

A PRACTICAL GUIDE
FOR SPARKING
*co-productive
agility*



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INTRODUCTION

This brief practical guide / slide deck outlines some exercises that can be used to explore our recent paper - “Co-productive agility and four collaborative pathways to sustainability” (Chambers et al. 2021). The exercises are designed to be used to enhance collaboration in any setting by fostering reflection over the roles that we often step into, and how this can potentially hinder or enable our role in fostering transformations. By “transformations”, we refer to fundamental shifts at different levels - from individual narratives and practices to broader policies and institutional structures.

This guide is structured around four archetypal roles, which represent distinct types of change agents. For example, the person who takes quick action to address an urgent problem, such as a firefighter or vaccine developer (the “hero”). The protester or critical scientist who confronts power and demands change (the “woodpecker”). The enabling scientist or citizen who provides data or takes action to support another’s cause (the “genie”). Or the facilitator who creates space for all perspectives to be heard (the “host”).

In our recent paper, we acknowledge the importance of these roles, but also show how their tendency to exacerbate or suppress tensions can hinder transformation. Nonetheless, we often step into these roles out of habit or convenience. This is because it is very difficult to find the agile spaces in between them. At a personal level, it is challenging to bring one’s perspective clearly to the table but remain equally open to changing it. At a relational level, it is often easier to listen to persuade or to be persuaded rather than cultivate the critical middle ground or agile “third” space. At a collective level, it is tricky to design spaces where critical tensions are brought into the room, yet in ways which enable people to question their individual notions of “success” and broaden their collective imagination and possible actions.

We call this ability to navigate the many pushes and pulls (i.e. tensions) in collaborative processes “co-productive agility” - “the willingness and ability of diverse actors to navigate different agendas for change to grow ideas and actions which were unforeseen from the outset”. This practical guide presents exercises that can foster reflection over what “co-productive agility” is and how it can be cultivated. They can be used individually or in sequence, and are intended to create small “sparks” to then be followed by broader conversations and processes to cultivate co-productive agility in practice. They may be useful as a teaching tool or early in collaborative processes to surface different perspectives and ways of operating and to facilitate conversations about how the initiative might engage with tensions that are likely to emerge. You may feel compelled to create your own exercises, and if you do so, please share! All the best with your efforts.

Josephine (Josie) Chambers ([🐦@jo_chamb](#)) is a transdisciplinary social scientist interested in how research can play a transformative role for nature and society. Josie specializes in designing processes that support diverse actors to critically and constructively engage with their differences to spark transformation. In her upcoming role as Assistant Professor in the Urban Futures Studio ([🐦@FuturesStudioUU](#)) at Utrecht University (the Netherlands) she will design processes that enable diverse societal actors to imagine and enact futures that serve our shared humanity. You may contact Josie at jmichambers@gmail.com.

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FAMILIARIZING WITH AGILITY



- EXPLORING “AGILITY”
- MEETING THE ARCHETYPES

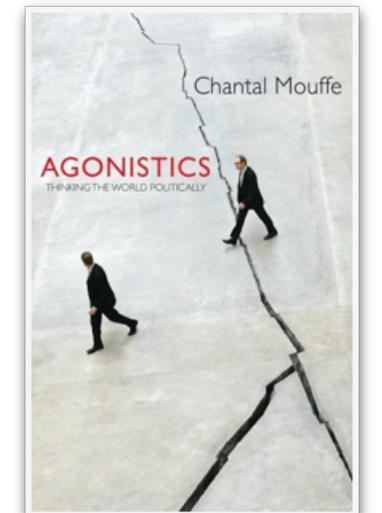
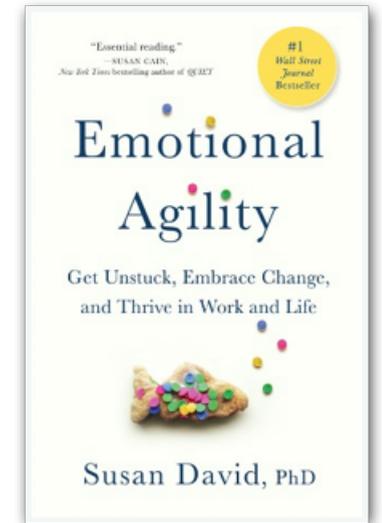
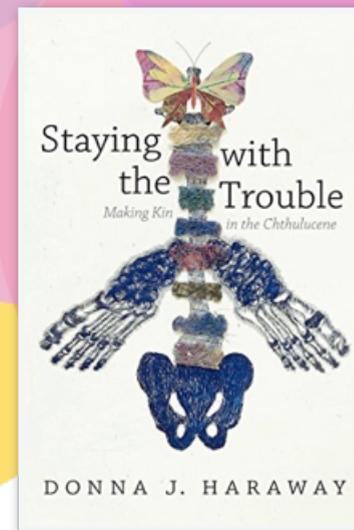
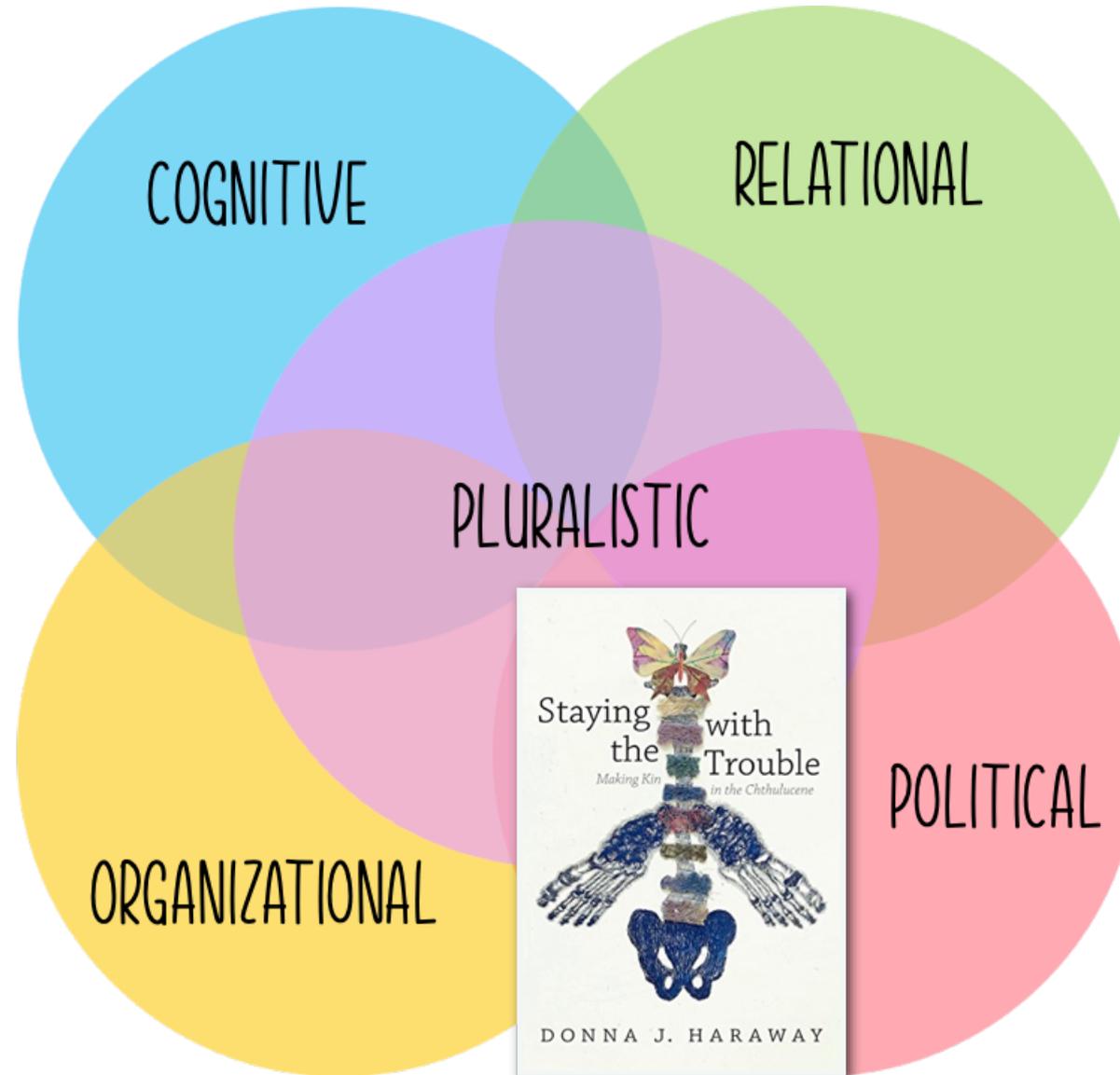
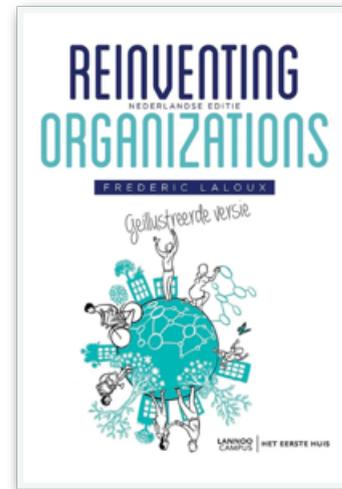
EXPLORING “AGILITY”

Ask people: what do you think of when you hear the word “agility”?

Then identify and discuss different aspects of agility (e.g. see suggestions provided).

CO-PRODUCTIVE AGILITY

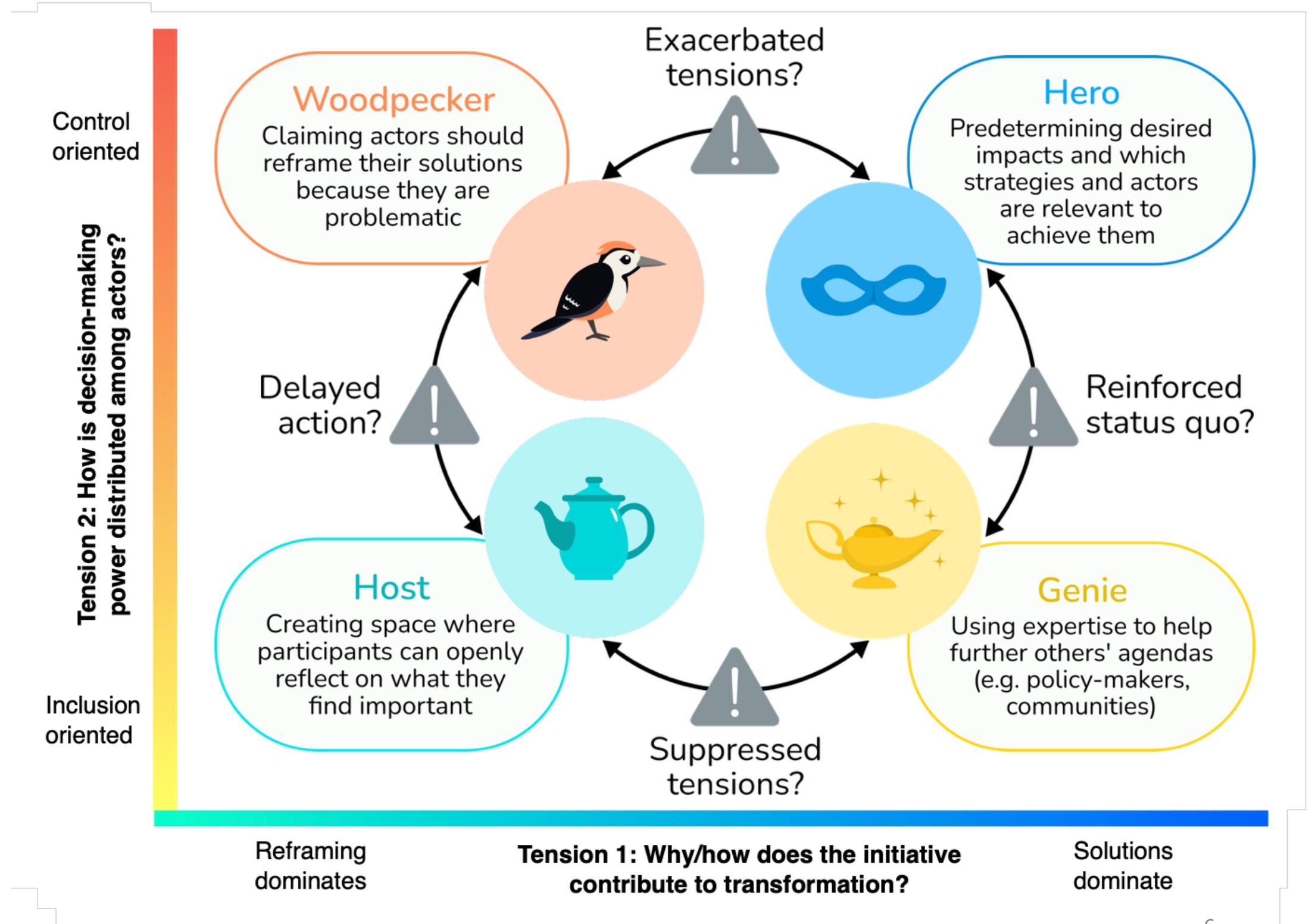
“the willingness and ability of diverse actors to navigate different agendas for change to grow ideas and actions which were unforeseen from the outset”



MEETING THE ARCHETYPES

Describe these archetypes and how they take different approaches to pursue change.

Ask people to think of examples of these archetypes in both science and society.



FOSTERING PERSONAL AGILITY



- EXPLORING DISTINCT ROLES
- MAPPING EMOTIONAL (IN)AGILITY
- IMAGINING THE AGILE SELF

EXPLORING DISTINCT ROLES



Use the following questions to dissect how people personally relate to these four archetypes. You can use a poll for Q#1-3 followed by discussion in groups.

1. Which role is most similar to **your** approach to impact? Why?
2. Which role do you think is most likely to generate **beneficial** impacts? Why?
3. Which role do you think is most likely to generate **harmful** impacts? Why?
4. How might these four roles **hinder** or **enable** transformations?

MAPPING EMOTIONAL (IN)AGILITY



Use the following questions to explore the relationship between emotions and these archetypal roles. Q#1-4 can be discussed in pairs or small groups.

1. What emotions do you tend to experience when you step into each role?
2. Why do you step into these roles? Consider internal and external factors.
3. How do your emotions/roles relate to feelings of certainty or uncertainty?
4. How do these dynamics influence your role in collaborative transformations?

IMAGINING THE AGILE SELF

Give people space to personally reflect on the following questions. Then share in pairs, and afterwards share in plenary popcorn style.



Draw (or visualize) an avatar that represents how you see yourself in this messy middle 'agile' space:

- What do you look like?
- What do you feel like?
- What tensions do you face?
- How do you remain agile?

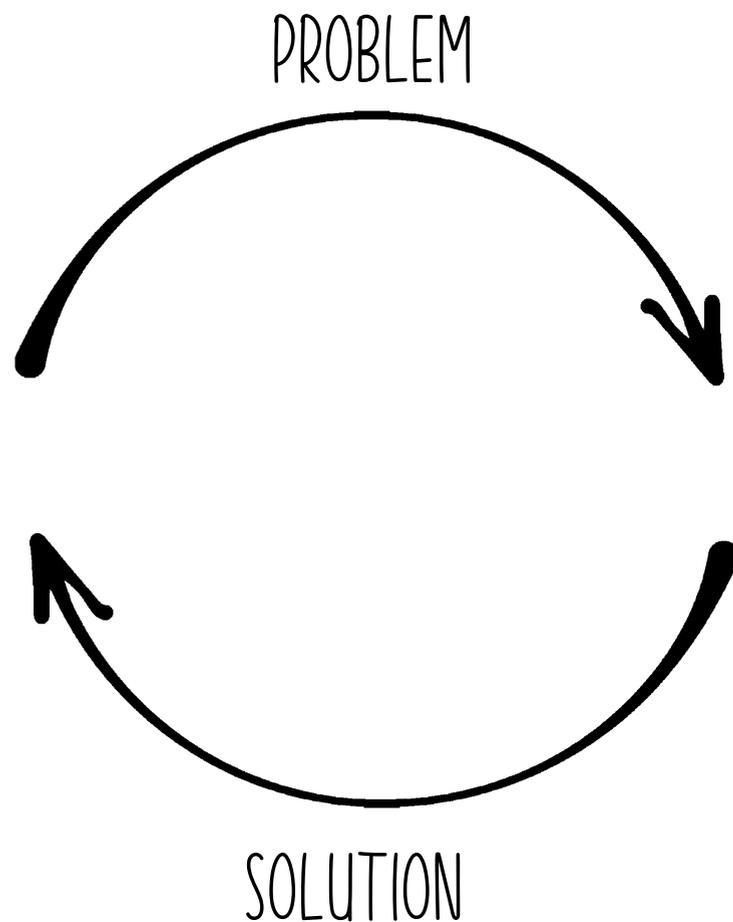
CULTIVATING RELATIONAL AGILITY



- IDENTIFYING LOOPS
- PLAYING WITH RIGIDITY
- CREATING AGILITY

IDENTIFYING LOOPS

Use any preferred visual method for people to map out how they see problems. Identify loops in thinking. Facilitate discussion over these loops and consequences.



1. Draw a map of “problems” of concern.
2. How does this point to particular actors & solutions?
3. How do solutions and ways of assessing “success” reinforce particular views of problems?
4. Why are **those** views preferred? What is excluded?
What are the consequences and for whom?

PLAYING WITH RIGIDITY

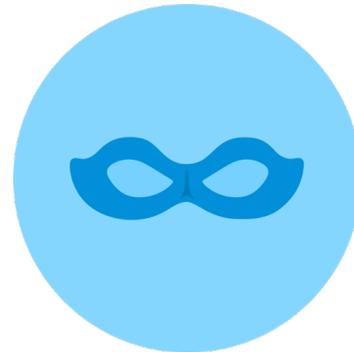
Choose a problem context and characters for each role before the exercise. Explain and enact the role play (groups of 5). Discuss in small groups, and then in plenary.

E.G. POLARIZED CONFLICT OVER A STATE DESIGNATED PROTECTED AREA

“Both the state conservation & local development plans are **HIGHLY** problematic”



CRITICAL SOCIAL SCIENTIST



STATE CONSERVATION AGENCY

“We **MUST** enforce the newly designated protected area to protect nature”

“I want to bring different stakeholders together to **EXPLORE** different views”



PROCESS FACILITATOR



COMMUNITY SCHOLAR ACTIVIST

“Let’s support the communities to develop how **THEY** want”

1. Choose a problem context
2. Identify a character that reflects each role
3. Set up the role play:
 - 1 million Euros are given for a project
 - Someone steps into each of the four roles
 - The fifth person is the donor (observes)
 - The characters try to create a joint project proposal
 - The donor decides who/what to support and why
4. Discuss the roots & consequences of rigidity:
 - What about roles & process hindered transformation?
 - How did this constrain or enable certain outcomes?

CREATING AGILITY

Use this exercise in small groups and follow the instructions to create agile relations through creative forms of expression.



1. Pick a category of things (e.g. instruments, ingredients, dance moves)
2. Choose four different things that fit that category (e.g. voice, saxophone, drum, keyboard) and give each a role
3. Explore several different ways these four things can interact
4. Reflect on what these different metaphors mean for fostering agile relations and transformation



*For inspiration, listen to the [musical abstract](#) of our paper, where the four archetypes (played as four instruments) go from co-productive rigidity to increasing agility.

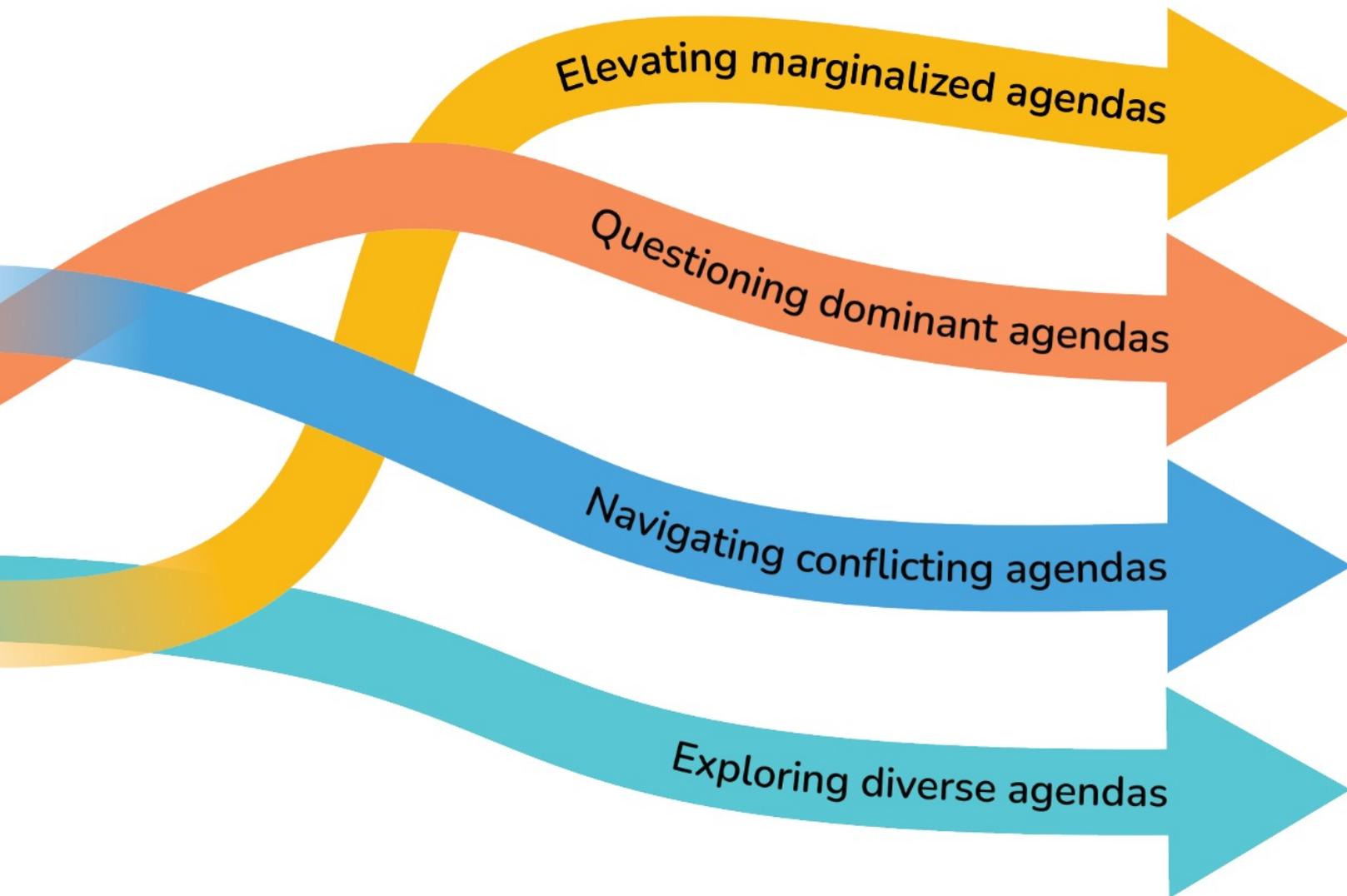
DESIGNING COLLECTIVE AGILITY



- MAPPING YOUR JOURNEY
- EXAMINING CASE STUDIES
- IMPROVING COLLABORATIONS

MAPPING YOUR JOURNEY

Each participant reads the paper (Chambers et al. 2021) in advance to reflect on and then discuss the following questions in groups.



1. Read the “co-productive agility” paper to explore the four pathways.
2. How has your engagement with these different pathways changed during your career? Why?
3. How would you like to shape your trajectory going forwards? Why?

EXAMINING CASE STUDIES

Select case studies and assign participants to groups in advance based on their preferences. Give people sufficient time engage with case materials and discuss.

1. Select a case study for each pathway (see next slide for suggestions).
2. Divide the group into small groups – each examines a different case.
3. Each case group reads publications and materials about the case.
4. The following questions are discussed and then presented to the full group:
 - What key design choices enabled agility during the process?
 - What struggles arose and how were they addressed?
 - What kinds of transformations emerged from the work?
 - What could they have done differently?

EXAMINING CASE STUDIES (CONTINUED)

Some possible case studies for each pathway are suggested below. Refer to IDs in Table 1 of our paper (Chambers et al. 2021) to obtain more materials for each case.

Elevating marginalized agendas

Elevating marginalized agendas (Environmental management/policy focused)

- ID #23: Knowledge co-production and boundary work to promote implementation of conservation plans
- ID #28: Balancing wildlife conservation and pastoral development in East Africa

Elevating marginalized agendas (Indigenous community focused)

- ID #4: Managing Indigenous lands under a changing climate
- ID #27: Connecting diverse knowledge systems at multiple scales in IPBES assessments and related science-policy contexts

Questioning dominant agendas

- ID #22: Farm dwellers, the forgotten people? Consequences of conversions to private wildlife production
- ID #31: SeaBOS (Seafood Business for Ocean Stewardship) - resulting from the Keystone Dialogues

Navigating conflicting agendas

- ID #1: Crafting local ownership of institution building processes (I.e. Constitutionality): The case of the Kafue Flats fisheries in Zambia
- ID #14: Probing the cultural depths of a nature conservation conflict in the Outer Hebrides, Scotland

Exploring diverse agendas

- ID #3: Recasting Urban Governance through Leeds City Lab
- ID #6 Promoting Agency For Social-Ecological Transformation: A Transformation-Lab In The Xochimilco Social-Ecological System

Questioning dominant agendas

Navigating conflicting agendas

Exploring diverse agendas

IMPROVING COLLABORATIONS



Use the following questions to open up discussion around how to work better as a team. This may especially be useful at the start of new collaborations.

1. Looking across your group as a whole, which archetypal roles are present? Are any more or less dominant?
2. How might the different roles shape how you develop the project and your efforts to engage with transformation?
3. How might you deal with conflicts and tensions that arise as a result of the different roles?
4. How might you foster co-productive agility at individual, relational and collective levels?
(bringing in some of the many exercises in this guide)



MAY THE AGILITY
BE WITH YOU.

