Emotional Contagion in Collaborative Networks

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Preliminary Discussion

- How has emotion influenced the work of your collaborative efforts within your home organization, with external partners in your network?

- If you were asked to describe your home organization in emotional terms, what would you say? How about your network?

- Have you ever experienced emotional contagion in your network?

Affect Theory of Collaboration

- Collaboration works when a group of motivated individuals come together to commit themselves and all of their collective energy to accomplishing a clear and elevating goal.

- It is our reading of the force and flow of affective energy that most profoundly influences our decision to commit, or not, our time, effort and resources towards furthering the goals of the collaborative.

Process

Energy

Clear &
elevating
goal
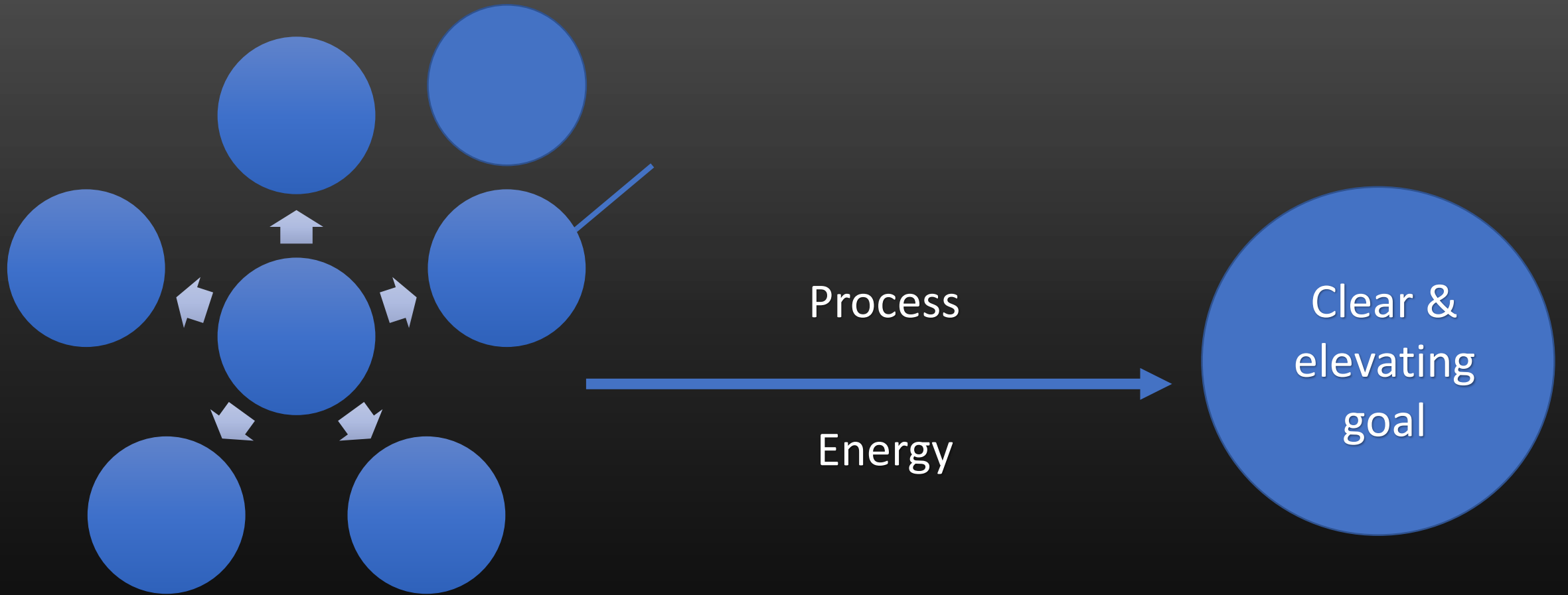
Part I: Affective Energy Fuels Collaboration

- **Energy is the dimension of experience in which a person feels eager to act and feels capable of action**. We assess experience, first and foremost, along **two** energetic **dimensions: that which enhances** our capacity to affect change in the world and to be affected by the world and **that which diminishes** us, depleting our reserves, leaving us feeling weaker.

- When we enter interactive situations, like a collaborative initiative, **we continuously assess** the **interactions** we have with other people **and** our **environments in terms of their felt energy**.

- While energy, at its most base level is physiological, it is experienced in multiple ways: **physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual**.

Affect Theory

The central conceit of affect theory: **We do not negotiate our worlds solely, or even primarily, by representing that world to ourselves as ideas, but rather by feeling**—intuitively, emotionally, even physically — what can we can do, or what can be done to us, in a particular situation. This negotiation is not dominated by conscious, reflective beliefs about the world. Rather, it is motivated by sensations occurring below consciousness, **which serve as the basis for the intuitive inferences underwriting judgment and decision**.

The relationship between affect, feeling and emotion

Emotion: A means of conveying how one feels about others and situations; a grammar of social motivation, accountability, and judgment (*expressed as social judgments*)

Interpretation: The capturing of feeling into words (culture interventions)

Feeling: The recognition of embodied sensation and its expression as an appraisal of an event, encounter, and climate (*expressed in terms of receptivity and sensitivity*)

Reception: The body's registration of sensation as personal (climate interventions)

Affect: The capacity to affect and to be affected; the felt energy of an event, encounter, and climate; pre-personal and non-conscious (*expressed as intensity*).

Communicating to increase energy

- **Affective energy is an outcome of high-quality collaborative relationships**; low-quality collaborative relationships drain affective energy.

- We appraise our relationships in terms of three criteria: **belongingness, competence, and autonomy**. Relationships that contribute to the satisfaction of these needs increase the affective energy of each partner.

- We can, therefore, **increase our collaborative partners' affective energy by communicating in ways that enhance their perceived sense of belongingness** (by conveying that we value their presence**), competence** (by conveying that they now have the resources to achieve their goals), **and autonomy** (by conveying that we respect their agency, their self-determination)

How We Read Energy from Communication

- **When reading others' energy, we focus not only on their words, but their expressions, vocal rhythm and tone, eye gaze, hand gestures, and other bodily comportments as signals of their interest**. We interpret these expressions as other-provided feedback: using it to discern whether or not they find us and our proposals attractive, and will they, in turn, be likely to invest their time and effort into collaborating with us to achieve shared goals.

- **In particular, we read others' energy for what it can tell us about whether or not we belong, if we are presumed to be competent, and are being afforded autonomy**. When a signal is taken as confirming belongingness, competency, and autonomy, it is typically reciprocated, leading partners to commit themselves to the group and its goals. And when a signal is taken as disconfirming, it motivates partners to withdraw commitment.

How Affective Energy Creates Commitment

Affective energy influences the quality of our connections through two mechanisms:

- **Mutual resource creation:** As two or more people begin to think in relation, using each other's perspectives to broaden their own, coalescing their thoughts and acts in moments of shared invention, they create mutual resources

- **Attachment:** As a group focuses its attention on a common object—an event, a problem, or a goal—the intensity of affective energy increases. Affective intensity, in turn, focuses the group even more tightly; interactional partners become aware that they are having a common experience. They are feeling, thinking, and deciding together.

- **The result is an experience of solidarity**. While solidarity is a conscious mutual awareness, it begins below consciousness as a process of intensifying affective contagion, a strong and involuntary rhythmic reaction.

- Collaboration creates and feeds on **solidarity**, a collective good that **must be continuously regenerated. When the costs of producing solidarity feels fair, we commit to the group**—or better, we allow ourselves to be taken up by it.

Part II: The Importance of Process Quality

- **A process organizes the work of a collaborative from start to finish**: who gets invited, how goals are set, how tasks are assigned, how decisions are made, how resources are allocated, and how conflicts are resolved.

- While **collaboration** promises significant benefits, it also **comes with substantial risks** (rejection or exploitation).

- Because collaboration demands an upfront commitment to using a process, before its outcomes are known, **the decision to collaborate must be underwritten by considerable trust.**

- The most common cognitive device people use to determine the risks inherent in collaborative activity is their impressions of the fairness of the process, because it is among the first available, easiest to ascertain, and most reliable indicators of one's security in a social situation. **Process quality judgments, thereby, serve as a proxy for interpersonal trust in guiding decisions about whether to behave in a cooperative fashion**.

- While there may be significant advantages of collaboration, **a judgment that there is a relatively high likelihood of either exploitation or rejection will lead people to pursue lower risk, lower reward, self-oriented goals.**

The Six Features of a High-Quality Process

A High-Quality Collaborative Process feels:

- **Inclusive**: The network does not exclude participation on the basis of organizational membership, access to resources, or political affiliation.

- **Equal:** All members of the network have an opportunity to act as leaders, to forward ideas, and to issue objections.

- **Authentic**: The network has the requite authority to not only formulate strategic plans but has the power to implement their vision.

- **Transparent**: All members of the network have access to the information used to make decisions, know who has influence and can point to the status of any proposal.

- **Focused**: The efforts of the network are directed towards the goal set by the collaborative and not on simply keeping the project going.

- **Revisable**: The members of the network can revise decisions as needed, and if they feel the process is off-track, can call for a redesign.
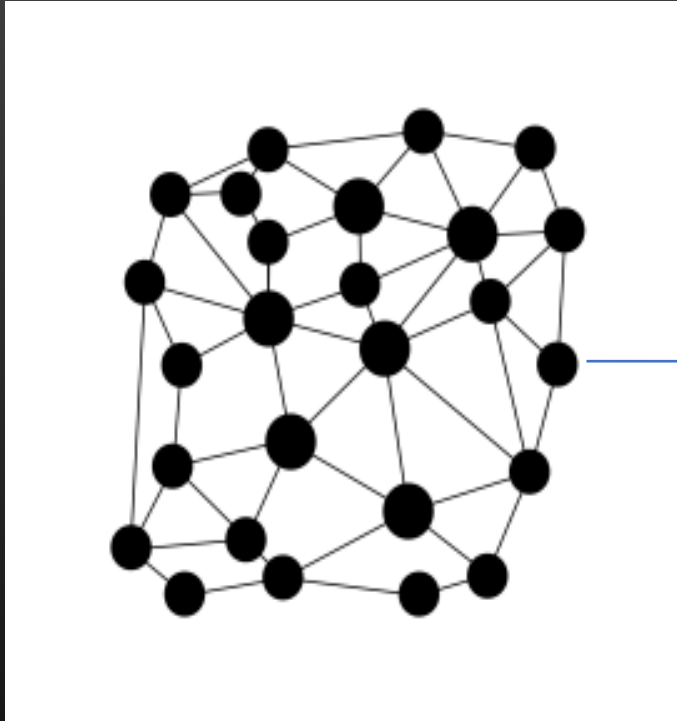
•Inclusive
•Equitable
•Authentic
•Transparent
•Problem-focused
•Revisable

Norms

↑

Process

Energy

↓

Drains

•Exclusion--Fear
•Exploitation--Anger
•Powerlessness--Depression
•Uncertainty--Anxiety
•Wasted Effort—Disappointment
•Immobility --Frustration

Clear,
Elevating
Goal

The Process Quality Scale

We have developed a measure of process quality (PQS). It addresses each of the significant features of PQ. Let's use three of its items to get a sense of how you perceive the quality of your process:

Often decisions are made in advance and simply confirmed by the process.

(1) Strongly Agree (2)Agree (3)Agree more than disagree (4)Disagree more than agree (5)Disagree (6)Strongly Disagree

 In the process, some people's "merits" are taken for granted while other people are asked to justify themselves.

(1)Strongly Agree (2)Agree (3)Agree more than disagree (4)Disagree more than agree (5)Disagree (6)Strongly Disagree

In the process, strings are being pulled from the outside, which influence important decisions.

(1)Strongly Agree (2)Agree (3)Agree more than disagree (4)Disagree more than agree (5)Disagree (6)Strongly Disagree

Part III: How Affective Energy Becomes Contagious

Affective Energy is Transmitted at Three Scales:

- **Dyadic**: Affective energy is exchanged between two individuals, each projecting her or his energy and introjecting the other's affective energy **(mirror neurons)**. Individuals decide to commit or withdraw energy by reading the signals sent by those with whom they directly interact.

- **Group**: As they feel affective energy begin to flow through the group (**entrainment**), individuals increase the energy they contribute. The experience of being part of a group as it crosses the threshold of feeling and acting together is an especially intense affective experience. In these moments an **affective cascade** begins. More than the sum of its parts the group becomes an agent capable of formulating and acting upon its own interests

- **Environmental**: At the environmental scale affective energy circulates throughout a social network (**imitation/homophily**). Affective energy spreads exponentially; given the multitude of social ties each group member has, potentially infecting a host of affiliated community organizations**.** The entire communication **climate is altered,** with the contagion establishing **"moods"** which color all subsequent interactions.

The Affective Legacy

- **Metaphors**: The collaborative becomes defined in terms of these moods; expressed in circulatory or miasmatic metaphors **These metaphors find their way into stories of how the community does business,** how working with fellow community members came to feel a certain way and how these patterns have determined the outcomes of previous collaborative efforts**.**

- **Stories**: Stakeholders use these **stories** to **account for the success or failure of** their **collaborative initiatives**. Repeated over and over, these stories circulate throughout the network and are passed onto new members, where they come to constitute the **affective legacy** of the community network.

- This **affective legacy** not only influences the community's self-conception, but also influences how external agents perceive the community This characterization drives speculation as to the likely "risk adjusted rate of return" on an investment of resources, time, and thereby drives the level of investor confidence. In so doing, it **alters appraisals of risk and reward made by both individuals within the collaborative and outside agents who are considering financing a collaborative effort.**

The Transfer of Commitment Model

- **We explain this through the "transfer of commitment."**