policy and administrative procedures. Some of them would need serious public attention, deliberation, and decision-making.

For this project, the group's last task in step 3 was to select one of the proposed actions that met TIP's criteria for when a question or issue requires deliberative decision-making.[5] As with most of the choice-points required in TIP, the group had to weigh priorities to select one. With such a large list of important items, this was challenging. So, this group began by highlighting four actions that it would choose from. Couched in the form of open-ended, neutral issue-questions, they were:

- How do we involve the whole community in deciding changes to zoning codes?
- Who needs to be included and considered in deciding zoning variances?
- How do we ensure transparency and access to all public information?
- How do we ensure accountability and protections in cases of retribution?

During step 2's work, I had begun to question if the group was as homogenous as participants' earlier assessments indicated, and to question my earlier assumptions about this, too. Then, and during some of step 3's discussions, I suspected that several people had somehow developed misplaced assumptions about the project's purpose. A few comments seemed to infer

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[4] This project tailored TIP's design to accommodate the limitations of a small group working on a public issue, since such a group cannot make decisions that require many other people's perspectives and experience.

[5] These criteria are beyond this article's scope to include here.

that this group would decide how to resolve whichever issue was selected. One small group could not resolve such an issue, of course. And, although subtle at this stage, I was picking up that there were different perspectives about *how* to approach whatever that action might be. I was able to digest all the implications of these signals after step 3's first session, although it would have been better if I could have explored them with the group with more immediacy. Those dynamics may have been in the mix at the point, above, when the task was to select a specific issue-question to work on. Rather than select one of those four questions, the group deviated from that task. Spontaneously, the discussion began to broaden and it was sprinkled with some new questions. These included: Why do we mistrust them? How do we understand the role and responsibility of government? How do we understand the roles and responsibilities of citizens?

A group may have a mixture of reasons to depart from a task. It can be as simple as not really understanding the task in the first place, feeling resistance to making a choice, and/or other dynamics. Thus, I always pay close attention at such junctures. Rather than insist that they finish the task, it was more important to let this new discussion unfold a little bit to listen to what was going on. Then, we reached the end of the session's allotted time. Step 3's final task of selecting an issue-question would have to wait until the next session, even though the participants felt discontented with the confusion they created during their final discussion.

I believe that a unique combination of factors led the group into its task-avoidance and confusion. People were juggling the emotional charges of the issue, along with the unusual high-level nature of the issue, along with the different assumptions mentioned above, along with an underlying *group level* issue that had not yet been identified: I sensed that there was an invisible "elephant in the room" that had to be identified so that productive work could resume. The dynamics indicated to me that a fifth issue-question had to join that list.

Between Steps 3 and 4

The discussion that closed the last session had continued to reflect some negative judgments of officials and other citizens. These had shown up in the earlier steps, and had quite understandable origins in historical community events. Half of the participants later referred to this as "the negative tone." If such a tone flavored efforts to foster positive change in an adversarial political culture, it would fail by being quite like the very culture it wanted to change. Ingredients of the invisible elephant in the room included the contradiction between (a) the group's expressed desire to improve the community atmosphere and interactions and (b) the tone that characterized a number of participants' attitudes—and then the silence about the contradiction. The most recent discussion suggested that participants were not of one mind about how, why, and when they should engage their overall goal, much less of one mind for choosing one of the four issue-questions they prioritized.

Some of the participants talked about this during the individual interviews after the end of the sessions. One of them mentioned that she had been aware of some differences among group members' orientations, but she had figured since everyone shared the overall goal to improve things in the community, that those differences would not really matter. By the end of the project, she had concluded that such differences would probably have repercussions if they had not been addressed directly.

The benefit of that last discussion was that the participants' diversity of key questions and confusion came out in the open. There were clear signs that the earlier sessions' opportunities to

voice a wide range of emotions, along with their origins, had not lessened the strong influence of those feelings. These factors would make it easier for me to introduce them to their elephant.

I decided to begin the next session with an extra discussion before the group would choose which issue-question to work on in the remainder of the project. I would call attention to the dynamics I had been observing, and recommend a shift of focus. The shift would be from addressing the overall community issue at this stage, to first address the within-the-group differences. Unaddressed, I suspected those differences would make it hard to succeed in anything they wanted to do later on the community issue.

It is a potentially transformative process whenever we shift our focus from just paying attention to issues "out there," to also examining our own perspectives and assumptions "in here" before and/or while acting. This is called action inquiry.[6] For many people, it is an unfamiliar personal experience and an uncommon group experience. I felt an ethical imperative, for the sake of the group and the overall community issue, that we address the elephant in the room, even if it was hard for me to communicate to the participants what I was hearing and sensing, and why it led me to the conviction that it was important to shift the focus. With this goal in mind, I prepared some supplemental handouts for the next session, hoping they would facilitate the upcoming discussion about this elephant.

I would call the elephant a "tone and intention" issue-question. By tone, I meant the personal judgments that underlie human speech and behaviors. Judgments can be negative, or positive, or simply non-existent when someone feels genuinely neutral about things. Many times, people are unaware that their silent judgments—negative or positive—come through loud and clear as the tone within their speech and behaviors. Some of the participants in this group had negative judgments, while some exhibited no active judgments at all. The negative tones were influential in creating the group's atmosphere (just as they were in creating the community's atmosphere). By the term intention, I meant whatever we *intend* to have happen. Intentions reflect the *motives* that guide behaviors, and these motives underlie the tones of our speech and behaviors. In this group, there were mixtures of motivations that showed up in the contradictions described earlier. In times of change, it is very natural to have conflicting intentions, and we should always expect them in ourselves and in others. In this case, some were reactions to the past (e.g., "we feel the need to punish them first") and they conflicted with sincere intentions to work for a better future. Deliberating about a tone and intention issue-question would help participants sort out their mixtures of intentions and decide how they wanted to use them.

We spent some time at the beginning of the next session to discuss all of this. The rationale for working on their own tones and intentions seemed sensible to participants, at least on the surface. Possibly assisted by whatever trust-levels they had developed toward me, they agreed to shift their focus. It seemed to make sense that their own tones and intentions would affect other people if they tried to improve the community's adversarial atmosphere. The group developed new wording to capture the question they would work with. The wording reflected the idea about the impacts of the group's tone and intention on their larger issue of concern, expressed in these terms: "What kinds of relationships do we, as a group, want to have around the issue of troubled interactions with and among citizens, officials, and public servants?" With step 3's task completed, the group was ready for the next step.

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[6] See: Bill Torbert & Associates. (2004). *Action inquiry: The secret of timely and transforming leadership.* San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Step 4

Step 4's premise is that (a) people have a serious, specific question about taking action and (b) the question is more complex than one that just needs a debate between yes or no. The question must be one that could have multiple answers to either choose from or to intermix as a tailored response to the question. Its purpose is to make this complexity explicit so it can be worked with. In step 4, people develop several viable and distinctly different approaches toward taking action. These approaches need to ensure that all competing perspectives toward each approach are likely to be included. The process of developing such an "issue framework" creates an informed basis for deliberating about such a complex decision. The outcome of step 4 is a brief issue booklet about the question that needs deciding. It includes the reasons for asking the issue-question and a neutral presentation of the diverse possible approaches to it. The booklet serves to educate people about the issue, and people refer to it as a resource as they deliberate.

When a group has an array of tones and intentions to deliberate, as in this case, people can weigh how each option may contribute to or detract from an overall goal. Then, they can carefully choose conscious strategies in advance of any action. This can reduce the odds of people self-sabotaging their own efforts once their active work begins. This is especially valuable when the stated goal is to transform an adversarial political culture and there are some bitter feelings about it to begin with.

In its fourth step, the group developed four very different approaches toward the tones and intentions it could take, using TIP's template for issue framing. Each approach was a different way to respond to the question, "What kinds of relationships do we, as a group, want to have around the issue of troubled interactions with and among citizens, officials, and public servants?" The idea of asking about the kinds of relationships came from the group's recognition that intentions and their tones *flavor* relationships. Thus, the titles given to the four approaches reflected a different flavor, as follows.

> Approach 1: The intention and tone of preparing to organize an "us vs. them" campaign to get the changes we want.
> Approach 2: The intention and tone of preparing to take an "it's the law" approach to enforce needed changes.
> Approach 3: The intention and tone of preparing to take a positive "strategic encouragement" approach to get changes rolling.
> Approach 4: The intention and tone of preparing to take a fully collaborative community-wide approach to work on changes.

Although they always have qualitatively different subject matter, all approaches use the same outline to develop that content, using the following sub-headings.
1. We might favor this approach if we assume that…
2. This approach to the overall issue would be best because…
3. Examples of how we would prepare for taking this approach.
4. This approach may be worrisome, because…
5. Trade-offs that would be involved, including impacts on the kinds of relationships we want.

As introduced earlier in this article, deliberation refers to the natural oscillations of the decision-making process that goes on inside of people and groups all of the time. Those natural

processes often take place rapidly and unconsciously under the surface, unless there is a major decision that we take our time to make. Then, we are more likely to notice that we are weighing the pros and cons of doing something. To weigh the pros and cons of just one thing is like having a debate between two possible answers. When the question is more complex because there are more than two possible answers and we have many consequences and what-ifs to consider, our internal oscillations can seem like a mish-mash. This can make it quite difficult to even articulate all of the options, much less the pro-and-con zigzags that swim in the mix. To lend coherent order to such messy decisions, each section of an approach, indicated by the sub-headings above, offers distinctly different opportunities to notice and shed light on those zigzags. Once identified, they can become active agents in the process of informed decision-making.

With this project's focal shift to intentions and tones, the processes in steps 4 and 5 proved to be the most meaningful and in some cases transformative for the participants, based on what they said in interviews afterward. The following description of step 4's work emphasizes the process of taking multiple, other perspectives while developing approaches to any issue. I recommend that readers look at each of the four, one page-long approaches the group developed, (click here), for two reasons. One is that they are lively and descriptive, which should make this discussion more meaningful. Another is that they offer a glimpse at the potential value of "politically *in*correct" language to deepen understandings of certain issues.

In order to do the step 4 tasks, each separate perspective has to be developed into an approach that is tailored to the question a group will deliberate later. This means "putting on" different vantage points, akin to putting on a different pair of glasses to see things differently until the next pair of glasses is put on. A chief benefit from step 4 that participants identified was *that* TIP provided distinctly different perspectives to work with. Since it is common for people to think and behave automatically from their own, customary view of things, it was a new experience to discover that *multiple* perspectives could be purposefully used to look at the same question. They found that each perspective had real legitimacy based on experiences, current conditions, assumptions, and needs.

To develop the perspective into an approach, participants first had to identify what that perspective would assume about "how things work." With my coaching support, they came up with two or three assumptions that seemed to underlie each perspective regarding their issue. Each set of assumptions had a different-sounding tone, which created the approach's flavor. For example, one assumption included in Approach 1 (the combative, "us vs. them" perspective) was "They're out to get/beat us." An assumption in Approach 2 (the legalistic perspective) was "We cannot trust our government officials." In contrast to these, an assumption in Approach 4 (the collaborative, community-wide flavor) was "Other citizens and city officials want good public relationships, good decisions, and effective processes just as much as we do." Since different assumptions result in different tones, intentions, and behaviors, developing the assumptions was the first task to do on each approach. Keeping the approach's perspective "on," participants developed the reasoning to explain why the approach made good and legitimate sense; this further develops the unique flavor of the approach. Then, they imagined and described concrete actions with that flavor that could address the overall community issue. These actions served as examples of how they might implement the tone and intention of each distinct perspective if it were used.

The second part of developing an approach so that it will generate oscillations that foster deliberative decisions is to *take off* the perspective that flavors the approach, and to put on as many *other* perspectives as possible that would find the approach worrisome for any reason.

Under the sub-heading, "This approach may be worrisome, because," TIP's template takes a very systematic approach to ensuring that all imaginable worrisome aspects are included in the approach. This is crucial for all public issues because such issues affect many different people who are in different circumstances, and not all of them will "be in the room" when such issues are deliberated. However, with this group's focus on its own tone and intention, I followed my intuitive decision to facilitate this part of the task by relying entirely on what the participants would come up with on their own. Without any prompting from TIP, they would surely know what things would be worrisome to *them* if they adopted any of these different tones and intentions in the larger community.

The final part of developing an approach is to identify the real-world trade-offs that would be likely if the approach were taken. At least several of these have to be identified for inclusion in the issue's booklet. They need to describe likely, concrete consequences for diverse people if the approach is implemented. This is because different people and groups, their self-interests, and the common good are impacted differently by different actions. We all do not have the same settings, concerns, values, or responsibilities. Thus, trade-offs illustrate real impacts that could be experienced from different angles, including individuals' long-term hopes for the overall issue. A list of viable trade-offs not only keeps the issue tied to on-the-ground realities; it also further informs and strengthens the deliberative oscillations as people consider the future impacts of any decisions.

The group put on and took off all of these very diverse perspectives without judging or discussing the merits or demerits of the approaches they were developing. This is an important discipline, because it is unproductive to jump ahead before an essential tool is ready: deliberations have to wait until there is a complete issue booklet. Thus, these participants immersed themselves in each task at hand in order to create a meaningful and realistic vehicle that would serve their deliberations in step 5. These four approaches, combined with the summary issue description and some other material, formed the issue booklet that they used in the last session of the project.

Step 4 freed each person to give full voice to a wide range of distinctly different concerns without feeling pressure to advocate for any one of them. One participant reflected later on how the two steps—framing the approaches as a group, and then deliberating them as a group—served an important function.

I was just thinking of the insight that we tend not to do that kind of decision-making in groups. To say, "Here are our options, let's describe each one very thoroughly without trying to judge them, and then take a break, and come back to it and try to evaluate and judge. But only after we've really understood what each one of them means." It's a process that takes the competition out of it, up front, so people aren't feeling they have to argue their point. They're just describing each one, and people can suspend their opinions long enough to detail each piece of it. So, it seems like it brings some perspective, as well as it drops the intensity; they don't feel they have to fight all the time for their particular thing.

They did not have to change their opinions in order to do this step, nor did they "lose" themselves by putting on and taking off perspectives that were different from their familiar favorites. To the contrary, they were preparing an orderly way to *use* all perspectives. As it turned out, this process of purposefully donning other perspectives helped many of them discover more about themselves, others, and their options for ways to operate in the world.

Step 5

With the issue booklet in hand, step 5 puts all the preparation to work. It is a deliberation of all the pros, cons, and real world consequences and trade-offs involved with each approach. Its outcome is an informed group of people that can articulate priorities, decisions, and the reasons for them. The outcome can include identifying new factors, e.g., if more information about the issue is needed, if more people need to be involved, and even if any other questions need to be deliberated before the current decision can be finalized or before things can really move forward.

There are several basic purposes of the deliberative decision-making process (and there can be more than several, depending on the issue and its scope). The first basic purpose is to reveal and understand the issue's complexity. The complexity reflects many different perspectives and the issue's impacts on different interests, concerns, needs, and real or potential conflicts of various kinds. To discover the complexities of an issue while deliberating it is a collective learning process, and it is always wise to do the learning before making decisions.

The next basic purpose is to identify the actors that are involved with the issue in any way, as thoroughly as possible. Actors will be individuals, groups, and organizations and institutions of various kinds, depending on the issue. They may be involved in a variety of ways, for example, by: (a) the impacts on them when the issue is addressed (and not addressed), (b) their resources or lack of resources, (c) significant changes they would have to make to implement or adjust to the issue being addressed, and/or (d) other facets of the issue that come to light *by virtue of* identifying the actors that are really involved. All of these factors matter, *if* the issue is to be addressed effectively.

A final basic purpose of deliberative decision-making is to lay the informed foundations and directions for organizing and coordinating complex work on the issue and the layers that are revealed in the process. This is because the kinds of issue-questions that need to be deliberated are often part of a systemic "whole" that requires much more than a one-time meeting or technical remedies.

For the project group's issue-question, the complexity was different. The primary purpose of its deliberation was to find out "where they landed" on the question, without needing to take any action at all to implement it. It was essentially an action inquiry. They would inquire into themselves, the local situation, and one another, to consider how different tones and intentions could impact public relationships if they flavored future actions. Another purpose that I hoped it would serve was to enable participants to imagine how deliberation, in general, could be used in the community to address the topics of concern that they had identified earlier.

The earlier negative tone was missing by the time this group began step 5. Two persons later expressed their surprise at this "dramatic" group shift. I think the explanation lies in the insightful observation made by the participant quoted above: the process of framing different approaches seemed to dissipate the negative energy.

As it concluded its deliberative session, the overall preference of the group was the tone, intention, and action-examples of the fourth approach (community-wide collaborative work) that it deliberated about. This was because the actions that could implement that approach would hold the greatest potential to foster *un*troubled interactions in the community: it would change the workings of public relationships and decisions. The group pragmatically recognized that there would be issues or situations when such a higher-level approach would not fit or succeed, in which case the next lower approach could be appropriate to try. It identified that there may be

cases where none of the last three approaches could work and the first approach would be needed as a last resort.

The content and quality of the group's thoughtful deliberations are best reported by allowing them to speak in their own voice. I believe this is especially so in this case, because it was a groundbreaking event: people conducting a truly deliberative action inquiry about their tones and intentions and how their decisions would impact an already-troubled community. Their work was characterized by the rhythmic back and forths of deliberation's interactive reasoning. In that session, they demonstrated the capacities to remain focused, build constructively on one another's contributions, and arrive at well-reasoned conclusions tailored to their personal styles and the community's history and context. Click here to read the report on their deliberative session, which I prepared and edited for them from the session's audio recordings. It conveys the unique character of deliberative dynamics more effectively than any of the words I have written to describe it.

Transformative Impacts

The purpose of this section is to introduce two of the major themes that reflect significant impacts participants discussed at length during my final interviews with them.[7] In the first of two sub-sections, I draw from two participants' experiences to discuss the theme of transforming "us versus them" mindsets and behaviors. Then I develop the theme of liberation, also through highlighting specific participants' experiences. This theme showed up in personal and interpersonal dealings, public and private. These two themes merged to underlie a unique community project that two members of the group began to plan after the last group session. All of these influences could be expected to have some positive direct and indirect impacts on the adversarial community atmosphere over time.

"Getting Off Our Horses"

The negative tone that had been apparent in the group was initially introduced into the group dynamics by several people. They had had an accumulating number of disturbing experiences dealing with city hall and certain groups of citizens over the years they had lived in the community.[8] Each of them had a different kind of history in the community and different levels of activity. I cite only two of them because they were more influential within the group and the way they described their changes illustrate this theme best. One of them, who I will call Larry, had lived in the city for only a few years. In that time, he had trouble getting public information from officials to help him solve various problems and to inform his voting decisions. Along with those frustrations, he was concerned about the community being overdeveloped with both residential and commercial buildings. He had never attended a public meeting or been visibly active, but he considered himself very active by virtue of his considerable mental, residential, and child-rearing investments in community life. The other was a long-time activist who I will

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[7] Descriptive portraits of all participants are included in the longer research report in this issue, referenced in this article's footnote 1. They report the changes in people's levels of hope and motivation before and after the project, and convey more information about how each person experienced the process and applied its benefits.

[8] An analysis of how this tone "infected" the tone of the group is included in the longer research report.

call Janet. She was involved in various ways in community organizing, citizen referendum initiatives, and lawsuits against the city to overturn or prevent certain official decisions. Janet and Larry began the project with points of view about local affairs that were quite similar to the first and second approaches that the group deliberated. Approach 1 was the tone and intention of an "us versus them campaign," which was how Janet and others had been using legal mechanisms for a long time. Approach 2 was the legalistic tone and intention of forcing officials to change through passing new laws and exercising vigilant oversight over and enforcement of existing laws. Larry's perspective toward officials reflected a combative, heavy hand of the law tone. Both Larry and Janet were convinced that officials routinely made questionable deals and violated administrative and zoning ordinances to the detriment of the community, relations with at least some citizens, and democratic process in general.

In our individual interviews before the group work began, each of them explained in detail the local issue that concerned them the most. They described how they understood the causes of the issue, what should be done about it and by whom, and what they would do if they were in charge of making sure the issue was dealt with. In brief, Larry's remedy centered on requiring officials to disseminate *all* public information to citizens in a timely, accessible way. Thus equipped, citizens could "take the power back from the government" and control the community development directions and decisions. Janet had been thinking for a long time about what she would do to address the zoning-related issues (the real or suspected back room agreements, strategic appointments to the zoning appeals board, manipulations of the code, and outright violations). She would start a neighborhood congress system to be a defense mechanism, a counterforce against the city's power. It would select and support new candidates for public office that would support the congress's agenda. She wanted to ensure that the voice of a huge number of citizens was too strong for officials to dismiss, and believed such a congress was the only hope to alter the traditional dynamics and get a different caliber of public officials into office.

Those sketches capture how Janet and Larry began the project. They ended it very differently. In Janet's terms, it was time for everybody—citizens (including her) and officials—to "get off their horses," to step out of the vicious cycle of playing offense and defense with no end in sight. She would not build a defense mechanism against the city, but rather, something very different. For Larry, it was to "quit looking at it like an us versus them thing, because it's not an us versus them: it's a 'we.'" He no longer thought in terms of citizens ("us") taking the power back from the government ("them").

How did their experiences in this six-week project transform their long-held perspectives? A thorough explanation would include their self-reports about their thinking, their biographies, how they internalized all of the discussions and activities during the group sessions, and life events that were going on while they were having and reflecting upon their project experiences. It would also require a great deal of theoretical discussion, including the tone and intention issue, TIP's design, and adult development psychology. In the space of this short, general article, my explanation will simply draw from the main experts: the people who had the actual experience. I offer a synthesis of their reports about getting off their horses. The process of "laying down arms and coming to the peace table" was the way another participant described this shift.

Their first step in this transformation was noticing *that* they had been thinking like aggressive warriors. They had not seen it this way before. They had felt like victims of others' behaviors, and thus justified in taking a defensive stance. They had not realized that their defensive stance

behaved just like an offensive stance. This was like finding out they had been playing a different role than they thought they had been. The idea of *role* was instrumental here.

Once they recognized that they had been in an aggressive role (mentally and in their concrete actions), they had a natural reaction to that discovery. They did the kind of mental role-playing that most adults can do: they imagined how their aggressiveness would trigger undesired reactions in others. Those reactions would seem to be defensive, but of course, they would be aggressive, too. In this way, they realized how they participated in a cycle of adversarial tones, intentions, and relationships, but, as Larry said, "I don't want to feel like an outsider to another group of people." Neither of them wanted that. Since they were now aware of their own roles in supporting many of the situations they did not like, they became open to alternatives.[9]

Fortunately, the group process that elicited these experiences and insights was simultaneously introducing them to a range of alternatives. They discovered for the first time that there *were* alternatives. They simply had not known that their view of reality was not really "all bundled up together" in one, unpleasant way. They did not have to be stuck where they were, and they could look at alternatives. They found out that they could step out of the vicious cycle, first mentally, then physically. The alternatives indicated that there were different ways to do this, so they would not be stuck in any single approach at all. This was a liberating discovery.

As is often the case, along with that liberation came feelings of insecurity, taking forms that reflected each person's uniqueness. For example, Janet said that although "getting off the horses first" was necessary, "it's not something that I am personally real comfortable about. It makes me nervous. I feel safer on the back of my horse. And I'm sure that they probably do, too." As a novice in civic affairs, Larry's fears were different: "I don't know if I've got what it takes to be able to do it mentally, physically, or verbally, so it kind of scares me." These and other participants found creative and further-liberating ways to experiment with and ease into their discoveries.

With these internalized understandings that "we need to act the way we want them to act" Larry and Janet took different paths. Larry's is reflected in the next section. Janet and another participant dove into early planning for a substantive, long-term goal to develop a "neutral platform" for non-adversarial community "network mechanism" that could include citizens from every part of the community, city officials and departments, and area groups and organizations. They planned to begin by conducting focus groups throughout the community to research and test their ideas and integrate them with what they would learn from others. Their intention was to foster communication and informal issue deliberations on an ongoing basis, so the "community organism could know itself" and begin to learn how to recognize and deal with its issues before they became situations that tore the organism apart. This did not seem to have a pie-in-the-sky idealism. Rather, it reflected the realism of the group's deliberative conclusions, that diverse approaches should be tailored to address conflicts that arise from time to time. They wanted to build an infrastructure to support local communications and information exchange, and proactively reduce unnecessary conflicts. Such a mechanism would support efforts to work through the inevitable future conflicts, too.

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[9] There are important things to understand about how and when people *can* become open to alternatives at all; regrettably, they are beyond the scope of this article to discuss.

Liberated By Taking Multiple Perspectives

The discovery that they could consciously select from among multiple perspectives in forming their own thoughts—about anything—was the high point for some of the participants. Reports from Larry and a woman I will call Sue showed how thoroughly life-changing it was for them. There are both nuances and pronounced differences in how each person used their new insights. For the sake of brevity, I will highlight only Sue and Larry, and do so without discussing all of the differences I heard during their interviews.

There are, however, two differences about this case's issue-focus to point out at the beginning of this section. As I mentioned earlier in the article, people have been "framing" public issues for a long time; there are some different methods for doing this, including TIP's in recent years. A customary design is for one person or one group to develop the approaches into an issue booklet for *others* to deliberate the issue. In other words, most often, people do not experience both steps 4 and 5, above. Another difference is that if this project group had selected one of its four, prioritized issue-questions in step 3, before the tones and intentions surfaced as an issue, this transformative theme may have never developed, at least not in such life-changing ways as it did for Sue and Larry. The difference in this case was that the tone and intention issue invited a different kind of deliberative activity: self-reflective inquiry. By self-reflective, I mean that there was an explicit need for people to move their attention back and forth from the issue *within* them to the community issue in front of them, in order to reflect upon the implications of each possible choice of intentions and their tones. Unfortunately, our social settings rarely provide such transformative opportunities.

How were these experiences liberating to Larry and Sue? They released them from a trap. Although this played out differently for each of them, the common trap was to be wedded to one way of looking at things. As they both said, they didn't *know* there was any other way to look at and react to things. Many of us do not. This is reminiscent of the saying, "If you find that you are digging yourself into a hole, the first thing to do is: stop digging." That is easy for a critic to say, yet it does not consider this: what if digging is all we know *how* to do? What if we do not even know *how* to stop it? This could be like electric current without an on/off switch installed: the electricity just keeps flowing. These people were elated to discover that they could switch; they could look at and react to things in life quite differently.

The first step was to realize *that* they had been looking at and reacting to things in one way. An analogy may illustrate what this seemed to be like for them. If we never encountered any reflective surfaces—mirrors, glass windows, pools of water, etc.—and if we did not have arms and hands with which to touch our own faces, and if we never talked about seeing, how would I know that I *had* eyes? How would I know *how* I saw things at all? I suspect I would not even think about seeing, but rather just take it for granted, because neither I, nor our culture, had a concept of it to think about it with. Just so, many people do not have a concept of, or a way to, notice that they have a point of view. Often, we assume whatever we think *is* the way reality is. This is reminiscent of another saying: "Our perceptions are our reality." It is often true. We often *are* our points of view and so we have no reason to give them a second thought, just like the eyes that I am unaware of in the analogy. Both Larry and Sue made this point, that they had not had any *concept* about their own perspectives. The group process provided the concept for first realizing *that* they had perspectives. Simultaneously, as described above, they learned that there were other perspectives than their usual ones. This contrast supported their discovery that they had been using the same perspective to view things in life, even when it was not getting

satisfying results. With the structured support and resources of the process as a starting point, they began running numerous joyful experiments in this liberating territory of multiple perspectives.

The group's focus on tone and intention was instrumental for *bringing home inside* what it *meant* to them to explore and use different perspectives. Larry's early experiments were with his family, and he found that it meant a whole new world of information that he could mine from within himself and share with others. He told me how his whole thought process had changed, and with it, his behaviors. An immediate benefit was that he became more approachable to his wife and children, who now clearly enjoyed being with him. Rather than reacting to things out of old habits, he took time to look at things from different perspectives—his own new inventory and those he imagined others might have—to find out what a whole situation might be about. He would ask questions now, and in a non-threatening way. All of this also meant a way to help others mine information from within them. One of several examples he gave was reading books with his elementary school-aged children. He would suggest they pause at various points in a story, and talk about what perspective a character was using at that particular point. Then they would imagine what *other* perspectives might the character take, and how would the story be different then? He found he could directly transfer his learning from TIP to any other domain in his life, including educating his children so they would not live in the trap he had just emerged from.

This played a major role in transforming how he wanted to address the issue of citizen access to public information and community development: it erased the dividing lines between "us" and "them." For the first time, he was viewing the entire community as a "we" without those dividing lines. For him, it had become a system in which to exchange as much information as possible about points of view and respect them *as* valuable information, even when they were different or conflicted. He would respect those differences. With his experience of becoming un-wedded to one point of view, he wanted to help other citizens appreciate the information-value of differences and respect them, too. The exchange of viewpoints *as* essential information became a main criterion, in his view, for developing a healthy community.

For Sue, bringing home the learning about using multiple perspectives meant exciting new ways to approach all of her interpersonal dealings and her modest social change efforts. She integrated those new insights into her thinking about the issues she was most passionate about, nationally and locally. I do not discuss details of her experience here because I think the following observation eliminates the need to do so. I observed that although there were significant differences in her and Larry's interests and "where they were coming from" in general, before and after the project, she used her learning in ways that were similar to Larry, but from a different angle. Her palpable excitement was that she now had ways to decide what approach to take with individuals, groups, or organizations: she could "handle it according to *who that person is*." She developed a detachment from her own preferences that enabled her to assess a situation in a more comprehensive and realistic way. She could consider the person or persons involved, their individual and/or institutional constraints, the individual and social needs that people were trying to meet or were unaware of, and base her strategic approaches on who the people *are* that she was or was going to be interacting with. She was running experiments with her grown children, extended family, and friends in the community who were concerned about the same issues she was. Our interview was punctuated by a phone call from one of her children, whose reaction to a recent interchange with her was so positive that he called spontaneously just to tell her he loved her. With a laugh, she told me, "See? It's because of how I

approach the situation!" Her new sense of general empowerment was both exciting and liberating because she felt equipped with new powers of discernment. These fed her creativity for conceiving new ways to help others learn how to use multiple perspectives, to see others' conditions with new eyes, and to see how systemic complexity needed to be addressed. She saw this as the best hope for breaking certain kinds of cycles that trap both citizens and their societies.

In this group's community, with its troubled interactions between citizens and their government, there was a long history of "us versus them" dynamics and entrenched positions that clashed in important issues. What happened during this project has potential to influence changes in that political culture. As I write this, it has been almost six months since the end of this research project. I have not returned to the community—a follow-up study is decidedly alluring—and thus, I cannot report further than this about the transformations that participants experienced.

Conclusion

This article divided its focus between the steps of "The Integral Process For Working On Complex Issues" that I used in this research project and discussed it with the group's work on an issue, and the two predominant themes that emerged from the participants' final interviews. A brief summary of the project's outcomes may help to pull these subjects together and summarize this reporting. Those outcomes include both the participants' perspectives and my own, as the researcher.

A first outcome is finding that a number of participants connected their increased sense of hope and motivation toward the community's issues to learning that there are processes and methods for dealing with issues and diverse perspectives on them. That was particularly meaningful because it included learning that perspectives can be distinguished and worked with, with productive implications for the issues, i.e., there were reasons to hope. Another outcome was that the negative group tone had a dramatic shift into a productive, positive tone, apparently as a natural byproduct of the process itself. Although a small, self-selected group is not representative of any larger population, for this group concerned about the negative local culture, to experience a dramatic shift even at this micro level was significant and hopeful. Participants learned about ways to anticipate and accommodate multiple perspectives on issues and within their own intentions and tones. They developed their own conceptions of how they could use their learning, and/or described how they were already using it to meet their interests and affect their own and others' experiences. A new small group formed to develop a freshly conceived approach to a community network mechanism, which it hopes will facilitate positive change in the adversarial political culture over time.

From my perspective as researcher, the unexpected outcomes of this project were (a) the tone and intention issue itself, and related to that, (b) the project's impacts on participants. As far as I know, it was groundbreaking for a group to conduct an individual and collective reflection that inquired into intentions and tones using deliberative methods. The impacts and learnings that the participants internalized and used within such a short time are the most significant changes—personally, socially, politically—that I have ever seen in my years of working with individuals, groups, and communities.

Of the countless public issues that I have had the privilege to work on with other citizens—on the ground "live," as intentional action research, and in assorted educational settings—I never

had the occasion to work on a tone and intention issue. Although this was the first opportunity, it was not the first time or place that I saw a need for people to address their public relationships and attitudes.

Some years ago, I summarized my thinking about how to address complex public issues in such a way that efforts would foster healthier evolution of individuals and their political cultures and social institutions. Based on the experiences that I had accumulated at that point, I prioritized that thinking based on the importance of conditions that show up often, not just in this project's site community. To date, I still agree with the first item in that summary.[10]

> Address the community's most presenting or hidden needs first, those which, if left unaddressed, would likely sabotage other efforts.
> - Troubling relationships and their history
> - Assumptions about capacity, knowledge, power, leadership, inclusivity
>
> a. Provide a method for recognizing them because people need to become conscious of them before they can intentionally work through them.
> b. Provide a method for working through them because the [likely] alternative is paralysis or regression (p. 2).

Because of this study's findings, I have institutionalized the tone and intention issue: TIP's methodology now incorporates it as a specific option for groups to discern using before addressing other issues. Whether or not existing troubled relationships or misplaced public assumptions appear to characterize a political culture, in these decades of rapid change, with their clashes of worldviews, expectations, and competitions over rights and resources, the potential for an increasing number of tone and intention types of issues is, itself, a pervasive—if unrecognized—socio-political issue. Thus, this small study seems important because it documents that at least in this case, using TIP helped people and may help their community. Further studies on tone and intention issues at larger scales could make vital contributions to how we understand and foster healthy social change.

In recent months, researcher Richard Harwood has been traveling the United States to promote and discuss his book, "Hope Unraveled: The People's Retreat and Our Way Back."[11] He reports, "people can no longer see or hear themselves reflected in politics and public life…. They abhor this retreat, but feel lost about what to do… [We need to] square with the reality of people's lives…tap into people's desire to be part of something larger than themselves…affirm our commitment to hope."[12]

I first heard about Harwood's book as I was concluding this study's fieldwork. I had been hearing how much *more* hope and motivation participants had in our closing interviews. A number of them who had felt lost and hopelessly shut out of their community's life at the beginning no longer felt so by the end. Further action research could indicate if the methods used in this study would be effective to implement Harwood's prescriptions. They might fill such prescriptions while people are addressing their issues and *being* their communities' new politics and public life—not just reflected in them, but enacting them, themselves.

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[10] Ross, S. (2000, July). *An integral approach to public issues and changing the culture*. An unpublished manuscript.

[11] Published in 2005 by Charles F. Kettering Foundation.

[12] http://www.theharwoodgroup.com/book/index.html

Sara Ross, Ph.D. (Cand.), has written her dissertation and is (refreshingly close to) graduating with her doctorate in Interdisciplinary Studies with a concentration in Public Policy/Administration, specializing in Political Development. She had been dividing her time between that program and her role as president of ARINA, Inc. She is an associate author of the book referenced in this article (Action Inquiry), and lives near Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S. Email: sara.ross@global-arina.org.

Epilogue

For readers who are interested in integral theory as promoted by Ken Wilber and his Integral Institute, and who are curious about the qualities that make TIP an integral process, this section points out those connections in the steps described above. For brevity's sake, I confine this correlation to only those steps, and I assume that readers of this final section are already familiar with integral theory. Therefore, I do not define its basic terms that I refer to below. TIP does not use the theory's jargon, and its incorporation of "all quadrants, all levels" is natural, since all issues inherently include them.

Step 1. Meeting people wherever they "are," it invites concerns to be expressed in whatever terms reflect the way people already think about them. Then people identify the topics' chief (apparent) characteristic(s). These may be individual and/or collective attitudes or values (left hand quadrants), and/or the behaviors of individuals and/or social systems (right hand quadrants).

Step 2. The selected topic is broken down into its concerns, impacts, and causes; in effect, all of its integrated quadrants and levels. Whichever of those is selected to work on as an issue, is analyzed in terms of the all quadrant/all level elements that support its existence. If a "human behavior issue" (i.e., any issue where individuals' behaviors are "problems") is selected, it gets extra, developmentally tailored attention and investigation into complex causes, but it is beyond my scope to discuss how that happens here. Participants develop an integral understanding (a "portrait of the issue") that integrates the left- and right-hand quadrants and pertinent levels of worldviews that comprise it by their presence or their absence.

Step 3. An integral array of all quadrant actions and assumptions on the issue addresses the relevant developmental (individual and social) levels involved. Its analysis identifies how individual and collective attitudes and behaviors will be interactively improved or changed by each of the new actions and changes proposed. Criteria for the kind of decisions that will require multi-perspectival deliberation promote integral attention to social change and its challenges.

Step 4. The issue-framing template embeds the distinctly different perspectives of all developmental levels' concerns, values, and stakes in the issue, tailored to the specific issue that is framed. The framing process invites reflective consciousness by identifying underlying assumptions and walking in the shoes of all perspectives without judgment.

Step 5. Deliberations engage all the perspectives on an issue and the tensions of diverse, possible actions on different parties' life conditions, values, and agendas. Depending on the complexity of the decision or issue, deliberations can result in integral or meta-system approaches to address the issue. All quadrants and all levels' interiors and exteriors are inherently worked with, and worked through, in this method.

I hope that this overview, read in conjunction with the body of the article, responds to any basic questions about how TIP has correspondences with integral theory, for those who are interested.