Mapping Our Roles in Social Change Ecosystems (2020)

In our lives and as part of movements and organizations, many of us play different roles in pursuit of equity, shared liberation, inclusion, and justice. This framework and reflection guide are starting points to reflect on the roles we play in our social change ecosystem - whether that is a project team, an organization, a network, a neighborhood, an online community, a campus group or a movement.

The framework is incomplete because there are many more roles that people play to bring about social change than envisioned in the map. Feel free to be creative with the framework, keeping in mind that what is added should be about the roles you play, rather than job titles or functions. Similarly, the reflection guide is a launching pad to catalyze deeper self-awareness. It provides questions for individuals and organizations to locate and understand their own roles, identify the gaps and strengths in their ecosystems, and develop aspirations for the future.

Together, the map and reflection guide can be used at an individual level to reflect, assess, and plan, as well as at staff and board retreats, team-building meetings, orientations, and strategy sessions. Often, this exercise works well if it is used at the start of a gathering or workshop. It can especially be helpful to re-align ourselves when we feel lost, confused, and uncertain in order to bring our fullest selves to the causes and movements that matter to us.

Please feel free to adapt the framework and guide to suit your individual and organizational needs and goals. Duplication permitted with attribution (Deepa Iyer, SolidarityIs and Building Movement Project). For more information, please contact Deepa Iyer (diyer@buildingmovement.org).

The Framework

Weavers: I see the through-lines of connectivity between people, places, organizations, ideas, and movements.

Experimenters: I innovate, pioneer, and invent. I take risks and course-correct as needed.

Frontline Responders: I address community crises by marshaling and organizing resources, networks, and messages.

Visionaries: I imagine and generate our boldest possibilities, hopes and dreams, and remind us of our direction.

Builders: I develop, organize, and implement ideas, practices, people, and resources in service of a collective vision.

Caregivers: I nurture and nourish the people around me by creating and sustaining a community of care, joy, and connection.

Disruptors: I take uncomfortable and risky actions to shake up the status quo, to raise awareness, and to build power.

Healers: I recognize and tend to the generational and current traumas caused by oppressive systems, institutions, policies, and practices.

Storytellers: I craft and share our community stories, cultures, experiences, histories, and possibilities through art, music, media, and movement.

Guides: I teach, counsel, and advise, using my gifts of well-earned discernment and wisdom.

Reflection Guide

My Roles

• Identify your ecosystem (a team, an organization, a network, a movement) and put its name on the top of the map. Then, locate yourself on the map and put your name inside the circles that you find yourself playing most frequently. Add other circles if needed and label them with roles (not job titles).

• What role(s) do you feel comfortable and natural playing, and why? What role(s) make you come alive, and why? Are there any differences between these two responses for you to explore?

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• What is the impact of playing these roles on you - physically, energetically, emotionally, or spiritually?

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• Reflect on the values in the middle of the map. How do your roles bring about social change?

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• How does your role connect to your privilege and power? For example, are there roles where you might be taking too much space (or not enough)? Which roles provide positional authority and power within your organization and what are the effects?

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• How often do you vision and dream? What is the effect of repetition and redundancy, or compromise and sacrifice in the roles you play?

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• What story emerges about you when you review the map and your reflections?

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• How could you stretch yourself? Where can you take bolder risks?

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• How do/can you sustain yourself to be aligned and committed to social change values?

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My Ecosystem

• Who is in your ecosystem? What roles do they play? Start with your immediate ecosystem (usually, your organization), and then zoom out to include mentors, coaches, supporters, and colleagues outside of your organization. You can also do this part of the exercise through the lens of an organizational ecosystem by first identifying your organizational role(s) on the map, and then placing allies and partners in different circles.

• The middle circle in the map identifies the values of the communities and the world we seek to create. Which resonate with your ecosystem and why? How does your ecosystem create the conditions for justice, liberation, solidarity and inclusion to be realized?

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• What observations emerge about your team, organization, network, or movement when you review the complete ecosystem, and your role in it?

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• An effective, healthy, and sustainable social change ecosystem requires people playing diverse roles. Is your map imbalanced in any way? If so, how could the ecosystem provide support, alter objectives, or course correct?

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• Often, social change ecosystems are prone to maintaining cultures of overwork, productivity, and performance at the cost of individual well-being and long-term sustainability. Does the mapping process provide insights into the culture of your ecosystem? Are there roles that need to be strengthened in order to cultivate a more sustainable culture?

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Alignment and Aspirations

There are times when we all feel confused and lost about the roles that we should play, especially during community crises. When you don't feel in alignment with my roles, how can you re-set? Who can you turn to for guidance? How can this exercise help you?

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Based on the reflections above, set 2 goals for yourself to try out before your next check-in. Identify 1 SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely) goal and 1 B-HAG (Big, Hairy, Audacious) goal. Check in every quarter to reflect on what's changed, and if possible, work with a partner, coach, or team-member for accountability and momentum!

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