

Gatherings

How to participate in, host or facilitate
rEvolutions with abracadabra

Magda Barceló, Serena Cook

Laure le Douarec

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For more information check the book's website:

www.gatheringsforevolution.com

This book has been self-edited.

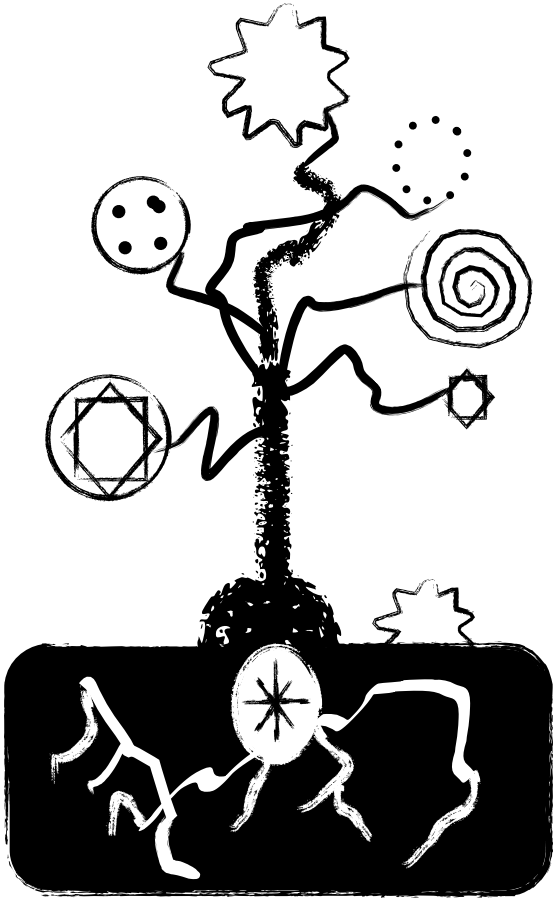
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All stories portrayed in the book are real. Some names have been changed for confidentiality reasons.



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Prologue

Working collectively is a challenge... thus so was writing this book.

The idea of a book which has taken the shape of *Gatherings* arose in two places at the same time. One place was in Magda's meditation group in Seattle around the beginning of 2011, as she reflected on the Art of Hosting program she had just been part of. She realised that no publication presented the different ways of hosting gatherings, and that this would be a helpful resource.

On the other side of the world, in Paris, Laure engaged a growing number of people in her charity but the conversations she was having faltered when she proposed certain kinds of interventions. To understand what she had in mind and how it could work concretely, people from potential participants to her own mother needed simple descriptions of the methods she was keen to put into use. She was increasingly eager to offer these simple descriptions.

Oblivious to the others, but in quirky synchronicity, Serena did the groundwork of starting her own business. At the same time, she stretched out of her familiar life in many ways. How could she stay congruent in the middle of so much change, and continue to practice in her daily life what mattered most to her? She didn't have the money or confidence to ask her family to stand behind an unproven business idea, but it bugged her to see so many others overcoming obstacles, when she was losing sight of her gifts and experience.

From these situations of openness or difficulty, the seed of writing a practical book that encompassed the techniques described here sprouted in our hearts and minds.

One factor favoured the idea becoming reality: all of us had experienced the profound difference using these processes could make. We had been part of the wonder of different ways of gathering for business, society, or family.

Magda considered the possibility of writing the book on her own, but what sense did it make for one person to write a book on collective intelligence? Magda connected the three journeys. She took the brave act of asking her friends and colleagues, Laure and Serena, “Do you like the idea of rEvolutionary gatherings? Would you like to participate in writing a book on this?” It felt momentous.

To Magda’s surprise, they immediately and enthusiastically accepted. Not only did Laure and Serena want to join the project, they wanted to finish the book in three months!

Laure knew that Magda could translate the book into the Spanish language and culture. Laure was certain that a book on collective intelligence, in three languages (Spanish, French, and English) from a European view, would offer a fantastic journey for both the readers and the authors.

Serena was delighted to be involved, though such a book in any form had not crossed her mind. She thought of the thousands of business books available in bookstores, airport vendors, and e-sellers. Was there anything distinctive about what Magda proposed? Was there a need in the world, or in herself, to spend time on this project? She hesitated. Was it about her personal confidence, perhaps a shadow pretending to be a wise voice? Her commitment came as much from her wish not to miss out on the adventure as it came from the clarity of her contribution, the value of the project, and the impact of the book.

Different expectations and needs appeared early as we committed to work on the book. Web-based conversations were held over the months, and some meetings were in person.

After the initial enthusiasm and falling in love with the project, things did not go *exactly* as planned. Whatever does? We each had a different book in mind and saw different paths to complete it.

Laure wanted a book that went straight to the point and was written French. Nothing fancy. Serena dreamt of a beautiful manuscript, where designs reinforced the meaning of words. The readers would be pleased to hold it in their hands and it would give them the confidence that they could do the work themselves. Magda had in mind a colorful book full of inspiring case studies from around the world that delighted and engaged readers.

The role of money drew out different feelings about spending, waste, and equality. What funds were we ready to invest? How much money did we want to make from the book? Laure resisted investing anything because she wanted to use the broad collective intelligence of our networks instead of money to bring the book to life. She did not care about making a profit. She wanted the book to be cheap enough so that anyone could buy it. Magda was more inclined to invest in designers, proofreaders, and a website and generate resources through sales. With a good book, we could reach more people and increase our impact in the world. We also had bills to pay. Serena wanted a book, elegant in design, useful, delightful to hold and read. Her bold ideas about distribution and marketing left the others cold.

Editing was another story. When we edited the manuscript, each of us asked, "Whose book is it?" *The book is mine, only mine, my Precious*, we murmured. The manuscript became a wicked ring, and we were competing Gollums. We edited when we were not supposed to, altering its structure, holding it for more days than agreed. We wrangled with our experience of the practices as well as our own values in modifying the text.

Frodo talking to Gandalf:

"I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened."

Gandalf replies:

"So do all those who live such times. But that is not for them to decide. All that we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us."¹

¹ *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, directed by P. Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001)

The decision-making process emerged over time rather than being agreed explicitly at the outset. A democratic approach was typically applied. If two of the three of us wanted something, the third person had to propose another way or agree. It was tempting to feel the other two as an opposing force when an individual view was rejected. We needed to speak explicitly of the experiences of exclusion, resistance, responsibility for agreement, withholding, and keeping silent. These practices made gathering to write the book fruitful and challenging.

Surprising sessions blossomed in which we operated as a single mind, working in a flow. The thought of one of us connected to the others, ideas pinged, and breakthroughs burst.

We locked ourselves in a monastery in the mystical hills of Montserrat, Spain. It was so cold that we drank steaming tea, wrapped in blankets, and at some points, danced to warm up. After sessions of intense work, we relished the mountains surrounding us. This change of focus and taking time to be together or alone deepened our stamina for the work. When we met in sunny and warm Catalonia, we experienced the opposite and enjoyed a jump into cold water!

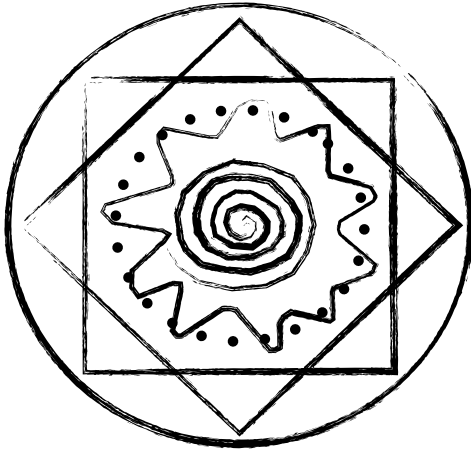
When we were missing a case study on a particular method, one came up. We met people who had inspiring stories, and once invited, they were willing to share them. There were many more synchronicities.

While sometimes we felt that the writing was a curse, we wondered how we could effectively write the book and not only continue to be friends but be closer to each other. Our determination to keep an appreciative outlook for one another and the process was key. Admitting that no matter how annoying this or that trait was to each other was as important as our aligned qualities. The practice of checking in, as individuals and as participants in the work, was a great help in reaching that level of connection.

We developed skills in addressing behaviors without attacking the person. When annoyed, we asked, “Why is this making me react like this? What is my responsibility in this?” By doing so, we looked fiercely at our own traits, thoughtless habits, reactions, or shadows. This is how a book about groups became an opportunity to gain insight.

Having a strong, shared intention got us to a happy end. We wanted to write a book that would inspire all readers to personal action, a book that would not encourage the destruction of what exists but reconnect people to the profound, implicit order beneath the apparent fragmentation and chaos of the world.

The results were both tangible and intangible: deep and cherished relationships, increased contribution in the world, the present book, and a great story to tell our friends, sons, daughters, nieces, and nephews.



Introduction

Morpheus to Neo:

“You are here because you know something. What you know you can’t explain, but you feel it. You felt it your entire life. That there is something wrong with the world. You don’t know what it is, but it is there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad. It is this feeling that has brought you to me.”²

Why Gatherings for rEvolution

We know the crises of our time. We see them in the media, and we feel them: global ecological challenges, extended poverty, and widespread economic downturn.

While many people linger in indecisiveness, we’ve seen groups stand up to state their disagreements with the current model and look for alternatives. Examples include the Arab revolutions and the Occupy movement.

Other movements such as Roots and Shoots, Colibri, and Transition Town experiment with new ways of being and living. They offer new types of connectedness and collaboration. They embody peaceful and often invisible evolution.

This book builds on the efforts emerging along the continuum of evolution to revolution. It provides tips to bravely be and do what we sense that our life or the world needs.

Gatherings based on trust are essential to bring about lasting change. They reconnect us to the beautiful, the joyful, and the meaningful.

² *The Matrix*, directed by Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski (Warner Brothers, 2003)

The book presents ways to transform gatherings into opportunities. These practices allow co-creation of a positive shared vision and intention. We have not invented any of these practices. Some of them are ancient, and although they may be familiar, they can be applied in surprising ways at many levels:

The personal level

- Communicate with loved ones or friends with better connection and understanding.
- Deal with disagreements or complex issues in an authentic manner to maintain relationships through the storms of life.

The community level (work, associations)

- Enjoy coming together and having fun with teammates.
- Empower groups and individuals; allow them to be responsible and committed.
- Build on the strengths of groups and find ways to make change happen.

The local and global level

- Tackle global challenges with local insight and local challenges with global insight.
- Create alliances with multiple actors to create sustainable change.
- Take responsibility for the care of our shared world.

**Let's get rid of leaders unless...
each one of us is a leader**

We believe that no one individual has the whole answer to a problem, and no one person is powerless and uninformed. All parties involved must gather to create meaning with depth and compassion. In doing so, collective intelligence emerges, and groups can create shared understanding and take meaningful action.

Collective intelligence is anchored in human practices that are thousands of years old. It taps into ancient wisdom and the intuition that everything is connected.

The methods presented here show how to engage with people from crafting decisions through implementing and sustaining them. These inclusive, participatory, and motivational processes allow time for feedback, which guides adaptation as the context changes.

rEvolutionary gatherings	Conventional gatherings
emergence	control
diversity	homogeneity
slow to decide, swift to implement	swift to decide, slow to implement
wholeness	fragmentation
equal opportunities	arbitrary opportunities
adaptability	collapse in front of crises
inclusive	exclusive
compassionate	authoritarian
transparency	controlled information
responsibility	submissiveness

A warning and an encouragement

Our encouragement is to begin and act, rather than wait for perfection. As you engage in these gatherings, you will find healthier, better functioning relationships, responsive group-dynamics, more profound listening, greater trust and enjoyment in whatever work you have at hand. Quite often, it will feel like beautiful magic, hence our use of the word abracadabra. But the gratification of a quick decision, a swift action plan in hand, and someone else to blame are not on offer.

With these gathering practices, success comes more slowly. And you are likely to meet with enormous fear and doubt, in yourself and certainly in others. Because these techniques allow for a longer period of ambiguity, the fear and doubt may seem greater. Tough conversations and ensuing discomfort will be part of the journey to learn to work in a better way. This is the trade-off of a richer, more authentic way forward. And these processes offer a structure to encounter these rough moments safely.

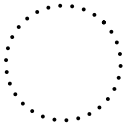
Accepting responsibility to lead a rEvolution, small or large, is a brave choice. Just as Neo was seeking Morpheus, if the book is in your hands, you are longing for a different way to be and bring change about. And with that longing, change has begun.

Navigating this book

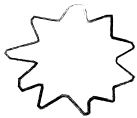
The techniques for organising gatherings are presented in six sections:



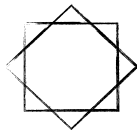
1. **Be. Ways of participating.** You are the foundation of any gathering. We all need to start with choosing how we take part, whether we are a participant, host, or facilitator. No matter what your role, age, or gender, you can influence a group of people with your way of being.



2. **Explore. Same as unusual.** Add an edge to how you organise gatherings. Take a step back and consider different ways of inviting, welcoming, and reporting. Make sure that your actions match your tone.



3. **Dare! Subversive techniques.** Weave these practices into any type of meeting to change the pace, tone, or atmosphere. They are especially suited for accessing creativity and the connection that we tend to.



4. **Engage. One-off gatherings.** These methods enable action and give a chance to wrestle with your rEvolutionary partners. With a defined format and specific steps, they can be used for a single event, as short as a few hours, or for periodic meetings over months or years.



5. **Ground. Abracadabra.** Intention and Container are the magical ingredients that distinguish rEvolutionary gatherings from conventional ones.



6. **Commit. Odysseys.** Odysseys are long, arduous collective journeys that require the commitment of the members. They help us transcend our ego and the feeling of separateness. You learn to trust the collective fully. On an odyssey, leadership becomes collective.

We, the writers, love journeys, so from now on, we will tend to meld ourselves with you, the reader, into an all encompassing “we” in the text, sometimes introducing the “you” voice for the sake of clarity. Please, play this grammatical game with us. We are not experts telling you what to do. We feel we are on the journey alongside you, trying to be better humans and generate more positive rEvolutionary gatherings. Writing the book is part of our journey, and we sometimes struggle with practicing the techniques. So when we say “we” for the rest of the book, we do mean you and us, imperfect but on the move.

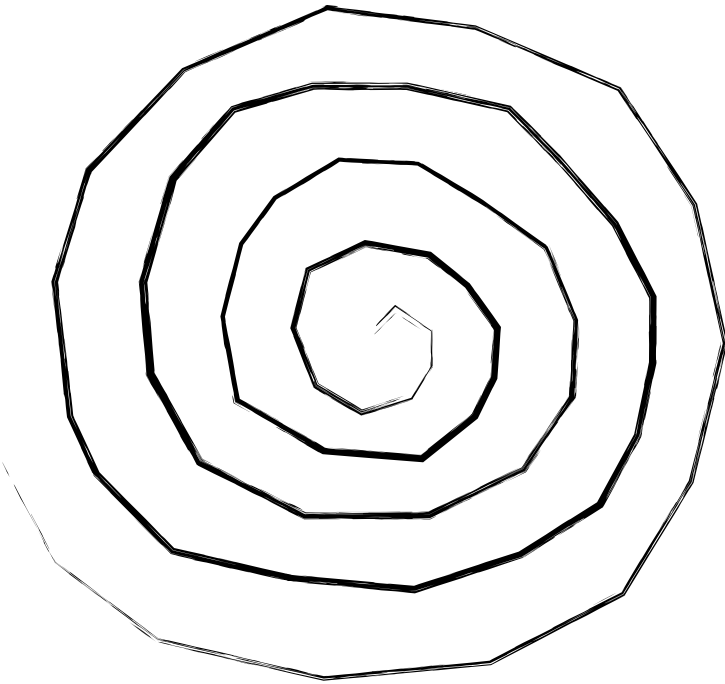
Overview of Methodologies

Type	Tags	People	Time range	Pg.
Be. Ways of participating	breathe / listen / see / working well / choose / diversity / dark parts / herding cats	individual	minute by minute	17
Explore. Same as unusual	our question? / resonant partner / a good spot / the invitation / show up / ready on the day / say welcome / frame the day / what's next? / collective meaning / hi again or farewell?	individual or group (host)	as needed	33
Dare! Subversive techniques	creativity / flexible / inner connection / relating from non-rational mind / presence / relaxation / celebration	individual or any group	minutes to several days	53
Engage. One-off gatherings	engagement / hosting change / collective intelligence / conversations / energy for action	pairs or groups	30 minutes to several days	85
Dialogue	listen to all voices / exploration of a topic / perception shift	2 to 30	1 hour to 2 days	86
Open Space	work on what matters to the group / concrete actions	20 to thousands	2 hours to 5 days	92
World Cafe	connection with others / exploration of a topic / shared insight	20 to thousands	1 hour to 1 day	97
Insight council	exploration of a topic / non invasive help / pre-decision making	3 to 12	30 min. to 2 hours	100
Sacred listening	space for individual reflection / non invasive help	pairs - any group	30 to 90 minutes (each)	103
Shadowing	insight from within / into another person's or organisation's shoes	pairs - any group	half a day to several days	108

Overview of Methodologies

Type	Tags	People	Time range	Pg.
Commit. Odysseys	commitment / deep change / long journeys	groups, pairs and individuals	months to years	123
Creative process	group and/or personal journey / create and connect to others from the centre	individual to any group	bound to the readiness of each person	125
Peer partnership	shared journey / same pair / same topic (optional)	pairs - any group	each meeting from 30 min to 1.5 hours. Journey over months or years	129
Circle	shared journey / same group / same topic (optional)	up to 12 people	each meeting from hours to days. Journey over months or a lifetime	132
Community of Practice	shared topic / learn collectively / periodic interaction	from 2 to many	one year to many	135
Appreciative Inquiry (AI)	build on strengths / transformative vision and action	from 2 to many	SOAR or parts of AI from 1 hour to 1 day / Whole process: from 1 to 4 days spread over 2 months	138
Theory U	letting go of damaging ways / invite an unknown but better future / tool to design an Odyssey	from 1 to many	one meeting to years	148

BE



Be. Ways of participating

This section provides tips on how to better participate in any gathering with other people, whatever your role. To write the book, we've used these tips intensively. We use them daily in our lives.

Breathe old friend

We must breathe. But it is worth being explicit about the simple, when mastering the new. We aim for deep and steady breath, particularly in gatherings.

Heightened states of human experience, such as crying and laughing, both have shorter cycles of breath. When we encounter stress or confusion about what to do next, we focus on our breath. Reclaiming our full breath affects those around us, because people unconsciously mirror one another's breathing. If we find our thoughts drifting to judgment, anger, anxiety, or ill-timed giddiness, steadying our breath will bring us back to the present.

If our energy is low and we wish to raise it, we focus on our inhalation. We count to six while inhaling and to four while exhaling. If our energy is high and we wish to steady it, we focus on our exhalation. We count to four while inhaling and to six while exhaling.

Laure's experience: "Breath is a challenge for me. I tend to go through life in apnea, to stay focused on the task at hand. This disconnects me from my body, creates tension, and reduces my ability to be compassionate with others. Through my practice of the martial art Aïkido, I am learning to reconnect with my breath and to breathe while I make a physical effort, while I am focused, and while I relax. In my day-to-day life, I now notice my apnea. This is the first step to breathe again."

Breathing is the foundation for all the practices in this book. At a gathering, notice your breath without judgement. Inhalation enables you to take in energy. Exhalation allows the release of emotion and expressing yourself.

Listen up

Listening well is important because it enables the speaker to think more clearly. For most of human history, oral traditions were the only means of holding stories and learning. The ability to listen intently to capture knowledge in order to survive has diminished. But we haven't evolved any better ways of knowing one another. Listening remains the best way of sharing information rapidly, forming relationships, and creating a shared future. *Even better than Powerpoint presentations.*

Some people's roles encourage others to speak freely—think of barbers and bartenders. Pets offer simple companionship: they neither ask questions nor propose answers. The main attributes of listening are being present and refraining from judgment or offering solutions.

In order to listen with attention: be aware of and acknowledge your physical, intellectual, and emotional states. Avoid judging your anger, sadness, indifference, or joy. You have no need to change your state, because it will pass. Simply acknowledge how you feel so that you can focus on the speaker. This helps to establish trust, connection, and commitment to the working session.

Listen without intending to persuade or prepare a response. Listen without trying to help. This demonstrates that you trust that the speaker is fully equipped to find his or her own best solution.

When it is your time to speak, you may ask for a minute to think through what you need to say. Slowing down the conversation can be a gift to a group. You don't need to be self-conscious about slowing down or apologise for it. You can encourage others to use the time for their own reflection or to simply support you.

For those of us who struggle to stop our mind from chattering while we listen to others, listening with attention is useful. We can put every scrap of energy into noticing the person speaking. We can see the smallest detail of their expression and hear how their voice conveys each thought. Again and again, we direct our attention back to the speaker. If we are microscopic about listening and noticing, we have less time to judge.

The Transition Town Network started in Totnes, United Kingdom, in 2005. In 2012, approximately 200 towns are part of the movement. They have mainstreamed permaculture, consumption of fruits and vegetables grown locally, and own currencies to build resilient communities. As the achievements of the Transition Town Network became popular, the UK government offered to send a Member of Parliament (MP) as a keynote speaker at one of the gatherings.³ The Transition Town Network replied that it would gladly allow the MP David Milliband to attend but rather than coming as keynote speaker, they welcomed him as a keynote listener. More about this in: www.transitionculture.org.

Keynote listeners may have relevant expertise, but in rEvolutionary gatherings, their insights about effecting change are valued no more than the other participants. By asking for a keynote listener, the network signified the importance of listening, especially among leaders who serve and guide people. David Milliband took the opportunity and listened with care, which was inspiring and helpful for the network.

³ In that gathering, they used Open Space. Read more in the section Engage.

I see you

Serena's experience: "When I find myself in challenging situations I try to see the people around me more carefully. The train from Mumbai to Delhi feels claustrophobic to me, and I suffer from motion sickness. Or when I am surrounded by aggressive drivers in Boston or I walk past a homeless person, in these situations I feel tense.

I notice my hands: are they clenched and sweaty or relaxed and open? Are my shoulders hunched, ready for an imaginary battle? Is my breathing shallow? I try to use that moment when I am a bit overwhelmed by emotion or sensation to focus outside of myself. I find great peace of mind in noticing another person well in such a moment.

I notice as much as I can about them. They tend to notice me too, and when they do, I smile, send them a silent wish for health and happiness. I politely shift my attention, because it is a bit odd to gaze at strangers deeply and fairly unsafe whilst driving. In challenging places, I invite humour and lightness to see people. It can greatly enhance the commute to work."

"I see you" is a Zulu greeting, similar to the Sanskrit word *namaste*, which means, "The God in me sees the God in you." I see your essence, and I am in awe of what I see.

Each life is unique. If we see others with respect, we see each other's gifts. We draw on their gifts, hear their unique voice, and uphold their worth. As we see others fully and welcome their vulnerabilities and imperfections, we invite them to think with clarity and express themselves better.

Compassion is a cornerstone of connection with others and a key to collective intelligence. The practice of compassion begins with us. In the conversations we have with ourselves, are we scolding or compassionate? Let us speak respectfully, and listen respectfully to others.

What is working well?

We find what we look for. If we choose to look with a positive frame, we notice what is valuable and essential in ourselves, in others and in our environment. This raised awareness of what works builds our faith that we can continue to improve. Focusing on what you appreciate and holding onto the good allows you to go where you need to with more certainty.

Consider applying this in your professional life. If asked what's wrong with your job or work environment, you can find aspects that are irritating. Thinking about these examples and sharing them can leave you feeling resentful. If asked what you appreciate about your job, you can find positive examples, at least small ones, and these enhance your pleasure and commitment for the time you spend at work.

Exercise: Rewire your brain

These two steps are part of the exercise Shawn Achor specifically designed. See his TEDTalk, *The Happy Secret to Better Work*. It mirrors practices of daily prayer for example during the Christian season of Advent. This helps us see more of the beauty in our life. This can be a personal or collective practice, over 21 days:

- Each day, write in a journal three new things you are grateful for.
- Each day, write about one positive experience you've had in the past twenty-four hours. In doing so, you allow your brain to relive it.

www.goodthinkinc.com/speakers/shawn-achor/

Choose ownership

Here is the pact we have signed:

Do you promise to forget you are God's child and become a poor citizen? Yes, I promise.

Do you promise to forget that the world was confided to you and to sink into a profound helplessness? Yes, I promise.

Do you promise to always give to others responsibility over your own life: to your spouse, professor, priest or doctor, and in the case of atheism and emancipation, to fashion and advertising? Yes, I promise.

Impossible to tell when this pact was signed but it doesn't matter as at any moment we can sign it off and enter the incandescence of presence.

Christiane Singer⁴

Life inescapably demands we participate. At home or in a meeting, we choose to stay or leave, to keep silent or speak up. When we participate in formal meetings or family gatherings, we sometimes feel powerless and passively follow the lead of our hosts, evaluating what they are doing to us. Yet, responsibility for our actions always remains in our hands, and choosing to use that chance brings about a different energy, one likely to spread to other participants.

The difference between rEvolutionary gatherings and conventional gatherings is that in the former, all participants are made aware of their choice and responsibility. At the beginning of collective intelligence gatherings, personal responsibility⁵ is made explicit.

⁴ C. Singer *Les Âges de la vie* (1990)

⁵ See the Ground Rules in section Explore, chapter Hosting.

In a transparent group where authenticity and even intimacy of exchange emerges, I might feel compelled to share more details of my personal life. However our stories, views, beliefs, and ideas are ours to share, or not. Choosing privacy can sometimes strengthen a group.

At the same time, I can set an example of risk taking and be open to the gift of surprise. The more I challenge myself and move out of my comfort zone, the more I learn and grow.

The Orange Tree Theatre in Richmond (UK) used this invocation of personal responsibility in its invitation to audiences for an upcoming season: “Audiences are now often confronted with notices in theaters informing them that there will be smoking in the play, or bangs and gunshots. This is not a good idea. Plays are meant to surprise and it is not always possible, or desirable, to tell audiences in advance what is going to happen during the performance. Plays may contain murder, incest, flagellation, sex, smoking, gunshots and, if you are watching King Lear, eyes being gouged out. And of course ‘language’. It is, I believe, the responsibility of audience members who may be concerned to make their own enquiries.”⁶

Beyond your own individual safety, you are also responsible for the group’s safety in rEvolutionary gatherings. If someone interrupts others, disregards others, speaks too much, or shows resentment for the group, all participants of the gathering have a responsibility to state their feelings, and propose a solution.

⁶ The Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond, Surrey, UK, Letter to Customers, Spring Season 2012

Invite diversity so we last

The preservation of life on earth depends on diversity. Genetic diversity has allowed adaptation for life to survive. Diversity is that important. In his article in Fast Company, Michael S. Malone wrote the following:

David Marsing was Head of International Manufacturing at Intel when he was handed the mandate to manufacture the Pentium 5. It was a huge challenge to create what did become in a very short period of time the largest microprocessor fabrication plant in the world. In that capacity, he instilled new ways of working to leverage diversity. At that time he said: "What most companies want is homogeneity. They want 150 trumpets playing in unison. But homogeneous teams have blind spots; they move like a herd and often in the wrong direction. What's needed instead is complexity, the team as a jazz band that both harmonizes and improvises."

"If the goal is to maximize profits, then it seems obvious to me that the best way to get there is to have happy people who are motivated to work. And the way you do that is to bring together different types of people, allow them to be themselves, get them behind the larger corporate vision, and then give them room to create. Above all, if you want breakthrough thinking and innovation—and you definitely do in this business to survive—then you have to cultivate those aspects of each employee's personality where it will come out."

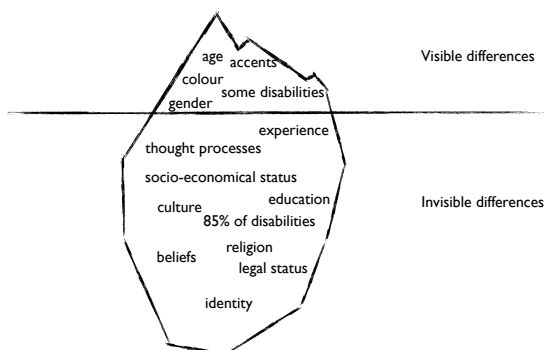
from Michael S. Malone's *Killer Results without Killing Myself*, Fast Company October 31, 1995⁷

Here diversity means the differences among individuals in a group.

- Visible differences: gender, age, body shape, ethnic group, some types of disability.
- Invisible differences: thought processes, experiences, educational backgrounds, culture, religion, beliefs, identities, legal status, learning styles, socio-economic status, 85% of disabilities and a large etcetera.

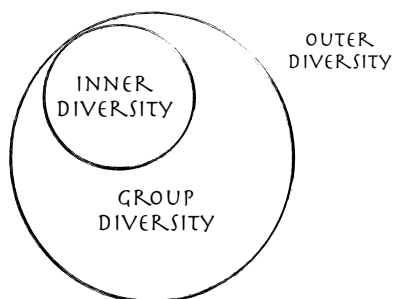
⁷ www.fastcompany.com/magazine/01/marsing.html

Diversity iceberg



Diverse teams tend to be more resilient. The more diverse the perspectives in a group, the more complete the big picture can be. This is why a growing number of organisations, multinational corporations, governments and Non-governmental organisations alike, take diversity seriously.

There are many ways to invite more visible and invisible diversity in gatherings. Invite diversity within yourself, in the people in the group, and in the people outside the group. Diversity makes the muted voices audible. Dare to express your emotions or the ideas you might typically discard. Encourage the people who are quieter to speak up. Ask for the contributions of people outside the group. Invite people with antagonistic views who might have been fearful to join the group.



Welcome the dark parts

Master Yoda to Luke Skywalker: *“Remember, a Jedi’s strength flows from the Force. But beware. Anger, fear, aggression. The dark side are they. Once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny...”*⁸

The concept of the shadow as an unconscious aspect of the personality was developed by the psychiatrist Carl Jung. His contemporary Alexander Solzhenitsyn said the line between good and evil runs through every human heart.⁹ Indeed the kind of shadow we are referring to is not strange to the Dark Side Master Yoda is describing.

Using the term shadow is a means of distancing from those bits of ourselves that hold shame or disgust. With a bit of distance we may be able to see our shadows, acknowledge why we have needed them in the past, perhaps thank them and ask them to sit down nicely—for a bit or forever—so we can return to the business of relating and creating.

Shadows are ways of being that we tend to deny. It can be too much or too little of something. Shadows give us balance, when we cast light on them. By accepting our shadow we see that our strengths are also our weaknesses.

Most often shadows are behind us, so we are unconscious we have them. Because we deny that we embody these features, they trigger particular reactions from us when we see them in others, or when a situation stimulates that gut reaction in us.

The processes presented in the book will be an opportunity for shadows to come to light: my own and those of my rEvolutionary partners’. Knowing this allows us to be ready when it happens, to identify it, understand it and decide how to move forward.

⁸ *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*, directed by George Lucas, (Warner Brothers, 1983)

⁹ A. Solzhenitsyn, *A World Split Apart* (lecture, Harvard University, June 2008)

While working together writing the book, we would experience a real dance of shadows... Serena's creativity and appreciative outlook were essential qualities for our team to work. When we were stuck between two options, she brought in another one. She would repeatedly praise each member's contribution to the work. Serena's shadow showed up as withdrawal from the project without notice on several occasions. She made commitments that she failed to keep without explanation. This created tension, confusion and controlling behaviours. Over time she saw more clearly the consequences of an old coping mechanism.

Laure was a driving force for the book, eagerly contributing to it and encouraging the team to do better and meet the quality and deadlines we set. However, she was frustrated because the process was taking so long, and her shadow came through as threats and sharp words. Her shadow introduced fear, resentment, and several group breakdowns that could have stopped our endeavor if our bond had not been strong.

Magda conceived the project and gathered the team. She created time and space for the team through her calmness and flexibility. When our differences were too big, she held the vision of the book through the turmoil of our egos. Her shadow showed up with her need to protect harmony at all costs, and when she felt disrespected or treated unfairly, she responded abruptly to control the process and impose her way.

Exploring shadows takes a lifetime, and there are no final answers. If you are not aware of your shadows, you might disregard highly valuable contributions from others simply because they touch on your shadow.

Exercise: Explore your shadow

Consider these questions:

- What trait annoys you when you see it in other people? What irritates you when having a group conversation? Reacting disproportionately to others' traits helps you own your shadow.
- What attracts you most? Who are your heroes? These are golden shadows that you own but have denied out of false modesty.
- What do you find yourself doing by accident? What things do you repeat or cannot help doing? What do you find yourself doing when working with groups that you would prefer not to do? Despite the will to do otherwise, "I cannot help it" is a trademark that disowned features are at work.

For an introduction to the concept of the shadow, read *A Little Book on the Human Shadow*, by Robert Bly. If you are interested in workshops consider *Practically shameless: How shadow work helped me find my voice, my path, and my inner gold* by Alyce Barry.¹⁰ Shadow Work Seminars, Inc. provides personal growth seminars and coaching processes based on Jungian psychology. Constellation Work is a fluent way to explore our dark parts as well.¹¹

¹⁰ www.shadowwork.com

¹¹ www.movingconstellations.com/resources/useful-websites-c-300_309.html

Herding cats

The saying “herding cats” sounds frustrating. Unlikely to be successful, hysterically funny, perhaps pointless? It can describe the feeling of the shepherd: a great sense of responsibility for the safety of the cats, and a need to get the herding finished before nightfall. Participating in a conversation through Divergence and Convergence can feel like the same way.

Divergence creates new options. It means proposing ideas, even crazy ones including contradictory explorations, without censorship. Some people struggle staying too long in the phase of divergence because it feels out of control. If the process is made too lengthy, divergence can be the place of plans that never come true, or the place for just talking with no action.

Convergence on the other hand is the time for bringing ideas into action. Order and prioritise dependent actions so the whole can be implemented. Many options have been offered in the divergent phase. Convergence clusters them into related themes and selects the ones of highest priority. In a convergent phase we see what can be put into practice and what not.

While writing this book, a period of convergence—to agree, define, and proceed—emerged at different times for each writer. *“It is time for the book to be bound and ready”* wrote Serena. The needs for convergence jarred with the needs for divergence to explore ideas and ensure that we offered our best. The divergent members felt constrained. Convergent members felt overwhelmed and confused when we withheld taking action. Sometimes, the person who needed divergence suddenly craved convergence. Despite the tensions between divergence and convergence, the result was the book that is in your hands.

Divergence and convergence are key patterns in gatherings, and particularly in change processes. Being aware of these patterns allows you to be relaxed and to relinquish control. Notice without judgment which phase you are in, and decide how you need to spend the time you have left. Each practice described here requires this attention. What part of the ride are you in? Are you diverging or converging? Which do you need more of?

If the group needs are different from what you need, can you cope with it, or do you need to tell the group that you feel challenged?

Awareness allows divergent colleagues to respect the need to converge. It brings ideas out of the dream world and into the tangible world. Awareness kindly reminds converging allies, in their rush to make things concrete, that the time for exploration is still important. Convergence or divergence are objective descriptions, not character flaws. They take the pain out of requests to move into action or continue exploring.

When will you know when a phase is over?

End of a Divergent Phase

The energy of the group has changed. You have been working for some time on the subject, and you have done a good deal of exploration, key themes have surfaced, and nothing else is coming out. You see people are no longer motivated; their energy for new ideas has flagged. There is a will, tacit or explicit, to go deeper into the themes that emerged and work from a different level.

The Groan Zone¹² signals the transition from divergence to convergence. Its key feature is the lack of direction. However uncomfortable this time is, avoid rushing it, because the ideas and actions emerging will most effectively take root.

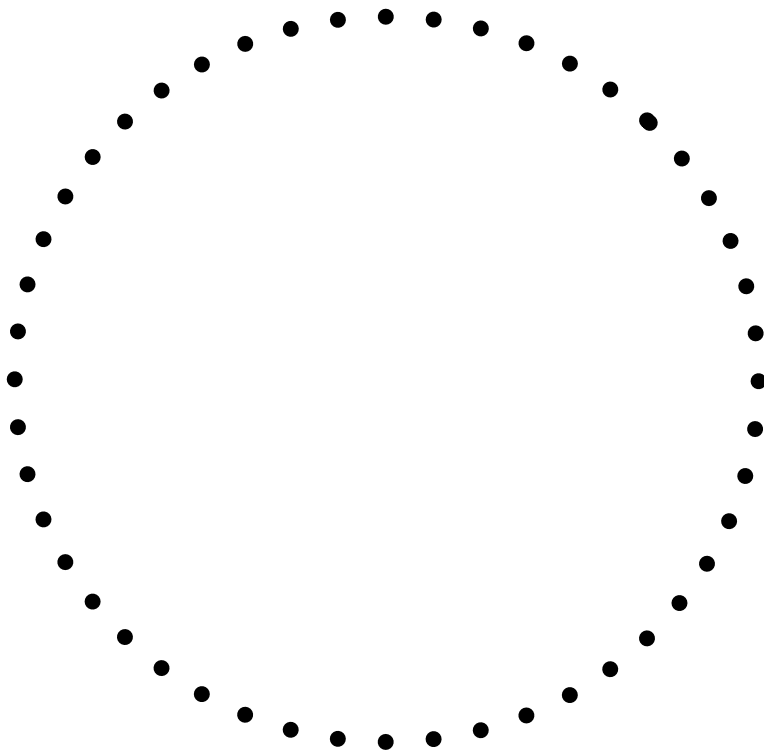
End of a Convergent Phase

There is a sense of completion in the work that has been done. Clarity is achieved, themes are prioritised, and responsibilities are allocated. You feel ready to go and eager to put things into practice. Some questions have been resolved, while others need further exploration.

Convergent and divergent movements can spiral infinitely as no process ever brings all the answers, but the questions left over from a convergent phase often serve as openings for the next divergent phase.

¹² The Art of Hosting community coined the term “Groan Zone”, also spelt “Grown Zone” to show how participants experience both pain and growth in this phase. See www.artofhosting.org.

EXPLORE



Explore. Same as unusual

“The way we do anything, is the way we do everything”

Anonymous

To invite rEvolution this section has a dual relevance. The section *Explore* is on the one hand, a way of giving a twist to usual ways of gathering with groups. Most likely you already host gatherings. Adjust how you implement some or all of these steps in your gatherings and things will happen differently. Subtly but powerfully.

On the other hand, *Explore* provides the vital steps that are required to implement the processes described in the next sections: *Dare*, *Engage* and *Commit*.

In this section we describe the seemingly mechanical steps for a gathering. We highlight the defining ways in which these steps create abracadabra. Sometimes we need them all, other times we don't. For instance if you create a *journaling* exercise in the midst of a periodic meeting, it does not make sense to think about who you are going to invite, greeting people or crafting an invitation. However it is helpful to have a good question in mind, to frame the exercise and encourage participation.

When considering the eleven *Explore* steps below, trust your judgment to select which ones are helpful and to adapt them. Every successful gathering requires paying attention to the three main moments or preparing, hosting and closing.

Preparing the gathering

1. What is our question?
2. Who is up for the party?
3. A good spot and goodies
4. Craft an invitation

Hosting the gathering

5. Show up
6. Ready on the day
7. Say welcome
8. Frame the day
9. What's next?

Closing the gathering and following up

10. Make collective meaning explicit. Or not.
11. Hi again or farewell?

Preparing

1. What is our question?

"The first people had questions and the earth flourished. The second people had answers and the earth perished."

Native American quote

We tend to want solutions, but the most precious gifts we have are our questions. A question opens up a world of possibilities.

The first step in any rEvolutionary gathering is to *define together* what we want to explore. The questions we ask, the words of the invitation, and the way we frame the journey are all important. Hosts often *decide* what question they want to ask and how it will be tackled in the gathering. To create magic we need to be willing to be surprised, unattached to any answer. Is it only my question, or is it a shared question? Am I open enough? More on this topic in the section Powerful Questions.¹³

2. Who is up for the party?

Enemies, supporters, friends. Who is invited and who is not, certainly deserves careful consideration as not inviting certain stakeholders (e.g. short term contracts, administrative staff, or challenging partners) impacts the gathering. Who should participate in the gathering? Who am I missing? What valuable insights could they bring? What are their stakes in the success or failure of the gathering? Let's make sure we include as many of those who will be part of the implementation as possible.

If we look around, we find someone interested in our question a **resonant partner**. Such a person is a treasure because they help us when we lack motivation and when things do not work as planned. They also help us by challenging some ideas and making them sharper. They help in bringing new perspectives and ideas when we are so enthusiastic or frustrated that

¹³ See Powerful Questions in section Dare, chapter Words.

we lose sight of alternatives. Support may take many forms, and powerful allies need neither to be high up the hierarchy nor in the same room where the gathering happens.

If we look long enough, we find several who are potentially interested in our question. Let's talk to colleagues, friends, family about our intentions. In some cases expertise from consultants or internal staff can help us gain experience and confidence in how the event is hosted; so later we can jump in the swimming pool on our own.

3. A good spot and goodies

The space where we spend our days encourages collaboration or makes it difficult. Space influences our relationships immensely.

Take the example of a classroom. There are so many ways to set it up! Kids sitting in rows facing forward imply only the teacher deserves attention and is the sole source of learning. In a kindergarten where kids sit in a circle, the feeling of equality is palpable. By spreading kids around tables, some teachers encourage pupils to learn from each other.

Please, do take the time to think about how you set up your space.

We might be already hosting regular team meetings. Adapting them slightly will be easier than setting up a new one. There might be a large gathering planned but no clear idea on how to run it in a way that would be highly interactive and exciting. We may have meeting rooms in our office, made available by the local town, or in a friend's house. It might be all we need to host.

Once we have found a place, we are vigilant in considering what the *seating* and *acoustics* may impose on participants. It is also important to consider varying mobility and those with significant physical stiffness. Here is an opportunity to use collective intelligence: ask a few other people for their evaluation of a potential location. We will literally sit and consider if our legs and back are at ease. Can we hear well? Can we easily leave the group if we need to find the toilet, etc?

The beauty and light of the *space* is also important. Are there flowers or plants to provide some living energy? Are there windows? Is it possible to go outside and breathe some fresh air?

In many places, tables invade much of the meeting space. People therefore sit behind tables, protected by this physical barrier. This creates an impression of separateness. Our experience tells us we do *not* need tables, not even to take notes. A notepad is sufficient for each person to write on their lap. And the freedom and connection that are generated through a simple circle of chairs without any table are well worth that small effort. Consider whether we even need chairs. Cushions provide more warmth and get us closer to the earth.

Food and drinks

Providing food and drink is a tangible way to welcome participants. It encourages us to relax and become present. These don't need to be expensive. They can be homemade and brought by participants. Every culture in the world uses food as a form of celebration.

Be aware of the impact of the food and drink shared at a gathering. Choose what foods will be nourishing for the kind of work you want to do and the time of day you serve them. In a gathering to help women be in touch with themselves we offered an Ayurvedic diet and alternatives to caffeine. When we wanted to create more warmth and connection, participants brought cakes to share potluck-style. It showed care for one another, gave sensual enjoyment, and comfort.

Connectivity and virtual spaces

Social networking sites and web-based tools can be used before, during or after rEvolutionary gatherings. They extend the ways in which we can share and connect with each other. For example, consider sharing the question with the participants in advance of the gathering via e-mail or a social networking site. Capture highlights and share them with the wider community via a weblog during the gathering. Share images and knowledge after the gathering through photosharing or podcasting sites.

Some of the tools we used for gatherings are:

- Social networking: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter
- Voting: Google moderator, Doodle
- Weblogs: Wordpress, Tumblr
- Photosharing: Flickr, Picassa
- Filmsharing: Youtube, Vimeo
- Podcasting: mypodcast
- Conversation recordings: Skype, Google+ hangouts
- Wikis: Wikipedia, Wikispaces
- Tagging and bookmarks: Delicious
- Crowdfunding: Indiegogo, Goteo
- Community mobilisation: Avaaz

The following sites include the latest social technologies:

Go2web20 www.go2web20.net/

Wikipedia www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites

Bear in mind that *during the gathering* there is an antagonistic correlation between connectivity and focus. The more technologies available the less attention on people, and the greater the risk people will be distracted. A venue lacking mobile phone coverage can be a blessing. Our participants are given the gift of an environment with fewer demands on their attention. If we feel the urge to have connectivity we need to be aware of its implications. Does the use of connectivity uphold the intention? Perhaps it is vital to sustain the work beyond the event we are holding? What about sharing the results with others?

4. Craft an invitation

We, Magda, Serena and Laure, craft our invitations carefully, paying attention to the tone so participants show up in the right mood. For example, we insert a humorous cartoon if we want people to have fun. We include an inspiring quote if we want the event to be more reflective.

Our invitation also raises the core question so participants start reflecting even before the event starts. It also provides the logistical details: when is it happening, where, how can we access the place?

Choose who is sending out the invitation. Should it be the director, or an active member? A team or an individual? If the invite is coming purely from management, it might feel too formal. If it is coming purely from junior staff, it might not be taken seriously.

Here are two examples of effective invitations:

This invite will self-destruct in 2 weeks.

This is your one chance, one opportunity to THINK TOGETHER with eager neighbors about what YOU actually think, want and can do to meet the challenge:

“How can we transform our shared land?”

What? A quick sandwich lunch

Where? In the meeting room Dahlia next to the Mayor House

When? October 30th, 11:45 am - 2 pm

Why? To get to know each other a bit better

How? By exploring together our ideas and energies in an Open Space.

The Mayor will kick off the meeting in the first 20 minutes. He will then leave the floor to us, as this meeting is about collaboration among citizens, to define actionable **ideas we can implement within the current resources before the spring**. If we find ideas that need formal political backup, we will collectively define the best way to ask for that. But we will focus on the numerous places where we could act already without asking for other permission.

Please join us with all your ideas and energy!

The Events Team: Brandon, Jessica, and Leo

In Silence Together. An Invitation

This letter comes to you with a simple, yet in our experience, profound invitation: to join women around the world in a monthly day of Silence.

In August 2009, five women who had been doing leadership and women's work for decades gathered for two days to talk about our lives, and particularly our sense of calling around the nature of women's work in this era. As we explored the topics and themes that were relevant for us, Silence came up as the common commitment we all shared. All of us had already been experimenting with practices in this realm. By the end of the gathering, this invitation was born.

We have initiated this practice to anchor a clear and sacred place of origin for our lives. Together we sustain an energetic wave of loving care for, our own lives, this earth and all its inhabitants. Slowly and steadily, women from around the world have begun to engage in this monthly pulsation.

The day that we have chosen is the last Sunday of each month as it turns out to be the most doable for the largest number of women. We recognize that some of us may not be able to allocate this day for very real reasons (e.g. a shift in a busy hospital), and yet the beauty of this kind of attention is that it easily weaves in those who can only be there in spirit with those of us who are practicing. Three of the five of us, Glennifer Gillespie, Dorian Baroni, and Beth Jandernoa have chosen to practice silence in their own rhythm each month.

Barbara Cecil and Peri Chickering are practicing with the larger circle on the last Sunday of each month~ and then there is Anne Le Claire, the author of the book *Listening Below The Noise*, who practices every other Monday. Whatever discipline and practice works for you is what is important. The main invitation is to listen to your own inner voice and act in accordance to this guidance. If you would like us to consciously know that you are joining us, feel free to email Peri (pchick4@myfairpoint.net). We will send you a reminder note and some kind of inspirational piece just before the last Sunday of the month.

The five women who came together to initiate this practice wish that you may be filled with the wonder and joy of friendship that comes your way with this letter.

In honor and celebration of wholeness, beauty, and the voice of "all our relations",

Peri Chickering

Barbara Cecil

Hosting

5. Show-up

*“Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is crack, a crack in everything
That’s how the light gets in.”*

Anthem by Leonard Cohen

It is important to consider that there is no “perfect way” to go about a rEvolutionary gathering. We each have our own style and they all work. No matter how many times we have used a process, there’s always room for learning and adapting the method to the present situation. We allow ourselves to be imperfect, comfortable with our own style. We keep the confidence that the process will work because it is sound and because we are surrounded by other resilient and bright people. Both are good ways to overcome insecurity. Even the most experienced facilitators confess to some insecurity in leading change processes. It is a sign of our interdependence.

Expressing our vulnerability is powerful. It is a sign of our humanity, of our imperfection, and our personal confidence. This combination is tremendously appealing. It will inspire others to join us. After all, *that’s how the light gets in.*

As the host we fully participate in the gathering. We can and ought to set the example, though not necessarily being the first to share. With our participation we set a tone of openness and we also reduce a sense of hierarchy and separation.

And, last, but not least, if we are facilitators, we need to be conscious that we are role modelling our words with our behaviour. This requires our attentive presence and authenticity. If we say all voices are unique and important, then listen when each participant is speaking. If we give an instruction, we ensure we all have time to understand and complete the task.

6. Ready on the day

What do we need to pack in our suitcase? Having the pens, badges, notepads, music, decoration, etc ready helps us be at ease at the start of the event.

Taking time prior to the event to set up the space also allows us a peaceful start. We can check on:

- lighting
- temperature and controllable air flow
- acoustics and speakers
- seating
- writing/recording materials, (markers, pens, paper, flip charts)
- technology (wi-fi, projectors, cables, electrical extensions)
- catering
- toilets unlocked
- supplies accessible and convenient

We make contact with the people responsible for the property. We acknowledge their part in the gathering. We respectfully share needs, expectations, and constraints with each other. And we thank them for their help no matter how busy we are.

We make ourselves ready. We settle. Even a few minutes of quietness create ease and focus in ourselves, which echo in each person we greet.¹⁴ It is even better if the day before we mentally welcome the group to gather. By thinking about what each participant will bring: their questions, backgrounds and possibilities.

Magda's experience: "I arrived just in time to the postgraduate course in Gender and Development I was teaching using rEvolutionary practices. Unsettled, I greeted the students and invited them into a check-in. What had brought them to the course? What were their burning questions on the topic? Fascinated by the answers and driven by the class's curiosity, I forgot to do my own check-in. Ten minutes later, while talking about my experience, I realised that I had

¹⁴ See Quietness in section Be. Ways of participating.

skipped my check-in, and understood the students' relief when recognising it. Once I shared my story the flow of the class was restored, enabling full learning and participation.”

7. Say welcome

We greet each person individually even if for a moment. If we are the hosts, in some sense these people came at our invitation. It is polite, it is gentling, it is a small start to all the breakthroughs and connections we hope all will make. Some of us like Laure are shy. She finds it difficult navigating the thin line between a warm welcome and invading another's space. “Do I shake hands? Do I offer a kiss? Do I just say hello? Am I too cold? Am I too warm?” Serena feels the stress of making a light, but genuine connection with each person, friend or stranger, under the pressure of starting on time. “Do I seem insincere?” Magda enjoys this stage of the gathering when after e-mails or phone interactions, faces and smiles get real.

8. Frame the day

Either with a timeline, a map,¹⁵ or a spoken description, we set the scene and context for our gathering: When do we start? When do we finish? What will we cover?

As people arrive at the event some will be preoccupied by unfinished business. We name this phenomenon and ask participants to settle to the work. Breaks provide time and space to let people catch up with their personal agenda if they need to, but we ask them to focus on the program while we are together. Often participants realise, once they are settled in the gathering, that their emergencies are less urgent than they seemed at first.

¹⁵ See Learnscapes in the section Dare!, chapter Beyond words.

Ground rules

Laure's experience: "I was co-facilitating a leadership program for women. I set the ground rules for the next exercise: "when a person tells her story, the other participants simply thank and appreciate her but do not—under any circumstances—offer advice". To set the example before splitting up the group to do the exercise, I shared my life story. With the best of intentions, one of the participants started offering me advice. I noticed this was breaking the ground rules but it didn't hurt me, so I didn't call out her misstep. When the process was done in the small groups of participants (without co-facilitators) the same thing happened between two participants: one started to advise the other instead of simply appreciating her and her work. But this time it distorted the exercise for the participant and hurt her. Since that day, I make sure ground rules are respected even towards me in demos so rules of participation are clear and no one is hurt."

When embracing the new, some mistakenly think "because this is different from old hierarchies, then anything goes". This is not the case. Contracting ground rules explicitly may be necessary. We can garner from the group what is important to them using their words and add others we consider important. Or simply offer our prepared list for their approval. If they are uncomfortable, we take the time to clarify and reach agreement with them. If no agreement is possible some participants might choose to leave at this early stage. It is rare, but it's a good sign that those who stay are operating from a safe place where a rEvolutionary gathering can blossom.

Isabelle Pujol is masterful at setting ground rules.¹⁶ "I always feel some joy offering openly ground rules at the beginning of a gathering. All these rules are basic and natural (nothing new really!). At the same time, making them clear and visible, asking participants to fully accept them, creates a new dynamic. A better sense of responsibility emerges from the group. Some participants may feel surprised or challenged. Others rethink their participation in a more liberating way. Everyone can find his/her place. If all commit to honor them, a new harmony and state of mind is present, enabling outstanding conversations. Setting and offering the rules takes five minutes and it is worth it!"

¹⁶ Isabelle Pujol is director of Pluribus Europe www.pluribus-europe.com.

We offer this list, learning from her practice:

What is written on the wall	What the host says, or what is written in the participant manual
Respect	I respect you even when we disagree
Open Mind	I welcome and consider new options and ideas
Listen	I listen with generosity
Participation	I share authentically about myself, but only what I choose to. I avoid monopolising the time.
Presence x 3	I am present physically, mentally, emotionally
Responsibility	I am in charge of caring for myself and responsible for my own experience. I embrace my discomfort and push out my comfort zone. I use “I”, instead of “you” or “we”.
Dare	I speak without worrying about “correctness”
Confidentiality	Afterwards, I only share my own experience

We make it clear to participants that they are responsible for choosing at what level they want to participate. We cannot know everyone’s history, nor their personal sensitivities. If we will be asking for intimacy either in personal revelation or physical contact, we alert the group. We remind them that *they are responsible for setting the boundaries they can tolerate*. This ground rule of being responsible for oneself is particularly important in rEvolutionary gatherings as these invite more surprises and openness. I speak only for myself and I decide how much I share.

You might notice that our list of rules does not refer to time, because time is a topic of its own. If you want people to be on time, you might want to make sure everybody’s watch is matching the exact time. You can then explain that you will start on the dot. In our experience, a stronger option is to start each session when the hosts sense the group is ready to resume. Yet it is ok for participants to join late as long as they do this discreetly and take responsibility to catch up on what they missed. This flexibility requires participants to be more responsible for their experience.

9. What's next?

The event we create needs to have a narrative arc linked by transitions. From the invitation to the follow-up and definitely on the day, each section needs to be tied together.

Before we begin a transition, we must sense the energy in the room. Or we can ask. If the feedback we receive comes from the vocal few, we still must honour those who choose not to speak. Intuition tells us when we need to lighten the mood, provide sustenance or allow diffusion of energy. If the quality of work has begun to lull, it is time to change the tone, the pace, the setting, to ensure our precious time together is best used.

We allow people time for transitions. Some people transition quickly then experience doubt, others transition slowly but steadily forward. Sticking to timelines allows ease with transitions. By warning that an ending is coming, we allow participants to prepare themselves and trust the boundaries of the process.

We sometimes opt for radical transitions, for example from chaotic conversations to total silence. These help the group achieve different levels of connections and awareness and prevents boredom. However some groups might struggle and prefer a step change e.g., by journaling as a transition between dialogue and silence. Journaling is quieter than dialogue and more active than silence.

- *Change the configuration.* Change seating, move to the floor, move to an outdoor space, share a drink or food.
- *Change the modality.* Spoken, gesture, written, sound, temperature. Throw open a window, use a Tibetan chime, be silent, engage in a round of anti-thesis. Antithesis asks participants to champion the opposite of what we are gathered on the day to create, the playfulness of ranting for the opposite can create a wonderful frisson. Guiding a group to something more contentious, more spiritual, is a delicate balance. A greater danger is to miss the perhaps exclusive chance to have the group face something together. It is more likely we are tempted to avoid the important work, because of some people's discomfort. Instead we can

seize this chance to explore deeper work. By being brave and pushing until the group says no. It is very rare a group will say, “we should not go to such sensitivities”. Very rare indeed. Most people who have gathered crave the honesty of doing something profound.

- *Change the leadership.* Having someone new facilitate a session can ignite attention. It is not a commentary on the leadership styles but on our propensity to grow accustomed.

Closing and following-up

10. Make collective meaning explicit. Or not.

Magda's experience: "After facilitating the gathering of a Community of Practice in the format of an Open Space, I put together the notes that every discussion group had typed during the sessions and pictures of the event, in a direct and synthetic document. The regional authority sponsoring the event was somehow disappointed as they were expecting a lengthy report capturing every single item that was discussed. From this day forward, in new projects I make sure that everybody is clear about what will be reported back and what not, stressing that capturing results is just a tiny bit of the change that is set in motion with rEvolutionary gatherings."

Making collective meaning explicit is about agreeing what happened and can help sorting out next steps. It can be done at every phase of the process or at the end. It feeds the process with new levels of insight and inquiry. However, it is optional. Gatherings generate collective meaning anyway, independently of us making it explicit or not. Gatherings also don't lend themselves to being captured. How do you document the thrill of being at a rock concert or making love?

Our main endeavor as hosts is to stay present, for things to happen. This tends to be incompatible with trying to *capture* things, so before deciding to capture we make sure that:

- It's absolutely necessary for the project to grow. If the request comes from the formal leader as a way to keep control over the outcomes, this would send a counter-productive message. If sharing the story of a gathering is truly helpful, we need to be clear about why, and for whom.
- Some participants are committing *to doing it* in a format and timing that most participants support. This avoids the pointless but common scenario of only one person drafting the report.

If we want to make collective meaning explicit from the past we may ask: What did you notice? What were the patterns? What has been resolved?

In the present: What are we sensing? What is emerging? What projects/actions are for now? Which ones will be addressed in the mid/long term?

For the future: What questions do we have now? What are the next steps?

There are many techniques to capture collective meaning. Tap into the talents of the group so it becomes as participatory as possible. These methods can be done at the gathering or with web-based tools listed in the earlier section Connectivity:

- Ordering and prioritising: different issues that emerged can be managed by clustering and voting
- Anchoring insights in images: mindmaps or visual learnscapes drawn collectively
- Sharing narrative: write or tell our story of the event or project, make a live or recorded performance
- Bottling the essence: symbols, brands, poems, or music

rEvolutionary gatherings are diverging and converging in their nature. Instead of ending at a certain moment in time, they have the advantage of connecting with the coming challenges, the coming questions.

11. Hi again or farewell?

Naming the end of a process allows members to relish the memory of a good event. We can celebrate the ending of a phase and be ready to continue our journeys separately. Acknowledge the passing of the extraordinary momentum of collaborative work. This is part of the integrity of the gathering.

“When we no longer want anything, when we don’t expect anything more and when we give in to life, it is not bitterness and despair that overwhelm us, but a new feeling of astonishing freedom and an immense, immense tenderness.”¹⁷

Marie de Hennezel

Ending can be done very briefly. People gather in a circle, and those who wish to share something do so. It can be more ceremonial and require that each person takes a stand. It can be a dance together, a play by a few, a speech from one participant, or a minute in silence together to simply take the time to appreciate what happened.

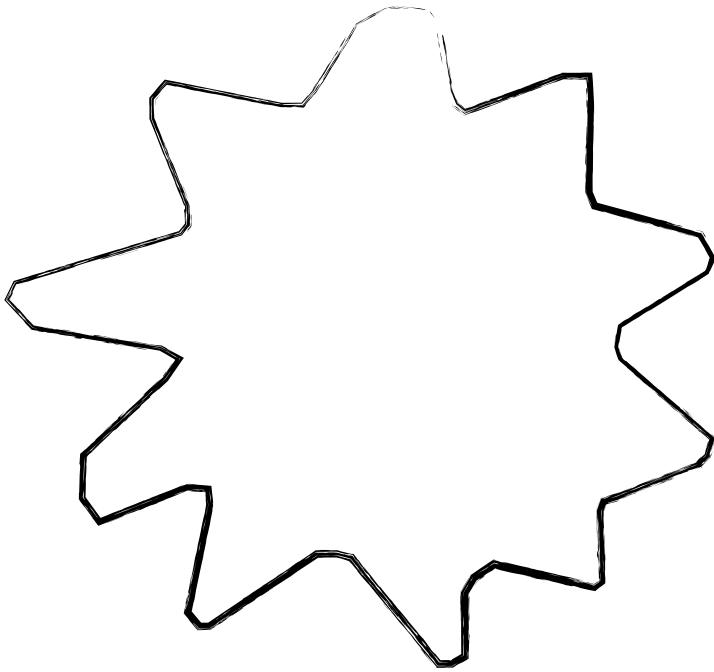
If there is collective energy to sustain what was experienced in a face-to-face event, or virtually, we create the means.¹⁸ If you decide to go virtual, there are many tools you can use. Please, be aware of the push versus pull effect of each type of communication. E-mail is considered a push form, it comes into your mailbox whether you like it or not. A social networking site is considered a pull, where you log in whenever is convenient to you. People will vote with their feet. Either they will come and use it or they won’t.

Ideally anyone would feel permission to invite others for a meeting, write an email to share ideas, or contribute to the shared website. If we have led so far and the action continues to be initiated through us, we ought to question ourselves: have we let go enough to accept leadership from where it wants to spring? If not, why not?

¹⁷ M. de Hennezel *The Warmth of the Heart Prevents your Body from Rusting: Ageing without growing old* (1990)

¹⁸ See web based tools in Connectivity and Virtual spaces chapter of this section.

DARE



***Dare!* Subversive techniques**

Writing a book collectively requires linguistic precision. Part of the exercise is highly mental. Yet we also experimented with many *subversive techniques* to tap into our creativity, clarify what was most important to us and how to convey these messages as cleanly as possible to our dear readers. We drew, painted, stayed in silence together, danced wildly, went for walks, touched textures, explored museums, skinny-dipped, took pictures, listened to our kids and partners, journaled... We connected to our non-rational brains using many *subversive techniques*. On other occasions, we have used these *subversive techniques* in more conventional settings with great success too.

Our positive definition of subversion is any attempt to bring more authenticity, collective intelligence, or loving kindness into the established structures, authority, or hierarchy of our world.

We have organised them in four main chapters as follows:

Quietness inside

- Silence
- Meditation

Disco time!

- Music
- Movement and dance

Words

- Check-ins
- Powerful questions
- Storytelling
- Journalling

Beyond words

- Working with our hands
- Mindmapping
- Learnsapes

We don't need much preparation to try these practices, and we can adjust them as we go. They are flexible.

They are scalable in terms of time, people and money. Most can be used with just two minutes to create a change of energy. Or these *subversive techniques* can be extended to last days to tap into different intelligences. Intuition will tell us what will work for our situation. These practices encourage a playful frame of mind mixed with a strong anchoring. And we can do these alone, in pairs, triads, or in a gathering of hundreds. The cost of using any of these subversive processes can be less than a drink with a friend.

It's about creativity

Many great thinkers and scientists such as Leonard de Vinci are known to have had ways to express themselves through artistic or creative activities. Large evidence supports the idea that artistic ways of expression are key to bridging the right side of the brain with the left one. When this happens, our thinking, communication and intelligence flow easily.

Nicolas le Douarec is an entrepreneur. When he started looking for investors he took along with him a big Lego car (equipped with his company technology) and Lego people.¹⁹ Nicolas and his colleagues were actually using the Legos to show to potential investors what the service looks like and how it operates. They didn't start their presentations with the Lego. They started presenting a few slides with the context and usual questions. However they noticed that the quality of the dialogue improved drastically each time when they brought out the Lego. Their audience moved their focus from unlikely risks to the practicalities of their project and the real challenges it held.

¹⁹ The business is a web platform enabling citizens to rent each other's cars www.cityzencar.com.

These *subversive techniques* can use any art form to expand our group's creativity beyond its usual ways of knowing and being: dance, writing, drama, music, sculpture, movement... They can be fun and light, or they can enable groups to break completely new ground. These processes are specifically adapted to combine with other more analytical or verbal ones.

When using them we are creating space to:

- Relate to each other from unusual dimensions
- Deepen our sensing capacities and empathy
- Think out of the box and be more present for each other
- Relax our bodies and brains before or after a more "serious" exercise, releasing any tension or anxiety
- Celebrate together after intense work, ending a process with a positive frame of mind

Here's an example of *subversive techniques* as a way of life. In the beautiful mountains of Lazio, Italy, near the delightful village of Labro, there is a group of highly talented artists who have created the Art Monastery Project.²⁰ The Art Monastery Project is a non-profit arts organisation dedicated to cultivating personal awakening and cultural transformation through art, community, and contemplation. Active since 2007 they hold a clear intention: to create their art while living under monastic principles of spirituality, rigour and dedication to the community. The Artmonks consider the subversive practices presented here the necessary ground for them to relate and create.

In the beginning, we can introduce some of the *subversive techniques* we feel most comfortable with. As our confidence in ourselves and our group grows, we can test more challenging ones. We can even decide to live our life using *subversive techniques* as our core way of being, working and relating.

²⁰ www.artmonastery.org

Quietness inside

Silence

Tuning down to tune in

Meals were becoming a noisy fight at Laure's house. Her kids were sitting down at the table and complaining about the one dish they hated in that meal. They also were competing for her attention: "Mummy I did this today..."; "Have you seen this big bruise on my arm?". One day, she and her husband introduced starting the meal with five minutes of silence.²¹ Each child had a turn to call for the meal and silence using their Tibetan bowl. The responsibility included sensing when the five minutes had passed or the family had had enough silence to ring again. All three children loved holding that responsibility. These few minutes completely changed the meals' dynamic. With the new memory of peaceable gatherings, and though after a few months they resumed speaking during meals right from the start, family meals have stayed more pleasant at Laure's house, and the whole family notices and enjoys moments of silence in meals but also in walks, onboard trains...

Silence seems easy. Don't we simply need to find a quiet space and stop making noise? More difficult is the practice of silencing the noise of our continuous thoughts.

Both external and internal silence have become a rare gift we often miss in our busy lives. Offering it to each other in a group setting enables us to reach new levels of consciousness, discover new insights, and digest information and emotions. Or to simply change pace in a longer working session that needs relief.

²¹ This idea was inspired by the practice of Mindfulness of the Maison de l'Inspir. See Thich Nhat Hanh's proposals in the next section on Meditation.

A group can take a short pause for silence, perhaps one minute with eyes closed. At the beginning of the meeting this pause can allow us to settle to the work at hand and let worries or obligations outside the room be dismissed. Eating in silence or walking in silence in nature offers heightened awareness of our surroundings, our feelings and thoughts.

The practice of eating carefully selected food in silence in the home, is easy to replicate in any setting including the corporate world. Google's experimentation with it was guided by the Buddhist Master Thich Nhat Hanh.²² We do encourage you to try it out.

To guide a lunch in silence, we simply warn people in advance, and explain why we do this. For example we could point out that this practice brings us into the present moment. It helps us realise the gift of food, the work that was put into getting this food on our plate. Silent gratitude increases our happiness and sense of satisfaction, and diminishes our gluttony. Eating this way helps us make sense of the morning's work without feeling the need to socialise.

Be ready to listen with ease if participants need to express anxieties. Stay centred and encourage them to experience it wholeheartedly.

For a practical application of silence in periodic collective gatherings, check out the invitation of Together in Silence in the section *Explore*.

In the middle of a gathering, silence reconnects us with what we feel is needed. Signalling with a pre-agreed sound the beginning and end of a pause for peaceful silence helps us let go and use the time for releasing tension, worry, anger, giddiness.²³ Any member of the group can at any moment in the meeting use the sound to ask the whole group to stop, take a deep breath, and then perhaps explain why she felt like ringing the bell. After that break, the meeting will start again but most likely with a different energy.

²² See the video of that experience on Youtube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Pd5Ndg0oJA&feature=player_embedded

²³ Tibetan bowl, whistle, bell and iPhone apps are some the devices we have used. You can be creative as long as participants are told at the beginning of the meeting which is the signal sound we can use.

Magda's experience: "During the second day of a workshop in Dialogue and Mindfulness we offer a coffee break in silence. When introduced, it is usually met with surprised faces and questions such as "How long will it be?" or "What is the purpose?". We encourage participants to be aware of what they do, feel and think during the twenty minute coffee break, and to avoid talking with signs.

When silence comes to an end, we debrief on the experience. Some participants are more comfortable than others. Some were seen reading the fire safety instructions of the building, the only way they found to cope with the discomfort of being in collective silence. A shared insight is often to realise how used we are to living outwardly, and how bizarre it feels to look inwardly. How silence on our own might be "acceptable" but when surrounded by others we often feel compelled to fill in any silence. After the silence, the presence of the participants is heightened and the focus on the work at hand clearer."

Listening Below the Noise by Anne D. LeClaire (2009) is a beautifully written book showing her own personal experimentation with silence and the many different layers she discovered in it. She believes silence has been her deepest teacher and her writing leads the reader towards trying it for themselves in a gentle way.

Meditation

Wisdom inside out

The visionary leaders at Google invited Dr. Joel and Michelle Levey²⁴ to develop a new Mindfulness and Meditation Laboratory. The program had a strong and enthusiastic launch and reception with software engineers and staff onsite in Seattle and Kirkland, USA. After the great success of the first classes in 2011, over five iterations reached an audience of hundreds around the globe.

The program expanded in 2012 to offer a one-day intensive Meditation and Mindfulness Retreat for Googlers, Google workers. A special workshop explored the interface between inner technology and outer technology, Biofeedback, Neurofeedback and the Frontiers of Cyberphysiology and Mind Fitness Research. As the program grew in popularity, a small team of Googlers began to emerge who were excited to partner with the Leveys. They continued to refine the program's themes and practices. They also expanded the scope of this work for more colleagues. They started to lead meditations themselves and Google Hangout sessions, with their peers internationally. Participants have shared how meditation has enhanced both their personal lives and their day-to-day work.

Meditation is an ancient widespread practice used in multiple cultures and religions. It is said that the Buddha alone taught 84 thousand methods of meditation...

Meditation can last a few seconds while listening to a bell or looking at a rainbow. It can happen within a few minutes and be part of our daily life when we call for it, like the Muslim call for prayer. Or it can last hours, days and years. What an idea!

For a guide to the different varieties of meditation, *Luminous mind: meditation and mind fitness*, by Joel and Michelle Levey (2006) is a great resource. Here we focus on the shorter kinds of meditations. Below we offer three main categories of practice we have found most helpful in our lives:

²⁴ Founders of www.WisdomAtWork.com

1. **Concentration Meditations** aim at awakening the peace and power of the focused mind. Single-pointed concentration techniques focus on a single object: a candle flame, visualised object, mindful breathing, mantra repetition in yoga, sacred symbol (e.g., Blessed Sacrament adoration in Catholic Church).

Exercise: Breath-focussed meditation

Powerful base for any meditation, it develops our abilities to concentrate and relax.

- Sit in a comfortable position with your backs straight, on the floor or in a chair. If in a chair, make sure both your feet are well grounded with the weight evenly distributed between them.
- Notice how your bodies feel. Just notice.
- Notice your breath, inhalations and exhalations, without changing it.
- When thoughts capture your attention away from your breath, let them drift away. Come back to your breath, letting your thoughts go. Imagine each thought emerging as a cloud; watch it and let it go. No need to action or worry you will forget. If an anchoring phrase is needed try, “I am” on the inhale and “peaceful” on the exhale.

With practice it becomes easier to maintain our attention on our breath and thoughts distract us less and less. Some days this isn't true at all and monkey mind invades again. We accept this mental state, notice, breathe and try to stay with the meditation.

2. **Mindfulness Meditations** help us become present to the beauty of what is, and to connect to the bigger thread that unites life. The Vietnamese buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn²⁵ is a great master of such practices through all daily activities. Spiritual efforts are also part of such meditations,

²⁵ Thich Nhat Hahn lives and teaches meditation at the Plum Village in France
www.plumvillage.org

but its particularity resides in its connection to day-to-day life and to the body. Martial arts, yoga²⁶ and body meditations often support that practice.

Magda's experience: "Throughout the day in conversations, e-mails, interactions, my attention is pulled towards the outside world. My Iyengar yoga practice, gives me a chance to look inwardly, reconnecting me to a place of centeredness and balance from where I can relate better to the world and to myself. What is special about this practice is that it requires a strong awareness in one's body in order to do the practice well. I can not do an asana (body posture) correctly while thinking what groceries need to be bought for dinner. Concentrating on my body movements, I have little time to indulge in my thoughts, which in time become more and more silent as my consciousness expands to my body. Sometimes an exercise seems too challenging, and my mind says "No I can't do it". With practice I've learned to overcome these limiting thoughts and do the exercise. Beyond creating a healthy addiction (!), a periodic meditation practice equips me to lead meditation during different gatherings.

In the gathering of a Community of Practice in Equality at Work, I expanded my own personal practice to a group. We started the workshop with twenty minutes of yoga stretching movements. While meeting the proposal with giggles, participants took the exercise to heart. The practice shifted the whole gathering making it less formal. People said they felt more connected to each other and were ready to engage in powerful dialogue."

For a variety of mindfulness meditations, *The Blooming of a Lotus: Guided meditation exercises for healing and transformation*, by Thich Nhat Hanh (1997) is a great companion. For simple steps to integrate mindfulness into our daily life, read *Mindfulness: Finding Peace in a Frantic World*, by Mark Williams and Danny Penman (2011). In *The places that scare you: a guide to fearlessness in difficult times*, Pema Chödrön (2002) presents heart meditations as a way to transform painful experiences into spiritual awakening.

²⁶One form of yoga to try: kundaliniyoga.net/Kundalini/.

3. **Reflective Meditations** cultivate insight, logic, and intuition through sustained reflection. They consist of disciplined reflection or contemplative analytical meditation focused on a specific question, theme, verse of scripture (e.g., Q'ran, poems, Bible), or challenge. Islam and Christianity offer different techniques of such meditations: reading until a verse resonates for us on that day and then staying on that verse for as long as we want to for example.

Each day the diversity consultant Virginie Allard²⁷ picks up a positive quote and keeps it on her mind throughout the day, finding deeper meanings within it, as the experience of her day unfolds. This meditation grounds her in appreciation.

To work with groups on sustainability, we sometimes use the visualisation “30 years later” of Joanna Macy to bring participants 30 years into the future, in a fully sustainable society.²⁸ From this place, participants gather personal insights that are later shared with the group to build a common vision of a sustainable society.

There are diverse approaches to meditation. These different approaches are interrelated and enhance each other. Access the resources available on meditation that appeal to you, then share this better way of being to ease, refresh or deepen in gatherings.

From our experience, meditations need to be well known by the facilitator who introduces them, and we need to be totally convinced that this is the right thing to do. Otherwise, the exercise is likely to fail. When introduced with ease and confidence, we have found meditations very powerful.

²⁷ www.2d4b.com/WP/?page_id=432

²⁸ See her book *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World*, Joanna Macy (1998) and her site on *The Work that Reconnects* for the detailed steps of that visualisation www.joannamacy.net/theworkthatreconnects.html

Disco time!

Music

What is our rhythm?

Set the tone for a session by choosing complementary background music. We can move from inner reflection to active participation through a simple change of music type and volume. Instrumental music without vocals is suited to support reflection, meditation, listening.²⁹ If the purpose is to wake people up (e.g. after lunch), lively music with funny lyrics is spot on. And sometimes a special song wraps up perfectly the key messages we want to start or end a meeting on. For example, Laure used the song 'Femmes je vous aime' from Julien Clerc to wrap up powerfully a dialogic gathering of women on femininity.

We can open the floor so those who wish can play an instrument for the group. Such moments are open windows of presence and contemplation recharging the group to continue the work. They leave great memories.

We can suggest that the whole group sing together or make harmonious rhythms. It is highly entertaining and often shows how individuals who think they don't sing well can produce a harmonious choir.

Movement and dance

Ease and lengthen our bodies

Who hasn't felt the stiffness of hours sitting obediently?

Offering slow stretching movements allows people to get up after a long time sitting. Take even a few seconds, and hear the sighs or groans from a grateful tribe. We may not realise our own bodies are stiff or sore until we offer this movement. Done together we feel less embarrassment or self-

²⁹ We recommend Tibetan mantras Dewa Che, classical music, Michael Jones and his piano www.pianoscapes.com, or Nawang Khechog and his flute www.nawangkhechog.com

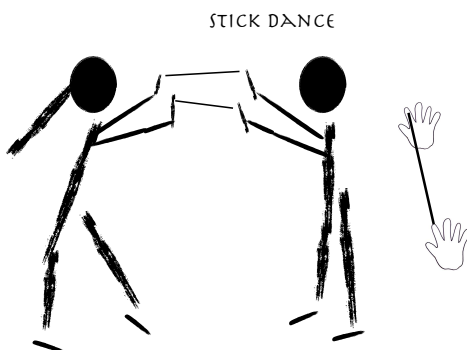
consciousness. Show a few movements of dance or Tai Chi or other slow practices.

We might choose a burst of loud music and wild dancing if the group would have fun doing so. Suggesting faster movements can bring energy or release tension.

When the energy of a group is low or disagreement is peaking then try this exercise: Ask everyone to stand together. Move away from desks, chairs and obstacles. Continue the discussion, no other change is necessary. By simply standing, the pace of the discussion and the quality of listening will change.

If the group has enough time and trust in each other, offer movements in pairs. One person can guide the other who has their eyes closed for example. Or both find each other with the eye and make movements together following the music. Such exercises deepen the trust amongst participants.

Laure has used a stick dance exercise³⁰ where partners close their eyes and dance together with a stick to the music “Common Thread” from Bobby McFerrin. There is a boundary provided by the stick, but the stick is also a way of extending possible movement.



A **whole group** can move together with purpose in any setting. Such activities test individual fears and confidence, and help shape a group's

³⁰ Coming into Your Own, feminine leadership programs: www.ciyowomensretreat.com

trust and strength. Celtic dances take only ten minutes. 5 Rhythms is an activity that proposes five different rhythms for dancing and a variation of individual moves that sometimes interact with others.³¹

A 360° nature walk (see steps on the next page) takes 45 minutes and is outdoors. Treasure hunts, climbing, or high ropes can provide long lasting memories for groups but require a half-day at least. Creating the time for an outdoor activity, might be challenging for your gatherings. However, we have found such walks deeply rewarding with *all* the groups. Writing the book, we experienced this technique when we pulled ourselves out of the book manuscript to walk together in the beautiful mountains of Montserrat.

Exercise: 360° Nature walk

This exercise explores how symbols of nature can help clarify goals and wishes for the future.

We start by grounding ourselves. We form pairs and agree who is Person A and who is Person B. Each pair goes to an open spot where both feel comfortable. Standing next to each other, they follow the steps in turns:

Step 1. See and be seen

Person A turns around B looking at nature in 360 degrees and describes only what he/she sees. Person B listens with eyes closed. Once A is finished, B repeats to A what he/she has heard.

Step 2. Symbols of a mood/emotional state

Person A chooses a spot that symbolizes the mood he/she is in right now and explains why (for example - happy is an open space, or sad is weeping willow). Reverse roles.

Step 3. Symbols of a desired future reality

Person A chooses a spot that symbolizes his/her desired future reality and explains why. B only listens and then repeats to A what he/she has heard. Reverse roles.

³¹ www.gabrielleroth.com

Words

Check-ins

making ourselves present

Any conversation tends to start with an introduction. “How are you”? Check-in is about that introduction, a way of ensuring we welcome each person. It creates the space for each participant to be fully seen. It sends the message that our voices are equally welcome.

By sharing a bit more of our ourselves, we enable a greater connection between the people present. Check-ins are a vital step so participants may then delve into the topic at hand without trying to get attention. Those who tend to be quiet put their voice into the gathering early, so they are known and they experience an equal voice. Those who need to speak plenty and often, let off steam by speaking a bit at the beginning.

Check-ins encourage people to settle down together, so information about who we are and what’s important to us trumps listing credentials or achievements. We share only what is important to us (e.g. age, life partner, family status, passions, education, socio-economic situation, charity involvements, religious or political beliefs). We can also ask a person who has done check-ins to go first and set the example of openness.

Each person gathered takes a turn to speak, ideally volunteering to talk when they are ready. When time is tight, we ask people to take turns following their neighbour.

When we have a large group, going round the circle to listen fully to each person might be too lengthy. In such instances, we introduce an intermediary step before the group check-in. Participants journal alone, or check-in in pairs with the person they know least. After that intermediary step, the group check-in can be one or two sentences or even one word. It still holds a different quality than the usual short and formal introductions.

Comments, even positive ones, during the check-in are not allowed. However we can thank each person who has checked-in. “Thank you”

signals that another person can speak without interrupting. It sets the tone of respect for every person present.

The degree of sharing of our check-in depends on how much we know the people in the group, our practice on check-ins and how we feel that day. With this in mind, here are fictitious examples of weak and strong check-ins.

Weak check-in:

Question: Your name and how are you today.

Participant 1: My name is Pei and I am very well today. Thank you.

Participant 2: My name is Sergine I am curious and happy to be here.

Strong check-in:

Question: Your name, and what was on your mind when coming to the venue.

Participant 1: My name is Karim and when coming here I noticed that spring is coming, the flowers are blossoming and this makes me happy after this very cold winter. I am super excited because I've just gotten a promotion.

Others: Thank you.

Participant 2: My name is Chao and when coming here, I was thinking about my mother, she was diagnosed yesterday with pancreatic cancer, I don't know what that means, but I am worried for her. And I feel guilty that I'm relieved to be here, at work, and with you all day.

Others: Thank you.

In a useful check-in people share enough and each person has made herself present in her own way. If something wonderful has happened in our lives that day, we feel joyful unexpectedly, it's great to share it. And if some deeply worrying news is with us as we turn our attention to the meeting, simply stating that can give everyone space and perspective to be tolerant.

Check-ins call on our ability to be vulnerable, because through our vulnerability, we can have empathy for each other.³² They also acknowledge our wholeness. We are not robots, leaving our personal matters at home when we are at work or vice-versa.

³² See Bréne Brown's research and TED talk on the subject www.brenebrown.com

When crafting a check-in, we consider what the situation is, what work is to be done, and what format would achieve this. Sometimes, asking people to share what insight they are getting from a poem, or to doodle with play-dough and show how they feel right now will be stronger check-ins than many words.

Check-ins are a fabulous practice that can be used for any exchange, face-to-face, telephone, web-conferencing or even letters and emails. This practice is absolutely central to the three authors' way of operating. Sharing our vulnerabilities allowed us to find new connections and new ideas.

Serena's experience: "When disagreement by email arises about details on the manuscript, I feel a dread as the time for our weekly web conference creeps closer. As the call starts there can be heavy silence for me. Not wanting to rush in talking, I wait, or try to wait for the other two to speak first. As we near completion of the book our fights are stormier. Someone else starts their check-in, I hear tears in her voice, and my eyes well with tears. When she finishes speaking I want to be silent. I resent the need to rush back to our process, constrained by time and all our other commitments waiting for us beyond the check-in. Logically I know we need to move, but the emotion comes up and almost as quickly passes.

The time spent on check-in gives me a chance to meet Magda and Laure, the turmoils or joys that make up our lives, but still stand up when our shared work is becoming a gargoyle. By taking away the mask of platitudes in more typical greetings, I can be more efficient in voicing concern. When we agree it brings me more delight because I know it is genuine. As we leave the check-in our energies are better matched, even and steady. A check-in doesn't preclude emotions bubbling up during work but they allow me to find more tolerance before reacting. Mostly."

Powerful questions

our compass for thought and action

We can walk through life looking for answers and providing answers to those around us. This habit can give a temporary sense of comfort, but little transformation. We can also happily explore questions for ourselves, and offer helpful questions to enlarge the field of possibilities for those around us.

Framing agendas in formats of questions is a deliberate and powerful act in itself.

Typical Agenda	Agenda in Questions
Budget	Where can we align our spending with our main intention?
Headcount. Full time / part time	What talent, skill or type of energy do we wish we had more of to bring home our goal in each of our areas?
Annual face to face: logistics	What do we want to achieve with our annual face to face?
Project Efficiency	What has worked efficiently so far, and how can we extend that throughout the project?
Any other issues	What else do we want to explore together?

In the middle of a stalled conversation we can choose to offer a new question, rather than take sides or offer counter arguments. Think what might help now, what question is behind this topic? What is the question of this question? We frame our question, have it clear in our minds and share it with others, without needing an answer or a quick fix.

We may also conclude gatherings with questions to signify and support the journey beyond the day.

A genuine question is one for which we still don't have an answer. There resides the power of the question to guide thought and action.

As David Cooperrider put it “*human systems grow towards the questions they persistently ask about*”.³³ That is how important questions are. The way a question is framed is enormously powerful. Some questions create division and fragmentation. Other questions open the possibility of understanding and action.

Notice the difference between:

- How can oil companies pollute less?
- How can we contribute to restoration and preservation of the environment?

The first question has a problem focus. Pollution is the problem we need to sort out. It is also not our problem but the oil companies’ problem. In the second one, we take responsibility for pollution and connect to the future we want to create. This illustrates the challenge we have, to frame questions as questions, rather than as problems. We are very used to focusing on problems. Yet problem-focused questions stem from a limited frame of mind and possibility. Instead, framing our questions positively connects us to creativity and possibility, key drivers of innovative ideas.

Consider these other two questions:

- Are we happy as a couple?
- What makes us happy as a couple?

The first question is a closed one (yes/no with restrictive limited answers). When reading it, doubt is raised as a sharp sword. This underlines the importance of the usually hidden assumptions that questions have. The second one assumes that happiness exists within our relationship, and we focus on those things. What a blessing!

Whether for an invitation, an agenda, as an activity during a gathering or as a way to conclude, here are some questions we’ve found helpful to test our questions:

- Where does this question focus our attention?
- What assumptions or beliefs are embedded in this question?
- Is the question relevant to the real life or work of the people who will be exploring it?

³³ www.davidcooperrider.com

- Is this question clear, can I understand it easily? Is it sharp and surprising, clear enough while maybe paradoxical? Questions framed as short oxymorons are harder to pinpoint but so effective. See these examples of oxymorons: How can we grow smaller? What is the impossible solution? Who is yelling silently in our city? How can we amplify muted voices?
- Is this a genuine question—a question to which I/we really don't know the answer? Or are we leading the witness?
- What question could provide a fresh route of exploration?
- Have we provided the time and space to allow profound answers? We may ask a great question but if we do so in the context of an impending deadline, pervasive hunger, or in an antagonistic atmosphere, we may lose the value of the question, or the trust of those gathered.

Exercise: Question Storming

Question Storming is a brief, intense, rapid-fire process based solely on asking questions. Questioning without stopping to answer or judge the questions taps into our stream of consciousness and expands our awareness of possibility. This is best done with a limited time, 10 minutes or less. One person is the question holder and presents the first question. Afterwards, she is silent and lets others question the question. Questions are captured on a flip chart or with each person writing on stickies to share on a wall. From *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 7 Powerful Tools for Life and Work* by M.G. Adams (2004)

Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future, Margaret Wheatley (2002) sums up beautifully and simply the importance of questions that matter.

Storytelling

creating legacy

Odile has eight grand-children ranging in age from eight months to ten years. Before bed, story-time is a moment where all children cuddle up together and enjoy the warmth of being both physically close together and mentally focused on the same story. Odile reads from the old books she read her own children, building a bridge across generations. She picks stories that talk about respect, honesty, care for nature, responsibility. Stories in which the girls are not only beautiful princesses waiting to be rescued but also brave and innovative beings adapting and contributing to the world. Stories in which the boys are not only strong and bright but also sensitive and sometimes vulnerable. Through the stories she picks, through the repetitions or the exploration of new books, Odile teaches her grandchildren the most important values.

Stories are powerful tools to share experience, meaningful moments, and capture personal and collective learning. Storytelling reinforces identity. Who am I in the story? What role do I play? It also helps clarify what message we really want to put across. Too often, we chat without a clear intent. Storytelling forces us to refine what matters to us. Another beautiful dimension of storytelling is that it focuses us on our audience. Indeed, if we want to share with a group of children or a board of directors, it is likely that our storyline will need adjustment. And at the same time, its core will remain the same. If you have a great story kids adore, most likely your board of directors will too!

Storytelling can be done:

- In pairs: individuals are invited to share with their neighbour their best personal experience on the topic at hand.
- By a professional storyteller who can start or end the meeting with a compelling story.
- In groups: teams tell their story through a short and funny drama play or video. They can prepare their show prior to the gathering to present what they do or what is important to them as they start this gathering. They can also create their show during a gathering as a way to wrap up and share what was most important to them in that gathering. Whether at the

beginning or end of a gathering, group storytelling can shift the energy and express tough ideas in a light way.

Laure and Magda's experience: "When supporting the European Investment Fund in their endeavour to foster collaboration across the organisation, we worked with an appointed group of employees (the core team) to design the annual meeting and the dinner the night before. The core team decided to ask each department to prepare a fun presentation two months before the gathering. Each department got into action. A buzz of enjoyment and some slight competition motivated all to produce their story of "a day in the life of their department". On the day of the annual gathering dinner, the 170 employees shared and enjoyed the songs, drama sketches, poems and short films. People expressed a stronger relatedness to colleagues and a better understanding of the work of each department. The "fun presentations" also set the tone for the next morning's working session, which proved highly productive and yet kept lightness and a sense of humour. Hard work does not need to be boring and overly formal..."

Changing the story we tell of our organisation, our relationship, ourselves gives us great power to understand and act in new ways.³⁴

Journaling

writing to make sense

Writing can release thoughts, feelings, and actions needed to understand and enact the best change. A defined time to write allows us to assimilate what has been talked about in a larger group or what has happened at the end of a busy day. In that case, the only guidance provided for the journaling is "please take some time to write down your thoughts". Journaling is done in silence, or with peaceful music without lyrics in the background. Journaling can be done in a group or alone.

³⁴ See also Appreciative Inquiry in the last section Commit. Odysseys.

Magda's experience: "I journal almost everyday about significant moments of the day. My journal is a space for drawing, for challenges, for strong feelings...for anything I can imagine. Journaling has increased intensity when I'm angry, concerned or confused, moments when words with others would help little, harm or even make things worse. A personal space where to deepen myself. A white page can be such a blessing! When writing, often the words go from the heart and the senses straight to the paper without going through my mind's filters. By writing and reading my journal I make sense of my life."

Writing creates space at the beginning of a dialogue for those who process their thoughts more slowly to be able to grasp their insight in time to share it. If not, new perspectives are missed. In such instances, the journaling will be guided by a powerful question.³⁵ Journaling is a useful process to help people settle and get more deeply into what they really need and want to share before a conversation starts. This can be particularly relevant for groups where non-native speakers are a minority as this exercise will provide them a space in which to breathe and gather their thoughts in the comfort of their own mother tongue.

Exercise: Hot Pen Writing

Hot Pen exercise aims to connect to our creative mind. It requires us moving our pen across the page without stopping. We might write the same word several times or even what could seem like ridiculous sentences to our analytical mind because our creative and analytical minds don't work simultaneously. Writing without stopping allows no time for judgment, criticism or analysis. The words coming through the pen are theoretically our creative or child-like minds speaking freely. By setting a timer or appointing a time keeper, we allow ourselves to fully focus on the flow of words, ideas, images. We write without stopping the pen for 5 to 10 minutes.

³⁵ See Powerful Questions in section Dare, chapter Words.

Beyond words

Working with our hands

Body intelligence

Particularly after a very abstract conversation, a session working with our hands feels good and unlocks ideas. We can offer any type of material to participants, and allow them as little or as much time as we want, and leave them to creatively represent something e.g., the current state of their team, the communication flows, their life, how they feel now... It is important to reassure participants that this activity is not about art and no-one will be judged on what they produce. No one is expected to do something beautiful. It is simply a different way of expressing oneself and a chance to connect to other sources of creativity and presence.

We can use paint, markers, clay, pipe cleaners, Playdough, flowers... We can do an individual creation or a collective one. It can be done in silence to be more ceremonious and thoughtful, or with light music in the background so it is fun and energetic.

Here is an example of this technique used by the facilitator Ana Arrabé³⁶ with pottery:

“At the end of a Theory U seminar, we wanted participants to trust that the preparation was over and now was time to act.³⁷ Not from their minds but from their entire beings. “Stop thinking now. Trust your hands: they know more than your mind.” Participants had previously gone out to collect objects from nature. Eight inspiring questions helped the listener reflect on their purpose in life, their containers, their short and long-term plans and the first steps to be taken. In pairs, while one person asked the questions, the other started modeling, drawing and using the object from nature. This person was free to talk about what s/he was doing or to remain silent. They were also free to choose to answer the questions while modeling. Once the practice was over, in a circle, participants were

³⁶ www.eus3.es

³⁷ See Theory U in the last section Commit.

invited to show their piece of art and explain the symbols, what they meant to them and to their life/work projects.

This was a way of crystallizing their intentions. Months after the workshop, many participants shared that most of what they had modeled had become a reality. This was proof of the power of the exercise.”

The Case for Working with Your Hands: or why office work is bad for us and fixing things feels good by Matthew Crawford (2010) provides ideas on how to organise such activities.

Mindmapping

connecting ideas with drawings

Mindmapping is a nonlinear method of capturing a conversation or exploring the whole of a situation or project. We draw visual representations to unleash creativity and connect ideas.

The author and educational consultant Tony Buzan³⁸ is the person that has significantly popularised mindmaps as they are known today. However, visual representations in a similar way have been used since the third century by Porphyry of Tyros or Ramon Llull in the thirteenth century.

Colour is essential to trigger creativity so choose a variety of colours in markers, crayons, or paint. Electronic mindmapping is also possible with computers and adapted software. Here we describe the drawn mindmaps.

- Start from the centre: The key idea or theme has a space in the centre without being circled or contained.
- Organic and colourful lines: From the central idea, concepts connect with each other through organic and colourful lines. From the centre to the sides, decreasing its width.
- Everything is connected: every line is physically connected with the one that comes after and before.
- Keep words to the minimum: One idea, one word.

³⁸ www.tonybuzan.com and on mindmaps: www.thinkbuzan.com

- Drawing is king: Design is better than a word. The more ideas we can illustrate in simple unsophisticated drawings the better.
- Coded designs: If a concept appears a lot, we might want to give it a coded design to use it many times.

Mindmaps can be drawn by one person or a group drawing together. Individual mindmaps bring the big picture onto one sheet of paper, ease the memorising of ideas, talks and stories. Group mindmaps capture a dialogue, map the phases of a project, reach agreement and much more.

- *For individual mindmaps*, we explain the rules once each person has a piece of paper and access to different colours. Once finished, participants can share their mindmaps in group or pairs. If the exercise is more intimate, participants keep their mindmap to themselves.
- *For group mindmaps*, used as a gathering unfolds, each participant is free to take a marker and draw on the paper. Clarification with the rest of the team is asked if necessary. As an alternative option, one participant in the conversation may want to take the responsibility to solely draw the mindmap, listening to suggestions and remarks of the rest of the participants.

If you want to go deeper into the mindmapping techniques *The Mind Map Book: how to use radiant thinking to maximize your brain's untapped potential*, by Tony Buzan (1996) may be of help.



Learnsapes

drawing together

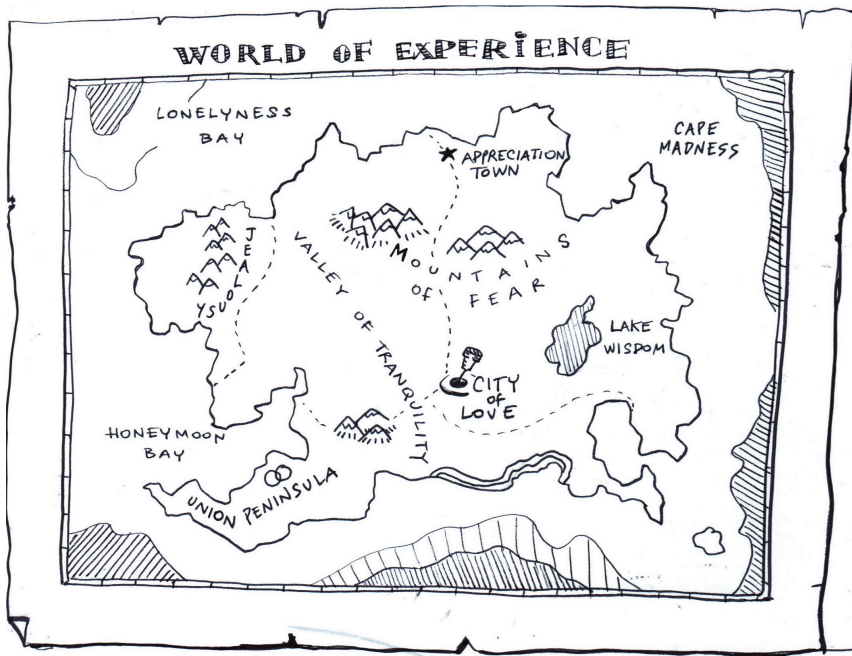
Learnsapes are open graphic representations of things, experiences, ideas, projects. In their simplest form, they offer a white space for participants to use as they wish to share their insights, and key lessons throughout the event. A bit like a group mindmap, but without any rules. Anything goes!

An international aeronautic organisation in Germany asked Nükhet Solak and her colleagues to engage a large group of engineers around their well-being at work as part of a leadership development program.³⁹ Because of their work, this group was regularly confronted with complex multidimensional/lingual systems, worked long hours with tight deadlines and travelled a lot. Nükhet shares below how they used visuals in their effort.

"We, the facilitators, chose to build on their passion for flying over landscapes. We created a map and used as terrain themes that from our point-of-view were playing a role in being well—individually and collectively. In this natural and man-made terrain we had “mountains of work”, “oceans of possibilities” or “a harbor-village called family” and many more. Neither was this terrain theirs nor was the map identical with each and everyone’s inner world. Exploring this emotional and psychological map in small groups opened up the conversations and laid the ground for deeper reflections.

The participants could also take smaller versions of the beautiful maps with them to their local offices and homes to further explore the topic of well-being with other colleagues, family members and friends. It was not us teaching or telling facts that they most probably already knew, but a shared journey of listening, being heard, speaking up and learning."

³⁹ www.nuekhet.de

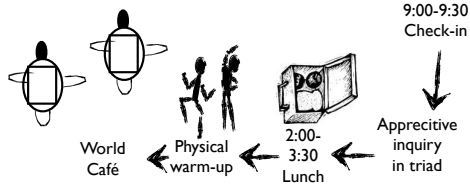


The Atlas of Experience, from Louise Van Swaaij and Jean Klare (2000) provides geographic maps where places are no longer mountains or cities but abstract topics such as emotions, challenges, aspirational vision...

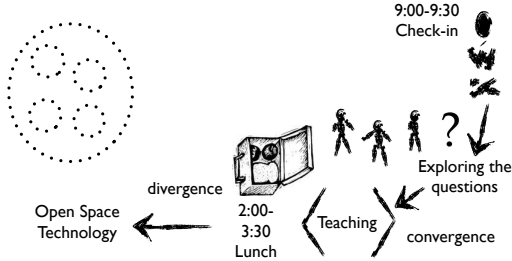
A **Visual Landscape** is a kind of learnscape (see next page for an example). It is a linear graphic representation of a process showing the key steps that are going to take place. They follow a time flow and provide a structured space for all participants to draw the key learnings that each step is generating in them. This process helps participants become co-creators of the gathering like group mindmaps and learnsapes with the time flow being the only structure.

VISUAL LANDSCAPE

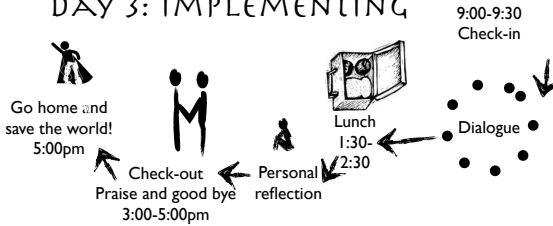
DAY 1: BECOMING PRESENT



DAY 2: EXPLORING



DAY 3: IMPLEMENTING



***Dare!* in practice**

The social action network 2d4b⁴⁰ experiments with different subversive steps in its periodic dialogues:

- A poem to signal the end of chatter and kick off the dialogue
- The collective creation of a bouquet in silence, where each participant chooses a flower and sets it in the centre
- Martial arts movements while waiting for the last participant to arrive
- A lunch in silence after a morning of intense dialogue

Every practice enables different connections, different ways of being together.

Now that we have introduced the different kinds of *subversive techniques* available, we offer below a few steps to help you select and introduce one in a future gathering you take part in.

First you might want to consider these questions:

- What do I feel comfortable introducing? How might it benefit the group? Some of these activities are reflective while others are active. Some are solitary, while others are collaborative. What mix would be most useful for our intention?
- What moments of the gathering would benefit from having a subversive technique?
- What physical space(s) would be suitable to develop the activities?

Once you have selected your *subversive technique*, prepare the physical space in advance. Have all the materials you need: paint, pipe-cleaners, flowers, magazines to make collages, instruments to make music, markers of many colours and paper etc. Lay them out in a beautiful way. The beauty of the space sets the tone without words.

⁴⁰ 2d4b stands for Diversity and Dialogue for the Base of the Pyramid. The three authors are members of that social network and charity. For more details, check out www.2d4b.com

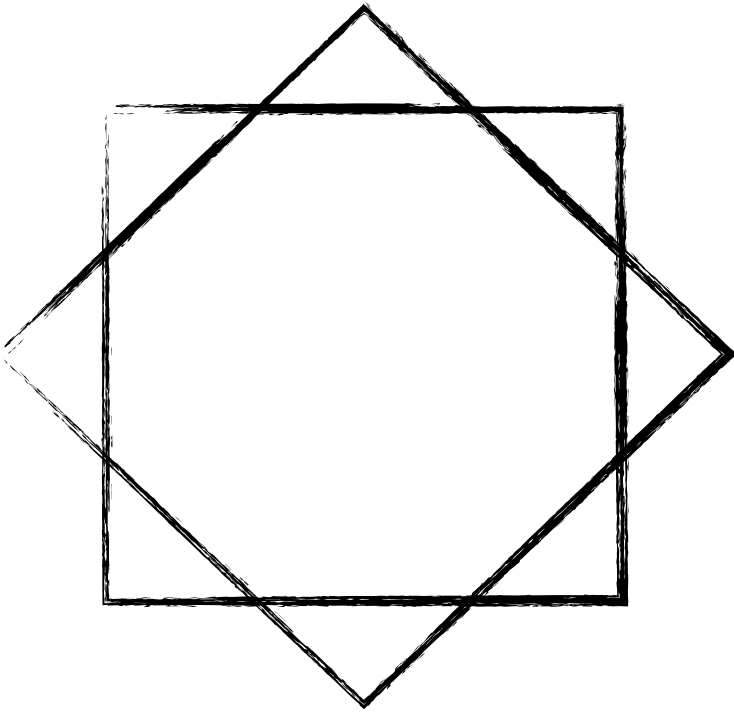
Be realistic about how much time is required for the process you have in mind. Poor *subversive techniques* due to lack of time can be worse than no such steps at all. The risk is leaving the group disjointed, self-conscious, or reducing trust in the flow.

When introduced, the creative activity needs to be presented as an important step, as key and nurturing to the process as other more rational activities are. If the group or prevailing culture is strongly rooted in analytical thinking or seriousness, then we will be particularly gentle in how the activity is introduced. We want to leave shame and insecurities out, get into the mood of the activity and encourage the group to experience it wholeheartedly.

If we are the host, we remember to simply participate.

Enjoy!

ENGAGE



Engage. One-off gatherings

Engage processes are distinct from the *subversive techniques* because they have a defined structure, rules and boundaries to implement them. Yet once they have started, instead of trying to control the flow, we need to relax and accompany the flow. They are also flexible and can be adapted to varied settings. While they imply a good deal of talking and listening, this is not idle chit-chat. The most common result is that people want to literally run towards action, and to set things in motion. They don't need to be told what to do and according to what deadline. They are committed to doing it. What is most important is that the actions people undertake after such gatherings are often well thought out, wise, spot on, and therefore last. Isn't it a nice change from our frantic world asking for ridiculous actions that become meaningless a few months after they were even introduced?

We have organised the practices according to their audience: for groups and for pairs.

For groups:

- **Dialogue** goes beyond politeness to raise participants' awareness on their respective mental models and reach new collective understanding.
- **Open Space** enables what really matters to participants to unfold and translates a strategy into a concrete roadmap.
- **World Café** creates connections while building shared insight around a topic.
- **Insight council** is a way to listen to different perspectives without feeling compelled to follow them.

For pairs:

- To enter a space of possibility without judgement or advice, **Sacred listening** is the technique.
- To step into someone else's shoes, **Shadowing** is the practice.

For groups

Dialogue

Flow of meaning

In prisons, the traditional communication patterns are all too often damaging to the institution and to all individuals within it. The environment is fundamentally adversarial and fragmentation occurs with the splitting-off of different groups – prisoners, officers, senior management, psychologists, etc.

The charity Prison Dialogue⁴¹ facilitates dialogues in prisons, as authentic and candid conversations that build healthy relationships across all stakeholders and levels. The objective is to provide a safe space and open forum for people to enquire about what matters to them, with the responsibility to take others seriously even when they do not agree with them. Alternatives are developed that influence individuals and, through them, an establishment as a whole.

As an example, Prison Dialogue was commissioned by the then-governor Peter Siddons to introduce dialogue work into Blakenhurst prison (UK). This provided purposeful activity for a large number of prisoners who were not held in the local prison long enough to benefit from accredited prison-run courses. The dialogue ran for two consecutive days each month and involved 20 prisoners with two or three uniformed staff and a senior manager from the prison. The senior managers attended just one day, and they were on a rota so that each of them joined a dialogue group twice a year. The conversations were facilitated by Prison Dialogue with an open agenda. Prison issues such as security and food were often aired along with resettlement needs such as employment, housing and family relationships. The level of staff involvement was key to ensure the whole establishment could learn from the conversations.

⁴¹ www.prisondialogue.org initiated by Peter Garrett

Dialogue ensures everybody's voice is heard, all perspectives are taken into account. It explores both our differences and similarities, finding common ground, and the points of disagreement. In dialogue, we raise, hold, converse on, and transcend profound questions, including charged topics and emotions.

Dialogue is perhaps the queen of all gatherings. We like it so much!

Where it comes from

Dialogue has a heritage of many thousands of years within spirituality and ancient wisdoms. David Bohm(1917-1992), physicist and mystic, experimented with dialogue from the perspective of quantum physics.⁴² Two of his followers, Peter Garrett and William Isaacs,⁴³ modelled the dynamics of dialogue at their best, using the work of David Kantor who had found four key dimensions that were missing in highly dysfunctional families.⁴⁴ Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea from Peer Spirit made a great contribution to lay out the rules of dialogue in their book *The Circle Way, A Leader in Every Chair* (2010).

To make it work

Dialogue works from two to 30 people approximately. If a group meets for the first time a dialogue of one to three hours creates a personal connection. An overnight stay allows the group to collectively work through a breakdown with the possibility of finding a breakthrough.

From our experience dialogue brings great results, yes. Success too. It does not always work smoothly. While writing the book, our weekly calls would have a Dialogue shape. Once the check-in was done we would bring up topics. One of us would propose a concrete line of action. Another one would inquire with a question to understand the proposal well. The other would say something that would oppose the proposal. Sometimes we would all be silent in the midst of the tension created by disagreement. Refocusing on our initial intention, we would detach from our seemingly opposing ideas, and move forward in our work.

⁴² *On Dialogue* by D.Bohm (1996)

⁴³ Peter Garrett founded www.dialogue-associates.com. Bill Isaacs wrote *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together* (1999) and leads www.dialogos.com.

⁴⁴ www.kantorinstitute.com

Dialogue is characterised by both its simplicity and its power of transformation. It requires from the host and its participants courage to welcome what could emerge, including strong tensions, tears and frustration.

Dialogues dissolve unnecessary tensions and ease participants into action.

Yet they rarely end with concrete action plans. So for groups in need of a to-do list, the results might be too intangible.

Before the event, we define the profound question, craft the invitation, and send it out as detailed in the *Explore* section.

The space is arranged so that there is a circle of chairs with no tables in between so everybody sees everyone. With this, we convey the meaning of equality and transparency. This seems easy but many venues struggle with accommodating that setting. We might have to insist on de-cluttering the room.

The centre of the circle, the place where we speak to when in dialogue is empty, or may be carefully decorated with a beautiful and meaningful setting: a bouquet, a candle, an object related to the theme, a nice piece of cloth, etc.

On the day, we briefly introduce (five minutes):

- the context
- question being explored today
- roles
- rules⁴⁵

One key rule we need to emphasise in Dialogue is to speak to the centre and *not* to any particular individual as it reduces the potential responses and excludes all other participants. Another particularly important rule in dialogue is to focus on oneself rather than others, and to slow down to be able to do that.

⁴⁵ See Ground rules in section Explore.

When we are eager to speak up, let's question ourselves, am I *inquiring* or am I *advocating*?

- **Inquiring** is when our intervention is directly focused on knowing more about a position. Inquiry is often lacking in regular discussions and exchanges, and when in dialogue we aim to increasing the amount of inquiry.
- **Advocacy** is when we are defending a particular position or point of view. This is the most natural tendency in conventional settings.

On the roles, learning from Peer Spirit practice,⁴⁶ we propose the following distinctions:

- **Host:** person or group of persons that make the call to host the dialogue. Once participants have been welcomed and the context set, the hosts become simply equal participants.
- **Guardian:** is the person(s) who ensures respect and encourages quiet reflection. There can be one or two people assigned to that task, or all participants take that responsibility. For this it may be useful to have a talking piece: a physical object which people must hold in their hand to speak. It serves as an instrument to avoid interrupting each other and slows down the conversation. A gentle noise maker such as tingshaws, rattle, bell, chime, placed in the centre of the circle can be useful to stop the dialogue, take a breath, rest in silence. The person who called the silence can then share why she called the pause or just let the dialogue resume.
- **Scribe:** person who collects key ideas that arise. To encourage a shared responsibility, we recommend that a notepad is offered to each participant to the dialogue, so each person can take their own notes of the event, and possibly record their own intention, those of others, and their key insights.

We allow for a few burning questions when it is the first dialogue for some participants. We then signal the move from chat to dialogue with a poem, music, minute of silence, or a physical movement.

⁴⁶ www.peerspirit.com

We start with the **check-in**. This phase of check-in is crucial to create the container for the dialogue.⁴⁷ Everybody has to speak. This is not optional. They can speak more or less, but everybody's voice has to be heard.

Once everybody has had a chance to check-in, we **open the dialogue** by restating the question. People can choose to stay silent or speak, share emotions, or reflections, propose actions or challenge ideas.

Dialogue improves as we become more conscious of the role we play in it. Every time we speak, we need to ask ourselves:

- Are we providing direction? When proposing new initiatives, voicing new ideas...we are **moving**.
- Are we correcting what has been said? When correcting, contradicting, arguing against, clarifying...we are **opposing**.
- Are we giving support to what is being said? When expressing approval, agreement, when listening or empathising, and when reminding about an earlier suggestion...we are **following**.
- Are we giving perspective to the dialogue? When we reframe what is happening, when we offer an alternative view on what seems stuck in the conversation, when we feel like an outsider mirroring perspectives... we are **by-standing**.

The four moves we propose are from David Kantor's work. They are necessary to a good dialogue, and an improved dialogic capacity would mean we are comfortable moving in the four directions at any time. Often, some individuals tend to oppose, while others tend to by-stand. Dialogue is healthiest when all participants are able to use the range of moves so no one individual is stuck in one set of behaviours and contributions, and the whole group is exploring new territories.

Within a 2d4b dialogue Leila shared with tears in the check-in her despair about being single though she dreamt of having children.⁴⁸ Meg, a first time mother, shared her joy of being a mum with much detail in her own check-in. When we explored the question "how can we listen to muted voices in ourselves and in the world?" Jo, another participant, reacted abruptly against all of Meg's contributions and then stayed silent. We realised that Jo had been

⁴⁷ See Check-in in section Explore and section Ground in the chapter Container.

⁴⁸ Names were changed for confidentiality reasons.

touched by Leila's check-in and outraged that Meg seemed so uncaring with Leila's feelings. This made Jo defensive about everything Meg brought up in the dialogue. Yet Leila was not at all hurt by what Meg had shared. Hearing about other people's experiences of motherhood was not painful for her... Jo had been triggered in her own pain, which she hadn't expressed. Her attempts to protect Leila were in fact a desire to protect herself from some sadness she had not yet acknowledged.

As the dialogue flows we may discern some of our shadows through noticing who and what kinds of comments from others trigger us, i.e. make us sad, angry, or distant. In ordinary conversations, we tend to blame others for triggering our shadows⁴⁹. In dialogue, we are encouraged to look inward. The slowing down of dialogue allows us to explore what is really happening, as we see in the earlier example.

Dialogue ends with a **check-out**, a chance for participants to distill what sense they make of the dialogue. In turn, each participant shares their individual intention going forward, and might offer a learning or idea they noticed for the group. The check-out can be deeply engaging or a more gentle time to close the great sharing. For a two to three hours meeting, the check-out is likely to be light, for example around the question "What is staying with me from our dialogue?" or "What did I learn today?". After a gathering over three days, the check-out often takes a more formal and engaging process which can be ritualised e.g., asking each person to stand up while they describe their intention,⁵⁰ getting their neighbour to write down the intention, giving a flower or small object to symbolise the intention.

⁴⁹ See Welcome the dark parts in section Be.

⁵⁰ See the penultimate section Ground.

Open Space

Self-organisation at work

Colibri,⁵¹ a French NGO and movement aims to encourage citizens to do their own part to care for planet earth. In the run up to the Presidential elections, the Colibri organised about thirty Open Spaces across the country so all citizens could share their ideas, insights, questions, challenges and find resonance to move towards the world they intend to create. The overarching theme was “Transform our Land.”

Open Space enables groups of all sizes to break down complex issues into pragmatic subjects participants feel passionate about. Within a short time participants co-define the agenda. Then, active conversations and connections can flourish. Implementation will be easier as action plans have been created by motivated parties.

Open Space has proved particularly useful for organisations with a clear vision and strategy but lacking concrete steps to implement them. Open Space translates visions and strategies into a specific and shared action plan that is rapidly implemented afterwards because all stakeholders play a part in crafting it.⁵²

Magda’s experience: “The Spanish city council of Reus contracted me to co-define together with the local citizens the town policies for equality and inclusion for the coming years. Laure and I designed a participatory process that engaged the civil servants from the different areas of the council in dialogues over two months. When the container was ready, I facilitated an Open Space of two whole afternoons, where civil servants hosted dialogues on their topics. This was a challenging step, as civil servants were used to delegating contact with citizens to consultants. About a hundred motivated citizens joined and contributed to the policies they wanted to see in their town, giving ideas and offering support for the implementation of policies. What is more important, is that the civil servants engaged and listened to the wisdom of citizens.”

⁵¹ www.colibris-lemouvement.org. P. Rabhi *As in the Heart, so is the Earth: Reversing the Desertification of the Soul and the Soil* (2006)

⁵² www.change-management-toolbook.com/mod/book/view.php?id=74&chapterid=112

Where it comes from

In 1983, Harrison Owen worked over a whole year to prepare a conference for 250 people.⁵³ He gathered from the feedback that the conference was good, but the best parts were reported to be the coffee breaks! Drawing from ancient village gatherings in Africa, he created a way to convene meetings like a coffee break. In 1992, he published the first edition of his book clarifying the rules of Open Space.⁵⁴ This technique has since been used in many settings, from the United Nations to civil society movements, very successfully.

To make it work

We have seen Open Space work well with groups from 20 to 350. Yet other practitioners have made it work with 2,000 people in groups.

It can be done from two hours to five days. With a day, an Open Space allows for good conversations. It takes two days to have a detailed written record ready and printed at the end of the event. Three-days to put it all together, and select priorities for action.

Before the event, we set the theme and question, craft the invitation and send it out.

The room is prepared for the opening and closing sessions with chairs in a circle or concentric circles for larger crowds. The fewer circles, the better. Breakout rooms or spaces welcome the different sessions from separate rooms or corners of a big room as long as acoustics allow. The ratio for the breakout rooms needed is five rooms (or corners) for 100 participants.

On the walls we tape the following information detailed below: the rules of Open Space, the Market Place (empty at the beginning of the session) and the Bulletin board.

⁵³ www.ho-image.com

⁵⁴ H.Owen *Open Space Technology: A user's guide* (Latest edition 2012)

The rules of Open Space consist in 1 law, 4 principles and 2 roles.

Law of the two feet: “If you find yourself in a place where you neither learn nor contribute, take yourself to a better place”

Four **principles**:

- Whoever comes are the right people
- Whenever it starts, it starts
- When it is over, it is over
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have

Beyond staying the whole time in a session, people can take the **roles** of:

- **Bumblebees** that go from one group to another and cross-pollinate the discussions.
- **Butterflies** who do not participate in any of the conversations. They might get a cup of coffee, go to the toilet, enjoy the sunshine outside, or talk with a colleague. They are a reminder to all those in groups that they are there at their own choosing.

On the day of the Open Space event, we provide a matrix of times and places where the different breakout dialogues will take place on a big board. This is called the **Market Place**. It must be visible from afar, so flip-chart size is the minimum (see next page for an example).

With people sitting in a circle, we introduce the rules, the context, the question being explored and ask for topics relating to the main question which people have on their mind and would like to explore with others. We offer all participants to write down a topic on a piece of paper. Then we ask those participants who would like to host a conversation on their topic, to go to the centre to share it with the rest. We provide a mike for large crowds. Referred to as conveners of a session, they stick their paper on the market place at the time and place that suits them and is still available.

Once the marketplace is full, all conveners are invited to go to the market place and do some horse-trading. For instance they combine topics that are related, change times. Attendees sign up to the sessions they want to participate in, with their initials as indications for logistics. Once the marketplace is set, the sessions start and participants go to the topics that interest them.

Time/Space	Room A	Room B	Corner C
9.00 - 10.00	Community Engagement (Roberto)	WE ARE ALL TEAM PLAYERS (FEI)	Cutting red tape (Marta)
10.00 - 11.00	EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES (JAN)	Sustainable Practices (Pedro)	BETTER COMMUNICATION (Joe)
11.00 - 12.00	listening to the muted voices (Laure)	ARE WE AFRAID TO FAIL? (maria)	SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES (LS)

Bulletin Board: for meetings over several days and for large crowds, this place provides updates and news from all those who wish to post any.

When sessions are kicked-off, the role of the facilitator in Open Space, beyond introducing the rules and principles at the beginning and measuring time, is to “hold the space” during the whole process. Holding the space is about being present, relaxed and connected to what is happening without trying to control it.

At the end, a **closing circle** is created to provide an opportunity for all participants to reconnect as a collective through sharing, for those who wish to, and only briefly, what the event has meant for them, and what they propose to do in the future. This is *not* about reporting back. When note-taking has been decided, conveners are accountable for typing up minutes or delegating to a participant.

After a large formal European conference, Richard Pelly, Director for the European Investment Fund (EIF), came to the conclusion that overly formal meetings with presentations and imposed themes were not the most appropriate for his diverse, talented and determined workforce. With the support of Magda and Laure, he engaged his leadership team to structure their annual meeting as an Open Space, and to assign a core team constituted of all layers of the EIF to organise the annual event and to prepare the ground with three Build-up events. The Build-up events were Open Spaces for 30 employees. They enabled the EIF to test that format and for themes to emerge.

However, as comfortable as the core team felt to open the floor for 30 people to be creative in Build up events, it felt like a much bigger endeavour to gather 170 employees across Europe for their annual meeting under such a format. Getting over their worries, tuning down their need for control, the core team and the leadership team decided to still try Open Space.

The day was split into two parts. Topics were already defined in the morning, but people could choose freely where they wanted to participate. The afternoon was full Open Space format i.e., no predetermined agenda and all participants got a chance to offer the topics that were most important to them at that moment. Throughout the day, some of the creativity and fun initiated the evening before through *subversive techniques* was kept by way of music, a whistle to signify transitions, and some sessions being run outside in the park as the weather was fantastic. Employees took risks, supported each other, questioned each other, and managed to create a shared list of priorities and action plans that felt most urgent to tackle together.

The takeaways were written up on laptops as the gathering happened so they could be shared shortly after the event. A year later, they were still being regularly referred to.

For more information, check out the Open Space website.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ www.openspaceworld.org

World Café

Connecting to make meaning

Twenty citizens met in Barcelona in April 2012 to explore Sustainability before the Rio+20 summit. Their effort was part of the Global Dialogues movement.⁵⁶ Magda co-facilitated that event with Carlotta Cattaldi and Sergi Rovira, all members of The Natural Step Spain.⁵⁷

Two sets of objectives brought us together. Locally, we wanted to connect citizens, build a shared vision of a sustainable future and network with each other to make the vision happen. At a global level, we had committed to gather the answers and insights about a sustainable society to influence the Rio+20 UN summit.

Following a visualisation exercise about the sustainable future we wanted, the group was invited to a World Café. In tables of four, three rounds of 20 minutes covered the questions: What do we need to learn to make this vision of a sustainable future come true? What is our major challenge to bring this vision into reality? What key actions do we need to make this vision real? In less than an hour, ideas were shared, connections strengthened and energy for action created.

World Café creates short dialogue spaces at small tables, where three to five participants meet and discuss each round, moving in an organised manner so ideas get shared. The setting allows for participants to make collective knowledge visible through listening together for patterns, insights and deeper questions.

⁵⁶ www.onefutureoneplanet.org

⁵⁷ www.thenaturalstep.org

Where it comes from

In 1995 in California, Juanita Brown and David Isaacs experimented with the process during a two-day dialogue among a global, interdisciplinary group known as the Intellectual Capital Pioneers. The Café setting was initially designed as a waiting space for participants on a rainy day. They realised that while waiting, people engaged in profound conversations. They decided to continue with the format for the whole day and the process was born.⁵⁸

To make it work

World Café can work with groups from 20 to thousands. One hour with three rounds of 20 minutes allow for an icebreaker and an exploration of the topic. Three hours allows three rounds of one hour to go into each topic, and create significant connections. A whole day World Cafe allows for deep insights and strong connections.

World Café is oriented toward conversations and connections as opposed to action plans and decision making.

In advance of a World Café event, we need to define the questions that will be discussed and their sequencing. We think about how many rounds we will do, and how much time is needed for each round.

The room needs to be large enough for the group, for easy movement of participants, with tables of three to five people each, spread in a random form.

⁵⁸ J.Brown and D.Isaacs *The World Cafe: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter* (2005)

Café etiquette will be written on flip-charts and posted on the room walls:

- Focus on what matters
- Play, doodle, and draw!
- Contribute your thinking and experience
- Listen to understand
- Connect ideas
- Listen together for patterns, insights and deeper questions

Each table has two white flip-charts, and a mug with coloured markers and playing material (plasticine, metallic coloured strings...) to stimulate creative thinking.

On the day we briefly explain World Café as a process to engage in questions that matter through the use of collaborative dialogue. We state how many rounds there will be. Each question is presented, written on a flip-chart or projector. After each round, all but one participants move to another table and one person stays behind to brief the newcomers with the insights from the previous conversation. We can use music or other sound to signify the change of round.

To close we offer the opportunity for volunteer participants to share key insights with the rest of the group or record graphically collective insights on mural paper on the wall.

Case studies and different applications of the methodologies can be found in the World Café site.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ www.theworldcafe.com

Insight council

Different perspectives on one issue

The French Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants d'entreprise (CJD) is a network of 3,300 company heads and managers in France founded in 1938.⁶⁰ The age limitation is only for elected members who must be less than 45, but members are from all ages. CJD members lead a variety of organisations from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to large companies from all business sectors. Eric Parent is a member and shares his experience.⁶¹

“CJD committees are groups of around ten directors who gather monthly to explore areas of expertise (strategy, marketing, commercial, internet presence...) or concrete acute problems they face. Amongst the different ways of exploration, a very frequent one is the so called mirror mode, which is a structured insight council. When working in a mirror mode, we explore the case of one member only. The member presents his case to the others. The others listen and do not ask questions, except to reach basic understanding.

When the presenter is done, the listeners ask as many questions as they want, but they express neither opinions nor suggestions. When the questions are over, the listeners can chose to take several minutes to think it over and clarify their thought. Then a feedback session starts.

Response is structured in three levels: “What I understood of your situation...”, “So your problem is...” and “If I was in your place, I would...” The objective is neither to urge the presenter, nor to behave like judges or professors, but as peers, and to allow the working peer his choice to take or drop any comment. In practice, the “I would” feedback can be very different: they comment on the situation from different points of view, reflecting different personalities, experiences, professional knowhow. They can be completely contradictory or very similar. During the feedback session, the working peer just listens. S/he doesn't comment nor does s/he correct. There are two possible ways to conclude: by thanking and ending, or by stating the peers' feedback. I have found this practice very helpful. I gained new ideas and self-confidence in the action to take.”

⁶⁰ CJD website: www.jeunesdirigeants.fr/Default.aspx?tabid=142

⁶¹ www.2d4b.com/WP/?page_id=436

Insight council is structured feedback with clear boundaries to protect the presenter from invasive help i.e., someone else taking over the problem. One person exposes an issue to a group, and every person examines the issue while leaving the full choice to that person.

Where it comes from

Nancy Kline⁶² theorised this process for groups to provide ideas and advice succinctly and within limits, so the locus of control stays clearly in the hands of the person dealing with the issue.

To make it work

Insight councils can be done with three to twelve participants to explore professional or personal issues. It takes thirty minutes to two hours to examine one participant's issue. If each person's issue is examined in turn, the time needed is increased proportionally.

A word of caution: if a team has a competitive attitude, or is managed by the team leader who is part of the council, the insight council may become another way for the team members to impress the team leader rather than contribute authentically. We advise choosing any other *Engage* process if you find yourself on such a team and to pay attention to the dynamic in any event.

In the Round of Opening, which lasts for a few minutes, the presenter or issue-holder describes the issue or dilemma for which he wants insight, clarity or resolution. The presenter knows he will not be interrupted, and ends after ten minutes at most. The end of that round is signalled by the presenter confirming the question and posing it to the group.

In Round One, each council member in turn offers any information they have, in equal segments of brief time.

- Do say, "If I were in this situation, I would..." Each can tell of her own experience in a similar situation, a relevant story of another's experience, or put herself in the scenario.
- Don't use phrases "If I were you, I would" or "What you should do is..." They *cannot* take over the issue or dilemma.

⁶² N.Kline *More Time to Think: A Way of Being in the World* (2009)

Once all members have spoken, the presenter only says thank you. She does not give any feedback at that moment and only takes in perspectives at this stage.

Exercise: Blind insight council

This is an alternative way to conduct an insight council with the same rounds and ground rules already described. However the presenter turns his back while the council members have a dialogue on the topic at hand. This approach allows for the presenter to take a step back from his issue, and for the council members to be less worried about the feelings of the presenter while they share their own experience. This can be a good choice for highly charged topics, for example presenting a personal struggle, or a leader asking for insight from subordinates.

In Round Two, if needed, the presenter asks for clarity, and if he wants to, gives additional information. If time allows, each council member can offer additional insights.

The last round is called the Round of Appreciation where the council members state their appreciation for the presenter, the presenter states his appreciation for the council members. Here appreciation is synonymous with neither agreement nor commitment to put into practice.

For pairs

Sacred listening

Listening to ignite

When Rena's marriage was going through difficulties, she and her husband used sacred listening, the simplest of all practices: each spoke in turn with no interruption for 20 minutes. These 40 minutes were a weekly appointment the couple made and attended on time as a first sign of commitment and interest in each other. They used a timer to signal the 20 minutes. Rena had many things she needed to say. So she started talking fast. After a while, as she was not interrupted, she relaxed. She realised she had time and she didn't need to rush. Her thinking expanded and she discovered new emotions, new thoughts. In contrast, Rena's husband was not using his whole time. He would stop speaking. They just sat there, and she kept focusing generously on him until the 20 minutes had passed. Then more came out from her husband. Listening to each other created the kind of conditions where a deep understanding occurred. Sacred listening healed the wounds that emerge in any long-term relationship, so an enduring and loving marriage was made possible.

Sacred listening is a process for one person to explore an issue, with the companionship of a listener. Ideally this is a reciprocated practice: one person thinks in one session while the other listens. Then, they swap roles.

Where it comes from

Time to Think was theorised by Nancy Kline who aptly subtitled it *listening to ignite the human mind*.⁶³ This process uses an explicit protocol mirrored in many psychotherapeutic practices to aid the thinker in her work. Many groups use similar approaches, such as Saint Ethelburga's Center for Reconciliation and Peace in the UK following the work of Dr Justine Huxley

⁶³ N.Kline *Time to Think: Listening to Ignite the Human Mind* (1998) and www.timetothink.com

who formulated Tandem Dialogues for specific causes (e.g. interfaith dialogue).⁶⁴ In the corporate world, a powerful grievance or whistleblowing process includes a great deal of sacred listening.

To make it work

A sacred listening session lasts from 30 to 90 minutes to explore one person's question. One to three hours to explore both partner's issues. This work is conducted in person ideally. It is possible by phone or web-conference especially after experiencing several sessions face-to-face.

We usually know how to solve our problems best, but we can become muddled or distracted from our own true course. This process helps set us on our own path again, accessing inner intelligence and ideas we were not aware we had in ourselves.

This practice helps remove limiting assumptions from our minds that are blocking our thinking and our lives. As we learn to listen deeply to others, we strengthen our relationships and connection to them.

Contrary to many forms of coaching, this practice leaves the responsibility in the hands of the thinker. So for those who need to provide counselling and do not trust that the thinker has all his answers, this practice might feel like torture as the listener is not entitled to comment.

During the sacred listening session, the thinking partners sit facing each other, in comfortable seats and positions.

- Once both are comfortable the listener asks: **What's on your mind?**The thinker answers, perhaps surprising herself by how much she has to say. Just exploring what's on her mind is significant work. The listener remains steady and appreciative. When does the listener know that the thinker is finished? Typically a stuttering or silences signal the relief of clarifying what is of utmost importance to explore today.
- **Is there anything more you think, feel or know about that? What else?** It may feel contrived to ask, but please do. It is a permission most of us need to hear to be sure we've said everything to get to the core of our issue.

⁶⁴ www.stethelburgas.org/themes/facilitation-and-dialogue

- **What do you want?** This question positions the thinker to be able to look forward with a heightened sense of control and responsibility. This can be surprisingly difficult for people to state, they may move into listing what they do not want. Point out this discrepancy and ask again: What do you want?
- **What are you assuming?** What is the thinker assuming that is stopping her from changing this situation? The thinker will hopefully surprise herself.
- **“If you knew...”** This prompt is meant to place the person in a scene of possibility where they may have felt stuck. This has nothing to do with how powerful or in control they are in other aspects of their life, but their sense of powerlessness is stealing insight into their own solution. So ask the thinker to frame the assumption in the positive. Putting them back in control where they felt out of control. “If I knew that I had enough time, I would...” Have the thinker write down the statement. They may refer to it beyond the session. Writing also reinforces the assertion.
- Finish by expressing **appreciation** for one another. This is a completion of the work and an acknowledgment of the compassion and loving-kindness that set the tone for the work you have both done.

Serena’s experience: “My friend, Stuart, listens with a quality that consistently left me better when we parted company. Though Stuart served a listening role for me, overtime when speaking with him I realised that the experience of sacred listening was mutual and typical. I learned in his company to offer back that sacred quality of listening. Stuart and I discussed explicitly other experiences of conversation and listening that didn’t hold the same quality. A thinking partnership emerged for working through immediate issues and testing ideas about work, relationship and faith.

I had a habit in both work and friendship of sharing stories that in my mind echoed the experience of other speakers. This habit didn’t bring connection or a sense of understanding as I intended. But in a need to act, rather than just listen, I habitually used these reciprocal stories. They just didn’t work , but I didn’t have other practised means of showing empathy. I realised by experiencing sacred listening, it was enough just to listen. I didn’t need to offer advice, but listen attentively as I did with Stuart.

Experiencing sacred listening was a powerful shift in my work from needing to give advice, thereby proving value, to simply offering non-judgmental listening. Clients had a greater sense of ease and clarity mirrored by the ease I felt. Friends would explore more difficult themes, and experience more clarity. A phrase I'd so often used before, "I know what you mean" went rotten. Because when I engaged in sacred listening, the phrase "I know what you mean" seemed trite even if some factors were the same, even if I had ideas to share to solve the problem."

The listener check-list

Are we at ease? If not we move to a place where we can sit in repose for a long time. We need time without interruption: no phones ringing, no people seeking our attention.

Once the session has started, as the listener we keep eye contact and do not interrupt. When the thinker looks at us, our calm steady gaze will reassure her. We keep kindness and compassion for our thinking partner at all times. We let ourselves be fascinated by the thinker. We watch her expression. There is nothing for us to understand, only to listen. The thinker needs not make sense to us. She could literally be speaking a foreign language and we would be answering with attention.

We allow silence. When we feel panic rise or we're tempted to rush in, we breathe and wait. We watch our partner's face, is he still thinking? Don't interrupt him.

If signs of anger, laughter or crying arise in the thinker we just witness the clouds of passing emotion. We don't need to do anything.

"Don't ask picky, clarifying or confirming questions unless you are so confused that you feel faint."

"If the thinker becomes quiet, but their eyes are alive, relax. They are still thinking. Leave them to it." (Nancy Kline)

The thinker check-list

As the thinker, we listen to ourselves. We hear the strain in our voice; the vulnerability, stress, or anger. When emotions come, it is a signal we are working hard. We clear the path by letting any emotions arise; laughter, crying, even yawning are ways of letting unneeded energy release. We also sense the trust our listener has in us to find our own solutions.

St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace uses **Tandem Dialogue**, which mirrors this ethos.⁶⁵ The idea is that volunteers in a larger dialogue process, over the course of four to six months, choose a partner with whom to explore their own faith.

The partners are typically from different faiths, but not necessarily. Pairs in "tandem dialogue" meet about every two weeks in a place they both like, to discuss questions of their own faith. For example, "How does your faith deal with the death of children? What does your holy book say about it?" One partner listens as the first speaker explores what they personally know, and understand of their own faith's offering on this difficult question. Then the other speaker answers the question for himself. One simply listens to the other as he explores his own faith tradition. Whilst both certainly learn about the other faith, many report the greatest learning being about their own faith. And the key to both was speaking to someone who simply listened without expectation or judgment. In addition to the tandem dialogue pairs, the larger group meets at the formation and the close of the process, with an occasional meeting to check their course.

⁶⁵ Conversations for the Soul, St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace. www.stethelburgas.org/conversation-soul-0

Shadowing

In someone else's shoes

Sheri Flies is Costco's Assistant General Merchandise Manager.⁶⁶ She uses shadowing during her visits to farmers and suppliers to evaluate the whole value chain of the products for which she is responsible. During these visits, over the course of days she observes how they run their operations, looking at each process in turn in order to gain a deep understanding.

Shadowing is a platform for all her senses and intuition. Sheri can then make informed decisions and represent confidently the needs of the growers and their environment to executive decision makers in Costco. For example, she secured the purchase contract for African cashew farmers so they can plan in advance and develop their business. Her shadowing of pine nut harvesters in Siberia introduced her into their dire working conditions, and informed her about an endangered species, the Siberian tiger, that lived in the area. For Sheri, shadowing is a way of getting the whole picture of a business. This makes her a more powerful professional who helps operations be more sustainable for all parties involved.

Shadowing is a process of imagination and empathy to step into another person's shoes. We follow that person around like a shadow to gain a deeper understanding of her work or life. In doing this we gain consciousness and connect to someone with similar or completely different challenges. This practice is also useful to create and reinforce networks within organisations.

⁶⁶ Costco is the ninth largest retailer in the world

Where it comes from

Apprenticeship in the medieval times was based on shadowing. Learning from a more experienced person through simply watching them at work has been used efficiently for centuries. Children observe their parents and learn the simple tasks of caring for the body and the home. They learn whether and how to respect authority, how to speak, create intimate connections and so forth. Children imitate what adults do, much more than what adults tell or teach them. More recently, shadowing became a tool not only to learn skills but also to gain insights. Youth shadow adults at work to see what types of roles they could enjoy. Representatives from one organisation can shadow a group of professionals from another organisation.

To make it work

Half a day of shadowing gives a sense of a particular role in an organisation close to us. For a retired accountant to get a sense of the charity she is considering to volunteer for as an accountant, half a day will be plenty. However, several days is a minimum to form a deeper understanding of an unfamiliar reality: for a Brazilian project manager to get a glimpse of the reality of extending a project to Europe, we recommend at least ten days as used for instance for Leaders' Quest.⁶⁷

One thing we need to take into account when shadowing is the power dynamics between the shadower and the shadowee. Are we the buyer/seller, or funder? Are we equals, economically, socially, politically or for familial power? What are the unintended risks of the shadowing experience and how do we mitigate them?

Once we've identified a possible shadowee, we ask for an appointment. Our request is based on esteem and the need to learn. We let her know what we are particularly interested in, and that there's no need for her to prepare as the focus will be on her typical practices and routines. We confirm everything will be kept confidential.

⁶⁷ www.leadersquest.org/

Sheri Flies describes how she prepares herself with Quietness techniques.⁶⁸

“On the morning of the shadowing day I give myself 15 minutes before the exercise to think about the day, and the person I will shadow. I prepare myself. Who am I now and how will I show up? What do I hope to learn? I'm learning how important it is to show up and engage from a space as empty as possible with no attachment to outcome. This takes time to prepare oneself and is a lifetime of practice. So I try to centre myself and still my mind. A serious and consistent meditation practice each morning before embarking in these learning journeys helps me to form the grounding. I find how I show up really matters. If I am able to come empty, it helps me to more deeply listen from a place of compassion while at the same time have a clarity of mindfulness to discern what is arising in me, in others and among us.”

As I observe I become aware of my mental models. I suspend them to see the situation with fresh eyes. While I observe with an open mind and heart I take notes about my insights, questions and doubts. What is my ignorance teaching me?”

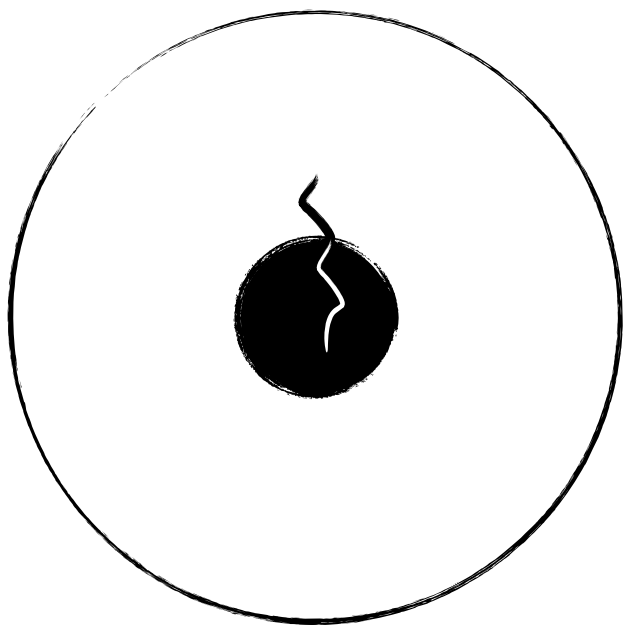
For the debrief we set aside an hour (could be lunchtime) to exchange main ideas and impressions with our shadowee. We inquire further about what we've seen today. We end naming what we particularly appreciated, including the things that might seem small or insignificant.

Afterwards, on our own, we crystallise what we've learnt right away: What are our two to three key observations? What are the implications for our work? What interventions worked? When did we like it? When did we feel uncomfortable? What else did we notice about ourselves?⁶⁹

⁶⁸ See section Dare!

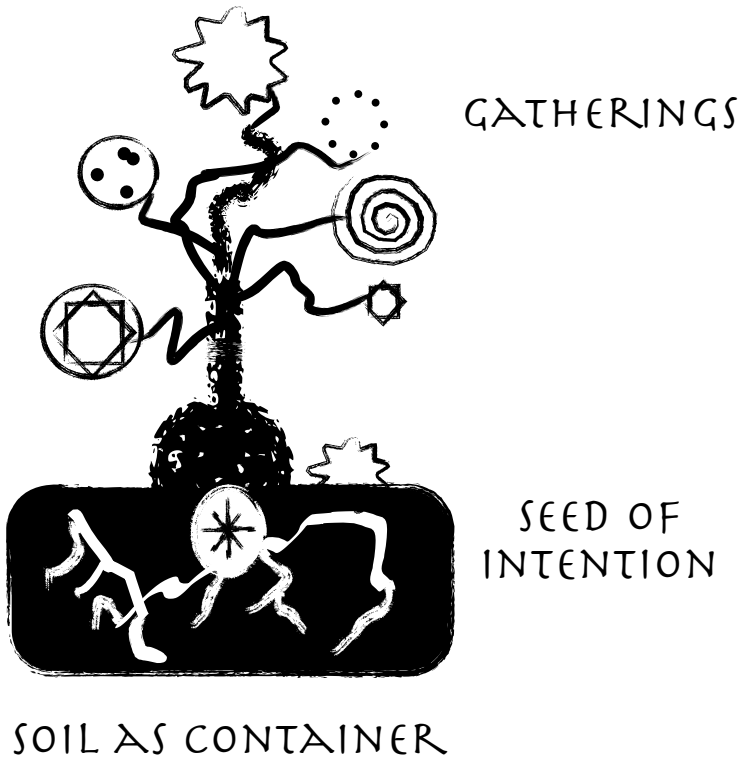
⁶⁹ Adapted from O.Scharmer *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges* (2007)

GROUND



Ground. Abracadabra

REvolutionary gatherings work because they rely upon and relish human strengths, a fundamental quality to navigate the path of change well. From the early stages of the book we have intentionally avoided background or prerequisites of the methodologies. We gave only the indispensable data to use them. In this section, we describe slightly more complex underlying ingredients that make the gathering practices presented here as magical as they are. These ingredients are not just some ingredients. They are the foundations, the cornerstones. We encourage you to truly digest these, especially if you want to embark on Odysseys that will last over time. These cornerstones help us know both where we are going and how to stay flexible and adjust as needed.



Intention. *It's a wild ride, get a grip*

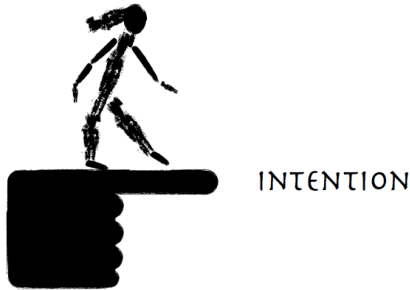
Born in 1867 in Varsovia, Poland, Marie was not allowed to study at university because she was a woman. At the age of 24 with her sister's help, she managed to move to France to study Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics at the Sorbonne. Staying in a tiny, old mansard, number 3 rue Flatters, she concentrated on her studies, dismissing any comfort and not allowing any distracting relationships. Marie Curie received two Nobel Prizes for her discoveries in the field of radiation. She is the only woman to receive two Nobel Prizes and the only person to receive these in different fields. She devoted her whole life to putting science in service of society. The clarity of her intention gave her an impressive resilience.

What is our intention?

What do we believe we need?

What difference will our gathering make?

Exploring these questions will help us discern our intention. When our intention goes beyond our own individual calling to connect with a larger more universal need for our group, company, community then we are touching the group's intention. These gatherings can help discern our individual and collective intentions, and make them become real.



In 1991, a group of twelve local teenagers met with Dr. Jane Goodall in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. They were eager to discuss a range of environmental and social problems they knew from firsthand experience, problems that concerned them deeply. Pollution in the city, deforestation in the mountains, welfare of domestic animals and the future of wild animals, including Dr. Jane's chimpanzees. She was impressed by their compassion, their energy and their desire to develop a grassroots style solution to problems. Although Dr. Jane was involved in their meetings, the project was carried out totally by the teens. The first project of Roots and Shoots involved teens educating villagers about more humane treatment of chickens at home and in the region's markets in Tanzania. Today, the Roots and Shoots network has blossomed into tens of thousands of members in more than 120 countries becoming a source of empowerment and inspiration for many.⁷⁰ A Roots and Shoot group in Spain campaigns for sustainable use and recycling of mobile phones.⁷¹ Their campaign includes consumer education of the dramatic effects of coltan mining in Africa.

⁷⁰ www.rootsandshoots.org

⁷¹ www.movilizateporlaselva.org

An intention can take different shapes. It evolves along the way. But its deeper sense remains. When our intention is grounded, we know, individually and collectively, why we are making an effort. It enables us to endure rough times and desert crossings.

As life is not linear, many things evolve throughout any rEvolution. Strong supporters leave the project, priorities shift, relationships are strained, and funds are reallocated. However through all these changes, if our personal and group's deepest intention remains vivid and shared, our process will be successful. In a sense, our intention is like a guiding star.

Container. *Holding and being held*

Who stands behind you? In good times? In bad times?

Where do you go to find peace, inspiration, joy, or courage?

“When I look at the journey I’ve made, living so many years doing what I love, studying the chimpanzees in Africa, traveling around the world, meeting groups of young people making the world a better place....it’s a dream come true. Who would have thought that a middle class British girl without studies (my parents couldn’t pay for them) would manage to do so? Well, I have to thank a very special person in my life: Vanne, my mother. My interest in animals developed very soon. When I was two, one night they found out that I wanted to sleep with a handful of earth worms under my pillow. With a smile on her face, my mum told me that it would be too hot for them, they would be better off in the garden, where I dropped them after some tears. Intrigued to find out how could a hen lay an egg, I stayed inside the hen house for several hours leaving all my family worried. Later, when I came out, instead of telling me off, and wipe out my passion in all living creatures, she listened to me with interest. She bought me second hand books on animals, so I would learn to read faster... Very soon I realised what I wanted was to go to Africa to study animals. While many people told me to be realistic and to dream something I could achieve, my mother would tell me: “If you really want something, and you work hard enough, take advantage of opportunities and never give up, you will find a way”. Until I made it.”⁷²

These are the words of the primatologist and activist Jane Goodall at age 85 on the key role her mother played as a container throughout her life and achievements. Often, intentions and containers are closely intertwined.

Container is the context, physical and psychological, that offers the required conditions for our intentions and the group’s to flourish and become real. It is an energetic field where we can experiment all possibilities safely. It is a supportive space.⁷³

⁷² Adapted from J.Goodal *Jane Goodall: 50 Years at Gombe* (2010).

⁷³ This definition is from the CIYO and Ashland Institute. www.ciyowomensretreat.com and www.ashlandinstitute.org, the best formulation we have come across on this.

A herd of Elephants walks at the pace of the slowest animal, normally a young or a sick one. Their herd constitutes a container, that takes care of all the members in it.

A container can take different shapes:

- **People:** could be our team, family, life partner, a friend or a mentor. A wider group of people such as a social movement. The author of a book that resonates with us, a world leader or a relative that passed away and we still feel connected to.
- **Places:** museums, a childhood home, mountains, the sea, airplanes or our car, old buildings... any place that makes us feel safe, calm, serene.
- **Practices:** prayer, physical practice or an intense hobby.
- **Virtual spaces:** our culture, our spirituality, our country's history...

Human beings develop in the womb, then in a caregiver's arms, family, school, local community and in the natural world. These constitute historical containers for us and are not chosen.

The nature of containers varies. They can be strong and supportive. They can be limiting where indifference reigns, or trust and love are missing. They can be harmful because of lack of respect, verbal violence, addictions, wars and many other behaviours and circumstances.

The good news is that we can to some degree choose our adulthood containers, work on them and improve their quality. We choose how to engage with life: what studies and jobs we pursue, or how we act as citizens i.e., going to vote, getting involved in a charity, joining a social movement...When we realise that a container is harmful to us, we have a choice.

Can you tell whether your containers support, limit or hurt you?

What do you do when your container hurts you? Do you stay, thinking the grass is never greener? Do you work it out? Do you build a new container? Do you leave the container either physically or mentally?

The rise of individualism and materialism in our societies are forces that strongly damage and fragment our containers. Sociologists refer to these as “liquid times.” We have more choice, but we experience and perhaps give less loyalty than at any time in human history.

Distracted by socioeconomic pressures from the importance of strong relationships and links with our families, we are left with fragmented containers. We are weakened. We hold less and are less held.

The processes described here intend to create, strengthen, and restore containers by creating personal links and spaces of collective action. This is crucial to restore our sense of wholeness and belonging to the world. We need containers to hold ourselves for the global challenges we face.

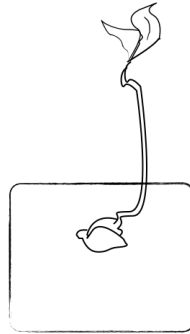
During the writing of our book, we tested our container continuously. The container was quick to build, given the enthusiasm we each had and our friendships, but then it was challenged with every bump in the road. One of us was going through significant change and she disconnected temporarily from the project. The container was leaking. At another time one of us was under a treatment that made it impossible for her to travel, imposing all the traveling for face-to-face meetings on others. The container was stretched. A violent argument made one of us lose faith in our team. The container was hurt.

Keeping an eye on the container’s strength and quality gives us a good indication of how fast and deep the actual change process can go at any given time. For example, we may find that there is difficulty in agreeing on what the operating rules are for the group. This may make energy drop as the tension grows. In this case, when the container leaks, we slow down. Measure the strength of the container by the level of trust, the shared intention and commitment. When the container is strong, exchanges flow, while resonances are numerous and disagreements can be transcended.

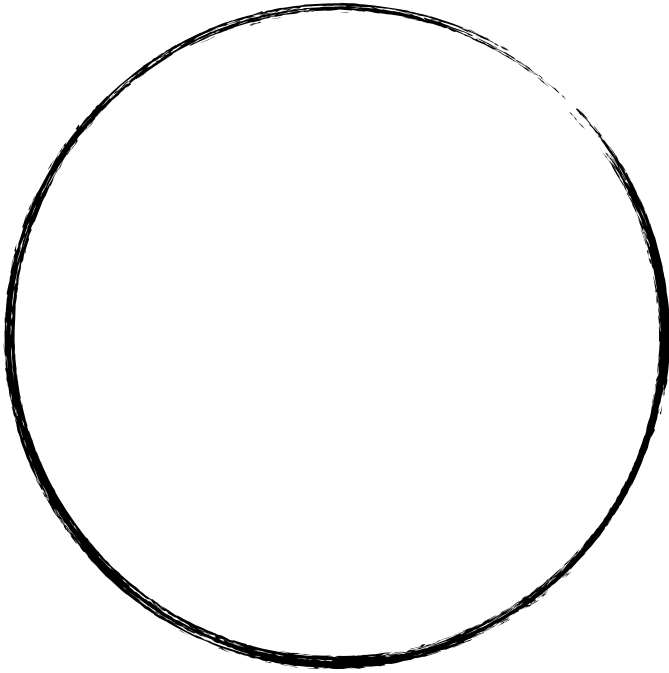
To strengthen the container of your rEvolutionary gatherings:

- Be aware of who or what is holding you, and who/what you are holding. Are the relationships that support the gathering working for you? Are they working for others?
- Ask others in the gathering: What is holding them personally?
- Engage in creating a shared container. An honest conversation about what holds this new initiative on which you want to embark will give you an idea of the speed and size of the effort you will undertake. What edge or rules, if any, will your container have? For what purpose?

CONTAINER



COMMIT



Commit. Odysseys

Serena's experience: "I was delivering a leadership development program in Azerbaijan that ran in three-day phases over a year. As a host my responsibility was not to make people happy, but to create the space for profound learning and trust the process. I let my own style and preference dictate the design, invitation, and facilitation of the program. For me some ambiguity in a meeting invitation, if the purpose is clear and the invitation is from a trusted source, is enough to show up wholly and participate. I also tend to share openly during gatherings.

Many participants joined wholeheartedly. But others struggled with their own embarrassment or disquiet at sharing who they were on a time scale and in a forum that felt threatening. With this I learned how important it is to think about the participants' style, preference, and cultural norm and to combine challenging exercises with more comfortable ones. Years later, some participants that were challenged beyond their comfort zone praised the program and my brave and ferocious stamina to show them a new way of managing. It took the long arm of time to provide them the perspective. And for me to realise the depth and beauty of the journey I had offered them."

Odysseys require commitment over a longer period of time. They are long, arduous, unforeseen. There is learning each step of the way, but the path is tortuous. Like a narrative arc, they can encompass the practices covered in the other sections of the book: *Be*, *Explore*, *Dare* and *Engage*.

This book has been an Odyssey from its start, as explained in the prologue.

How to design an Odyssey?

Odysseys require a **core group** to commit to the "shared intention" and "hold the container" concepts presented in the previous *Abacadabra* section.

What is your Odyssey's emphasis?

- Is it the *topic*? Then *Community of Practice* might work.
- Have you found a bunch of great *people* you want to hang out with though there is no specific topic you are limited to? Then think of a *Circle* or *Peer partnership*.
- Is your group looking for a *fresh outlook* on the challenges you face? Then check out *Appreciative Inquiry* and *Theory U*.
- Do you need to create, innovate, find new inspiration? Then look at the *Creative process*.

Who will join the Odyssey?

Take time to consider membership. Depending on the ground rules collectively set out, members might be able to drop out and others to join without ending the Odyssey. In other cases, we may want to build strong bonds among the members so membership is fixed.⁷⁴

How to contract with our group to create our Odyssey?

The needs of the project at hand and our creativity are the best drivers to frame our journey. It can be as long and periodic as we decide. We consider all the methodologies, and the sky is the limit to our creativity. Most likely, what we plan will be overthrown by reality as Odysseys are walked on shifting sands. Yet, investing good time contracting at the beginning will ease the journey immensely. Expressing our needs clearly allows our group to stay together through the difficult moments that will necessarily come our way.

In the writing of the book, we didn't spend enough time contracting and simply jumped into the project full of energy. However after a few months of work we realised how different our expectations were of the book (its price, its size, marketing strategies). Would we continue? Later when we were nearly finished with the manuscript we realised we had differing needs in terms of face-to-face gatherings, the routes to market, and speed of the translations. Then we began to invest more time in contracting carefully.

⁷⁴ See Who is up for the party? in section Explore.

Creative process

Creating from within

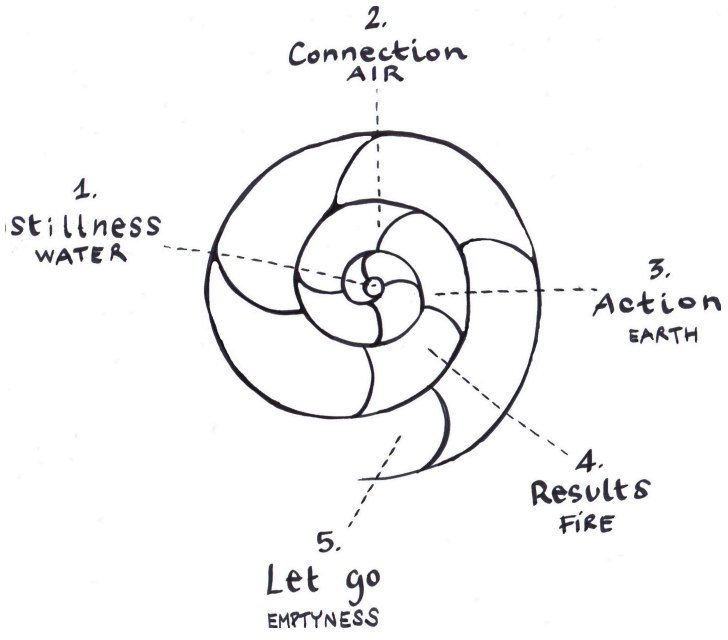
During what is called the Dirty War (1976-1983), at least 9000 Argentinian citizens went missing through state-sponsored terrorism. Their mothers and grandmothers were in great despair. They had no idea where their children were, who had taken them, if they were still alive. They were in a **place of stillness, powerlessness, and isolation.**

They asked “Did you suffer what I also suffered?” They gathered to share their stories and support each other. They **connected.**

A group of 14 mothers were brave enough to take **action.** They demonstrated for their children at the governmental headquarters in Mayo Square in central Buenos Aires in April 1977. Over time the pain became a fight, and demonstrations became marches. Many other mothers and activists would join them every Thursday asking the government to take responsibility for more than thirty years. Some of the mothers were kidnapped and killed. Others created an association offering education. The group divided in two, one willing to enter politics and the other to stay as an association. Through all these changes, collective intentions evolved but the core intention remained.

The women’s initial grief and powerlessness **resulted** in the recognition for all the victims that were invisible for so many years. The intolerance of further disappearances and the strengthening of the Argentinian democracy followed.

Some women decided their last demonstration would be 26 January 2006. It was time to **let go** of that fight, go back into stillness, and define what they wanted to do next. Others kept marching.



Creative process stresses that every project and act of creation, such as a business prototype, a painting or community project begins with not-knowing. That moment of stillness and uncertainty is to be nurtured for true creation to take place.

Where it comes from

All ancient traditions have creation stories that describe the emergence of the world. This model for how the creative process unfolds is based on the very old four-part archetype of the primary elements and what they symbolize: water, air, earth, and fire. This ancient cycle of creativity, birth, growth and death is mirrored in every living process.

This specific model was teased out of deep personal experience and observation by the women principals of The Ashland Institute: Barbara Cecil, Beth Jandernoa, Glennifer Gillespie, and Dorian Baroni. The substance of the creative process emerged after four years of dialogue and exploration in the 1970s amongst a group of women that came together supposedly to design a feminine leadership program. Rather than leap into the impulse to create a program for others, they slowed way down, taking time to examine their own life transitions and aspirations for as long as it took to really understand what it means to live your life on your own terms, from the inside out. The Creative process inspires an increasing number of participants of CIYO⁷⁵ programs around the world.

For how many people and how long?

The creative process starts in silence either alone or in a group. In both cases, the following steps reach out to as many people as we want. For time, the process can be undertaken in a few minutes. It can also take several years. Depending on the topic and how we are at a particular moment of our life, the time required varies. This process emphasises a feminine way to create. It is also applicable for men and masculine organisations willing to deepen and leverage their feminine intelligence.

To make it work

Stillness. Water

The creative process starts with listening and quietening down. Resisting the pressure to do something now. Stay still. Connect deeply. We welcome what we feel, sense, see, think. We are simply present and open to what is emerging. This step can materialise in one second of silence during a tensed conversation, or in three years of withdrawing from a way of life that is no longer making sense. Practices that can help in that stage are Silence, Meditation, Working with hands, or Journaling. We protect and nurture that vital slowing down to gain clarity on our intention. We come back to that place of stillness whenever necessary throughout our process of creation.

⁷⁵ CIYO stands for Coming Into Your Own, a movement supporting feminine leadership

Connection. Air

We open ourselves to the larger web of possible relationships. We identify the resonant partners and friends we sense may be part of this new project with us. We connect with them, bring them together and start collecting the thoughts and ideas that are showing up. We dare express what really matters to us. We share it with people who might be keen, and those who might resist but could help. We explore how our individual calling can become a group calling. We hear and integrate negative reactions from others and don't let them drag us down. We build a strong container. We continue to hold the impulse to act. For this step we might use methodologies such as World Cafe, Dialogue, Insight council, Shadowing.

Action. Earth

Once we are clear on our intention, and we have solid connections, we can decide what to undertake, develop a plan and determine what needs to be done. Only now we begin to act and make things happen. We become fully present to the doing, and enjoy the energy that flows. Gatherings in this phase can include Open Space and Peer partnership⁷⁶ to gear us toward getting things done.

Results. Fire

As the process unfolds, we guide it as it takes life of its own. We celebrate what has been achieved, what has been lived. We step back from driving things, and spend more time blessing those in the container who are still in the energy for doing and connecting. Here many *subversive techniques* can work such as Dancing, Music, or other creative ways of celebrating.

Letting go. Emptiness

We empty ourselves. We let our actions stop, the project die if it needs to and go back to a new level of stillness.

⁷⁶ See Peer Partnership in the last section Commit.

Peer partnership

Traveling with an equal

“BP and Amoco formally merged in 1998. By 2000 it was time to merge the two company cultures. BP decided to do this through leadership development starting from its 10,000 front line managers, that is the very first line of management, and going up. The leadership development offer consisted in training events and a Peer partnership program whereby team leaders could support each other and their learning over time.⁷⁷

During that time, Laure was the learning manager of a U.S. business unit in Chicago with 1700 employees spread across 80 locations in the US, from three different company heritages (BP, Amoco and Arco). She set up a Peer partnership program across the three regions, so team leaders would get to know at least one other team leader from a different heritage and get to understand how they worked.

At the beginning, some external reminders were needed for the peer partnership calls to happen. The pairs were assigned rather than participants choosing. As there was no competition between managers, exchanges became all the more authentic and helpful, managers grew new personal connections, and shared good practices with each other. They discovered some blind spots in their ways of operating. The program was a great learning opportunity in all aspects of work. Long standing practices typical in one region had been dealt with more safely in other regions. The peers discovered these improvements themselves and implemented them. The program strengthened the team and business practices and created a shared culture.”

⁷⁷ www.thechaosgame.com/developing-first-level-leaders from the Harvard Business Review article, June 01, 2005 by Andreas Priestland and Robert Hanig provides details on the leadership development program.

A peer partner is a person who wants to take some time out to reflect with another person in a spirit of equality. Peer partners may differ in seniority, roles, age, sector. Difference deepens insights as long as the spirit of equality is upheld.

If mentoring tends to have a more senior person advise a more junior person, peer partnership is based on the belief that we learn best through mutual exchange where both parties learn from each other. Mutual learning is what happens in any relationship including parents and child, but peer partnership makes explicit the equality of the relationship and mutual respect. If the culture of the organisation is top-down, calling the program “Mentoring Up”, fosters acceptance. It encourages junior and senior pairs to share equally and listen openly.

Where it comes from

Peer partnership is a methodology used widely to increase learning of groups. It has been used in many organisations to encourage sharing of values and experiences across cultures, nationalities, gender, age, and organisational heritages. For example, schools pair head teachers and teaching staff to learn from one another in many countries.

For how many people and how long?

Peer partnership can be an organised effort in one organisation or one individual seeking a peer to strengthen their work.

Each meeting or phone call can last from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. Meetings can be as often as needed; weekly, monthly or quarterly. The value expands as meetings and exchanges are done over time. The commitment can be in place from three months to one year or more.

To make it work

For a Peer partnership to work we need both partners to have a profound desire for insights and the willingness to share their questions, vulnerabilities and successes.

When designing for an organisation, if the program is considered pleasant but not essential, it is likely to fail. The members need to be able to ask for time away from other projects to meet with their peer partner and be supported by their management when they do so. From time to time (e.g. every 6 months) the organisation can host a larger event for all peer partners to exchange their best ideas and share their difficulties.

Partners define together:

- The periodicity of their meetings including ad hoc meetings, phone or face-to-face ones
- What they will share
- How they will share: Will they speak in turn at each meeting or focus on one person per conversation? Do they welcome reciprocal feedback? How do they handle interruptions e.g., phone calls? Techniques especially well suited for pairs are Sacred listening or Shadowing described in the *Engage* section.

Circle

Learning in loops

Laure and Magda participate in a circle composed of four couples. Two couples are based in France, one in Germany and one in Spain. They share a willingness to stay focused on their marriage. They have dialogues through web conference every six weeks. They take turns to host. This circle has been great fun for its members, gaining enthusiastic support from some of the initially skeptical male members. It broadened the field and expression of love in each couple. It helped overcome two couples' crises within a year.

Serena, Laure and Magda are part of separate women's circles that meet periodically to reflect on their lives in a caring and non-judgemental way. They use several practices: Dialogue, Journaling, Silence, Question storm...

Men's groups are numerous around the world.⁷⁸ Men too need to connect, reflect, and slow down!

Following ordination within the Anglican Church, vicars are assigned a circle of peers who meet several times a year as a neutral source of spiritual and vocational support.

Circles can also be on more practical subjects such as reading, running, knitting, walking...

A circle is a group focused on its members that gathers periodically to inquire about any sphere of life, be it professional, personal, leisure, etc. With time, and given authentic interaction, it grows beyond individual members to become an identity. With a shared experience a circle allows for high levels of personal development and spin-off capacity for projects.

⁷⁸ B.Kauth *A Circle of Men: The Original Manual for Men's Support Groups* (1992); G.Corneau *Absent Fathers, Lost Sons: The Search for Masculine Identity* (1991). See examples of men's circles in France: www.rhfrance.free.fr and Quebec: www.rhquebec.org.

Where it comes from

The most ancient way of gathering around a fire is to keep warm and tell stories. People make meaning together in this way and make sense of their inner world. The Jungian analyst and activist Jean Shinoda Bolen catalysed the global movement around circles with her book *The Millionth Circle*.⁷⁹

For how many people and how long?

Circles can be composed from three to twelve people approximately. Members commit to the circle for years and meetings can occur with any degree of frequency the group agrees upon. Each meeting can last from an hour to some days.

To make it work

The rules and principles are to be defined by members of the circle. For inspiration about forming and maintaining a circle, check out the paper on the Circle of 7.⁸⁰ The methodology of Dialogue is especially suited for circles.⁸¹ Alternate and combine other technologies as you are inspired.

When a person wants to create a Circle, she or he must first explore who to invite and how to do this. A personal invitation would be our recommendation. This personal outreach enables each person to engage with what we mean, and helps each potential member feel welcome and special, right from the start. More importantly as each person reflects on the invitation, the work of the circle formation happens. Whether members are from the same city or all over the world is not relevant, as long as they commit to when and how they'll meet.

⁷⁹ www.millionthcircle.com and J.Shinhoda Bolen *The Millionth Circle: How to Change Ourselves and The World—The Essential Guide to Women's Circles* (1999)

⁸⁰ www.collectivewisdominitiative.org/papers/circleof7_interv.htm

⁸¹ See Dialogue in section Engage. One-off gatherings.

Diversity between members is important to ensure perspective and experiences. This is especially the case for age difference so generations can support each other through their transitions. Yet commonalities like gender might be appealing: Women-only circles are numerous and men's circles are proliferating too.

The members of a circle may decide to invite other participants on a one-off basis from time to time. In that case, the group will make sure this is a group decision as very often different members feel differently about opening up the circle or not. While some members will be eager to invite new people in, others will need the stability of the core team.

Phone, email or web conference exchanges may hold the circle between face-to-face gatherings.

Community of Practice

Learning together

Serena's experience: "I participate in a writing workshop, Quad Writers, every other Thursday. This group of eight writers came together in 2006 with a shared interest in improving their writing and a tolerance for blunt but caring feedback.

We had tacit rules, for example to be invited one had to be known as being open to receiving others' opinions. We made explicit rules when necessary, for instance providing copies of our manuscript and the author reading aloud. Members have exited due to either time demands or the challenge of contending with feedback.

Members benefit from sharing companionship, publication resources, inspiring work, or access to literary salons. The community of writing practice is valued by its members for the quality of the container. A filial love of writing and a reliance on the huge contribution of time to better one another's work. Perhaps because of its voluntary nature, the Community of Practice continues: some members left, others joined.

The writing has improved, proving the gatherings are not just enjoyable. Book deals and agent representation are tangible results."

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a methodology to learn collectively about a topic through periodic interaction. On-line communities can be CoPs as long as their members share a common interest and interact periodically.

Where it comes from

The cognitive anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger coined the term “Community of Practice” in 1990,⁸² however the practice itself has existed as long as people have been learning together by conversing, sharing stories and listening to one another. The painters Monet, Renoir and Manet when they gathered in Paris sharing the techniques that would create Impressionism, constituted a community of practice. The golden age of Russian literature with poets and writers like Dostoyevsky, Tolstoi and Chekhov is another example. They worked together either face to face or virtually through letters of admiration, challenge and encouragement.

For how many people and how long?

A community of practice can consist of many or as few as only two people. The spirit of a CoP is characterised by permeable boundaries that allow it to be enriched by new members and resources.

A reasonable minimum duration for the CoP is one year. The periodicity and forms of interaction are to be defined by members.

To make it work

To start a CoP, we identify a shared field of interest. Then members must find each other. They will constitute a critical mass of people committed to gather periodically. There can be different types of membership: core members, followers, one-off contributors, sponsors (providing space, financial resources, etc.). The more open and diverse the CoP is, the more dynamic and self-renewing its potential.

Practice is what *makes* the CoP. Gather, gather, gather. Shared practice is what keeps members learning.

⁸² www.ewenger.com/ and www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Lave. Check out the book by E.Wenger *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity* (1999)

If you join an existing CoP and you want to introduce some gathering techniques, we recommend Open Space and Shadowing, as they are appropriate for sharing learning and practices. Open Space allows CoP members to wander where their special interest takes them and perhaps find resonant partners. Shadowing allows a member to explore more deeply the working practices of a colleague. If you want to create a CoP from scratch, we suggest you first use World Café or Dialogues to articulate the common interest and member's commitment.

The CoP *Art of Hosting* is “a global community of practitioners using integrated participative change processes, methods, maps, and planning tools to engage groups and teams in meaningful conversation, deliberate collaboration, and group-supported action for the common good.”⁸³ A number of the processes in this book are taught in the Art of Hosting. The way this international community is organised is open and free-flowing. There is an active web platform where participants join, share resources and find colleagues.⁸⁴ The community, of which Magda is a member, is composed of more experienced members and newly trained ones. No one owns the brand, a certification, nor the resources that are shared. There is no expansion strategy or planning, as new trainings are organised on demand. In 2010 there have been Art of Hosting events in more than 20 countries, including Zimbabwe, Slovenia, Japan, Greenland.⁸⁵

⁸³ Collaborative definition by several Art of Hosting stewards

⁸⁴ Source article *From Hero to Host: A Story of Citizenship in Columbus, Ohio* by Deborah Frieze and Margaret Wheatley. Berkana Institute. Berrett-Koehler Publishers. San Francisco April 2011

⁸⁵ www.artofhosting.ning.com

Appreciative Inquiry

Destination: a better us

In recent centuries, conventional scientific methods have encouraged us to create checklists of problems to fix what is broken. Appreciative Inquiry proposes an alternative, more ancient, strength-based approach.

To appreciate means seeing the positive. Appreciate also means to grow in value. Inquiry indicates exploration. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a way of growing more of the good that already exists in a group or system. This growth is led by simply placing our attention on what strengths are there. Even in the most difficult situation, AI encourages finding evidence of where things have worked to rebuild confidence and energy to overcome challenges.

Where it comes from

Appreciative Inquiry draws on an ancient idea of strength-based military strategy, probably first documented in the 6th century B.C. in the Art of War. David Cooperrider is widely credited with coining the modern term and leading the creation of the process described here.⁸⁶ It is based on the premise that organisations move in the direction of the images of the future they have.

For how many people and how long?

Appreciative Inquiry can be implemented with any size group.

Focusing on what works well, the first phase of an AI process can be done as a stand-alone anytime anywhere. This phase can be done as a personal reflection, with a partner, or with a wide group. This takes from three hours to a day. For example, we can use an Appreciative Interview to open up perspectives and connect to our positive core in as little as one hour.

For a group to create an inspiring shared vision of the future, we need to get through the four phases described below. It requires a conscious effort upfront to invite all the stakeholders. To go through the whole process, hold

⁸⁶ To learn more about AI we recommend two books: D. Cooperrider, D. Whitney and JM Stavros *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook For Leaders of Change*. (2007) and D. Whitney and A. Thorsten-Bloom *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change* (2010)

events that are from two half days to four full days in length over a couple of months. This will give space for ideas to expand, settle, connect. In some instances, it can be done within one gathering but then an overnight stay is required.

To make it work

The AI process is structured in four phases: Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny. The boundaries between phases are blurred in reality as in all other processes.

A wish for more is expressed in a valued system, for example a desire for more cooperation in a company, more safety in a factory, more tourism in a village, or more laughter in a marriage.

Facilitators work with a few people, some or even the whole group to describe what is needed. The goal is described in positive terms. The goal exists or has existed, in some quantity, in the system already. This is a vital and nonnegotiable element of AI. It is vital because each person has confidence in the fact that the system is proven to create a good thing, now more is wanted and needed. Participants have said what they value about their community, department, or relationship, and what they want more of is...

For example, people may affirm that they want more collaboration, or customer satisfaction or learning. Our role here is to help the team to transform this simple topic into an affirmative topic. The affirmative topic encompasses the initial one, and at the same time opens a world of possibility and inspiration.

Topic	Affirmative topic
Collaboration	Working together enthusiastically
Customer satisfaction	Delighted customers become our advocates
Communications	Compelling communications
External collaboration	rEvolutionary partnerships

Phase 1. Discovery: What gives life?

Acknowledging what is valuable and essential in our situation builds faith in working to improve that situation. With that in mind, a few people who have a stake in that situation write an interview protocol, emphasising the key areas they want to direct the group's attention to.

We choose whether each person interviews one other person or to have a small portion of the group interview many. The experience of being interviewed is a step in the change process. Both roles nurture and provide experiential learning. Each interviewer strives to be a listening environment.⁸⁷

Interviews can be conducted prior to a large gathering as preparatory work. This allows interviewing of stakeholders who might not be able to participate in the gathering. Or interviews can be done during a large gathering to ensure they are all done within a short period.

The first half of the interview explores what, if lost, would make the group not the group any more. What is the life of the group? What are the individuals' motivations? This will help identify the key positive themes of the organisation.

The second half of the interview looks at what potential is in the group. The interviewer captures the ideas and wishes that emerge strongly.

When designing our own interview protocol, a useful resource is the *Encyclopaedia of Positive Questions, Vol. 1* by Diana Whitney, David Cooperrider, Amanda Trosten-Bloom, Brian S. Kaplan.

⁸⁷ Sacred listening describes the quality of attention required for the interviews. Check it out in section Engage. One-off gatherings.

A basic interview protocol

1. What would you describe as being a high point experience of the affirmative topic in your life or organisation, a time when you were most alive and engaged?
2. Without being modest, what is it that you most value about yourself, your work, and your organisation?
3. What are the core factors that give life to your organisation, without which the organisation would cease to exist?
4. Assume you go into a deep sleep tonight, one that lasts ten years. But while you are asleep, powerful and positive changes take place, real miracles happen, and your organisation becomes what you want it to be. Now you awaken and go into the organisation. It is 2022, and you are very proud of what you see. As you take in this vision and look at the whole, what do you see happening that is new, changed, better, or effective and successful?

Guidance notes for Interviewers:

The wording of the interview protocol is exact. The execution of the interview needs to be exact, because our tendency from our years of formal education is to look for flaws and this is antithetical to AI. Use the interview protocol as a script. It is important to ask the questions as they have been written.

- Let the interviewee tell his or her story. We do not comment on their experiences or tell our story.
- Take good notes including great quotes and stories.
- Here are some possible questions to probe further
 - Tell me more
 - Why do you feel that way?
 - Why was that important to you?
 - How did that affect you?
 - What was your contribution?
 - What do you think was making it work?
 - How has it changed you?

- If somebody does not want to, or cannot answer any of the interview questions, that is okay, we will let it go. As a last resort consider rescheduling.

Phase 2. Dream: What might be?

This phase gives the group time to explore what could be. The second half of the interview protocol gathers insights for this phase. The consolidated strengths and wishes of all the interviews are shared with the whole group. They are used as a basis to create a shared positive dream for the group. It is time to be creative and wild, and to dare expressing what might feel like unrealistic aspirations. This phase is often done using Dialogue. What strengths do we have in the group? What stories back them? What are the wishes expressed in the interviews? What are the links among them? What do we desire?

Phase 3. Design: How can it be?

To connect ourselves with our desired future, we can craft provocative propositions. Good provocative propositions are statements that offer a clear shared vision of the future. They ignite the imagination. Imagining is a radical act. Provocative propositions take us beyond what is considered “possible” while still being grounded in our core strengths. World Café is a strong way to co-write the Provocative Proposition over several rounds.

While writing this book, Magda and Serena’s provocative proposition was “Sharing authentically with the world, we can change it.” While sharing authentically is part of ourselves, we have experienced, doubts, arguments, and no assurance our proposition was true. Yet the statement has made us bolder in writing and engaging with others to share these ideas and making the book real. Gandhi said, “Hate the sin. Love the sinner.” And millions of people challenged the status quo that was keeping them poor and obedient while avoiding a bigger bloodshed.

Phase 4. Destiny: What will it be?

The goal of this phase is to put the dream into practice. The Design team publicly affirms the intentions to make the wishes real, and asks for organisation-wide support to put it into practice. This phase rests on improvisation, cross-collaboration, and building an organisational culture of dialogue and continuous learning. Open Space fits perfectly here.

The case study of Imagine Memphis describes all phases of the process.

Memphis was a great city yet, it wasn't known as a city of choice in which to invest, work and live. This gap bothered MaryJo Greil, a citizen and an experienced Appreciative Inquiry practitioner.

Imagine Memphis started precariously with a workshop coordinated by MaryJo to introduce AI to Memphis. Weeks away from the event with too few numbers to cover the speakers' travel costs, MaryJo faced reasonable doubt. When the workshop planners expressed their anxiety, she found confidence to reassure them. Even the process of reassurance takes energy and time. This is a considerable cost for the AI process, as AI has a great element of uncertainty on the path as opposed to processes like Six Sigma, which have quick steady streams of data to reassure participants that something is happening.

Personal networks attracted a good diverse group of people to the workshop. Six months after the gathering, the idea gained momentum. MaryJo and others formed the AI Network Gathering. They were seeing and experiencing the power of the process, volunteering their time, and persuading others of the value of helping Memphis find its positive core. MaryJo was trying to find volunteers to support her and reduce her load. However, she was left with the choice of doing it herself.

Since Imagine Memphis' launch in the fall of 2007, over 600 interviews have been conducted. Learning from the successful Imagine Chicago model, led by Bliss Browne, Imagine Memphis uses a similar approach by involving high school youth interviewing adult neighborhood leaders with dialogues that capture the values and strengths of Memphis. Imagine Memphis has expanded the approach

with the adults also interviewing the youth. They created the interview protocol for Imagine Memphis (see next page).

The long-range goal of Imagine Memphis is to help Memphis become a city of choice by actively tapping into the sustainable talent for generations to come. As a concrete example of that, two of the young people on the Imagine Memphis design team changed their out-of-state college plans and chose to attend the University of Memphis as a result of their new appreciation for the city. The largest private hospital corporation in the US is using AI in their nursing program because the nursing program's leaders saw the positive change possible through AI when participating in Imagine Memphis.

The participants that co-led the project, MaryJo included, experienced doubts, shortages, and competing demands for time and attention. Part of managing a process like AI is navigating through these detracting factors while encouraging the unexpected results to emerge. Imagine Memphis was so effective in engaging the leadership and citizens of Memphis that Leadership Memphis' decided to make it their strategic initiative for change. As of 2012 MaryJo handed over the process.

Knowing when to draw a process to a close either personally or as a whole is difficult. Mary received thanks, but still she described grief at letting go. She was excited about the continuing use of AI in businesses, education, and other public sector projects.

MaryJo Greil is founder of Carson Greil Group based in Memphis.⁸⁸ AI forums and further case studies can be found online at: Appreciative Inquiry Commons⁸⁹ and AI Practitioner.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ www.carsongreil.com/bio.html

⁸⁹ www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/

⁹⁰ www.aipractitioner.com

Imagine Memphis™ interview protocol

Date of Interview:

Interviewee:

Email address:

Interviewer:

Email address:

Recorder⁸⁵:

Email address:

Conversation 1: **Introduction**

How long have you lived in Memphis? What is your current community/neighborhood? How long have you lived there?

What first brought you/your family to your community/neighborhood?

What do you like about living here?

When you think about the whole city of Memphis, what particular places, people or images represent the good of the city to you?

Conversation 2: **High Point Experience**

Tell a story about a high point experience in living in Memphis.

What did that experience look like?

What were the conditions/factors that brought about this special experience that made it so unique?

What was happening for you? How was this positive for others?

Conversation 3: **Values**

What do you value most⁸⁶ about Memphis? Please describe good values, qualities, behaviors, attitude, etc. What is good about the quality of life in Memphis today?

What is it about Memphis that is so unique/so special? In Memphis, what gives you life?

Conversation 4: **Wishes for Memphis**

It is 2015. You wake up and things have changed ... many positive changes for Memphis have occurred because of Imagine Memphis and other similar efforts.

What has really been working in Memphis?

What two things are making the biggest positive difference?

What do you imagine your own role might be in helping to make this happen?

Who could work with you as well?

What are you proudest of having accomplished?

As you think back over this conversation, what images stand out for you as capturing your hopes for this city's future?

For those willing to experiment with an appreciative approach less comprehensive than the four full phases of AI, substituting the old SWOT for SOAR in strategic planning is a strong option. The acronym SWOT is S for strength, W for weaknesses, O for opportunities and T for threats. Weaknesses and Threats focus on the negatives.

Designed by Jacqueline Stavros⁹¹, SOAR responds to Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations and Results, i.e. only positive frames. Instead of ignoring Threats, SOAR reframes them as Opportunities. Instead of focussing on Weaknesses, it focuses on making our Strengths grow. In Aspirations it gives voice to what is important to people, to build a shared vision that can be measured in concrete Results.

The company Cynara wanted to engage in internal reflection and planning to set priorities without using the typical SWOT analysis.⁹² They used instead SOAR. Before their gathering, each participant was sent a document with questions under the four categories of SOAR. Strengths in them and the company, Opportunities they had detected, Aspirations they had - for the company and themselves - and Results that should be measuring their activity. Although they did not gather a wide range of stakeholders the results were tremendously engaging for the whole team. They felt excited, full of possibilities and energy to make real the forward movement of the company, the projects, and their future development in it.

⁹¹ J.Stavros, G.Hinrich and S.A. Hammond, *The Thin Book of SOAR: Building Strength-based Strategy* (2009)

⁹² www.cynarasource.com

Comparison SWOT/SOAR

SWOT	SOAR
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group's resources and capabilities - Basis for differentiating advantage 	<p>(similar) Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are we doing really well? - What are our greatest assets? - What are we most proud of? - What do our strengths tell about our skills?
<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Absence of strength; lack of resource or capability - Flipside of a strength; downside of focusing on competitive advantage <p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - External circumstances that support profit and growth - Unfilled customer needs, new technology, favorable legislation <p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - External circumstances that hinder profit and growth e.g., more competitors, changes to revenue streams, restrictive regulations 	<p>(reframed) Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do we collectively understand outside threats? - How can we reframe to see the opportunity? - What is the enterprise asking us to do? - How can we best partner with others?
	<p>(additions) Aspirations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Considering the Strengths and Opportunities, who would we become? - How do we allow our values to drive our vision? - How can we make a difference for our group and its stakeholders? <p>Results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do we want to be known for? - What are our measurable results? - How do we tangibly translate Strengths, Opportunities, and Aspirations?

Theory U

A map to a group's heroic journey

Theory U frames a transformation. It invites participants to shift their way of understanding, sensing and being in the world. It enables to face one's deepest concerns, share hopes, define a new future and bring it to reality.

In France, 75 percent of electricity is produced by French nuclear plants. This makes France less tied to oil price and more self reliant. Areva, a nuclear energy provider, and successive French governments have praised the reliability of French plants. Yet such strategy increases the risk of nuclear contamination. Countries that do not produce any nuclear electricity do not face this direct risk. Several nuclear plants as well as sites recycling and storing nuclear wastes have been up and running for more than 30 years and need to be upgraded.

When Fukushima happened in 2011, French people (like many other citizens of the world) were shocked. The first reaction was to struggle to believe such a combination of earthquake and tsunami could happen and damage a plant in a country like Japan which has such high standards for operations. Some ecology activists questioned whether France should phase out of nuclear power. However, former French President Nicolas Sarkozy quickly stated that France's nuclear strategy was non-negotiable so discussions stopped.

The negative processing of the U is the way the story went, as it most often does when citizens do not play an active role: the risk was **denied** ("There are no earthquakes and no tsunamis in France"); **de-sensing** from our gut reactions was encouraged ("Stay rational: we can't get out of nuclear electricity so quickly. It has served us well!"); **absencing** from considering any alternative way of producing energy ("How on earth would you like alternative energies to replace nuclear energy? Oil is not an option."); **deluding** citizens from their right to influence their neighbourhood and country ("This is not a strategy to be discussed."); and **aborting** any change or even slight evolution of the strategy.

Germany took an alternative route. When the Fukushima disaster happened, the powerful green movement had achieved through many years of activism **going down and up the U** collectively. In that constructive mindset mainstreaming environmentally friendly policies could be considered. In May of 2011 chancellor Angela Merkel, **seeing** the disaster, **sensing** her people's reactions and perhaps realising that she could not defend nuclear power anymore without a significant loss of votes, bravely announced a change in the policy of her government. "We want the electricity of the future to be safe, reliable and economically viable. We have to follow a new path."

The German government invited the future that wanted to emerge. In an ambitious **prototype**, a new energy plan was born that will stop using nuclear energy and shut down all of its nuclear reactors by 2022. This was a groundbreaking decision given that in 2011 with all 17 reactors online and operating, nuclear energy provided 23 percent of Germany's electricity. Renewable energy, specifically solar, wind and hydroelectric power that then produced about 17 percent of the nation's electricity would be a major sector of investment and development for the coming years. A country **embodying** and **performing** a major shift in energy use and development could inspire the world.

Where it comes from

The story of Gilgamesh, one of the world's most ancient stories, follows a Theory U. Gilgamesh sets about a process of opening his mind, his heart, and his will to journey out into the wide world and finally be allowed to return home. The model of a hero's journey that follows a U was also proposed by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* in 1949. Glasl and Lemson developed U process as a way of practically applying the experience of transformation.⁹³ Theory U is constantly under development at the Presencing Institute⁹⁴ under the leadership of Otto Scharmer⁹⁵ along with Peter Senge, Beth Jandernoa and other practitioners.

⁹³ F. Glasl *Confronting Conflict: A First-Aid Kit for Handling Conflict* (1999)

⁹⁴ www.presencing.com

⁹⁵ O.Scharmer *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (2009)

For how many people and how long?

One person can explore her life, wishing to break unhelpful patterns, or uncover the best life she is able to create. Or millions of people can travel a Theory U seeking a new way to go beyond limited resources, outdated ways of working and being together.

Engaging in a Theory U could be a matter of months or years. In some instances, as you will see in the next example, even single meetings can follow a U.

To make it work

Principles of the Theory U:

- Intense interaction with the group is required, meeting in person when possible
- Distinct phases (going down the U and going up) are to be used as an orientation, as in practice the different phases overlap
- Equality of all participants is assumed and protected
- The process must be given generous time and space

Theory U is an emerging theory continuously updated and completed. It is characterised by two major phases: one going down the U, and the other going up the U. Each involves several sub-phases and different types of awareness.

In July 2011, The Hub Madrid hosted a three-day gathering renamed The Big Bang of the Madrid Art of Hosting because of its strong impact on 40 participants. On the day before the event, Anita Seidler, Jan Hein Nielsen, Lotfi El-Ghandouri, Max Oliva, Soledad Pons, Tatiana Glad and Magda Barceló gathered to formulate the design. The event was structured as follows:

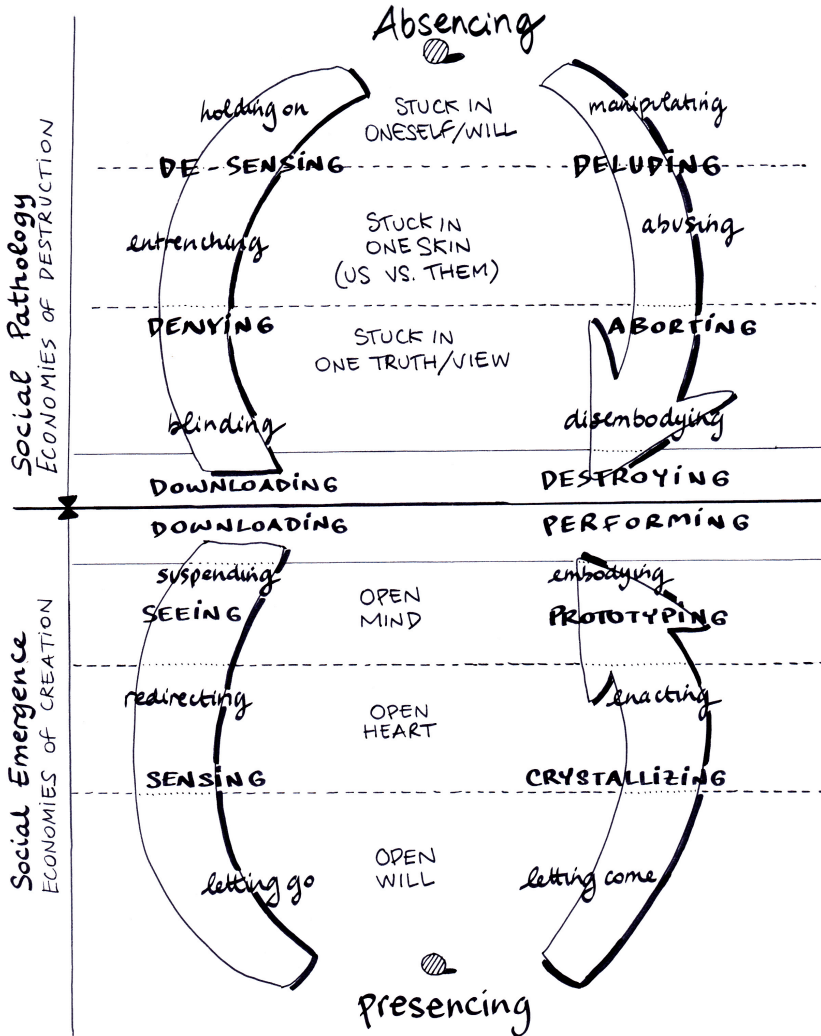
Day 1: Arriving and Connecting. The activities of the first day emphasised people getting to know each other while beginning in the practice of facilitation. Among the activities were a large check-in in a circle, an exercise of Appreciative Inquiry in trios, a World Cafe and Capturing insights. Participants were requested to connect with each other from a profound place, and to open their hearts, minds and will to consider different and challenging ways of facilitating change. On this day, they were going down the U.

Day 2: Deepening our Practice. The second day was about grounding what was explored the day before. From the bottom of the U, participants furthered their practice in the different methodologies. The activities started with a performance by a group of participants on the key learnings of the day before. From that place, yoga exercises preceded dialogues on different methodologies and co-facilitation of an Open Space.

Day 3: Impact, Taking Our Next Steps. Up the U, participants started to connect with the future that wanted to emerge, sharing their projects and intentions in a dialogic manner. Here Sacred listening, Question Storm and Insight council were very helpful prototyping what they would later put into practice.

Phases

The Presencing Institute's latest contributions to Theory U, as of 2012, includes the outline of the following necessary phases.



Down the U:

Downloading

This is the initial phase of the U, where we stem from our habitual awareness. We examine our mental models and habits of thought to interpret reality. It is not about trashing them, but being aware of them. Here Journaling, Dialogue, Sacred listening or Mindmaps can be helpful.

Seeing

During this phase the attention is focussed on the issue at stake. Being now aware of our mental models, we can start to see the situation, task at hand or other people involved, with an “Open Mind”. Practices such as World Café, Open Space and Insight council can be suitable.

Sensing

In this phase, we redirect our attention to the field. We are required to open our hearts. Awareness then goes beyond our mind to include our bodies. We suggest subversive steps such as Touching with hands, walks in nature, more physical activities, letting our emotions come through.

Presencing

Here we are at the bottom of the U. With our minds, and hearts open, we open our will, and let go of the future concerns, and what will be or not. We are aware of the whole, vulnerable and ready for anything. Here we suggest using Silence, Meditation, Dialogue or Social Presencing Theatre, devised by Embodiment.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ www.embodimentinternational.com

Up the U:

Collective intelligence and knowing cultivates strength. Here we begin the climb to the future. As we imagine something better, each member is creating a shared future built on collective intelligence. There are three sub-phases to this phase of the journey:

Crystallising

Going up the U, from the emerging spot of presencing and its deep awareness we let the future come. Here *subversive techniques* like Learnsapes or Mindmaps which draw on the power of images can be useful. Appreciative Inquiry can help us create a shared vision of the future together, grounding ourselves in our strengths.

Prototyping

As new solutions, new ways of being are shaping up we don't rush. Instead we prototype the future that wants to emerge and continue the journey. For the project to take shape Open Space is the technique to engage in the necessary conversations for action. We may also use Music, Movement or Storytelling.

Performing

We extend the new model we have created by implementing what we have learnt more widely. Here we suggest a Community of Practice, as well as Circle and Peer partnerships.

Odysseys in practice

Now that we have introduced different types of Odyssey, you might have ideas of Odysseys you want to firm up or initiate. Below are some questions you might explore in (re-)contracting with your partners.

About the Odyssey itself:

- How often do you want to meet and for how long?
- How will the different tasks be distributed (logistics, theme selection, keeping in touch in between face to face meetings, etc.)?
- How do you make decisions? Is it by majority or do you aim at finding total consensus?
- How do you manage time? Is one person responsible for reminding the other about dates or do they alternate? How do you manage schedule changes?
- How will you manage finance (costs of the meetings, traveling, space...)?
- What is the timeline? Is the horizon of the Odyssey months or years? What can members commit in terms of time?
- How and when can a member leave the Odyssey?

About each gathering:

- How do you select the topic(s) of the meeting if you decide it must be predefined?
- How will you share? How will you design your gathering? What practices will you use?

Farewell. Taking the red pill

Morpheus asking Neo:

Do you want to know what it is? ...This is your last chance. After this, there is no going back... You take the blue pill and the story ends. You wake up in your bed and you believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill and you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes. Remember, all I am offering is the truth, nothing more.

*The Matrix*⁹⁷

Before we part.

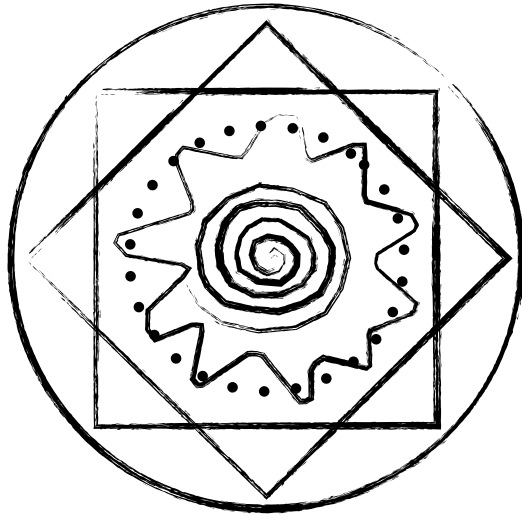
These processes provide different ways of being and doing work in the world. Once we taste these ways of being authentic, creating powerful links and making *r*Evolution real, there is no turning back. If taken to heart they are a serious threat to the status quo, because life will no longer be the same, just as everything changed for Neo when he chose to take the red pill.

We are all heroes. We are accepting our life's calling, overcoming fear and obstacles, on our journey becoming the person we are meant to be.

Offer a different way forward. Stay in the now so *r*Evolution comes from within. Accept the discomfort and the joy of working differently. Ouch! We know. *We know!*

*r*Evolution is happening. Are you joining?

⁹⁷ *The Matrix*, directed by Andy Wachowski and Larry Wachowski (Warner Brothers, 2003).



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Practitioner Platforms

(Available at low or no cost)

Appreciative Inquiry: www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu and
www.aipractitioner.com

Art of Hosting: www.artofhosting.org

Art Monastery: www.artmonastery.org

Center des Jeunes Dirigeants: www.jeunesdirigeants.fr

Circles: www.millionthcircle.com

Community of Practice Quad Writers: www.quadwriters.co.uk

Dialogue and Circles with PeerSpirit: www.peerspirit.com

Diversity, Dialogue and Collective Intelligence: www.2d4b.com

In Silence Together: www.insilencetogether.com

Mindfulness: Thich Nhat Hahn and Plum Village www.plumvillage.org

Mindmaps: www.thinkbuzan.com

Open Space Site: www.openspaceworld.org

Presencing Institute: www.presencing.com

Prison Dialogues: www.prisondialogue.org

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Rabhi P. on joyful frugality: www.pierrerabhi.org/blog

Scharmer O. on Theory U: www.ottoscharmer.com

Senge P. on the learning organization: www.solonline.org/

Wheatley M.: www.margaretwheatley.com

Workshops and Coaching

(Fee-based)

Appreciative Inquiry: Anne Radford www.aradford.co.uk, Neil Samuels
www.profoundconversations.com

Collaborative processes and collective intelligence: Generation Plente
www.generationplente.com and Equilibra www.equilibraconsulting.com

Dark Parts Seminars: www.shadowwork.com

Dialogue: Dorian Baroni, Barbara Cecil www.ashlandinstitute.org; Peter Garrett www.dialogue-associates.com; Bill Isaacs www.dialogos.com
Diversity: Isabelle Pujol www.pluribus-europe.com
Feminine Leadership: Coming into Your Own, www.ciyowomensretreat.com
Five Rhythms: www.gabrielleroth.com
Meditation: Drs. Joel and Michelle Levey, www.WisdomAtWork.com
Mindfulness: Ana Arrabé, www.eus3.es
Sacred listening and Insight council: www.timetothink.com
Shadowing: www.leadersquest.org

Web Videos and TED Talks

Brene Brown, "Vulnerability," TED Talk
Leonard Cohen, "Showing up, Anthem," www.youtube.com/watch?v=_e39UmEnqY8
Shawn Achor, "Rewiring the brain positively," www.goodthinkinc.com/speakers/shawn-achor
Thich Nhat Hanh, "Mindfulness," www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Pd5Ndg0oJA&feature=player_embedded

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Thank you, Gerard, the love of my life, for holding my hand in critical moments of the journey. Thank you, dear Joel and Michelle Levey, for your blessings and the initial kick to make the book a collective journey. Thanks to my dear friends Serena and Laure who bravely accepted, endured and made worthwhile this crazy adventure. Thanks to the friends of La Nau, who tenderly held me in the effort. Thanks to my parents for simply being there, trusting that I would know, and to Mother Earth which continues to hold us. May this journey inspire us to take care of her, of life, of each other. *Magda*

⁹⁸ A. Diamant, *The Red Tent* (1997)

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About the authors

Serena, Laure, and Magda have participated and created gatherings for rEvolution in the private, public, and non-profit sectors on topics ranging from leadership development, merger integration, and trading, to microfinance, faith, gender, sustainability and exclusion. They have guided change in groups of wealthy and highly-educated people as well as poor and excluded groups. They have run these processes in English, Spanish, French and Russian. They designed and delivered gatherings in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia. They have authored none of the processes described here but have tried and tested them. They have seen that the processes help groups and individuals.

We love to connect. Perhaps starting with tea? Get in touch.

www.gatheringsforevolution.com

www.facebook.com/gatheringsforevolution



Magda founded her consultancy⁹⁹ focused on organisational development, facilitation and diversity when she outgrew the confines of corporate settings. She has designed and led numerous change processes for clients in public and private sectors, across Europe and internationally thanks to her language capabilities. Magda combines consulting work with social activism, joining efforts with several local and global movements.



Laure founded 2d4b,¹⁰⁰ a charity that uses dialogue and diversity to be the change we wish to see in the world. She is also Associate at Pluribus Europe. Prior to that, she worked in organisational change and corporate social responsibility in multinational companies in London, Chicago, and Paris. Laure invests her energy according to her beliefs and around her husband and three children. Currently based in Paris, she splits her time between humanitarian, citizen, and corporate consulting work.



Serena works through Generation Plente¹⁰¹ to tap into what's plentiful in a person and in people together. By encouraging alignment and responsibility, better living, commercial success and every day heroism arise. This is strategic alignment. She worked in Alaska, Azerbaijan, Europe, Russia, China on strategic analysis and design, organisational change, learning, executive selection and development. Her favourite incitement for change: there are more stars than all the heart beats of all the humans that have ever lived. And there are more connections in a human brain than there are stars. So despite dire news reports to the contrary, Serena is confident in our ability to learn to meet the challenges of our world, together.

⁹⁹ www.about.me/magdabarcelo and www.equilibraconsulting.com

¹⁰⁰ www.2d4b.com and www.2d4b.com/WP/?page_id=32

¹⁰¹ www.generationplente.com