

RE-AUTHORING THE WORLD: UNFOLDING IDEAS AND PRACTICES¹

By Chené Swart

THE ROOTS OF RE-AUTHORING IDEAS AND PRACTICES

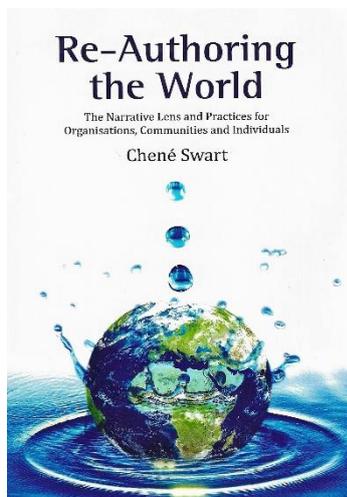
At the end of the 70's two social workers [Michael White](#) from Australia and [David Epston](#) from New Zealand met and started thinking and working together on what was initially called re-authoring therapy and is now better known as Narrative therapy (Epston & White 1990). In this regard they were inspired by the work of Barbara Myerhoff (1986:145) who wrote about people as 'authors of themselves'.



As I began my studies in Narrative therapy in 2002, 're-authoring' was one of the many big words in the lexicon of new words that washed over me like a tsunami. Words that I had to both make sense of and translate into my mother tongue, Afrikaans (a form of Dutch), and into my South African context.

In 2005 I stepped into the corporate world with these narrative therapy ideas and practices and a journey of translation unfolded, in a no-nonsense and no-big-words context in which I would be greeted with a frown or serious disapproval if I dared to sound like a head doctor (another word for a psychologist).

It was only in 2010, when the fresh eyes and continuous curiosity of Peter Block looked upon my fumbling explanations of what Narrative therapy means for somebody interested in community and organisational work, that I saw the word, 're-authoring' again. By that time, the word 'narrative' was captured because most people would immediately jump to the word 'storytelling' when I described what I do as narrative work. The word 're-authoring' was exotic enough for people to pause and to start making meaning in a way that opened up the conversation in a new way.



Five years into translating the narrative ideas and practices for organisational work, I wrote a book, *Re-authoring the World*, which some people considered, a presumptuous title. I realised that the work, amongst many things also re-authors the world in big and small ways. The transformational nature of the re-authoring work (Swart 2013) for the world we have been given, is what most caught my attention and imagination, and still does.

Although the majority of the translated ideas and practices that I use in my work firmly stands on the shoulders of Narrative Therapy, my re-authoring practice has also been infused by Peter Block's community work, Gervase Bushe and Bob Marshak's Dialogic Organizational Development, Jeff Zimmerman's interpersonal neurobiology, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's writings on meaning and

¹ This chapter has been translated and adapted from various published documents: Connect your story manual, Re-authoring Futures Con-Texts and blog posts on the www.beyondstorytelling.com website

presence, many conversations with my colleagues, Tom Carlson, Griet Bouwen and Marianne Schapmans and my beloved country, South Africa.

These ideas and practices are part of my life, my work and my body and by now, I don't know where it begins and where it ends, where it came from and how and when it entered.

WHAT DOES THE WORD 'RE-AUTHORING' MEAN?

Is re-authoring storytelling?

In organisational work today, we cannot even imagine that there was a time when story, storytelling and narrative were "soft" words that only the bravest would dare to try out when it comes to organisational work.

But what does story- or storytelling practices have in mind? Do we merely document and relay the stories of what is? Maybe in a humane way and touching way? Do we draw on the human capacity to be moved and touched to sell our products, our leadership vision, new organisational strategy or the brand of our company? Do we merely use story as an 'authentic' method to influence others? Have we extracted the heart of stories and casted it as an empty tool for our own purposes?



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The dilemma in working with stories, is that it has been captured. Because of training in storytelling in organisations, good leaders are now expected to tell good stories and stories are used as a marketing tool to influence buyers of products.

Therefore, working with narratives in organisations has become increasingly difficult, as people believe they don't have a story, or their story is not worth telling or seems too insignificant.

In this maze of meaning of storytelling-work, re-authoring goes beyond storytelling.

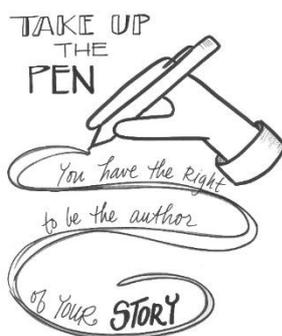
It dares to hold the hope of transformation for individuals, communities, organisations and our world in a way that invites deep connectedness, dignity, aliveness and collective meaning-making grounded in significant moments of real-life experiences. When a multiplicity of alternative futures emerges from this work, it is not without evidence and not outside of a context but grows from our connectedness in this world, knowing that the transformation of our relatedness in one domain can ultimately shift something in our world.

What is Re-authoring work?

Re-authoring work facilitates ways of **seeing** and **doing** that invites individuals, communities and organisations to take back the pen in the authoring of their lives and their worlds.

What do we see? Our Lens

To take back the pen builds on the human capacities to make meaning and to make story (White 2007). The smallest unit of story is a moment (Zimmerman 2018). Through our meaning-making capacity we can weave various moments into narratives. These narratives are quite powerful as they shape and maintain people and communities' identities, relationships and how they see the world.



In the re-authoring work human beings are seen as knowledgeable about life, are connected to various communities and social histories from which they draw conclusions about identity. They are therefore the keepers of a multiplicity of stories of their lives with values, dreams, commitments and hopes that move them forward. In addition, this work does not see problems as inside individuals or communities but see the problem as the problem, not the person.

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The re-authoring lens also provides a way of seeing the world, or 'the way things are' as built upon societal discourses that have been crafted in history across time in a certain context and influence how we see ourselves, one another and the future. 'The way things are' is not seen as facts and can therefore move or shift in an instant.

In re-authoring work, transformation can happen in a moment, as if by magic (Gumbrecht 2004). Transformation is invited when our meaning-making and story-making capacity is ignited in connectedness to other human beings in spaces of dignity. In these spaces of dignity, a different kind of knowing and being is invited where meaning can shift and new possibilities become available that have not previously been seen or noticed. In these transformative moments, the future and its possibilities open up from a deep knowing of experience with the past and the present.

What do we do? Our practices

To take back the pen, re-authoring work employs practices that situate the storyteller outside or separate from the story in ways that are transformative.

Re-authoring work creates conversations or processes that invite participants to make meaning of significant moments in their lives that have often been shifted to the background or have been treated as mere exceptions. These significant moments are then further explored and enriched through the social and cultural histories that they grow from as they offer new possibilities for conclusions about identity, relationships and the future.

Re-authoring conversations also enable individuals and communities to separate their lives and relationships from moments that are impoverished descriptions of who they are.

Moments and meanings that get individuals and communities stuck are cast in a larger context with taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs about what is good and right in a particular time and age, sometimes also called the status quo or the norm. Re-authoring ideas and practices therefore unpack and challenge these favoured ideas and practices and its influence on people and communities as it questions "the way things are". Through this set of practices what is taken-for-

granted can be unveiled and precious moments can be enriched into narratives that can re-author the future.

Re-authoring work is an invitation into the joy of being authors and co-authors of our world. A joy that speaks of our 'acts of refusal' and 'protest' (White 2004) about the "way things are," the folding of the richness of our lives into our identities and relationships, the invitation to 're-member' (Myerhoff 1982) our communities and the kindling of hope through alternative narratives that dream of a different future.

The re-authoring practices aim to work and be with people in ways that ignite the beauty and dignity of their lives (Carlson 2017). As we do this work, the beauty, dignity and knowledges of individuals and communities are deeply honoured. This work also honours, understands and works with the importance of language in the construction of identity, meaning, community and the naming of the future.

Both the listener and the teller are transported to other worlds in these processes and conversations that invite narratives that move us forward to transform the way things are and therefore also the future. Re-authoring work opens up new possibilities and imagined futures wherein human beings can co-author their relationships with all things of the world.

As a facilitator of re-authoring work we ask transformative questions and listen in ways that people and communities can again become surprised and fascinated with their own lives. We are always aware of the privilege and power that our position in organisational work hold and work towards the deconstruction of power and the use of privilege that works toward the common good. We facilitate the movement between presence and meaning as the ground from where transformation can unfold.

These practices facilitate the transformation of identity, relationships, organisational culture and ultimately the future.

What are the gifts of re-authoring work in the transformation of organisations?

TRANSFORMING ORGANISATIONS THROUGH RE-AUTHORING WORK

What are the contexts in which organisations would want to transform? Is it about making our organisations better? Do we want 'more value for the shareholder' so that the 'bottom line' can improve? Do we want our organisations to transform to have less absenteeism and more 'engaged' employees? Do we feel the pinch of our inability to be an inclusive work environment where diversity is celebrated? Are we scared by the pace of change and innovation and all the prophets calling out our certain death if we don't adapt or are not agile enough? Are we afraid that we are not at the cutting edge of change?

In this maze of organisational transformation, the re-authoring work offers a lens and a set of practices that invite organisations to make meaning collectively as they to co-author the organisations' culture and future, to deconstruct the societal discourses that impact them, and to build on human connection whilst doing so.

We will focus on the practices that: re-dignify relationships with others, deconstruct the 'way things are', facilitate the movement between moments and meaning and discover glimpses of the futures we want.

Re-authoring work strongly builds on the hope that through our authorship and co-authorship, we are able to shift something in our organisations and consequently also in our world. The heart and soul of re-authoring practices is to co-create moments that transform our past, present and future.

Through the re-authoring lens, transformation can happen in a moment, but is also part of a continuous process of becoming and never an end state or the crossing of a finish line. Re-authoring work therefore also provides the lens and practices for continuous transformation.

What do we see and do differently in adopting the re-authoring lens and practices? How can we imagine and build futures that are worth living into – for our organizations and communities?

Transformation through collective meaning-making

Moments, moments, moments

For many years I asked participants to tell a story relating to a theme. Time after time their perplexed faces and questions showed their strong belief that they don't have a story to tell or that their story is not significant or important enough to tell or be heard. But if you ask people about important moments in their lives or work, they will tell a story anyway.

In Re-authoring work, moments are the smallest unit of experience (Zimmerman 2018). But do not be fooled by size! Moments are small enough for anyone to enter. Moments hold the potential to unlock a whole new world that might transform all we take for granted in an instant.

Maybe the seeming simplicity invites people to dare to speak about a moment without knowing exactly what they will say. And therefore, the effect and impact always surprise participants. The key to this approach is asking people not to tell *about* a moment, but *to take us to* moments in which a topic or theme was / is / became relevant and important to them.

When we talk about significant moments, we have the moment in which we ask a group or a person about the moments: a moment that you would like more of, or that took you forward ... We have an overlap of the present moment in which you ask the question as well as the space you are asking the question in. At the same time these moments transform when you invite the past moments to join. And sometimes the past speaks louder now than it did in the moment we experienced it, because it happens in a certain context. This makes for a moment of transformation!

As we focus on significant moments, the work we do with organisations happens on two levels that is both the invitation to remember moments that might be long-forgotten and through this re-remembering to also collectively create moments for the organisation that matter.

Putting moments at the heart of the work, invite organisations to move away from the battle ground of opinions, views and the analyses and correctness thereof. By stripping away our opinions, views and analyses, we are able to make meaning of these moments anew. This creates the possibility for new ways of looking, new ways of relating and new interpretations of reality.

Moments activate the imagination, body and the senses and invite a different kind of conversation with different kind of 'knowledges' (Hancocks & Epston 2008). As human beings we are bodily beings in which each significant moment calls for the possibility to engage all our senses. When we are taken to these embodied moments, we experience what Gumbrecht calls 'presence', a moment when we feel 'the soft touch of the world on our skin' (2004:106).

The magic of asking to be taken to significant moments is that people are remembering specific situations or moments in which a theme have relevance to them. With this seemingly simple invitation, we invite people to take us there, to reexperience the moment, which according to Zimmerman (2018) opens the possibility of re-authoring.

Moments that matter or moments that we want more of in organisational life open up the possibility for new meaning, collective sensemaking and the ground from where we can imagine a new future as it become evidence of the possibility. These significant moments provide organisations with a rich treasure chest of real-life experiences of the possibilities of an alternative future for an organisation to live into.

As we unshackle moments out of the shadows of time (Carlson & Swart 2017) we bring them forward into the future because they are no longer bound to time. When these moments are here, now, we can imagine what it means for the future. We can see the future in a certain sense. Leonhard Cohen has a line in a song in which he sings that there is a crack in everything where the light can shine through. For me these moments are the moments in which the pen is all of a sudden back in our hands.

The movement between moments and meaning

Once we have explored significant moments and then ask, 'so what does this moment mean?' our answers give us embodied meaning that grows out of the different senses.

Gumbrecht (2004) talks in this regard about the oscillation between meaning and presence and we will talk about moments as a portal into presence. But because we in western society live in meaning-making cultures, we cannot but ask 'what does this mean'? Gumbrecht invites us to pause in these moments before we too quickly move to the meaning of these moments. Once we pause in these moments with all our senses, nature, the arts and relationships, we can move to meaning, which is then embodied meaning. The magic of transformation is on its way!

An example

In 2017 I was asked by the administrator general of Tourism Flanders, Peter de Wilde, to facilitate an open gathering of employees in which the sole aim was to discover together what the possibilities could be if we explore the transformational nature of tourism.

How could we invite moments to open up the possibilities of our co-search in a way that is useful and relevant for the people working at Tourism Flanders?



The invitation for Tourism Flanders to collectively make meaning of 'transformative tourism' also flowed into another invitation for partners in the tourism industry to join the effort of meaning-making later the same year.



Employees and partners of Tourism Flanders rediscovered why they are involved in this industry, saw themselves connected to one another anew and started imagining together what Flanders as a flourishing destination could be and look like.

These moments that were shared by nearly 50 employees and 150 partners from the tourism sector become evidence that stands as an alternative in the context of taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas of tourism as a purely economic endeavour.

It brought energy and excitement to collectively become co-authors of what this new initiative might mean for the industry and for the department. As these different groups explored significant moments, the gathering also became a significant moment in itself. One that marked the small beginnings of a journey collectively making meaning, collectively dreaming and collectively taking action.

The moment questions we explored in the gatherings:

- *Take us to a moment when you travelled where something shifted for you? Where were you? What happened? Who was with you? When did this moment happen? What did you smell, see, hear and feel? Was there art, beauty or nature in this moment?*
- *Who would not be surprised that this is the moment you have chosen to take us to today? To which moment will they take us to, to help us understand why they would not be surprised?*
- *What would you call this moment if you had to give it a name like the title of a book?*

The meaning questions we explored:

- *What transformed in this moment you spoke about?*
- *What is the influence of this moment on your life?*
- *What in the travel experience invites the transformation?*
- *Which insights from the moment can be carried into our work and lives?*



As we collectively make meaning, we become witnesses to one another's experiences in a way that builds relationships, connectedness and community. We dare to see life and possibilities through the eyes of the other which also creates a sense of belonging and intimacy. We are not only witnessing others but we are also listening to ourselves, reexperiencing the moments anew through our retelling.

One of the participants in the workshop stood up and said when he thought of the moment, the memory of the moment was even stronger than the moment itself. Re-Authoring taps into the richness of the moment and beyond. As if the moment transcends time. And the moment now is even stronger than the memory of the moment.

If we invite real-life moments to inform our futures and explorations we do not fall into the trap of seeing, in this case transformative tourism, through our well-established and well-known opinions

and frames of reference. By using significant moments in our meaning-making we invite the possibility that the exploration becomes transformative in nature.

Working with moments within the re-authoring practices invites people with all their capacities and gifts to bring their insights, commitments, passions and wisdom as they reconnect with the theme at hand, reconnect with one another and are seen and heard in a dignified way.

Since these two gatherings, Tourism Flanders have embarked on gatherings of exploration around important themes in transformative tourism called think tanks, have completed a SenseMaker® project where they harvested the stories of 1600 participants around this topic, have sponsored small projects of exploration and is now in the final phase of documenting the way forward. If you are interested in reading more about this transformative exploration, follow this link:

<https://www.toerismevlaanderen.be/toerismevandetoekomst>

Transformation through deconstructing societal discourses

The Re-authoring lens and practices provide ways of seeing and doing wherein the taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs or societal discourses of the contexts in which organisations function are disrupted so that possibilities for transformation can open up.

This work acknowledges that everyone, every organization and community is part of a context with taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas that supports and invests in the stories that are told by and about them and others.

What is water? What is air?

To bring back the authorship and co-authorship in organisations requires that we again see the water that we swim in or the air that we fly in. Like the fish in water and the bees in the air, we take for granted that there is such a thing as water or air. The fish might ask, what is water? The bees might ask what is air? As human beings we take for granted our way of life, our thinking, what is normal and acceptable, what is a good company and what is success. Until we understand that we were given the water and air through long histories, traditional power, our communities, markets and the stories we are told, we might remain characters in the larger story of our organisations and the world.



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Societal discourses or taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas make us believe that the world we are living in cannot change, is fact and one that we have been handed. The forcefulness and power of the context with its taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas is portrayed in the manner that it is spoken about as facts – both physical, social and historical – that are shaping our lives and organizations. Facts that also are without choice or any other alternatives. Because of choices and circumstances in the environment or in the history of the organisation, there seems to be no possibilities in the present.

The power of these beliefs and ideas is that it is hidden through language, power, knowledge and years of tradition. When one dares to ask questions about them, or to them, we often hear the answer: “This is just the way it is in our organisation.” Within the hidden nature of these beliefs and

ideas we give meaning and daily experience their impact on our lives and our organizations as we unknowingly contribute to the organisational future.

These taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas make people, teams or organisations the problem as it situates problems inside people or organisations. These internalised problem stories become thin descriptions about the potential and the possibilities that an organization or communities can live into and choose from.

Once we accept that this is just the way we are, we become mere characters in this story of the organisation. The stories we then tell and re-tell are shaped and maintained within this organisational context. As mere characters we never bring our gifts and passion to the organisation, as we become characters that hold no hope and wait for the pay check at the end of the month.

The re-authoring lens and practices therefore open the possibility to dare to say and see that something is amiss. It makes clear that the world is not what it can be in terms of the future. Societal discourses or taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas have something in mind for us, that shapes how we are in the world.

Re-authoring practices gives the platform for the context to be named and to understand the influence of the context. The joy of this re-authoring work, is that once we understand the givenness of this world, we can see the stories that are valued and supported and choose again, where, how and what we want to re-author in this world.

How do we deconstruct societal discourses?

Re-authoring work is about making these taken-for-granted beliefs visible and through living and telling alternative preferred stories change and re-write the context along the way.

These practices reveal this hidden world of taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas through powerful questions that make visible moments in which communities and organisations show up, play in and transform this so-call fixed world. What a joy it is to unveil these precious moments and fold them back into time (Carlson 2017) as the first taste and act of protest in re-authoring the future!

Re-authoring practices bring into focus the unique context that these moments take place in and help organisations and individuals to see and know how they shape the context and are shaped by the context. In a sense these practices provide a spirit of agency in relationship with the context. A relationship where organisations write themselves into existence and as they do, they are shifting the context by becoming authors and co-authors of their place in the world and therefore their future.

An example

[Everyone Deserves A Holiday](#) is a holiday participation centre in Tourism Flanders that facilitates holidays for people in Flanders that would never otherwise be able to have this experience.

In 2016 I first met the team and together we deconstructed and unpacked the world of their work that they took for granted. We unpacked the context in which they were providing holidays for people in poverty and with disabilities.

The questions we asked when unpacking taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas:

- *When we think of a holiday, what do 'they' say about holidays?*
- *Who is allowed to go on holidays in Flanders?*
- *What are the conditions under which people are allowed to go on a holiday in Flanders?*
- *What do 'they' say about people in poverty?*
- *What do 'they' say about people in poverty and the tourism industry?*
- *What do 'they' say about tourism in the industry?*
- *Who are the role players that say all of this/who are the 'they'?*
- *If you had to give these taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas a name like the title of a book, what would you call it?*

The questions we asked to unpack the influence of the taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas?

- *How do these taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs about who deserves a holiday influence?*
 - *You*
 - *The work that you do*
 - *The people that you work with*
 - *The teams' relationships with one another*
 - *The relationship to the rest of Tourism Flanders*
 - *The future*
- *What are also emerging moments in your team and work that tells a different story than these taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas?*
- *What would you call these emerging moments?*
- *What are these emerging moments of difference saying to the taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas?*

After this unpacking process, the team started frequently referring to the context of their work as the 'ocean' of beliefs and ideas. This generative metaphor, the ocean, became a way of catching out beliefs and ideas that the team did not agree with and enabled them to unpack and ask questions about them beyond our time together.

In the past 6 years Everyone Deserves A Holiday has been documenting the experiences of people they have facilitated holidays for, people that have provided discounts to make these holidays more affordable and people from the social sector that have supported people in going on holidays. All of these narratives have been standing as evidence for an alternative possibility in an ocean of beliefs and ideas that had very fixed ideas about who deserves a holiday.

Recently, when I had a conversation with one of the team members she referred to the power of their firm belief in listening to, documenting and publishing of moments that tell of a different story than the taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs of the world in which they do their work. And she commented that now 2 years later, the alternative narratives of their work with people have significantly shifted even some of the ocean's of beliefs and ideas, so much so that she believes that



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it has transformed some part of the ocean into a place of dignity where everyone indeed deserves a holiday.

Transforming the futures of organisations

The notion of authorship implies that an organization, a community or an individual have agency in the stories told and the stories lived and created. The transformational nature of the re-authoring lens and work invites individuals, communities and organisations to individually and collectively take up the pen as authors and co-authors to shape the futures they want to live into.

The Re-authoring work sees organisations as the keepers of the stories and come alongside to ask careful curious questions and jointly craft processes that will take the organisation forward into preferred ways of doing and knowing. To build and transform the culture of an organisation requires an awareness and understanding of the: power of the storying capacity of the work-community, the power of language in the creation of the culture, the influence of power in the telling of preferred organisational culture narratives and the importance of relationships that carry these narratives.

If the stories we tell and live, shape and maintain our identities, relationships and reality, they also shape the future of an organisation. How we see ourselves, how we relate to our fellow employees on all levels and how we speak and think about the world and the place of the organisation in it, open up possibilities for the future or close them down. The future of an organisation is therefore closely linked to the stories we tell and live.

If we make up stories in organisations that are not grounded in real experience and practices, or we “sell” future stories that have not been invited into the meaning-making of the employees, we tread on dangerous ground. Meaning cannot be forced or sanctioned.

Through the re-authoring ideas, practices, questions and conversations, it brings into focus moments in organisational narratives that powerfully shape who they are, how they relate and also how they see the world. These ideas and practices therefore help individuals and organisations to steer away from opinions and analyses about “the way things are” but rather help them stand on the shoulders of real moments that give them a taste of the future to be re-authored. A future that is not without histories as we know that there is never just one story. And that means that when those moments are re-remembered it is as if we can remember our future. We put membership to the possibility of our future together.

Re-authoring practices therefore change people’s relationship to the future because organisations can no longer believe that things are just the way they are. You enable organisations to fold the future into the present and new stories of the past, and as organisations stand with a new view in a new place in the world, rich descriptions of new possibilities for alternative futures can emerge.

From this point of view, the future is not and cannot be cast in stone. The future in this understanding is an open book, a becoming, in which we all participate in writing and co-writing this story. The very notion of futures of becoming assumes a multiplicity of possibilities, options and alternatives.

Might we be able to see and taste futures where we are indeed authors and co-authors of our world? May we again tap into a “grand sense of a world of stories that can be written” (Zimmerman)

and re-written for an alternative future in which we become agents in authoring and co-authoring our organisations and our world.

An Example

In June 2018 I had the privilege to come alongside [How We THRIVE](#), a gathering of 130 people living in Nova Scotia, a small province on the east coast of Canada and the ancestral land of the Indigenous Mi'kmaq people. This was a grassroots gathering that had come together to build relationships and skills, and to imagine how they could re-author the future of their province.

Everyone had already been together for two days before our session. We began by asking groups of three to consider these questions:

- *Take us to a moment in the last 3 days when you saw a glimpse of the possibility of a thriving Nova Scotia. Who was there? What happened? When did it happen? What did you hear, see feel and smell? Was there any art or nature present?*
- *Who would not be surprised that you are taking us to this moment and why would they not be surprised?*
- *What would you name this moment if you had to give it a title?*

Each group then made meaning of what they saw using one or more of these:

- *A quote*
- *An insight*
- *A commitment*
- *An image*



Barbara Bash 1

The groups were then asked to jointly write a quote, insight, commitment or image on a stickie note. One person from each group first read their "glimpse of the future" to the whole group then posted it onto a mural that was portrayed as an ocean. That way, the whole group could further lean into, enrich and explore the themes that surfaced.

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH HUMAN DIGNITY

Re-dignifying practices and the creation of human connection stand central in all processes that have been discussed as they ignite the beauty and dignity of all who are present. When these practices are present human aliveness enters and people see one another anew. People learn to be active participants in their lives and worlds through practices that re-dignify all who are present, that honour the place of language and meaning and always invite a relationship to all the things of the world.

These practices provide the environment for conversations where we talk about things that really matter without thinking that we know what people mean. We create spaces where we welcome all

the voices and respect the diversity of meaning and ways of seeing the world as gifts that can assist us to move forward together.

Greeting and connection

Our human connectedness makes room for the diversity in the room to participate without fear and in so doing trust is created.

When we invite people to tell about heartfelt moments, it is therefore very important to create the context and a podium for human dignity, community and connection.

Firstly, we have to greet and "see" one another to create human connectedness in our teams, organisations and conversations. "Sawubona" (Zulu greeting): I see you, your land, history, ancestors, and relationships

Examples of questions:

Why was it important to show up and say "yes" to this journey in this season of your life?

On whose shoulders are you standing as you enter the room today? / Who has made it possible for you to be here today?

If you had to design a t-shirt that would help us understand who you are, what would it look like or say?

Re-dignifying practices are not tools for better communication

If we would like to create a podium for human dignity in every conversation we facilitate, the re-dignifying practices stand central.



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These practices bring the gift of respect which comes from the Latin word "respecere". "Specere" means to see and is the word that "spectacles" come from. "Re" means that we are challenged to look again, the word respect therefore challenges us to see again and look again.

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Re-Dignifying Practices for Re-Authoring Conversations	
<i>Avoid</i>	<i>You are invited to</i>
Judging and evaluating	Be carefully curious
Assuming	Ask questions that you do not know the answer to by using the vocabulary of the narrator(s)

Fixing, solving problems, intervening and interrupting	Elevate the narrator to primary authorship
Making the person the problem (The person is the problem)	Separate the person from the problem through itifying/externalising language (The problem is the problem)
Giving advice and reframing	Generous listening and being open to be surprised and transformed
Being neutral	Stand with and for the storyteller as decentred influential
Knowing about	Doing knowledge together
Ignorance of knowledge power	Decentring/deconstructing knowledge/power
Biographies	Autobiographies
Giving compliments, positive judgements, applause and affirmations	Share gifts through the offerings of our moved hearts
<i>Practices that come from a place of presuming to know things about people they do not know about themselves</i>	<i>Practices that come from a place of not- knowing about others with a deep appreciation for their uniqueness</i>

The giving and receiving of gifts

- *What were the gifts you received from each person in the group?*
- *What were the gifts you received from the conversation?*

As we listen to the storyteller, we are touched, moved or struck by what we hear, or we might even learn something from the conversation. We therefore share the offerings of our moved hearts with one another.

We share gifts by saying: "The gift I received from you in this conversation is ..."

These gifts (Block 2008) are contextual, specific and created in the conversation; they can never be reproduced in the same way since our narratives are always on the move. I believe these gifts are folded into the rich fabric of our narratives as we further shift the direction of our human becoming. These gifts are birthed from conversations and constructed in relationships.

When receiving a gift, we are invited to accept the gift with a "thank you" and not to diminish the gift by saying things like: "I was born like this", "I got it from my mother", "It is nothing special", or "There are other people who are better at this than I am".

When human beings share gifts with one another, they open richer descriptions of one another's identities that enable trust to grow from these moments. The "gift" conversation also helps participants to understand which gifts they are already bringing to their communities or the organisation and which gifts they want to bring even more fully.

THE LAST WORD

Re-authoring work reminds me of the two beautiful daughters of hope that Augustine spoke about, "anger" and "courage". May we have anger enough about the taken-for-granted beliefs and ideas to re-author that which is unjust and wrong in our organisations and may we have enough courage to dare to imagine and work towards a future, and indeed re-authoring futures that would hold the hope for us more closely to transform our organisations and our world.

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