

TAME:
The Evolutionary Tale of How We Came to Work at Multiple Edges

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“Every topic and situation is more intricate than the existing concepts.”
— Gene Gendlin

Imagine a group process that provides a systematic way for individuals to bring out not-yet-articulated inner wisdom, and then merge the unique newness of their discoveries into a whole that is larger and more visionary than the sum of its parts. A description of that convergence process is what follows. Because of the experience of that convergence, the authors are committed to applying this process more broadly in business and other organizational endeavors. In this article, we share and bring this process to light for all who are attempting to create a new and better way to both form and run group endeavors in any environment. We present a method to create a shared foundation and connectivity among stakeholders that will enable forward movement, creativity and innovation.

This article is about the desire to form a new organization — to realize a vision — and the process by which the authors brought their understanding of two practices called Focusing and Thinking at the Edge (TAE) to a group in order to accomplish the goal. The cast of characters in this tale needs some introduction at this point. Margie, Sophie, and Barbara Lucas wanted to create a new kind of organization to lift girls and women out of poverty and destitution, especially in Africa where the three had worked with an organization in micro-lending. They will be referred to as the “Founders.” When the Founders ran into some organizational roadblocks, Margie invited her friend and longtime TAE and Focusing partner, Barbara Dickinson, to help facilitate the difficult process of creating an innovative organization using both TAE and Focusing. We will refer to these two women as the “Partners.”

We tell our tale about how this happened in four parts: first is the tale of how the Founders struggled to articulate their vision, which often seemed amorphous and indistinct. And then there is the tale of how Margie sensed a need for a facilitator versed in both Focusing and TAE whose expertise might just unlock some forward motion. In the third tale, we tell how this facilitator partnered with Margie, to help the Founders create their vision regarding the new kind of organization they dreamed about. And then there is the tale of the birth of the new organization.

When TAE was originally conceived, it was to be the tool of an individual academic theory creator. The practice has broadened to be applied to many topics, but this is the only instance the authors know of where TAE was applied to a group in the setting of creating a new organization. In using TAE for a group process, we explored its application to multiple

participants — a variant of the usual application of TAE. The challenge was to simultaneously tap into the intricacy of three individuals' experiences to create and articulate a new whole. In the doing, we have created TAME — Thinking at Multiple Edges — which uses the TAE steps in a group where the Partnership aspect is “rewired” among three or four (or potentially more) members. The result is something larger than any individual member believes she could have created on her own or in a TAE Partnership.

We used Focusing and TAE and found the methods of TAE evolving as we worked in the group in such a way that it felt like a new way of using TAE to help create a new organization. Through TAE we formed “a more perfect union” of visions — a new vision creating a new organization. Along the way, both traditional Focusing and Interactive Focusing made this process richer and more effective than any of the four professionals had ever experienced before.

A PARTNERSHIP, A SHARED VISION AND A CONVERGENCE

Imagine three women knowing that their calling is to change the world. Although these three women shared passion and vision, they came from different backgrounds and brought different skills and resources. They were three women who trusted each other at a heart level. They believed that together they could bring a unique solution to the intractable problems rooted in abject poverty that women and girls face in developing countries. Each of them knew in their very core that they wanted to do something that would empower women and girls, and they wanted to do it in a way that had not been done before. Although they knew they could, they didn't know how or what form it would take. In the best of times, when they were together with this shared belief, they knew that they were going to make a difference and that they had a deeper purpose than any of them had been able to articulate so far.

Now that the endeavor is a success, two of the Founders have this to say.

Barbara Lucas: “It was important to me at the outset of this effort, not only to make the world better for women and girls, but to do that as women in a way that was unique to our strengths, yet viable and sustainable in the world the way we find it. *What I learned from what we did was that it is not just permissible, but advisable, to weigh decisions by their effect on your body.* We all have reactions to things in our business and life that give us visceral sensations, but I don't think we honor them. We honored them in this process and I think that, in and of itself, was the triumph of the feminine, that this was a process where we could do something tangible, organizationally sound and productive — but in a way that honored our bodies, and I think we came to a better conclusion because of it. We should remember this in our everyday lives. We will be better off.”

Sophie: “We are exactly where we should be, and when I think back to what was my own frustration in the process of things not happening faster, that does feel very masculine — this ‘do, do, do! get it done, doesn't matter how.’ We are in a place we should be proud of, real numbers, real supporters, worthwhile right program underway.”

Other times, deep doubts surfaced:

- *Who are we to think that we could make a difference where so many others have failed?*
- *How could we do this differently when others have tried and haven't succeeded before?*
- Sometimes, it seemed as if *We are somehow not right*, as if to say, *You are wrong if you are looking at it or sensing it differently.*

The Founders knew that they wanted the organization to be innovative and different, but they were unsure about how to proceed. Then Margie thought about her previous TAE Partnerships. As a TAE practitioner, she was experienced with its “magic” — its explicit purpose of bringing forth new theories that have not previously been advanced. Her knowledge of TAE gave her more than a process. It gave her the belief that “different” was doable, and that gave her the courage to proceed. She believed that the TAE process would allow the three of them to tap into something that they had not yet been able to articulate because TAE enables practitioners to bring out more than what is consciously known, making their own individual contribution to that “known + more.” That is when Margie asked her TAE partner, Barbara Dickinson, to work with her to bring forth and articulate this new vision or concept.

From here, the story of this journey follows two convergent pathways. One pathway was how the Partners used Focusing and TAE to guide a process that they were inventing. The other was how the Partners, working with the Founders, brought about a new type of organization.

The authors want to pause here to express gratitude to Dr. Eugene Gendlin’s *and* as one of his greatest gifts because that word explicitly gives us permission to think outside the box. Our creativity is often held in check by internal expectations that our ideas have to be “in the box,” but the word *and* can melt those limitations like a snowball in the August sun. Holding *and* as sacred space, they embarked on a journey tapping into group Focusing, Interactive Focusing and the TAE process in new and exciting ways.

THE PARTNERSHIP — MARGIE SPEAKS

Margie says, “I have been told that I am a divergent thinker with visual spatial memory. For me, this description helped make sense of all the times when my interpretation and flow would differ from those around me. When I read the description of TAE, I immediately sensed a ‘home port’ that could give me structure to better call on my natural processes.

“When Barbara Dickinson and I did a TAE process together around the vision, all this wonderful work came out about how it could be done, helping to articulate the inner wisdom. When I took that to Barbara Lucas, one of the Founders, she was so taken with our emerging ideas that she wanted to share in the process. At this point, I asked Barbara Dickinson if both of us could work with her. Barbara Dickinson explained to me her policy of always saying ‘yes’ to any request to apply Focusing or TAE in some new way, whether how it will work is

immediately obvious — or not. That was the beginning of the multiple edges, when Barbara Dickinson managed the first session with Barbara Lucas and me. This experience was so powerful that we agreed that we needed to include our third Founder, Sophie. She readily joined this new visioning exercise.”

THE PARTNERSHIP — BARBARA DICKINSON SPEAKS

Barbara Dickinson says, “I am a lifelong thinker, most frequently described as ‘thinking too much for my own good.’ Only when I learned that thinking well could be a strength did I find the way to leverage that skill with the techniques of TAE. Although Margie and I had already met in the Focusing community, it was when we shared TAE that our mutual love of this work brought us closer together and inspired her to invite me into the process of what would become the vision and actualization of the Founders’ newly formed organization named, WISE (Women in Social Enterprise). I have worked on vision statements, and this work speaks to one of my strengths called ‘futuristic.’ People who have the strength of ‘futuristic’ spend a lot of their thinking time on things that don’t exist yet. This skill is particularly useful in the construction of a vision statement. I listened to what Margie said about the intentions of the group so far and it sounded too exciting to pass up.”

THE CONVERGENCE

Barbara Dickinson facilitated meetings among the three Founders every week for over a year. This, then, was the beginning of what they would come to call TAM — Thinking at Multiple Edges. The result — creating an organization in a new way, which became WISE.

USING FOCUSING AND TAE TO MERGE THREE VISIONS

The normal mode of conversation in any gathering goes like this: A person says something. Another person says something that comes to them based on what the first person said. Maybe the first person responds. Maybe the third person adds something of her own. The conversation continues in a response/reaction mode like this unless someone consciously “pushes the pause button” and makes a different kind of effort. In normal conversation, there is little consciousness about the mode itself and how it is directing the flow of conversation. Barbara Dickinson knew intuitively that something different was needed and called on her Focusing and TAE training to inform her facilitating the group. This prompted her to do three things — to pause the conversation regularly, to sense what was going on in a way that let her pose questions for consideration, and to lead the discussion of considerations in a Focusing way.

Listen to the Founders themselves describe how this was for them:

Barbara Lucas: “We were brought together by a feeling that had not yet gelled into a vision that we were destined to do this thing, but we didn’t know what this ‘thing’ was. As we flailed around trying to figure it out, there were times when emotions stopped us. — particularly the emotion of fear. When we tried to examine why we were stuck, we got very

vivid images of fear stopping the process, and then equally vivid images of us dumping the fear, like a wheelbarrow full of everything we want to throw over the edge or cliff. The [Focusing] process brought us to a way of identifying what our bodies were telling us, enabling us to deal with *it*. The utility of the process was figuring out on a nonverbal level what works, what does not work, what is inhibiting us from moving forward, and what would allow us to move forward.”

Sophie: “I remember what felt like flailing at the time, but what was different for one thing, was getting quite methodical early on. We spoke every Monday. We were constantly trying to extract what *this* was. That is unique at the beginning of organizations — people do not allow that time and process to extract. I recall being a bit frustrated about why we were not moving faster — *the feeling*: we are at a standstill. Looking back, I now know we were shedding fear, shedding our own skins and working in a way quite methodically toward what we were going to do. I have never previously allowed that time and process at the forming stage of an organization. I can see how that has set me up for failure in the past.”

Barbara Dickinson now knew that she was holding something like her own vision about how this process was going to produce new results, but it was fuzzy. She used pauses to redirect when the conversation flow was heading into unproductive places, and helped the Founders take the “deep dive” into meaning that comes from TAE in order to create something shared and new.

The search for meaning at the heart of this whole effort centered on the words “different” and “innovative,” and resonated with the deep doubts expressed in the beginning. How TAE methods helped Barbara Dickinson guide the group was all about “When we say we want to be different and innovative, what does that mean to us? And how will that impact on the articulation of our vision to an audience with their own meaning for those terms?” In practical terms, she repeatedly invited the group to revisit their meaning and refine that meaning many times during the course of the creation of WISE. In so doing, the group validated both internally and externally the uniqueness of their design. TAE’s later steps include a process of testing a theory in a field other than one’s own. We adapted this step testing the uniqueness of WISE’s organizational structure and proposed operations against other organizations doing similar work.

Sometimes the Founders were going down rabbit holes, which proved to be fruitless. Sometimes they found tangents which turned out to be gold and needed attention, and that added value to the whole endeavor. One of Barbara Dickinson’s tasks was to help the group figure out which was which! What she was doing could best be described as “*taking known processes — Focusing and TAE — into uncharted waters.*”

For the Founders, there were times when the energy and enthusiasm for a fresh development — like an exciting new project — hampered progress toward completion of the vision and launch. Barbara Dickinson had seen something similar derail the creation of an organization in previous cases. Using pauses, she guided the group toward the creation of the vision statement by bringing the group back to their original words. This helped them stay grounded and on track toward the accomplishment of the larger goal, yet retain the enthusiasm for an important individual project.

Neither of the Partners knew at the time what the outcome would be of mixing and modifying TAE steps and Focusing in this way. Nevertheless, in the end, what came was a customized process that is a mix of the two. The Focusing element was crucial in helping the Founders tap into their individual inner wisdom so that together, they created the vision and the mission of the new organization.

Here is what came from these efforts and fueled the launch of WISE as we now know it. As might be expected, the vision statement born of this creative fluidity is an on-going process and has evolved beyond this version.

“We envision a world where women and girls not only have access to health care, education and wealth on a par with men and boys, but fully exercise equal power to make the most of those resources for their own good and the good of all. We operate on two plains, the global and the grassroots, creating a paradigm shift as a result of our work in the way that women and girls can not only survive, but thrive on equal terms with males in this world. The flexible teams we assemble, who are heartfelt in their approach, are imbued with local understanding, based in the needs of their own areas. Women everywhere, understanding it is within our power to make change, not just development professionals, create new, or strengthen existing, programs in health care, economic independence, and education for all women and girls. What we do is led by women, understanding their power to effect change beginning with global networking and collaboration.”

THINKING AT MULTIPLE EDGES — HOW WE USED THE STEPS OF TAE TO DEVELOP TAME

The *how* part of what we did was akin to listening to multiple participants and hearing when they are thinking *at and beyond* their own vagueness. With intuition and practice, the facilitator could hear the participants’ descriptions of what they were feeling and *more...* the fuzzy places in between knowing and visioning...and blend them into insightful questions that help participants articulate much more exactly what they want than they had ever been able to do before.

The questions she used were those of her on-going TAE practice and Focusing guiding, such as, “When you say [word] what do you want that to mean?” and “Can you pause and sense how that is in your body?” and “Let’s take a moment to go inside and see what comes.” What made her interventions insightful was the timing and her ability to take a thread from each person’s articulation, see the connections, and invite the group to share those connections. As each of the group members has subsequently said, each of them had worked alone in the past and these new results seemed much stronger and more promising to them because of the connections and bonds the process formed.

The essential elements of the TAE process informed our entire process. These included finding the crux, which is the essence of one’s individual vision; identifying key words that connect each participant to their individual meaning; elaborating instances, which are experiences informing meaning and detecting repeating life patterns from all that; and then creating what TAE calls “crossings,” which are building blocks of the vision. We did not

proceed in a straight line, starting with TAE Step 1 and ending with TAE Step 9. Rather, it was a process of holding the different spaces and allowing them to mesh. Nor did we work in a linear progression: the facilitator had to understand all the elements of Focusing and TAE, and bring them into the Founders' inner explorations in an evolutionary way.

We know what we accomplished was remarkable, both in the process we used and in the outcome we achieved. We hope what we have recounted here is understandable, teachable and repeatable. The method we created involves one person, who is a listener/facilitator, and multiple participants. The facilitator hears each of the participants' expressions of their individual visions and uses intuition, visioning, empathy, problem-solving, understanding connectedness and understanding of organizational development. We believe that this combination of skills exists in many people and therefore, we can teach this method for use in many applications.

FOUNDERS' EXPERIENCE

Here is how the Founders put it.

Barbara Lucas: "We did not do the traditional thing, which is to sit and draft a business plan. We did something that enabled us to get closer to the truth of what we wanted to do. It did take time — and, at times, the process was agonizingly slow. We would get off the phone and wonder why we hadn't concluded the initial phase of things. I think it was like gestation — the preparation for giving birth that doesn't happen in a minute. We felt in our bodies that this thing was growing from a small seed. Now, I think we own the idea in a way that would not have happened had we had simply rushed to do a business plan and found the first project to get the process rolling. For the nature of this endeavor, that was very important — *we're not talking about another organization — we're talking about a movement that catches fire and changes people all over the world.* Would we have liked to hatch that in a minute? Sure! But that expectation would not have been realistic."

Sophie: "Before this process, I had gone with something of a *light bulb aha! moment* that resonates with me, and then I created an organization from there. This time, we started to create with more of an intention to change the process. Then when we had our *aha! moment*, because we had the process already going forward, so the direction in which we were headed was more true to that spark. This is the first time I have worked in a way where I felt drawn to something and have been willing to put in the time to get to that moment of 'This is it!' I think if I have a light bulb moment again for something new, I will want to bring a process like this to that moment. I think I have created some things that are worthwhile in the past, but it seems like the end result is much more sustainable when you bring the process in the way we did."

THE REALITY THAT CAME FROM THE FOUNDERS' EFFORTS

The Founders believe the organization they created, Women in Social Enterprise (WISE), operates uniquely. For one thing, decision-making comes from the method that was used to form the organization, which is new. Calling on the skills and resources of

women and girls across cultures to develop community-based solutions to the obstacles and challenges facing them in developing countries is a concept that is gaining traction. The Founders hope to leverage this relatively new approach with TAME, which they now know to be a new organizational development model. Using their new skills, they are convinced they have accomplished more than they thought they could, especially in the days when progress seemed slow.

They are leveraging an existing relationship in Ghana with an NGO (Non-governmental Organization) involved in economic development so that they can address challenges facing women and girls from within communities. This model is what WISE intends to become pan-African and then global. As an example, part of WISE's model is to be in dialogue with community members facing challenges, instead of imposing outside solutions. One of the most critical challenges to lifting populations out of poverty is the delivery of consistent quality education, especially for girls. The high school graduation rate for girls in Ghana is significantly lower than it is for boys.

In certain areas of Ghana, there are no toilets in the schools. This is in part an infrastructure issue related to availability of running water. What this means for girls after puberty is absence from school for one week a month due of the lack of sanitary privacy. When a local entrepreneur partnered with an American engineer to offer a toilet solution that solves the problem of lack of running water, WISE saw this as an opportunity to keep girls in school. By building toilets and providing the necessary privacy, girls no longer miss a week of school, hence this project shifts the needle toward empowerment through education for girls.

THE FELT SENSE OF THE FOUNDERS FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THEIR VISION

Margie: “My felt sense first brought an illustration to a cover of a child’s book — a little girl looking at a mountain. It was all pretty, but not real. Then it changed and it came into focus and became real.”

Barbara Lucas: “Now, we have an organization...a vision...our first major project...supporters who have written checks. We have mobilized a group of women both here and in Ghana to take the vision to the next level. We completed two fact-finding trips, with a third trip in the offing. A group of 30 Ghanaian women will participate in an event in Ghana in October 2015. We had a reception for 50 people in NYC to introduce WISE and Challenging Heights, an organization specializing in rescuing trafficked children.”

Sophie: “In the beginning, the things we’re celebrating now all felt very sludgy — like sludgy coffee — not moving, not happening. Even little tasks felt like they would require a lot of effort. Then things started to flow, spin out and move. Suddenly, things seamlessly started to happen. Then it thinned out and became fluid, like espresso — the work, energy, life force of all three women...”

Barbara Lucas: “...like three orbs of energy coming together into one. This is something we created and are a part of — different and separate from us. It is an act of creation.”

HOW TO DO THIS WORK

We are confident what we have done in creating WISE can be repeated, and we believe TAME can be taught so that it can be used in many more settings. That will be Part 2 of our story. In order to further the work that is represented by the creation of WISE, the authors plan to design and present, in workshop form, TAME training to transform individual processes into this group process that can be applied to an assortment of endeavors. That, for them, is one of the wonders of both Focusing and TAE — there is no end to what can be done when these skill sets are brought together with innovation in mind.

GRATITUDE

The Authors wish to especially thank Nada Lou, Certifying Coordinator, for opening our eyes, minds and bodies, to the wonders inside via her TAE workshops.

Biographical Information

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