Bridging to Belonging: understanding power and creating connections

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PRESENTER
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The problem of “Othering” is the problem of the 21st century.
Othering is a generalized set of common processes that engender marginality and group-based inequality across any of the full range of human differences.
Situated in anxiety and polarization

- Change in demographics, Climate, Tech, Globalism, Economic, Pandemic
- Fear, anger, Othering
- Leadership, Meta-Narrative, Structures, Organizing
- Increase in anxiety
- Connecting on similarities, common threads of identity
- Bonding
- Bridging
- Empathy, belonging, inclusion
Breaking: When a group turns inwards and explicitly pushes away from other groups who are seen as dangerous or a threat

Bonding: Connecting to people like you in some important way

Bridging: Ties to people who are unlike you in some important way; stories, structure contact
Breaking

Social ties among an exclusive group who explicitly push away from other groups who are seen as dangerous or a threat.

Examples of breaking

White Nationalism

[Map showing white extremist attacks, 2015-2017, across North America, Europe, and Oceania]
BONDING
Social ties that link people together with others who are primarily like them along some key dimension. These are genuinely easier to build than bridging social capital.
BRIDGING
Social ties that link people together with others across a cleavage that typically divides society.

Examples of bridging
If bridging is the opposite of breaking what is the opposite of belonging?
Bridging expands the circle of human concern and builds a larger, more inclusive “We”
Bridging is not “same-ing.”
Bridges contain multitudes

There are short bridges and long bridges. Some bridges require more effort to build and maintain. Others are a short distance.

As bell hooks reminds us, bridges are walked on.
Bridging happens not only between individuals, but between groups and institutions as well.
How do we bridge in a polarized environment?
We are the polarized environment. The leader must attend to the environment
Belonging is about co-creating and co-owning structures to belong.
Deep Belonging

Belonging connotes something fundamental about how groups are structurally positioned within society and how they are perceived and regarded. There’s an affective component.
A Framework for Belonging

Uniqueness is valued

Low Belongingness

Differentiation
“\textit{I am different}”
“\textit{I am uncomfortable}”

High Belongingness

Deep Belonging
“\textit{I belong}”
“\textit{I can be myself}”

Sameness is valued

Exclusion
“\textit{I do not belong}”
“\textit{I am not welcome}”

Assimilation
“\textit{I can fit in}”
“\textit{I have to be guarded}”

How do we foster deep belonging?
Leaders play a critical role
Cracked containers

When there’s a crack in the container--when the context in which we live is broken--everyone feels othered and our solutions need to be more radical.

Leaders can help create a container where we all belong.
Leadership is dynamic

- Leadership is distributive and situational
- There are different types of leaders
  - A bonding leader is different from a bridging leader
- There may be “sticky points” when leaders do not differentiate between bonding, bridging, and breaking
Power & position matter

- Power is positional, structural, hierarchical and situational
- People are situated differently with regard to institutions and infrastructure.
- People are impacted by the relationships between institutions and systems…
- …but people also impact these relationships and can change the structure of the system.
Power impacts bridging

- Bridging work must consider power differentials and the structural conditions within which bridging happens.

- Those with more power should carry more of the weight of bridging, and yet the less powerful are often called upon.

- Leaders can help redistribute power to foster belonging.
Addressing power to foster belonging

- **Consider:**
  - Who has the most power in the room?
  - Who has the most space?
  - Who has the most authentic voice?
  - How is power being used?
  - What are each parties’ sacred symbols?
  - Whose perspectives shape both the “problem” and the “solution”?
- How can leaders reinforce marginalized voices and ideas?
- How can we bridge and link despite power differentials?
Leadership characteristics for belonging

- Visible commitment
- Awareness of Bias
- Curiosity of Others
- Psychological Safety

Leaders tell stories

- Stories help us deal with the anxiety of rapid change
- Stories change the narrative of who belongs, help us identify common values and encourage deep communication, bridging, and belonging
- Do we even need a villain in our story?
- May experience resistance/pushback when bridging and changing the narrative
- Adds complexity and allows for multiplicity of experience and identity
Designing an operating model for belonging

- PEOPLE
- SYSTEMS
- TECHNOLOGY
- PROCESSES

Putting Targeted Universalism into Practice for Belonging
The Learning Community Presented by Social Impact Exchange

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AUTHORIAL SUPPORT
OBI Staff
Thank you
Appendix
O&BI Bridging Examples
Bridging and Breaking

Across our communities, regions, states, we are witnessing increased anxiety, much of it related to an increase in a perceived “Other.” The 2016 election is a crystallized version of this, one with major consequences that we are witnessing unfold daily. Tapping into it can take us in two directions: towards breaking where we turn inward, only to what we know and who we know. This path leads ultimately to a politics of isolation. The other direction is bridging, where we turn outwardly to connect and explicitly work with other groups and seek ways to build common ground. This path ultimately takes us towards belonging and empathy.
Creating the Conditions for Belonging and Breathing in a Toxic Environment
@ Bioneers 2020 Conference
Appendix
Explainer Videos
Explainer Video Series: The Circle of Human Concern

URL Link