

# Engaging Emergence

---

*What to do when you don't know what to do*

---

Peggy Holman  
peggy@peggyholman.com  
www.peggyholman.com  
(425) 746-6274



# Emergence: Complexity in action



# Design for Emergence

## Engage

- Support **authentic expression**
- Encourage **connection**

## Create a container

that holds compassion and curiosity

- Focus through generative questions
- Invite diversity
- Welcome who and what comes

**seek meaning**  
Reflect together to find emerging coherence  
Listen for generative images

# A Dialogic Theory of Change

## Complexity & Emergence

Complexity science helps us understand how novel ideas and actions emerge.

*A form of discourse that cultivates generative capacity.*

## Dialogue

*Metaphors, pictures, ideas that catalyze and accelerate change.*

## Generative Images

Generative discourse changes narratives.  
Changing narratives change actions.

## Generative Discourse



# Some Definitions

Reality is in part a social construction emerging from discourse. Discourse shapes narratives – stories – that inform beliefs and actions. Narratives also shape discourse.

- |                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Discourse</b>  | Communications that bring a way of thinking into being.<br>Words, images, text, art, symbols, etc.                         |
| <b>Narrative</b>  | Connected ideas or events that form a storyline.<br>Narratives form webs of personal, interpersonal, and cultural stories. |
| <b>Generative</b> | Expands the realm of the possible towards an appealing future.   |

What makes discourse – and narratives – generative?

# Generative discourse shifts...

DEBATE (Latin for beat down)	To	DIALOGUE (Latin for meaning flowing through)
Advocate		Inquire
Tell		Learn
Defend beliefs		Uncover assumptions
Maintain status quo		Generate novelty
Argue well		Speak differently
Emphasize <i>differences</i> and <i>distinctions</i> to:		Explore <i>differences</i> and <i>distinctions</i> , <i>discover connections</i> and <i>relationships</i> to:
Choose <i>one</i> meaning among many (narrowing)		Create <i>shared</i> meaning among many (opening)
Win/lose		Win/win

*For many of us, debate is our default mode of communication.*

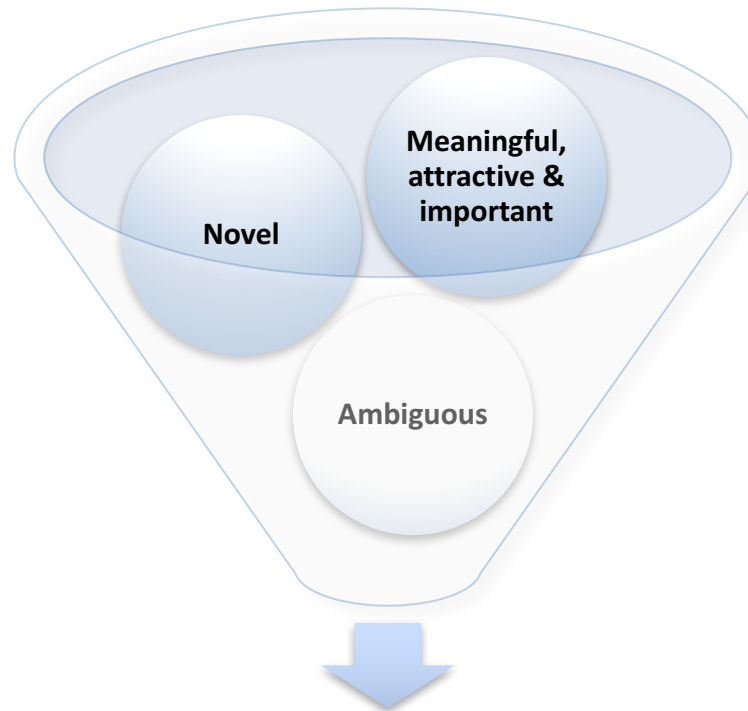
# What is a Generative Image?

A metaphor, picture, or idea that looks at a critical problem in new ways and catalyzes movement towards it.

Sustainable  
development

The  
American  
Dream

Following the marathon  
bombing  
Boston Strong



Engaged  
journalism



Generative Image

# Hosting Organizational Conversations

