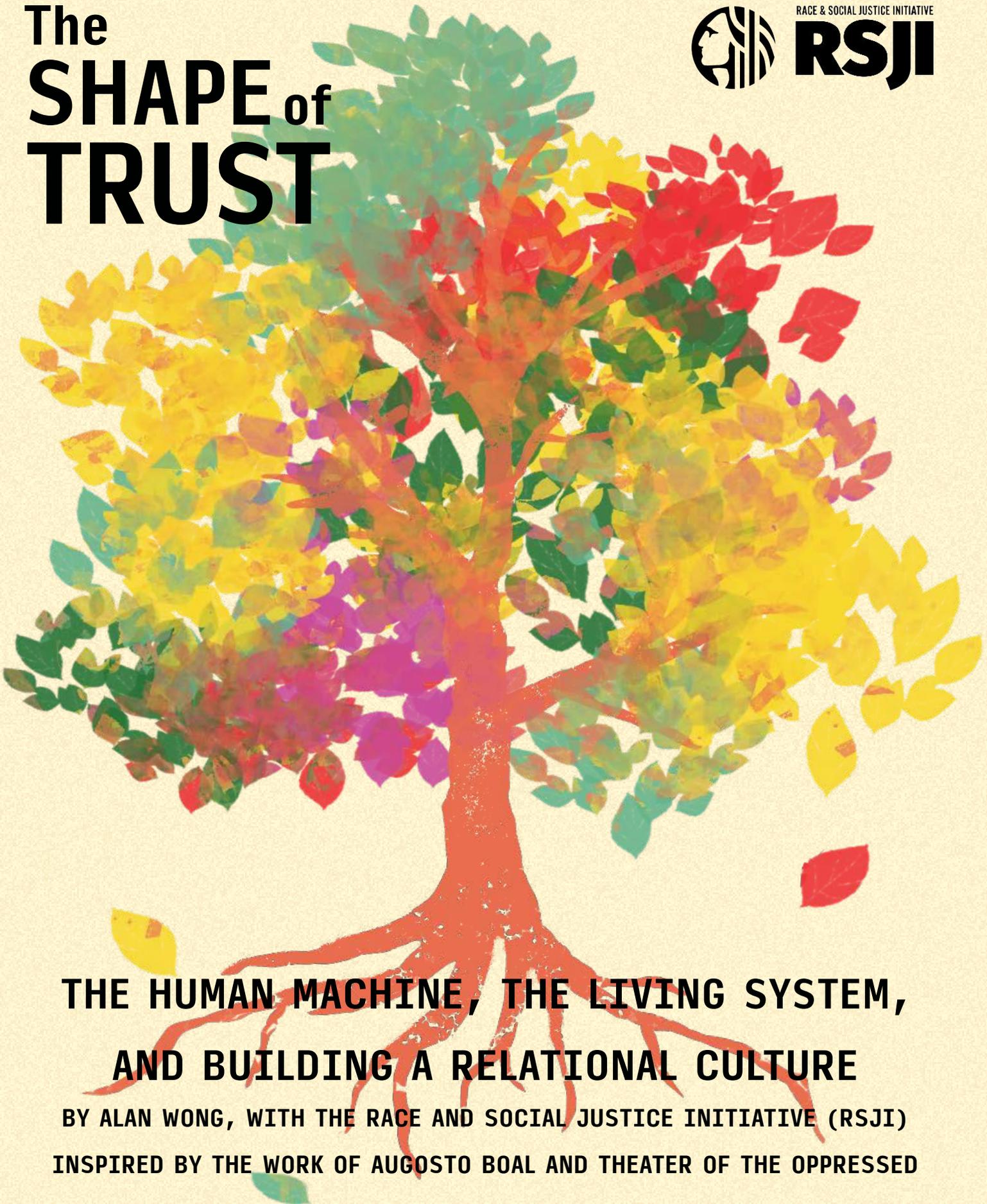


The **SHAPE** of **TRUST**



RACE & SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE

RSJI



**THE HUMAN MACHINE, THE LIVING SYSTEM,
AND BUILDING A RELATIONAL CULTURE**

BY ALAN WONG, WITH THE RACE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE (RSJI)

INSPIRED BY THE WORK OF AUGUSTO BOAL AND THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED



WHAT

A two-part, in-person activity in which participants explore the [Building a Relational Culture](#) document and then form two machines — the “Machine of White Supremacy and Colonization” and the “Machine of Belonging, Wellbeing, and Coliberation” — and examine the different impacts of and feelings evoked by each machine. The two parts can be done together or separately.

Number of Participants

8-40. For larger groups, you may have some participants who become part of the machines and others who are observers only.

Time

2 hours to 2 hours and 20 minutes combined for both parts.

Timing for each step is flexible, based on the needs of the group and overall facilitation plan. Some suggestions are provided. Total time will depend on format (in-person, virtual, or hybrid), number of participants, and other factors such as where you want to focus learning and for how long. We expect that experienced facilitators will know how to adjust and limit time as needed.

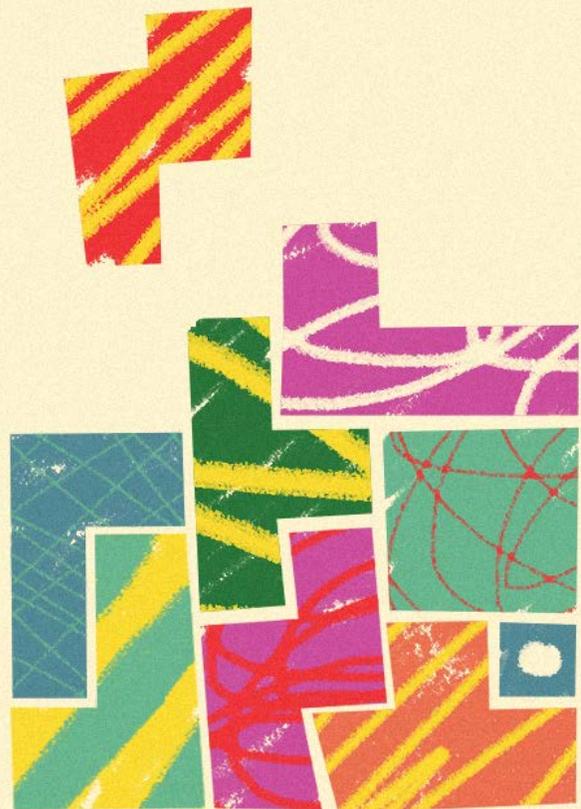
This Activity Spotlight is a component of The Shape of Trust Video Facilitation Guide by the City of Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI). For information on the facilitation experience recommended for those using the Guide, a glossary of terms, and tips to support collective health, wellbeing, and belonging – in particular of BIPOC – please download the Guide from the RSJI website.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:

Explore collective embodiments of white supremacy culture and relational culture.

Use this embodiment as the basis for understanding what is often true about how we move together in our organizations and institutions, as well as what is possible for how we can move together toward racial and social justice.



Participant Preparation

This is an activity that can lead to deep sharing and reflection. It is important that the group has explored and even created their own cultivating principles (See Activity Spot-

light, Principles to Cultivate a Community of Practice) or brought in some form of agreements that help the group develop a sense of community and the beginnings of trust.

Facilitation Materials

- Floor space to create forms out of multiple human bodies.
- [Building a Relational Culture](#).
- The Shape of Trust Video Facilitation Guide, “Glossary”.

ACCESSIBILITY

Be mindful of the access needs of the people in your group. Check in ahead of time with participants to find out what access needs they have. When designing the activity, center those who are most impacted. For example, if you have someone in the group who uses a mobility assistance device, you could remind people to use different levels in their poses so that participation does not require someone to be on the ground, fully upright, or standing without assistance. Avoid using ableist language and assumptions.

Remind participants that they always have the choice to do what feels comfortable and most safe for themselves and others. For example, some people may not want to be touched at all or require consent before others get close to them.

HOW IT WORKS

PART 1: THE HUMAN MACHINES (35 min)

EXPLAIN (1 min)

Let participants know they will be using their bodies to form a Machine of White Supremacy and Colonization.

Enter the center of the space and demonstrate different ways that someone might use their body to imitate the movements of a machine part.

THE MACHINE (11–15 min)

Invite someone to come into the center of the space and begin making a repetitive motion with parts of their body. Ask that participant to come up with a word that describes what their body is repeating such as “processing”, “cutting”, or “pushing”.

One by one, invite more participants — maybe as many as 10 — to come into the center of the space and make repetitive motions with parts of their body. After each new participant adds a motion, ask them to name a word that describes what their body is repeating.

Now go back through the participants in the same order and ask each person, one at a time, to share a word that conveys how they feel making that repetitive motion (e.g. “constricted,” “exhausted”, or “autopilot”).

Say, “When I tap you gently on the shoulder, please repeat your feeling word without stopping until I tap your shoulder again.” (This is another opportunity to practice consent: facilitators and participants might agree on another form of notification if tapping is not something that everyone agrees to use.) Begin to tap different participants gently on the shoulder. A chorus will arise from these feeling words. Then, one by one, tap each participant’s shoulder until there is only one feeling word being repeated and, finally, none. You might play with “conducting” this chorus from quiet to a loud crescendo and everything in-between. Doing it in this way helps the emotional impact sink in for everyone participating — those involved in the machine and those observing — and highlights the ways in which different parts of the machine interact.

TRANSITION / THE LIVING SYSTEM (11 min)

Ask everyone in the machine to pause. Let them know that in a moment, you will clap your hands five times, slowly. Over the course of those five claps, they are to move into a new configuration of interconnected motions to become something that isn’t a machine at all, but a living system: The Living System of Belonging, Wellbeing, and Coliberation. If the group needs an example, explain this to them using one of the existing motions and describing how it might interact with the motions around it.

Clap your hands five times, slowly. The group transitions as you clap.

Ask participants to describe their motion. Begin a process as you did with the machine, in which you invite one person at a time to share a word that describes their repetitive motions (e.g. “healing” or “holding”).

Ask participants to describe how they feel. As with the machine, go through the participants in the same order and ask each

person, one at a time, to share a word that conveys how they feel making that repetitive motion as part of this living system (e.g. “at-ease” or “connected”).

Next, say, “When I tap you gently on the shoulder, please repeat your feeling word without stopping until I tap your shoulder again.” One by one, a chorus will arise from these feeling words. Then, one by one, tap each participant’s shoulder until there is only one feeling word being repeated and finally, none. You might play with “conducting” as you did with the machine.

Variations and tips:

- When participants create their motions, they can also make a sound that they repeat along with the repeated motion.
- If you have less time, you could invite participants to share only the word for the feeling they’re experiencing and skip the word describing the motion.

HOW IT WORKS (continued)

REFLECT (20–25 min)

Invite everyone to give each other a round of applause, snaps, or hand waves and move into a comfortable position for a group debrief:

- How did it feel, in your body, to be part of the machine? To be part of the living system? (If there were observers, how did it feel to witness?) What did you notice, in your body, in the Machine of White Supremacy and Colonization. What shifted for you as you were invited to collaborate on the Living System of Belonging, Wellbeing, and Coliberation?
 - Let's reflect on the Machine of White Supremacy and Colonization: How did you know what repetitive motion to choose? How did you figure out how to connect with the others? What did you notice about the ways you were relating to and interacting with others?
 - When you transformed into the Living System of Belonging, Wellbeing, and Coliberation, how did the phrase "living system" shift your orientation to what you were doing? How did you know what repetitive motion to choose? What were some of the specific practices that you embodied in order to support what you believe that living system was trying to create?
 - What differences did you notice between the body movements of the machine and the living system?
 - In what ways does belonging, wellbeing, and coliberation require us to not see living systems such as people, teams, and organizations as machines? How is highlighting the living systems within our workplaces necessary for the work of belonging, wellbeing, and coliberation? What are the risks in doing that? How are those risks different for BIPOC and white people? How can focusing on the fact that we are living systems offer possibilities for care, repair, and healing?
- Some additional reflective questions:
 - How are the machine and the living system connected?
 - What is the role of the individual in powering the machine and the living system? What is the role of the collective in powering the machine and the living system?
 - What is different about the roles of white people and BIPOC in the machine and the living system? What is similar?
 - Is it possible to have a healing or helping role and be part of the Machine of White Supremacy and Colonization? If yes, in what ways can you have a healing role? If no, why not?
 - Why is it important to visualize and embody what we want for our workplace, for our world? Facilitators emphasize that, while the world doesn't change in five simple claps, if we can lean our minds, hearts, and bodies toward the feeling of coliberation, those movements become more possible. This awareness is connected to Augusto Boal's beliefs about the power of imagination as a tool of liberation from oppression. For more information on Boal and his work, read [Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed in TheaterArtLife](#).

HOW IT WORKS

PART 2: EXPLORE BUILDING A RELATIONAL CULTURE (1 hour and 40 min)

REFLECT (1 min)

If participants completed Part 1 of this activity, invite them to hold onto the embodied exploration they did as they move into Part 2, which will examine some specific ways to cultivate belonging,

wellbeing, and coliberation to undo the system of white supremacy.

FIRST LIST (12 min)

Ask participants to count off into small groups of 4 or 5. Ask each small group to create a list of the norms, ways of being, habits, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that support a culture of belonging.

SHARE (10 min)

In the large group, invite a few people to share from each small group. Create a larger list from the whole group of some of the practices they came up with that support a culture of belonging.

SECOND LIST (10 min)

Now ask each small group to create a list of the norms, ways of being, habits, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that prevent a culture of belonging.

Let participants know that for those who already strive to create a culture of belonging and those who have been marginalized from the dominant culture of their organizations, this part of the activity might stir discomfort or even anger.

SHARE / REFLECT (12 min)

In the large group, invite a few people to share from each small group. Create a larger list from the whole group of some of the practices they came up with that prevent a culture of belonging.

Ask participants to notice what is similar and different about these lists. There may be some similarities. It is important for them to recognize that this activity is not about reinforcing binaries or "either/or" mindsets.

READ (25 min)

Share the Building a Relational Culture handout and ask for volunteers to take turns reading the introductory paragraphs out loud. Ask the group if they have any initial questions before they take time to read through the rest of the document.

Let participants know they will have about 20 minutes to read the rest of the document. As they read, invite them to consider what resonates with them as true and what doesn't, and what they may have questions about, with their workplace as context.

HOW IT WORKS (continued)

SHARE (10 min)

Ask participants to get into pairs. In pairs, each person will reflect to their partner about one aspect of relational culture in the workplace and one aspect of white supremacy culture in the workplace that they noted while they were reading, and why.

REFLECT (20 min)

Facilitate a share-back with the whole group. Invite a few individuals to share what came up for them as they reflected. Some points to emphasize:

- This is not about saying that everything in the column on the right is “bad” and should be avoided and that we must live only from the column on the left in order to be “good.” Rather, it’s about recognizing that within many of our organizations there is a pattern of relying too heavily on the norms, ways of being, habits, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that uphold a system of white supremacy. It is also about recognizing what leads to our collective health and wellbeing, and what disrupts that flow. Participants should recognize that there are practices that can cultivate interconnection, wellbeing, and belonging, which are critical for our ability to move forward collectively in anti-racist ways.
- If participants return to a binary understanding of the concepts in this activity, ask them if they can see the complexity of it: the both/and (as opposed to the either/or). The introductory section of Building a Relational Culture has an example of this on Page 2.

Let them know they might choose something they observe often, already practice, or grapple with personally. (It is possible to practice something and also grapple with it!) They might choose something they notice happens repeatedly or something they hadn’t thought about until reading the document.

- Note how, as a society, we’ve hewn deep and familiar grooves through centuries of patterns within the culture of our organizations that reinforce the system of white supremacy.
- Moving out of what’s normal and what we’re already doing can be painful and difficult. Ask participants to reflect on what they can do for themselves and each other to build resilience and mutual support in the face of this change.

Tips and resources:

- The order of this activity could be inverted so that the exploration of Building a Relational Culture comes before the Human Machines.
- For an example of the mechanics of this activity, watch [The Machine – 2012 Saturday Academy in Drama](#) by University of California Irvine Claire Trevor School of the Arts on YouTube. Notice that this is facilitated significantly differently from the facilitation described here.