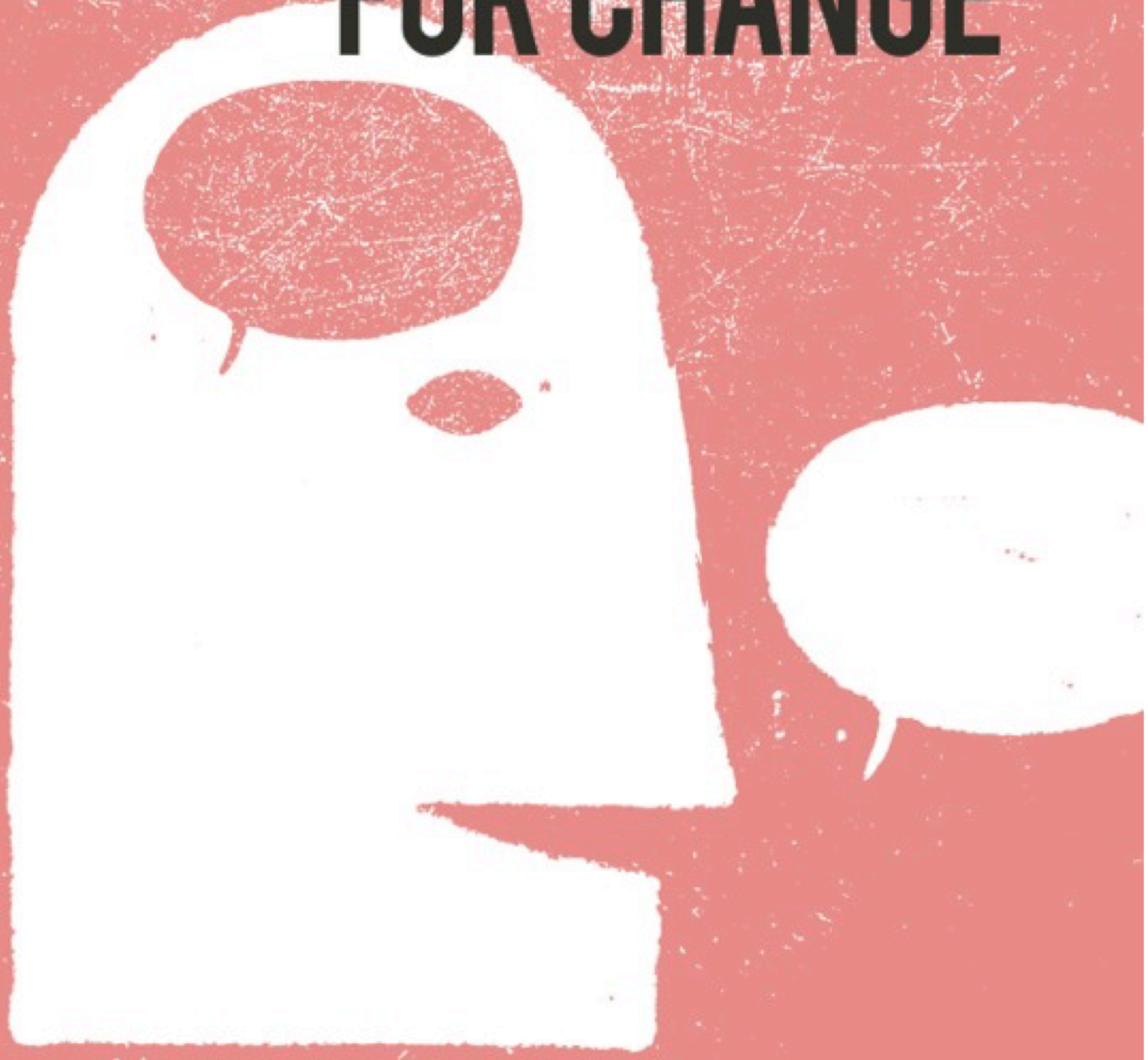
IN PURSUIT OF PATTERNS THAT BIND US

LEARNING FOR CHANGE



The outer boundary of what we currently believe is feasible
is still far short of what we actually must do.
-- Al Gore, Nobel Acceptance, December 10, 2007

Learning for Change

Introduction to a process for

Collaborative Learning

and for

Project Assessment

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…and many workshop participants
in Europe, Africa and Asia

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The driving force behind the concept of Learning for Change is the perceived need to accelerate the building of sustainable human societies. Since we can't really know what such societies will look like on a full planet, many current methods of management and planning are inadequate or even counter-productive. Even our most cherished beliefs and social structures may be equally inappropriate.

Fortunately, we have a reliable resource to call upon – our insatiable human inventiveness and creativity. The immediate challenge is to pull ourselves out of the well-worn ruts and look around with new eyes.

In the world of technology it is usual to collect, generalise and share learnings (state of the art) in such ways that the unhindered creative mind is left to build the next, innovative steps on a new level, driven by the challenge of creating the hitherto unknown.

The world of sustainable development, more reliant on behaviour change, so far lacks such a tradition. Instead, we tend to surround ourselves with databases of best practice, which, paradoxically, tend to keep us where we are by focussing mostly on the superficial, successful specifics of particular projects. The generalised or generic learnings, useable for others, are seldom extracted, neither from the ongoing process nor from the final results.

This book builds on one outcome of two decades of action research on sustainable behaviour change, i.e. a workshop format designed to accelerate learning from experience, now held with participants from around 40 countries. It outlines processes, methods and tools from the workshops, and is intended to give an introduction and overview of the current state of the L4C art.

Beyond the immediate effects of the workshops, the ambition is to go further and uncover some of the underlying patterns of thought and belief that help and hinder us. It is our intention to collect, synthesise and make available generalised pattern descriptions in a global library that would enable also people not attending workshops to benefit from the experience of others. This line of enquiry is still in its infancy.

All it takes is people, sustainability practitioners, to take on the ideas and link up. The door is open, you are welcome!

Some L4C workshop participants

Home groups, Uganda: first experiment using L4C for a whole school.

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How do we find out what we know?

This book reflects a workshop currently offered in two modes:

- Learning for Change – Collaborative Learning, gathering people from different backgrounds, each bringing a real-life example from which all can learn, so that participants gain new insights into the transformative potential of their work; 2-3 days.
- Learning for Change – Project Assessment, bringing together stakeholders from a single project in order to lift the enterprise to a new level of understanding and action; 1-1.5 days.

The process is in both cases intended to accelerate learning from experience, as a contribution to the global movement of education for sustainable development (ESD). It is primarily intended for educators and all concerned with project, program and curriculum design and delivery in the world of sustainable development. There are currently (2013) trained facilitators for L4C Collaborative Learning in Europe, Africa and Asia.

Part 1 of the book comprises a summary of the workshop processes, while Part 2 documents the individual methods and tools used. Some of the models and theories are summarised in Part 3.

Trewin Restorick, CEO of Global Action Plan UK, on Learning for Change

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This book is produced as an iBook for interactive use on the Apple iPad. In this PDF version picture galleries, videos and other interactive components will of course not work. Get the iBook on the Apple iTunes store.

Section 1

Overview of the workshop

Setting up a L4C project

THE LEARNING FOR CHANGE PROCESS

An informal international working group has developed the L4C process over several years. The intention has been

- To find ways to significantly accelerate learning from experience of projects for sustainable development
- To promote cooperation between / among ESD and social change practitioners with a view to strengthening ESD networks
- In the long term, to build a library of patterns that can be used to rapidly raise the effectiveness of subsequent SD projects

Outcomes

The usual direct outcomes of a workshop include:

- Deeper insights into the strengths and weaknesses of one's own work
- Learnings gleaned from other participants' work
- Plans and strategies for professional improvements
- A space for networking and learning

Indirect outcomes may include improved self-knowledge of participants, as well as of their capacity to deal with the unexpected.

Major sources

Learning for Change takes its inspiration from several sources

- Methods of Action Research, in particular, community-based research
- Pattern Language theory and practice
- Principles for design of empowering programs developed by Global Action Plan over approximately 15 years of action research
- The methods and models of Warren Ziegler concerning futures invention
- Psychosocial theories and methods, not least psychosynthesis
- Theories of social and collaborative learning

Dynamics of the process

A L4C workshop has a rhythm, like a heartbeat: it alternates between satisfaction and concerns, between the individual and the collective, between analysis and synthesis.

Satisfaction and concerns. Warren Ziegler said that ‘change happens when there is a reasonable balance between dissatisfaction and hope’. Often, project descriptions focus on either one or the other: in collections of ‘good practice’ the focus is on success and satisfaction, whereas in project evaluation the focus tends to be rather on weaknesses and concerns. In this way, little learning for change can take place. L4C creates an environment conducive to change by focusing first on satisfactions, and then homing in on a desire to do better.

Individual and collective. One of the direct purposes of this alternation is to bring to light aspects that are relevant to the individual as well as the collective: if one deals with collective challenges (improvements) that are not perceived as challenges by the individuals involved, change is unlikely to happen. Engaging the concerns of each individual enhances the likelihood of individual change, and linking those concerns to the collective enhances the likelihood of collective change.

The individual exercises are intended to create a respectful context for each participant’s perceptions and reflections, while the collective exercises are meant to develop a sense of community and connection in dealing with collective and individual issues. Together, they address the ‘I’ and ‘We’ needs of participants, enabling them to focus more clearly on the ‘It’. See Group Dynamics in the Models & Theories section.

Analysis and synthesis. This alternation addresses a particular cultural issue (i.e. the tendency to analyse and pull things apart) by complementing it with its counterpart: recognizing patterns that link the parts. Synthesis is essentially a process of recognizing underlying patterns, enabling both problems and solutions to be grouped, understood at a new level, and used as a basis for action.

These three rhythms enable participants to move beyond the simple gathering of results to another level of understanding and awareness.

Participation

The L4C *Collaborative Learning workshop* takes place over 2-3 days. The 3-day version gives an opportunity to introduce the use of the method for project assessment, so that participants may feel confident to use L4C in their own projects. Generally, each workshop has a particular theme or range of interests – for instance, ESD in schools, or sustainable community development, or teacher training. Where possible, two or more people attend from each invited organisation. Participants are expected to prepare a case summary in advance.

Participants are assigned to 'home groups' of about six people each, who meet regularly throughout the workshop to exchange experience. The lead facilitator is supported by (at least) one co-facilitator or trainee facilitator per home group. There is normally also a person with primary responsibility for note-taking and reporting.

An L4C Project Assessment workshop gathers stakeholders from a single project. In general, the group should include

- ✳ The core project team
- ✳ The person to whom the project manager reports
- ✳ Coordinators (e.g. regional coordinators or thematic coordinators)
- ✳ Possibly, some primary beneficiaries with a strong connection to the project; in a school project, for instance, this could mean including some particularly active teachers, school principals, or pupils.

In general, this will yield a group of 10-12 people. For an unusually large or complex project, it could be more.

Working the L4C

The process

Each workshop is planned in advance, but adaptations to the planning usually take place in response to the needs of the process and the participants. In general both types of workshop begin in a similar way, as shown in *Figure 1.* The initial exercise involves a pre-prepared case summary.

From here, the two modes diverge. *Figure 2* shows the continuation for a Project Assessment workshop, and *Figure 3* for a Collaborative Learning workshop.

- **Plenary/introductions**
  - **Home groups** **or whole groups as applicable**
    - **Other groups**
  - Presentation of case summary(ies)
- Introduce NGT method
  - NGT: dissatisfactions
- Empowerment spiral
- Aha's
- Deep listening method
- Synthesis of dissatisfactions
- Introduce YYY method
    - Pairs/3s: select topics, YYY
- How to handle feedback
- Introduce Synergy method
  - Synergy meeting; experience so far

Figure 1. The first part of the workshop

- **Plenary/introductions**
  - **Home groups** **or whole groups as applicable**
    - **Other groups**
- Other theories (only in response to questions)
    - Clarify focus for change (individual)
  - Identify focus and opportunities
- Prioritizing method
  - Prioritize suggestions
- Devil's advocate method
  - Critique top suggestions
- Risk analyses method(s)
  - Risk analyses
    - Activity planning
      individual or small group
  - Plan next steps; close

Figure 2. Second part of Project Assessment workshop

Plenary

Home groups

Other groups

Explain half hour feedback sessions
explain preparations ('homework')

Choose groups of 3 or 4

I, We, It; group dynamics

Half hour feedback session
or each in group of 3 or 4

'Advice for self'

Individual advice to self

Social diffusion theory;
when I/we get back

Individual or teams; feedback

Synergy meeting;
experience of feedback

What is change?
How does it happen? – eg elephant

L4C project assessment:
outline, additional tools

Brainstorm topics
for remainder of workshop

Summarize lists from HGs,
Prioritization exercise
Agree on program, carry out as agreed

Ongoing Communities of Practice;

Close

Figure 3. Second part of Collaborative Learning workshop

Facilitation

While the process, the methods and the tools are all important, it is hard to overstate the importance of the workshop facilitation. There are many good ways of running a workshop; in the case of L4C, the ability of the facilitator to create a supportive climate is paramount. The role of the facilitator becomes that of a group coach. We therefore include a summary of this role in section 3 under the heading *Empowering coaching*.

Some L4C Collaborative Learning workshops are combined with facilitator training.

Section 2

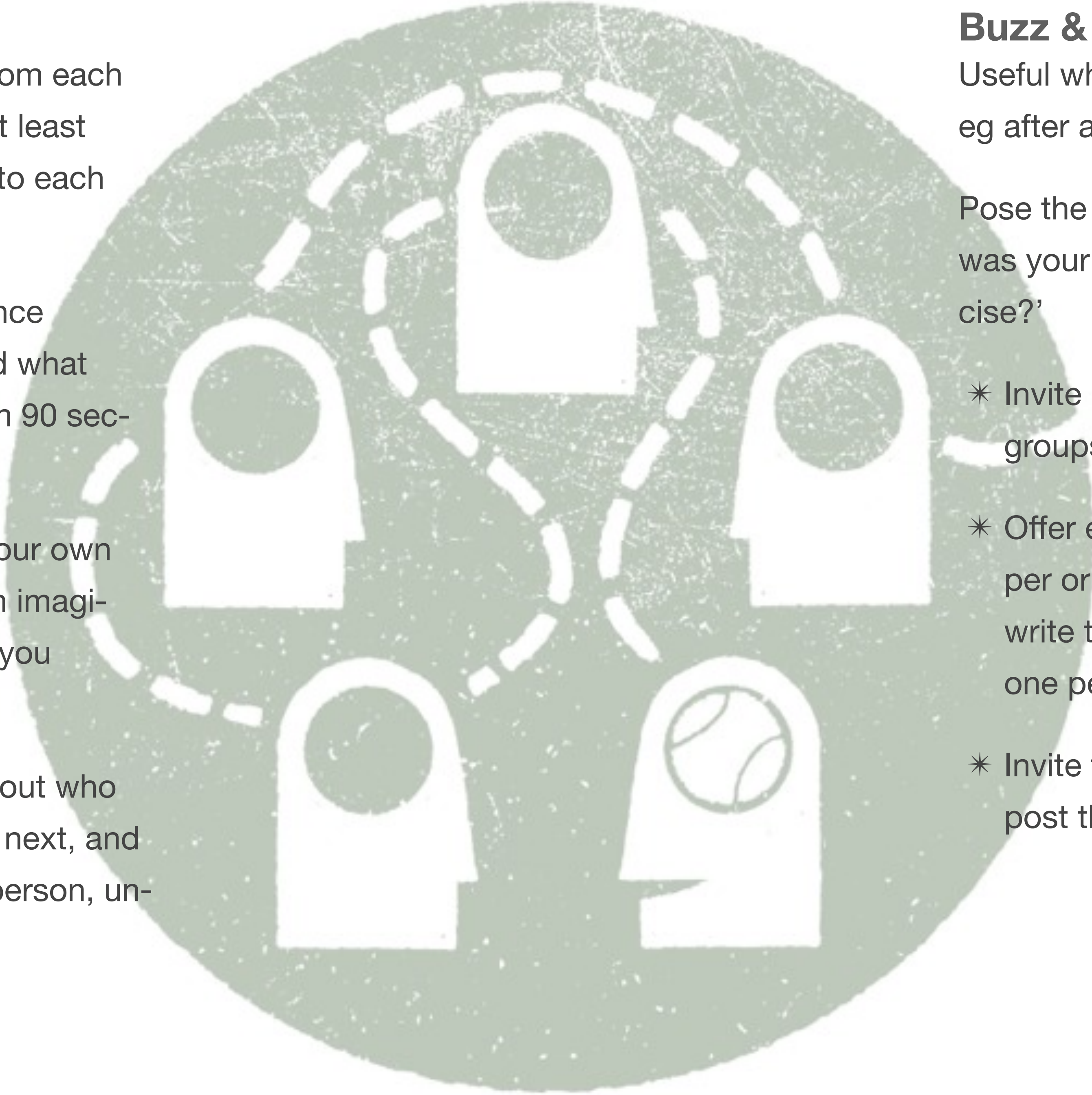
Toolbox

Plenary pointers – Ideas to energize plenary sessions

The Ball

Useful when we want to hear from each person in a plenary session, not least when introducing a new group to each other.

- Pose the question, for instance ‘Please say who you are and what brings you here, in maximum 90 seconds’
- Set the example by giving your own response, and then throw an imaginary ball to the next person you would like to hear from
- Ask each person to think about who they would like to hear from next, and to throw the ball on to that person, until all have spoken



Buzz & Note

Useful when we want plenary feedback, eg after a group exercise.

Pose the question, for instance ‘What was your experience of doing this exercise?’

- Invite participants to form informal groups of 2-3 and discuss (buzz)
- Offer each group up to 3 pieces of paper or post-its, and invite them to write their most important responses, one per piece of paper
- Invite them to read aloud and then post their responses

NGT – Nominal Group Technique

This method is useful whenever you need quickly to gather and synthesize input (facts, opinions, evaluations) from a group of people; especially useful when the group is part of an established hierarchy.

A critical point is the formulation of the starting question. Some examples:

- ✳ What are our criteria for success? What do we mean, when we look back at a piece of work and say that it was successful?
- ✳ What is functioning well and what is not functioning well in our current project?
- ✳ What factors might help us achieve our goals, and what might hinder us?

Step 1

1. In *silence*, each person considers the starting question and writes every answer that presents itself on a piece of paper, a separate piece for each answer. This is individual brainstorming so no censorship and there are no bad ideas
2. There is no need to prioritize or analyse, simply to write the answers. If someone has five answers, they have five pieces of paper. Each person keeps her or his own papers

Step 2

3. When all are ready, the group stands (not sits) around a clean/empty table. If you use Post-Its, you can gather in front of a whiteboard.
4. One person reads one paper aloud.
5. Brainstorming rules apply, i.e. no criticism or discussion, but questions for clarification may be asked.
6. When all have understood, the paper is put on the table. Another person reads one of her/his papers in the same way.
7. Answers that seem related can be placed close together.
8. People continue to read one paper at a time until all papers are on the table.

Step 3

9. The group completes the analysis process, sorting the papers into related piles.

10. Each pile is given a title, as specific as possible. If it's difficult to find a short title, maybe the pile should be divided. There is no right or wrong number of papers in a pile; a pile of one may be appropriate.

After this point you can interrupt the process to ask how they feel about the exercise and the results.

Step 4

A member of the group undertakes to write out the papers (grouped under their headings) and distribute them to all members of the group.

Fast prioritization

This method is helpful when a group needs to rapidly prioritize or eliminate some items from a list. As when:

- A list of possible actions/activities needs to be shortened so that high-priority items can be examined in more detail
- Applications for funding or entries in a competition need to be quickly sorted in order to devote more time to highly favoured entries
- A long list of potential sites for an activity or project needs to be reduced
- A choice needs to be made between different dates or times

Step 1 – Create a list

The full list of items to be prioritized is numbered or lettered, and displayed on one or more flip-charts.

Example: I think we should best use our time and energy to

- Expand our participation in Green Transport Week
- Invite the students' union to discussions about starting a project with them
- Put more effort into our work with the Women's Union
- Apply for project funding to start in a new district
- Apply for project funding to start new workshops on organic farming
- Hire a part-time marketing and PR expert to make us better known
- Follow up the invitation to support groups working with HIV/AIDS
- Consolidate our most successful projects before starting new things
- Lobby local government to regulate traffic

Step 2 – Instructions about voting

1. Each person is given a certain number of votes. If the list is no longer than 6 items, participants should get as many votes as there are items; otherwise a good number is 6 votes per participant.
2. The votes can be distributed at the will of each participant, for example all

votes can go to one option (if s/he finds it absolutely more important than any of the others). Alternatively the participant could decide to distribute the votes. One example could be

- ✳ The favourite item on the list gets 3 votes
- ✳ The next-preferred gets 2 votes
- ✳ The third choice gets 1 vote

Step 3 – How to register and count the votes

3. Each person considers his or her options, and writes on a piece of paper the numbers or letters of the selected options, and the number of votes allocated to each.

Example of one person's voting paper

A- GTWeek 3 votes

B- Lobby re traffic 2 votes

F- PR person 1 vote

4. Each person exchanges her or his voting paper with another person – this is optional, but helps avoid undue influence from seeing the accumulating votes of others.
5. Each person in turn allocates the votes on the voting paper they have received, by marking with a coloured pen on the flipchart or attaching the appropriate number of coloured stickers.

At the end of this exercise, the choice can usually be significantly narrowed, and often even concluded.

YYY?

Otherwise known as ***Why, why, why? How, how, how?***, this exercise is used to uncover underlying problems, and to create tension> between 'what is' and 'what could be' – or between hopes and fears. Normally each participant defines her/his focus and is then coached by one or two other participants. The main role of the coaches is to listen carefully to the replies to their questions, and to adapt subsequent questions accordingly.

1. Define the focus

What is the problem, concern, disappointment, fear, challenge, issue, wish to improve?

2. First 'Why'

The coach asks 'Why is this important to ***you***?' This is NOT a question of 'Why does this problem exist?'

Example: *Not enough funding.* Why? Because our donors are short of money. *No!*

Example: *Not enough funding.* Why is this important to you?' Because in one month I may be out of a job. *Better!*

3. Second and third 'Whys'

In principle the same as the first 'why', but the wording may need to be adjusted.

Example: *In one month I may be out of a job.* Why/how is this important to you? *Because I am a single parent with two children and no other income.*

What is the heart of this problem? Is it that you have no other possibility to find a job? *No, it's because this project is my passion and I don't want to give it up.*

Now you have reached an underlying concern.

4. First 'How'

How can you work with this problem? Is there anything you can do? The responses may vary from 'No, nothing' to 'Many things, but…'

Example: *I don't want to give up this project.*

How can you work with that? *I could dedicate some time to looking for additional funding.*

5. Second and third 'Hows'

So how can you work with that possibility?

Example: *I could fund-raise.*

How? *I could ask the present donor to endorse an application to another foundation.*

How would you do that? *I could invite the donor to a stakeholder meeting where the stakeholders explain the importance of the project, and how the funding cuts are affecting our work, and ask them to brainstorm with us about other potential donors.*

6. Follow a second 'How' trail'

If the person with the problem indicated several possible ways to work, you could go back and follow another trail in the same way.

Deep listening™ and parking

Deep Listening is a method originally developed by Warren Ziegler with the intention of helping participants access their inner wisdom or intuition. Each of us has knowledge that we usually either are not aware of, have no access to, or don't trust. At some level, we know that we know these things. We talk about gut feelings, about intuition. We may "have a feeling" that things are a certain way. We talk about putting things on the back burner, sleeping on it...

Bringing this deeper knowledge to the surface – making it accessible – is helped by deep listening to oneself; which in turn is supported when someone else deep listens. The listener also benefits, being freed from any expectation of ‘clever’ interventions and thus enabled to pay full attention to the speaker.

There are many ways to use and introduce deep listening as a tool. In L4C it is often introduced in two steps. One step is before people do the ”why why why” and ”how, how, how” exercise. The second is before the session giving feedback to each other.

Some points to help with the introduction

- ✳ The simplest way to use and explain deep listening is to invite participants to use the parking technique. Invite them to listen carefully. You can say, for example, that you are inviting them to use a very simple listening technique that is likely to increase their perception and capacity to act. Invite them to park their thoughts, feelings and other reactions.
- ✳ Offer an introductory exercise: for instance,
    - In pairs, tell each other a story while looking at each other and listening ‘normally’
    - Repeat the process while observing the basic Deep Listening rules: ‘be silence’, no eye contact or other feedback
    - Invite participants to reflect on the difference; contrast with Active Listening.

> ***”Memory is the key.***
> *The journey begins not with knowledge but with remembering. Eternal distances and everyday concerns make us forget what we really know.”* Sheikh Ismail Hakki

Reminders

- ✳ The story belongs to the teller – not the listener.
- ✳ Don't be afraid of the silence.' Silence is not dangerous – but too much talk can be.

Deep Listening

It's easy to listen – we do it all the time!

Well... we listen – but how do we listen? The quality of our listening has a great impact on the quality of our meetings. Different methods are available to improve the quality of listening. One well-known method is Active Listening. We choose here to offer another one, called Deep Listening™, because we want to focus not only how we listen to others but also how we listen to ourselves.

Deep Listening is both new, and very old. It is about hearing the other (or yourself) without the kind of censorship exercised by experience, expectations, and pre-conceived opinions. The originator, Warren Ziegler, describes six modes of Deep Listening. An experienced listener can weave them together or dance between them, for the beginner it can be good to practice them one at a time. They are:

1. **Be silence** – Do not respond in any way to the talker, either with words or with body language. Look away. No eye contact. This is not something you do, not a task but a state of being. Thus, be silence throughout your whole being.

2. **Give attention** – This is an early form of the sixth mode, emptying. Focus your entire self on what the speaker is saying, to the exclusion of all else. Her words are the only reality.

3. **Be empathic** – This is a grand act of the imagination through which spirit lives. Enter the talker's story and live it as your own. Feel it in your body, your mind, your spirit, as if you were living her story with her.

4. **Be non-judgmental** – A difficult practice when the talker offers images (values, ideas, intentions) in conflict with yours! But essential if you are to allow the other to come to the fullness of her images before judgment is rendered, whether her judgment or yours.

5. **Nurture** – This is an advanced form of being empathic. Enter into the talker's story and help her search for elements she may have missed. Remember: it's her story, not (yet) yours.

6. '**Empty**' – Put to one side ('park') your present: your longings, knowledge and experience, hopes, dreams, problems, visions. When you do that, you will find your way to deep listen to your creative side without any limitations

Parking

A technique that helps to deep listen is parking. It comes as a surprise to many people that our beliefs, thoughts and feelings can be safely parked until needed. We don't have to allow them to drive us endlessly round and round the same circuit.

Why should we want to park? Well, let's take a look at feelings. Emotions, like money and many other things in life, are magnificent servants and tyrannical masters. My feelings tell me that something is going on, and can help me understand and empathize with other people. They also can give me energy – or steal it. Any situation can trigger feelings, positive or negative. They come in waves: first an emotional response to the actual situation, then a wave of fossil feelings ("This has happened to me before"), then often feelings about the feelings ("Darn, now I got upset again, why do I do that?").

Feelings about feelings

The secondary feelings are generally energy-stealers. They also can cause problems in a relationship because when I act them out, they can be difficult for the other person to understand. For example:

When I was a child, I was taught that girls are not supposed to be angry. At an important meeting, a bunch of men tell me my project has been cancelled, just after I was asked to put in overtime to get it on track (which I did). I get really angry. What do I do? Burst into tears. The men are embarrassed but reinforced in their belief that women are hysterical. I get even angrier with myself for crying. And so on.

Maybe your mother dies, and you know you're supposed to be very sad. However, you actually feel numb rather than sad, you can't find your grief. You feel guilty about not grieving. Someone else is crying. You get irritated because of your guilt, and snap at the other person. What a mess!

Fossil feelings

An example:

I'm in a hurry and someone cuts in ahead of me in a queue. When I was a child, my younger brother always got in ahead, and I was never allowed to complain because I was supposed to be more grown-up. The suppressed, fossil feelings from my childhood well up inside me and I scream abuse at the person who just cut in ahead of me – somehow, it was just the last straw.

Overreaction doesn't do the job

When we overreact because of fossil or secondary feelings, we don't get the response from other people that we would like and hope for. Instead of being willing to talk about what is troubling us, they may withdraw or become aggressive. When we learn to park our feelings, we give ourselves a chance to sort out the different kinds.

There's nothing wrong with anger, or sadness, or any other feeling; the art is, to understand which feeling is the emotional response to the actual situation, and express it in an appropriate, non-aggressive way.

Fleck's synergy method

This text is an excerpt from the GAP Coach Trainers' manual

We live in a society where time is regarded as a resource in short supply, but we conduct our meetings as if it were unlimited. The Synergy method was developed to remedy this situation, by consultant Erhard Fleck in Sweden. The basic principles have proved applicable to a wide variety of groups and meetings.

The crucial formal difference between a synergy meeting and an ordinary meeting is manifested in the dynamic agenda. There may or may not be an agenda planned in advance by a person in authority or by a person with administrative responsibilities; but at the actual meeting the agenda is built and used dynamically.

Stage 1: Agenda building

name of person	topic	estimated time

1. Facilitator
One person facilitates agenda building. This is a different role from that of chairperson. There may or may not also be a chair of the meeting; the facilitator concentrates specifically on helping participants build and use a dynamic agenda, as described below.

Not only the starting time but also the time at which the meeting will *end* is given in advance, and notified on the invitation. There may or may not be 'obvious' items already on the agenda.

2. Wish list
Each person tells the facilitator what topics he or she brings to the meeting. These are written as an agenda in a way visible to everyone, for example on flip-chart, blackboard or whiteboard, as follows:
The time estimate is made by the person suggesting the topic. The amount of time allocated to the whole meeting should not be allowed to determine estimates – there is a tendency in inexperienced groups to mentally divide the available time by the number of participants. The facilitator helps each person to make an estimate based not only on a factual appreciation of, say, the complexity of the topic but also on a gut feel for how long this group might need to deal with it. This first cut at the agenda is a wish list.

For each topic, the suggesting participant states how the topic session will be conducted, i.e. who takes care of the time, what is expected from the others, etc. This may also be written on the agenda if it seems important. The order in which topics will be addressed is specifically *excluded* from the discussion at this stage.

3. Total time requested
The time required for the topics is totalled and written on the agenda, and the total is compared with the time available for the meeting.

The remaining time available needs to be a few minutes more than the sum of the topics to allow for moving from one topic to another. If there is enough time for all topics as requested, proceed to the actual meeting. Otherwise, go to Negotiations.

Stage 2: Negotiations

The facilitator asks the group how to handle the discrepancy between time requested and time available. Only the person presenting a topic can make the decision to shorten or eliminate it, so a process of negotiation ensues. The process itself takes time, so the time available for the topics 'shrinks'. The negotiation process is however very valuable in itself, and usually agreement is reached within a few minutes.

The revised times are written clearly on the agenda. They are a contract between participants that the times will not be exceeded.

Stage 3: Dealing with the topics

The function of the facilitator in stage 3 is to help the group hold the meeting in accordance with its contract as reflected in the dynamic agenda. The process is as follows:

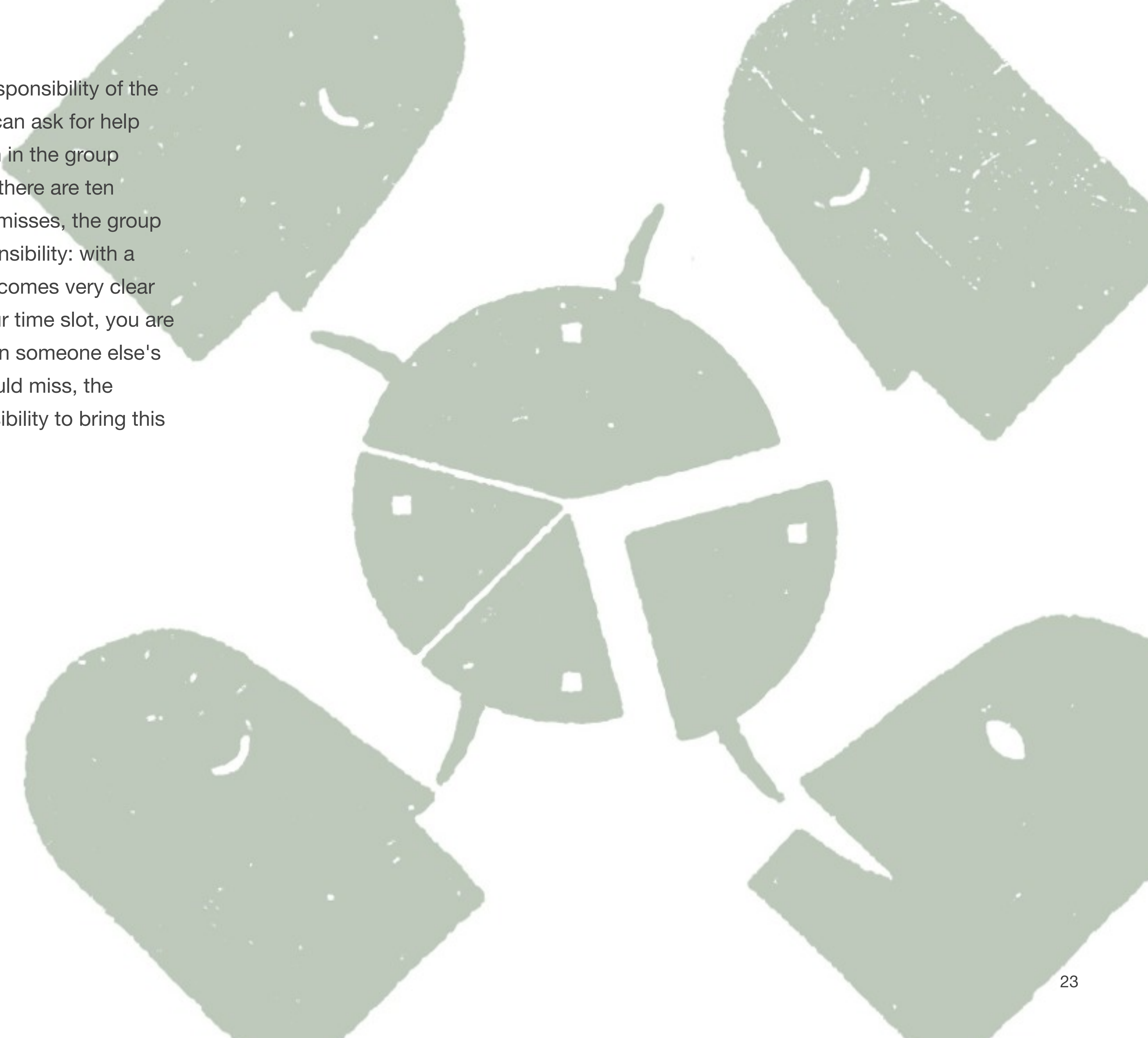
1. *Which topic should be addressed now?*
   The facilitator invites the group to consider the agenda, and to look around the group. The choice is made both on the basis of logic (which topic seems most appropriate) and energy (which person wants or needs to be next). Anyone may propose themselves or someone else. The whole group must be in agreement before the topic is embarked upon.

2. *Presenting a topic*
   The facilitator asks the topic presenter whether s/he would like help in keeping to the agreed time, and may gently ensure that the presenter has a clear agreement with another person to be reminded of the time when requested.

   The topic presenter also controls the meeting for the agreed number of minutes. **All other participants are viewed as a resource for that person.** At the end of the agreed time, the topic is closed.

3. *Closing a topic*
   The facilitator strikes the topic from the agenda and returns the group to point 1, to select the next topic/presenter.

Timekeeping is the responsibility of the topic presenter, who can ask for help from any other person in the group ('please tell me when there are ten minutes left!'). If s/he misses, the group has a collective responsibility: with a dynamic agenda it becomes very clear that if you exceed your time slot, you are actually trespassing on someone else's time. If the group should miss, the facilitator has responsibility to bring this fact to their attention.



Giving feedback

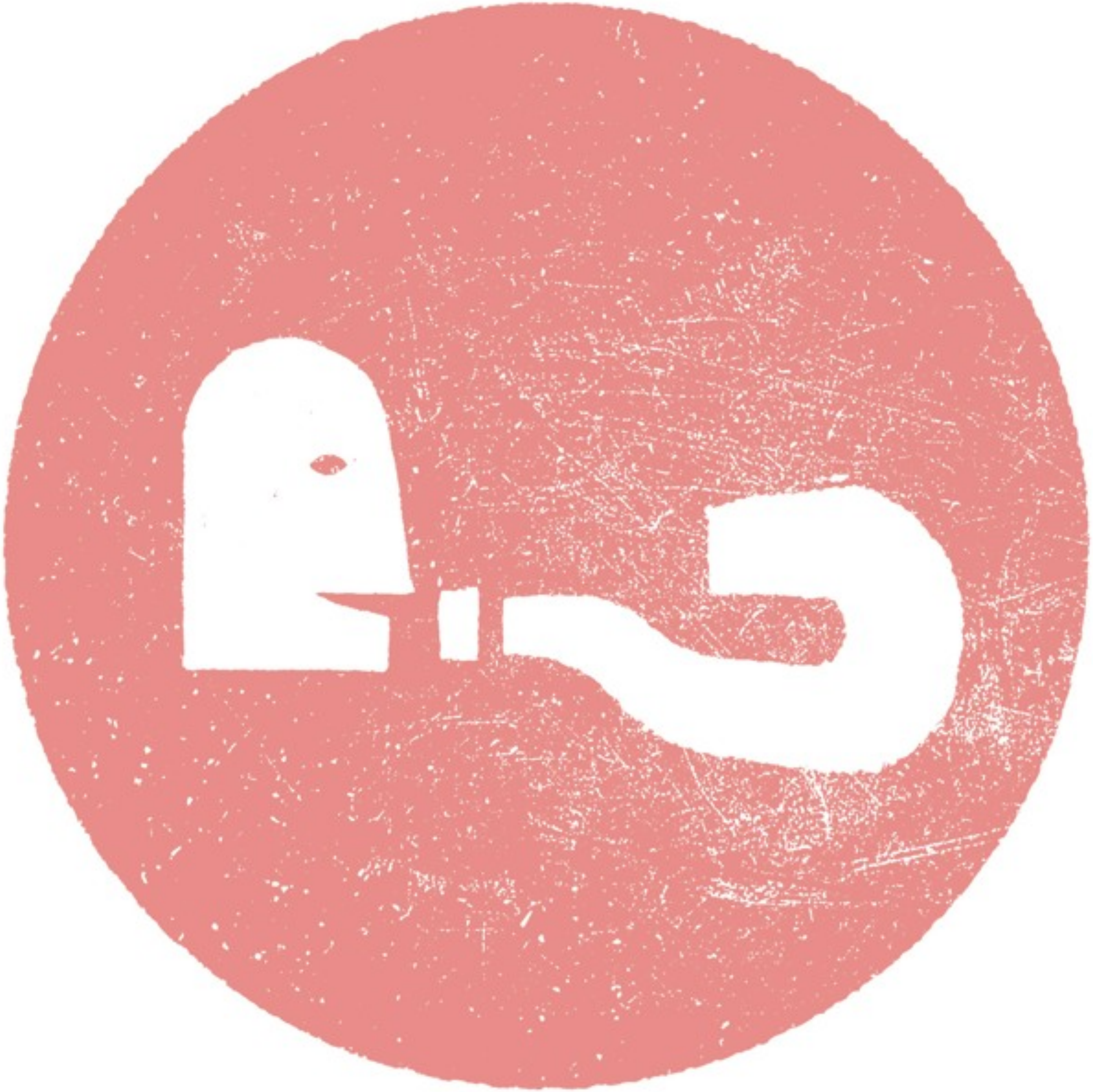
a. Deep listening/parking

A feedback session is not a conversation. It is a focused dialogue, with one person at a time speaking and the other(s) listening.

When you are giving feedback, your most important task is to listen. Your second task is to follow the needs or requests of the speaker. Remember that questions are more powerful and more empowering than answers!

b. Some key questions when giving feedback

Warren Ziegler used to talk about a ‘compelling question’. This is a question that comes back, even when you try to park it, and that would help you to more



fully understand and support the speaker. Some examples might be:

- ✳ What do you *most* want or need to change?
- ✳ How will you know it has changed?
- ✳ What will happen if it does NOT change?

Remember to speak from your own perspective: the so-called ‘I-message’. For instance, *“I’m having difficulty reconciling what you say about xxx and what you say about yyy – can you explain more?”* is more empowering than *“You’re contradicting yourself, it doesn’t make sense!”*

Good questions further into the dialogue can be:

- ✳ What first steps can you take?
- ✳ What resources will you need to continue? (material, legitimacy, moral support…)
- ✳ Concrete intention: when will you do it?

c. Some other tips when giving feedback

1. *Prepare*: put yourself in a frame of mind where you are committed to supporting the speaker to reach her or his own objectives.
2. *Create a safe space.* If you can influence the physical space, make sure everyone sits on the same level and that you are close enough to each other not to need to raise your voices. Ensure there is adequate privacy, and do your best to prevent phone calls and other interruptions.
3. *Don’t take away the problem!* Empathy is good, when it means you ‘get under the skin’ of the speaker and begin to experience how they feel. But always remember that the problem is not yours, either to have or to solve. At best you can ask questions and make suggestions.
4. *Look beyond the presenting problem.* The presenting problem is real, at least to the speaker, and needs to be taken seriously. And, it’s important not to stop there but to look for what could lie beneath or beyond it. This is one use of the ‘why, why, why’ method.
5. *Question your own motives.* It’s easy to ask questions or make suggestions that are not really what the speaker needs. Maybe they make us feel safer, or more clever, without supporting the speaker.
6. *Be kind to yourself!* No-one is the perfect coach, and those being coached are usually quite capable of ‘defending’ themselves from us if we are clumsy. The important thing is to *notice* our deficiencies. And to give ourselves a pat on the back when we notice them, because it means we are learning something.

Receiving feedback

Prepare

The first key to receiving good feedback, or coaching/mentoring, is good preparation. The clearer you can state your case and your concern, the more likely you are to receive useful feedback.

- ✳ Define your actual concern: not ‘the whole project’, but one particular aspect of it that you personally find problematic or challenging
- ✳ Formulate 1-3 things you would like to improve
- ✳ Ask yourself whether there is anything about the problematical situation that you DON’T want to change – that you find really positive

Before the session

Think about your ambition or objective for the session. What is the best you might achieve? Perhaps you can also identify an acceptable minimum?

Put yourself in the right frame of mind. The other person or people are there to support you. Be ready to make the most of the time they are giving you. Think in advance about how you will take notes, and what you will do to follow up.

Listen!

A feedback session is not a conversation. It is a focused dialogue, with one person at a time speaking and the other(s) listening.

When you are the one receiving feedback, you have the principal responsibility to direct the dialogue – that is, to say what you want (and need) to say as briefly and precisely as possible. When the other(s) speak, you need to listen carefully, e g by Deep Listening™. You do not respond unless there seems to be a misunderstanding, and above all: there is no need to argue or defend yourself. Listening is the key.

Take notes – or, even better, ask one of your respondents to take notes for you.

Thank!

At the end of the session, remember to thank your respondents! They are there to support you to see your own way more clearly.

Devil's advocate

As a facilitator it is useful sometimes to take on the role of devil's advocate. This means: to find and propose all the reasons why the project as a whole or an action you are considering may ***not*** be successful. The focus is chosen by the group to reflect their current priorities.

It needs to be done gently, so as not to crush enthusiasm but to help people think through how viable their ideas really are and how much work is needed to achieve something. In terms of inspiring people, it is more effective to take one small action successfully rather than start several large, unsuccessful actions. However, it is also important not to set the challenge too low, otherwise people may lose motivation and momentum.

Brainstorming

A fast, energizing, and effective way to work is to use a variation of brainstorming. The basic question for participants is:

Why will this (action, project, idea) not work?

The usual brainstorming rules apply:

1. Everything is permitted
2. No discussion or argument (only questions for clarification)
3. All suggestions written on a flipchart, whiteboard or other place visible to all participants

In this case it is helpful to encourage the participants to find really challenging answers, potential problems, as well as the usual emphasis on creativity and 'crazy' ideas. The atmosphere should be light and 'fun', not heavy or depressive. 'Big' problems are greeted with enthusiasm and applause.

First feedback

After the exercise, ask how participants feel. Overall responses range from

"It really doesn't seem possible" to

"Nothing worse than this? We can handle it!"

In general there is often a sense of relief at having shared fears and concerns.

If the general feeling is that the action or project is really not feasible, you can:

1. Choose to explore alternative ways of achieving the same results; in other words, you can re-frame your idea.
2. Alternatively, you can thank each other for your willingness to work together, and say goodbye.

Focus

It may be obvious from the first feedback that one or a few challenges are key to the success of the action/project. If it is not obvious, you can use the prioritization method to identify the most important. An appropriate question for the exercise is:

"What item/which items would you personally like to work on today?"

Using the results

You can continue with:

1. A group strategizing session: how might we avoid or mitigate the problem(s)? What would we need to do this? Who might join us/contribute? … and so on. This process may begin during the review meeting, if you have time.
2. A risk assessment (see next tool).

Risk assessment

1. List and prioritize risks

Start with a list of the risks the group sees, for example the results from a Devil's Advocate exercise. Pick the important ones, for instance using the Fast Prioritization tool.

2. Make a table

Risks can be given a numerical value by

- ✳ Assigning 'Likelihood of happening' a number on a scale from 1 to 5
- ✳ Assigning 'Impact on our action, if it happens' a number 1–5
- ✳ Multiplying the two together

The product is a number between 1 and 25 for each risk. The higher the number, the bigger the risk.

3. Steps to deal with risks

Take each prioritized risk in turn, and ask:

- ✳ What steps are we already taking to avoid or mitigate it?
- ✳ What steps can we take in the future?

NATURE OF RISK	ANALYSIS OF RISK	CURRENT ACTION	FUTURE ACTION
PROGRAM START IS DELAYED BY A WHOLE SCHOOL YEAR, BECAUSE OF PLANNING DIFFICULTIES	LIKELIHOOD: 3 IMPACT: 4 TOTAL: 12	-RAPID RESPONSE TO ALL QUERIES FROM FUNDERS -PROACTIVE CONTACTS WITH KEY PARTNERS	IF NECESSARY, IDENTIFY, FUND AND IMPLEMENT BRIDGING ACTIVITIES TO KEEP INTEREST ALIVE

60 seconds

The exercise is also known as the 'elevator pitch': the story you might tell if you happened to travel in the same lift as a person who could be important to your project. In many situations we need to quickly engage someone in our project or action. It can be a participant, a journalist, a politician or public employee, or indeed even a colleague.

There is a principle well known in the marketing industry that the first minute of information is critical to raising interest. After about one minute, if we have not succeeded in catching the attention of a person, their attention will move to other things.

If you decide in your project review group that you need to engage someone or some people in your work, you can do this simple exercise to prepare for a meeting.

The trick is NOT to explain your entire project in 60 seconds but to catch the other person's attention so that they begin to ask questions – you have reached a point on the empowerment spiral where the person has begun to care and wants to find out about what you are doing.

Rule 1: Never tell the person what they are doing wrong, or should do differently

Rule 2: Think whether you can usefully ask them a question about their own work or actions

Rule 3: Speak from the heart, engage your own feelings

Rule 4: Keep in mind what you are most proud of; what is the 'unique selling point' of your project or action?

Exercise

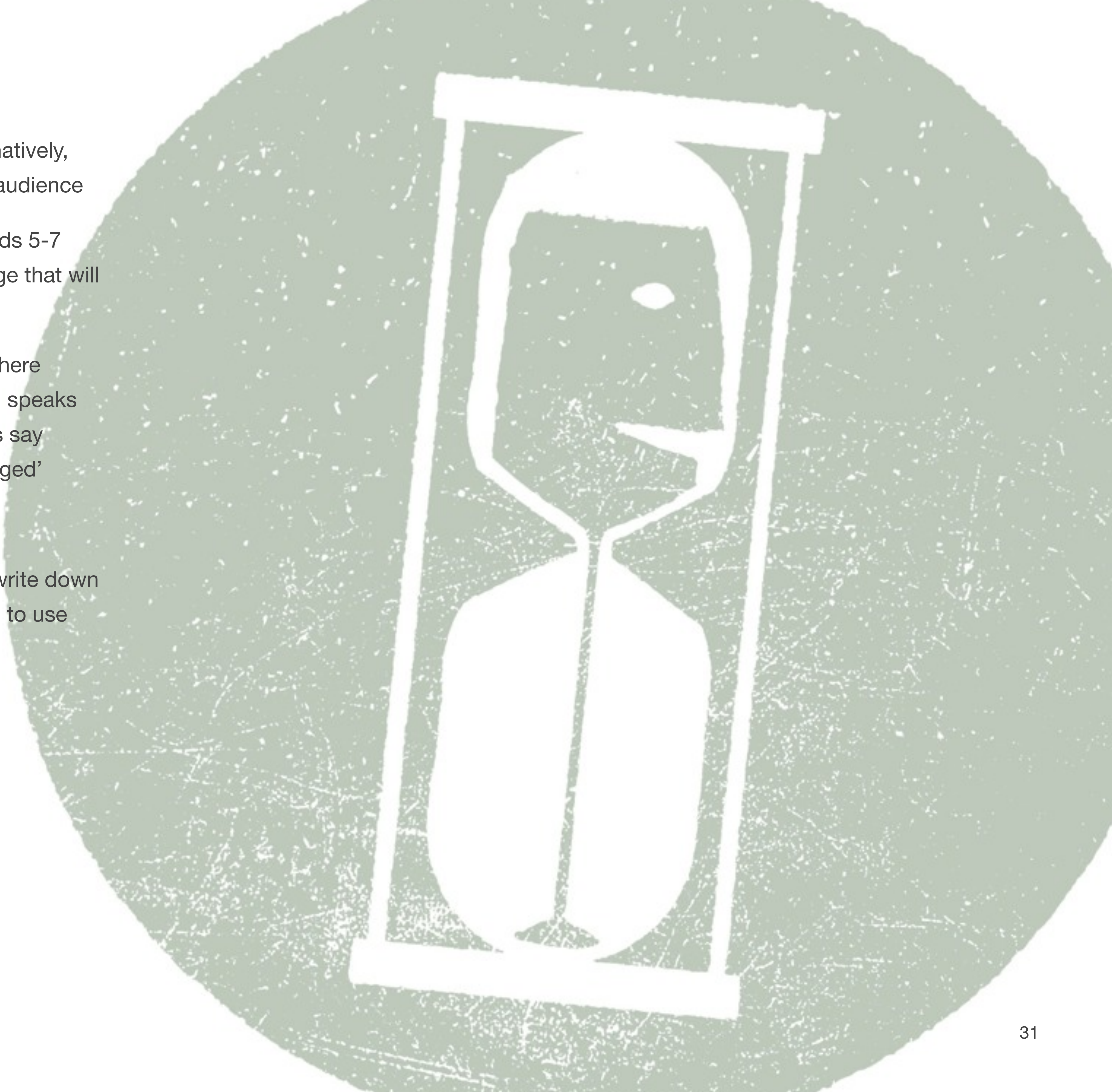
1. Agree on the audience. Alternatively, each person picks their own audience

2. Each person, in silence, spends 5-7 minutes formulating a message that will take 30-60 seconds to say

3. Role play. In groups of 2-3 (where possible): each person in turn speaks their message, and the others say whether or not they are 'engaged'

4. Present in the larger group

5. If appropriate, fine-tune and write down good messages for the group to use



Community of practice

Learning for change is not a one-off experience but – in the best case – an on-going process that can be considerably enhanced by regular exchanges with other learners.

A community of practice (CoP) was in the early 1990s defined as a group of people ”who share a passion for something that they do, and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better” (**Etienne Wenger**). It can take many forms. The simplest is that a few people – it can be as few as three – make a mutual commitment to meet, virtually or physically, 6-8 times a year.

All the methods and tools of L4C can be used by a CoP. Some CoPs find Fleck’s Synergy method particularly useful as a framework for meetings.

- Earlier, Warren Ziegler used the term ‘community of learners’ and described the most important questions to be tackled by such a group as
- What is it we do? (The power of naming)
- Why do we choose to do it? (Affirmation of the power of choice)
- How does it feel to do it?

Only thereafter does he recommend moving to the question

- How might we do it (even) better?

Pattern hunting

The workshops yield rich materials for pattern hunting; the question of building up a library of patterns as a development tool is beyond the scope of the present book, but this text can serve as an introduction for those with particular interest.

Generally the starting point is a concern, a problem, or at least a feeling that ‘it could have been (even) better’ – as at the start of any L4C workshop. This is one side of the equation balancing dissatisfaction with hope; see *What is change and how does it happen.*

The next step is to find similar occurrences. Recognition of a problem pattern can be triggered by memory: “This has happened before,” OR, “It’s never been like this before” – so it has implicitly followed a different pattern.

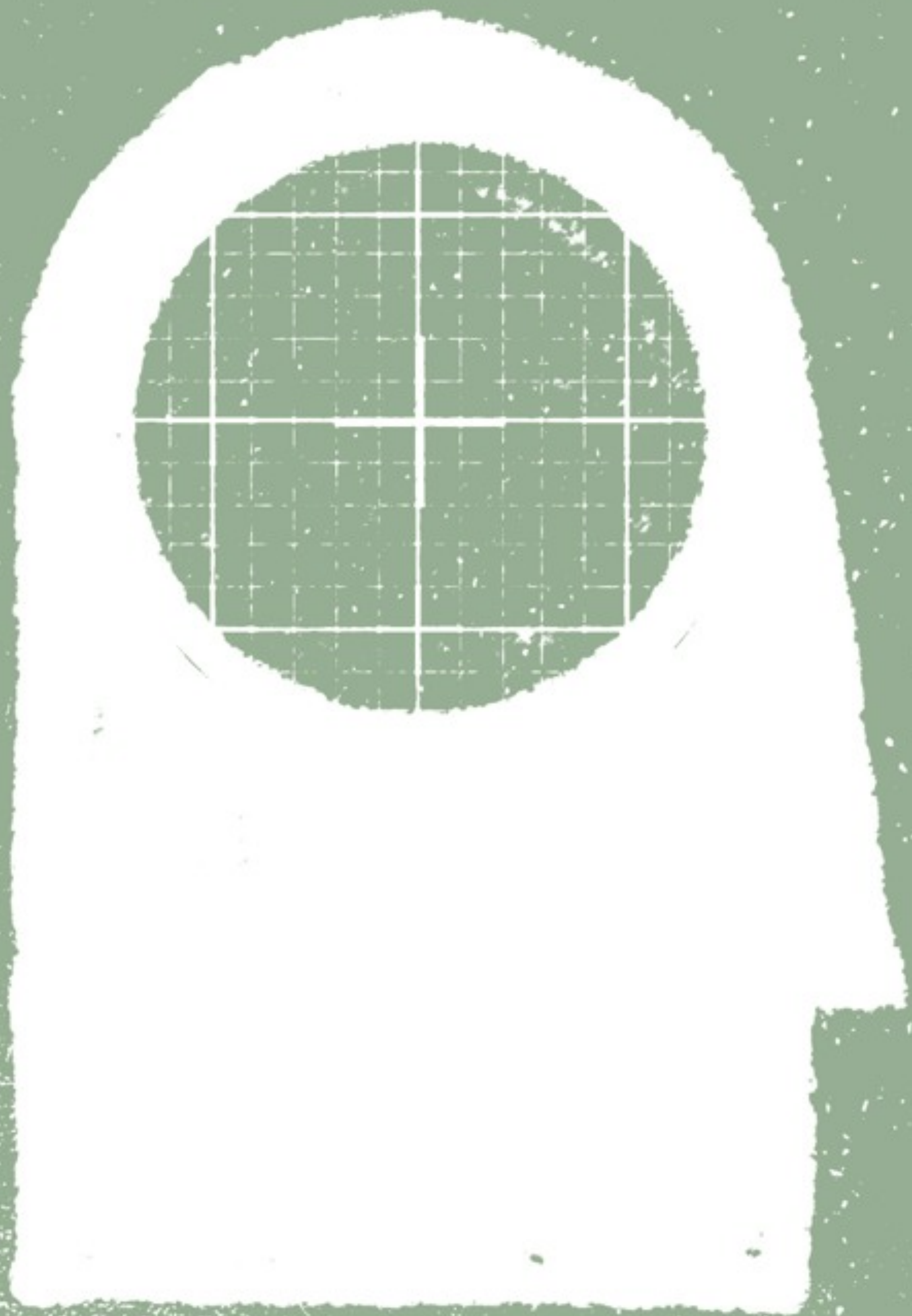
Paying attention to such moments helps uncover underlying patterns.

The idea of a possible pattern can then be refined using two main questions:

- What is it (about the problem) that is recurring?
- Can the difference between expectations and results be described in general terms, i.e. terms applicable to more than one occurrence?

Section 3

Models and theories



What is change, and how does it happen?

Change – say many oracles – is not really something you plan, it's something that happens when conditions are right.

In addition to hopes and fears, we can work with expectations. If what I *fear* is also what I *expect to happen*, then I have every reason to work for change – though I may feel overwhelmed by the challenge. If what I hope for is what I expect to happen, I have no reason to work for change: I only need to wait, and everything will be perfect.

Warren Ziegler said that change tends to happen when we have a reasonable balance between hope and dissatisfaction. No hope – no reason to even think about change; no dissatisfaction – no *need* to think about change.

In some cultures and with some individuals, one or the other is conspicuously lacking. To know whether to start with hopes or with dissatisfactions, you need to know what the existing balance looks like; but given the mass-media culture of today, there is likely to be a bias towards fears.

Is it possible that a combination of small hopes and small dissatisfactions is a basis for small change? Whereas a combination of large hopes and large dissatisfactions can give rise to major changes?

Robert Fritz has a similar model to Ziegler: he describes change as something that takes place when there is sufficient tension (discrepancy) between the perception of *what is* and the perception of *what could be.*

Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch emphasize that – as is well known in mathematics – change that takes place *within* a system is always in a sense 'no change': *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose…* In order to change a system, it's necessary to be able to place yourself outside it. How to achieve this expansion of perspective?

Empowerment, enablement, agency

‘Learning for change’ of necessity implies increasing levels of awareness and empowerment: a L4C workshop is in itself an awareness-raising exercise, with an empowering format that enables participants to see new possibilities for action – to learn, in ways that lead to change; and to carry that learning ability with them into their spheres of action.

What we choose to call ‘empowerment’ is in other contexts referred to as ‘enablement’ or ‘agency’. Enablement emphasizes the dynamic (process) aspect of empowerment whereas agency emphasizes the status.

Empowerment (agency/enablement) can be viewed on a scale:

Agency can be either general, or specific. Any individual (or group) can be more or less empowered in general, but can ‘deviate’ from this general level in a specific case. For instance: a business person can be very empowered in general, but feel powerless in relation to specific questions such as climate change.

Enablement refers to a process

– the process of moving from left to right on the ‘agency’ scale. It, too, has two dimensions: the inner process (my own journey), and the outer process (the help and support I can receive on the way).

The process of empowerment is about adventure, about exploring the largely unknown continent of the possible, both for us and for others. The adventure, this exploration, is as real and tangible as any journey of Magellan or Columbus. It takes us into deep space – inner space – and, just like the other form of space travel, brings a new perspective on ourselves and our world; our real world, the neighbourhood and community in which we live.

Empowerment is also another word for freedom. Nelson Mandela is credited with having said something like

“No-one can take away from me the ultimate freedom, which is the freedom to choose how I will respond to what happens to me.”

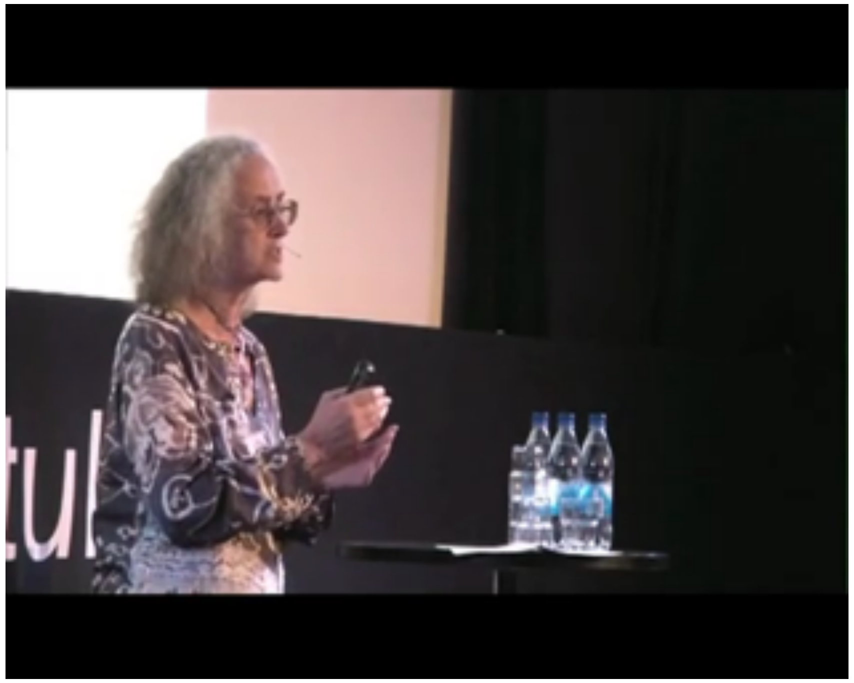
After decades in prison, that is a remarkable statement. Maybe few of us can travel that far. But all of us can move in that direction.

The elephant and the rider

Switch is a book by two American brothers, **Chip and Dan Heath**. From many years of experience working with change in the workplace, they have derived a simple model: the elephant, the rider, and the path.

- The *rider* represents the intellect
- The *elephant* represents everything else about the person or people whose behaviour they wish to influence – emotions, hopes, fears, biography…
- The *path* represents the externalities: the context in which the person finds her- or himself

The most crucial finding of their work – which indeed is borne out by many other studies – is that trying to influence behaviour with rational arguments doesn't work. Only when the rest of us is engaged – our hearts and other organs as well as our brains – do we become receptive to external promptings to change.



Myths that bind: Utopia, human nature and economic laws. Marilyn Mehlmann talks about learning at TEDxHornstull in Stockholm.

There is nothing wrong with brains! Indeed, the rider is necessary – but the elephant is the important player in the change game. Learning to speak 'from elephant to elephant' is an important skill for all change-makers.

A second conclusion is that the process of change can be considerably smoothed by simultaneously working on 'the path'. This is not the decisive element: an elephant with its mind made up will not be stopped by the absence of a path; but it may arrive quicker and more safely at its 'change' destination if the path has been smoothed.

In the workplace, working with the path is largely about making administrative and technical changes that ease the desired behaviour change by employees. It may also include leadership training.

Outside the workplace, working on 'the path' can encompass many things, from legislation to local regulations and services, to attitude changes on the part of parents or teachers. It's a question of examining the potential to influence any and all parameters that can promote the desired behaviour change.

Empowerment spiral

Information, knowledge, action

As the rider-and-elephant model illustrates, the relation between information, knowledge and action is not simple. We constantly screen out information offered to us by media, other people, and even our own experience. If it doesn’t ”fit”, we reject it.

Most behaviour-change campaigns ignore this mechanism and are designed along the ”scientific” (i e mind-focused, or ‘rider-focused’) model:

It all seems very logical. But we also know very well that it’s a poor model of reality. We inform and inform, for example about the risks of smoking. If the scientific model were an accurate picture of reality, there would hardly be a smoker left in the world today.

In practice almost the opposite seems to be true. Each of us is bombarded with gigantic amounts of information every day, maybe hundreds of thousands as much as we can actually absorb. Somehow, each of us decides what to hear and what to activate.

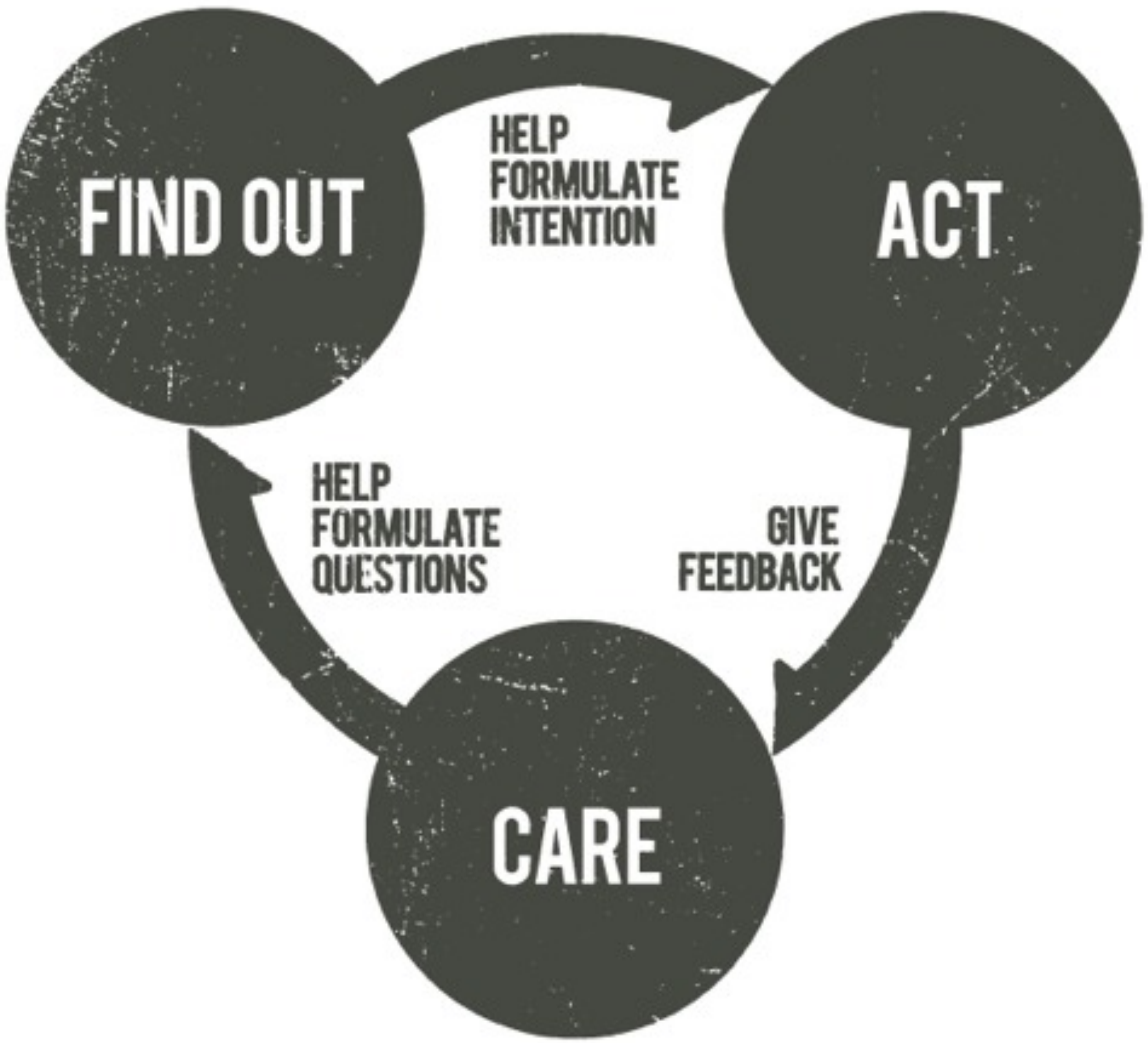
A circular relation

One way to understand what goes on is to view information and action as two elements in a circular or even spiral relationship. The third element is attention, or caring. It works like this:

- ✳ I take in information about things I care about. If you decide to buy a particular make of bicycle, you see nothing but them on the street, where you saw none before.
- ✳ I care about things I believe I can affect by my own actions.

Conversely, things I believe I *can’t* influence – where I feel powerless – are things I care little about; therefore I take in little information about them.

There are of course exceptions. I might be passionately interested in cars even though I see no possibility of owning one. Some people actually take in information about things they believe they *can't* influence, often in a limited subject area, without actually absorbing it, but rather spewing it out again over anyone who will listen. You may know someone who seems to delight in telling you that the world is about to come to an end, or the moral fibre of the country is in total collapse? Still, most of us in most contexts behave in accordance with the circular diagram.



Breaking into the circle

If you want to bring about change, for yourself, for other people, or for an organization, you need to break into the circle. The circular relationship can be very rigid and quite difficult to break into. Or… more correctly, it's extremely difficult to break into the circle only via *information*, as the description shows. This is where most of us try to do it, most of the time.

The other two points on the circle can be more fruitful.

I can break into the circle at the point of action, which seems quite the reverse of all conventional wisdom on influencing people's behaviour which dictates; first comes the changed behaviour, *then* the thirst for information, *then* the change in attitudes and beliefs.

I can also break into the circle at the point of caring – activating my 'elephant'! – especially if I have personal interaction with people. This is why – as the best sales people know – the most important skill in selling is to be able to listen. In a coaching situation, this means above all *listening for meaning*. What is important to this person?

The circle becomes a spiral

Once the circle has been breached, it can in the best case become an upward spiral – an empowerment spiral. Between the three pillars of the spiral (Caring, Finding Out, Taking action) are three other important dimensions of empowerment.

Between Caring and Finding out come questions. Learning to formulate good questions is a basic element of empowerment.

Between Finding out and Taking action comes intention. As we become more empowered, we become more skilful in using our willpower to formulate attractive, feasible intentions; and to formulate our own criteria for success.

Between Taking action and Caring comes feedback. Seeing the results of my actions – whether 'successful' or not – is a prerequisite for expanding my scope of caring – and thus moving up the spiral.

Spirals can have more than one direction

One reason empowerment is so important today is that there are many forces combining to create downward spirals.

At a time in history when humankind, especially affluent humankind, has powers of choice formerly only dreamed of by kings and emperors, more and more people experience themselves as powerless.

Isn't it strange?

Mass media as well as politicians seem to conspire to disempower. Their menu of failures and disasters is guaranteed to help most people experience helplessness and frustration.

The rapid change and shifting balances of power in the world have also created a situation where there is for most people a widening gap between what we believe about the way the world is, and what is actually happening. Consequently we are able to take in less and less of the information that might help us make sense of life and the world, creating a *disempowerment* spiral.

In this context, the work of empowerment is perhaps the most important contribution that any of us can make to the future of humankind.

The basis of empowerment is caring. Everyone cares about something. Caring, and then experimentation: is there something I can try?

Design of effective programs

The ‘empowerment spiral’ gives a good basis for effective program *design*; and indeed for review of existing programs. A checklist to search for areas in which your program could be tuned up can be found in the six intervention points:

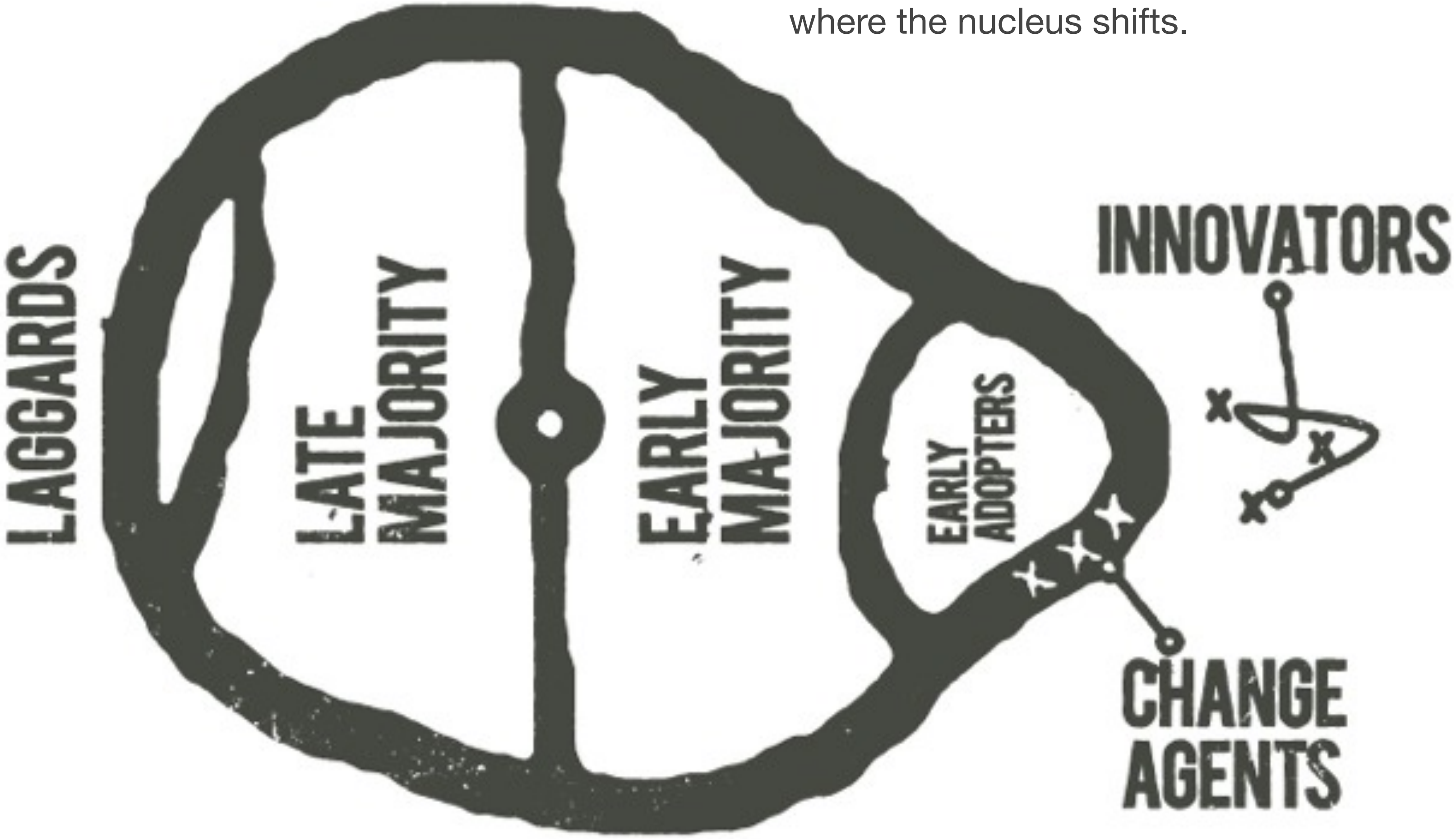
1. CARING
   a) About program participants
   b) About the program topic
   c) About each other
2. FORMULATING QUESTIONS
   a) What is interesting?
   b) What is important?
   c) What do I really *need* to know in order to take action?
3. FINDING OUT
   d) Who do I trust?
   e) Where to look?
4. FORMULATION INTENTION
   a) I will do this, by that date; link to another event if possible
   b) I need resources and help/skills
   c) I will know I have succeeded when…
5. TAKING EXPERIMENTAL ACTION
   a) *Do it!* Small steps, low threshold
   b) A reasonable number – choice, but not too much
   c) Tracking and support; tools
6. FEEDBACK
   a) This is what happened
   b) How it could have been (even) better
   c) Extrapolation and dissemination

Other design principles are:

7. CLEAR, SOLUTION-ORIENTED FOCUS
8. INVITATION RATHER THAN EXHORTATION
9. CHOICE OF LANGUAGE
   a) Appropriate to the actual phase of social diffusion (see below)
   b) Appropriate to the major audience
10. CONTINUITY
11. COMMUNITY TEAM-WORK, ’WE’ ORIENTATION
12. LEGITIMACY

Diffusion of innovations

How new behaviour spreads through a population is much researched, and often referred to as 'social diffusion'. From this research has emerged, among other things, the concept of the 'change agent'.



Like an amoeba?

Alan AtKisson has compared the social diffusion process to the movement of an amoeba: the amoeba extends a part of itself in the direction it wants to go, and as more and more of 'it' tip in that direction it finally reaches a tipping point where the nucleus shifts.

The relevant actors to promote change

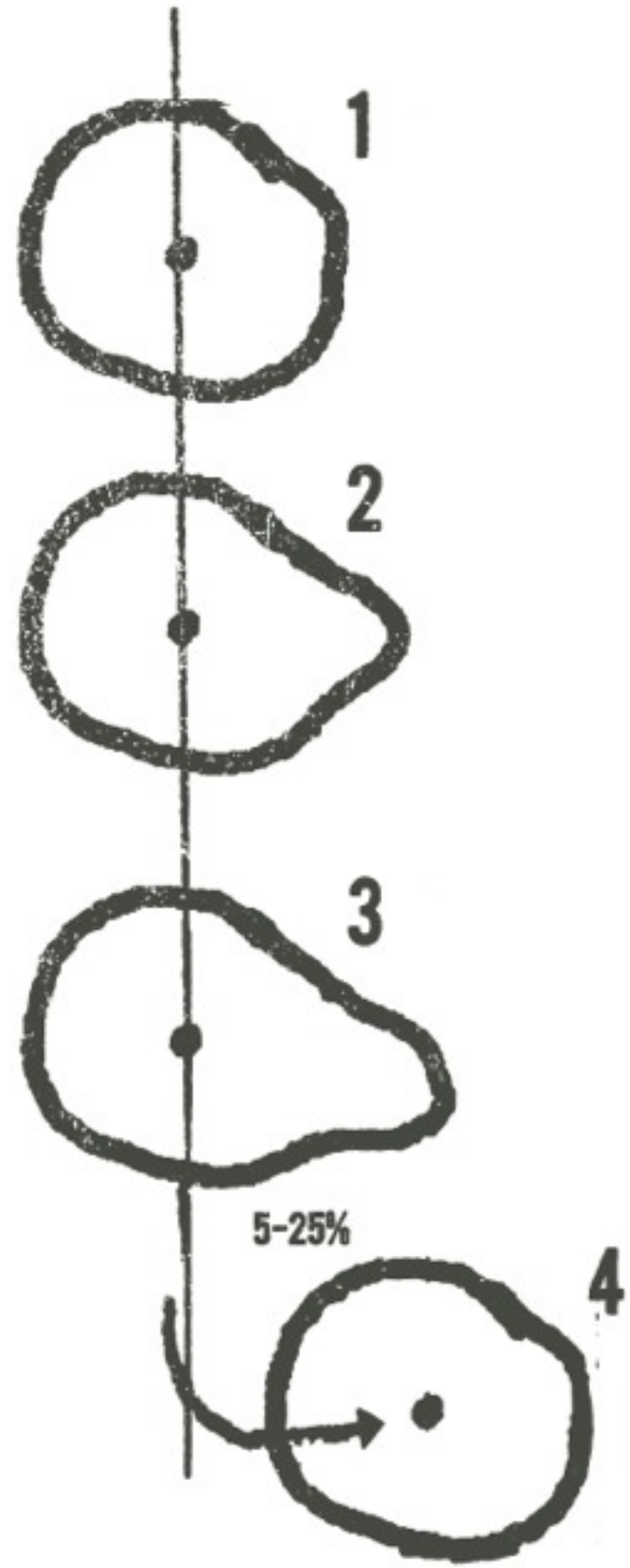
Innovators: suggest/ invent/ have a different behaviour. The challenge for these actors to bring about change is that they are perceived as 'not one of us'; they need help to be heard.

Change agents: bridge the gap by bringing the attention of others to the ideas of the innovators. This is like the concept of the 'first follower'.

Early adopters: can be up to 40% of the population. When about 12 % of the population adopts the new behaviour, the 'amoeba' begins to move.

The change process

The figure below has four steps that explain how the change process happens.



Step 1 describes a ‘status quo’. The change happens in relation to the perceived norm, which is represented by the central dot in the figures. The norm is the answer given to the question: “What is normal behaviour in relation to ‘X’?”. For example: How people make coffee? They use coffee filters. Using coffee filter is the norm in such a social context.This norm allows a variety of behaviours. Some use paper filters, others use cloth filters, and some people use socks. All these behaviours fit within the perceived norm. If someone uses the French press or an espresso machine, they are outsiders, “one of them”.

Step 2. Through the change agents, new behaviour begins to spread. Although the perceived norm is the same, some alternative behaviour is already being practiced within the society.

Step 3. As the new behaviour spreads – to the early adopters – the behaviour of the population continues to change although if you ask people about “normal” behaviour is still that “People use coffee filters”.

Step 4. Finally a tipping point is reached where the perceived norm changes. For many it can seem like a sudden change; however the new behaviour has been spreading for some time and the suddenness only applies to the perceived norm.

Criteria for diffusion

If an innovation – a new behaviour – is to spread from early adopters to early majority, certain criteria need to be met.

1. *Relative Advantage*

Is the innovation better than the status quo? Will people perceive it as better? Does it look as though it saves money or time, or gives higher status, or is simply more enjoyable? If not, the innovation will not spread quickly, if at all.

2. *Compatibility*
How does the innovation fit with people's past experiences and present needs? If it doesn't fit both well, it won't spread well. Does it require a change in existing values? If members of the culture feel as though they have to become very different people to adopt the innovation, they will be more resistant to it.

3. *Complexity*
How difficult is the innovation to understand and apply? The more difficult, the slower the adoption process.

4. *Trialability*
Can people "try out" the innovation first? Or must they commit to it all at once? If the latter, people will be far more cautious about adopting it.

5. *Observability*
How visible are the results of using it? If people adopt it, can the difference be discerned by others? If not, the innovation will spread more slowly.

Change happens in a balance between dissatisfaction and hope.

Group dynamics: I, We, It

According to **Kay Tift**, in any group, three major topics are always on the agenda. We can call them I, We and It.

I is about who I am and how I feel right now. It is also about I–thou relationships within the group.

We is about our behaviour towards each other, for example our meeting culture, everything to do with our common relations.

It is about what we do together, our collective task or focus.

‘It’ is often what appears to be on the agenda, while I and We are hidden under the surface. It is common to try to be super-effective from the beginning, discouraging any deviation from It. Under the surface, I and We lie in wait.

Those unexpressed topics can pop up and drain time and energy from the work of the group, which may remain forever stuck at an ineffective "beginner" stage.

If, instead, we consciously allow I and We topics to surface, we might find that the group initially spends a lot of time on these topics, and less on It. But over time the balance will shift and the group will develop into a highly effective group where people enjoy meeting, manifest creativity and feel that they can bring up topics of importance to them.

A group with a positive dynamic is learning how to satisfy these needs. We learn how to satisfy our individual needs, our needs as a group, our need to accomplish It.

In relation to sustainable development, "The startling fact is that ecological wisdom does not consist in understanding how to live in accord with nature; it consists in understanding how to get humans to agree on how to live in accord with nature."

According to this view, sustainable development is primarily a social rather than a technical question. Put differently: I and We are at least as important as It.

Empowering coaching

Learning can be enhanced by coaching: one to one, group coaching, or mutual coaching. Here are some basic principles of empowering coaching.

Role of the coach

The role of an empowering coach is to help people to

- ✳ Understand the context for their actions
- ✳ Focus on what is or might be possible: solutions rather than problems
- ✳ Define their own goals, explore what is possible, find opportunities
- ✳ Formulate their intention to change – and the help they may need to realize their intentions
- ✳ See the results of changes they make

As a coach, you are a midwife of individual and group knowledge / wisdom. You need to be engaged in your own journey of self-empowerment and self-discovery. This is how you understand the needs of others.

Major tasks of the coach

Your *first task* with a person or group is to build and maintain a safe space in which the person or people you are coaching feel able to ask for and give mutual support. Your major tools are:

- ✳ Trust in the wisdom of the process
- ✳ Ability to communicate on the 'elephant' level – see *The elephant and the rider.*
- ✳ Ability to 'park' your own concerns and beliefs, particularly your judgements
- ✳ A willingness and ability to respectfully interrupt aggression or negative criticism, and turn the energy behind it to constructive use

A group where this kind of working atmosphere has been established is in a good position to practice mutual coaching.

The ***second task*** concerns how you listen, and how you respond to what you hear:

- ✳ Listen attentively and with respect – see *Deep Listening*™ and *Parking*
- ✳ Let the speaker see that you hear and understand them

- If it seems they are stuck in a problem, *don’t try to solve it!* – ask whether they in fact see any possibility for action
- If appropriate, recall for them the power of their own hopes, vision, positive experiences

To do this successfully, you need to be on the alert for your own problems and fears. Recognizing them can help you to empathize with the other; not recognizing them can interfere with your communication.

The ***third task*** is connected with how you speak: with your own willingness to hold a solution focus and to speak from the heart.

- Ask questions!
- “Be yourself”. Acknowledge your emotional responses to what happens, and practice parking: stay with the process.
- When you need to bring up a tricky question: take a deep breath and say what you’re feeling. Use “I” and “me” statements – not “you”.
- And remember to keep returning to a focus on *solutions* – not problems.

*The **fourth element*** is the insight that all of this is much easier to say than to do. Give yourself a pat on the back when it goes well, but without blaming yourself when you realize it didn’t go so well. More important is the ability to *notice* whether you’re doing well or not, and thus to learn from your own experience.

Reflection praxis

> *"Our intentions stretch out into the world around us, and also extend into the future. We are linked to our environment and to each other."*
> Rupert Sheldrake

Reflection is the crucial basis for learning. To make regular time, however small, for self-observation, alone or in a group, is an invaluable tool – not least in a sustainability context, where outcomes cannot be predicted nor goals defined with any certainty.

Warren Ziegler talked about ‘communities of learners’ and ‘dialogue circles’ as a basis for ongoing praxis. Some key general praxis questions – whether in a group or alone – are

✳ What is it I[we] am[are] doing?

✳ Why do I/we do it?

✳ How does it feel to do it? What feels particularly good?

✳ What would I[we] like to do differently?

Group praxis can be done by telephone, if suitable protocols are developed. One protocol is similar to a talking stick: when a general question is put to the group, members reply in a predetermined sequence (for instance, alphabetical or conference-list order). Each speaker explicitly ’hands’ the stick to the next on the list. It is OK to ’pass’, or to ask for the stick on the next round.

Is it possible to establish praxis dialogues via internet? We would like to experiment with those of you who are interested. A web space is being opened for the purpose.

Pattern Language

The emergence of new patterns is a fundamental property of complex systems. The discipline of generative pattern languages aims to capture the patterns underlying success, and use them to establish structures and practices: pattern analysis in business has shown that most highly productive organisations exhibit the same patterns of organisation, process and introspection. These patterns are missing from organisations that are less productive or less successful.

There is thus nothing new in a pattern perspective. What is novel about the work here is its attempt to use patterns in a generative way to define or develop a pedagogy specifically useful for sustainable development.

Pattern language puts into communicable form (or language) detailed work patterns. In the words of **Christopher Alexander** et al.

Each pattern describes a problem which occurs over and over again, and then describes the core of the solution to that problem, in such a way that you can use this solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice.

Looked at in this way, "a pattern is an encapsulated story of a successful practice, optimized for rapid location and re-use of knowledge relevant to the type of problems that the practice resolves".

Put another way, patterns are meaning-making tools. They:

- ✳ Provide a conduit to externalize tacit knowledge
- ✳ Allow knowledge to be stored and retrieved, and for this reason they extend "group memory" and "group intelligence"
- ✳ Build a language with which "communities of practice" can share experience
- ✳ Facilitate the socialization and recombination of knowledge (ultimately resulting in hyper-productive, learning and knowledge-creating communities).

Simultaneously (from the complexity point of view) they provide:

- ✳ A way to capture the emergent patterns of a complex system

* A way to capture the underlying "building blocks" of a domain
* A means to record the present in ways that lead into the future and catalyse change

Thus, a pedagogical pattern library would enable the sharing of social and knowledge capital between educational communities by supporting collaborative problem solving and competence building. The most powerful approach will continually balance possibility, theory, relationship and structure. The dynamic balance between these four factors keeps a community of practitioners vibrant and alive.

Action Research

Classical research, even applied research, is a long process. Typically, the time from formulation of a question to translation into practice of answers seldom takes less than a decade. For this reason alone, its applicability to sustainable development – a matter of extreme urgency – can be called into question. However there are other reasons than speed for examining the possible role of Action Research in developing sustainability.

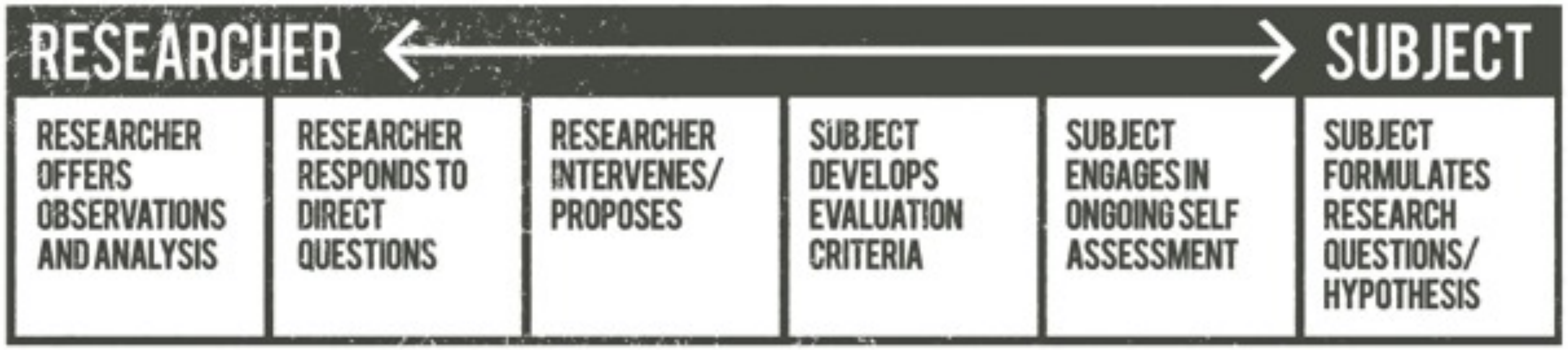
One such reason is that most (though not all) of the scientific and technical problems associated with sustainable development already have more or less adequate solutions. The key question is not how to make the science work, but how to make it work in practice, on a wide scale: it is a political and behavioural problem of how to change mind-sets, attitudes, values and behaviours. In such areas, classical research methods are of limited use – see below, *Researcher participation/ practitioner research*.

Another reason is that sustainable development itself represents a paradigm shift, in the sense originally delineated by Kuhn. Such a shift presupposes the ability to 'catch sight of' one's assumptions. This is arguably easier in dialogue in a mixed group of researchers and practitioners.

Researcher participation/ practitioner research

Action Research is not a single phenomenon but rather a range of methods and approaches. What they have in common is the convergence of researcher and practitioner: researchers participate – in some measure – in the activity being studied, while practitioners contribute – in some measure – to the research.

In other words, the intention of an action researcher is not only to observe, study and describe but also to influence, change the course of events – and observe and record the results. Similarly, the intention of a practitioner in an action research project is not only to engage in an effective change process but also to learn from the process – and to contribute to an analysis that will permit others to learn from the process, too. To a greater or lesser extent, the 'object' of the research becomes a 'subject'.



One may imagine the scope of Action Research on a scale from R(researcher)-dominated on the left to S(subject)-dominated on the right, where some of the 'stations' might be as in the table above.

Is it possible to research without influencing?

In the classical view of research the ideal researcher is purely objective and has no relation or interaction with the object. It may be questioned whether such a pure approach is possible in any situation where the 'object' is a person or a number of people; at the very least the researcher needs to be sensitive to her/his potential influence.

Different departure points for Action Research

A German social psychologist, Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) is often credited with 'inventing' Action Research. He is quoted as saying that "In order to understand a social system one must change it," and "No research without action, no action without research".

Vikegård discerns two major types of Action Research, the 'northern tradition' and the 'southern tradition'.

✳ The Northern Tradition is here seen as pragmatic and utilitarian, including

- A consensus view of society
- Development of working life, strategies for management, leadership and employee participation
- The ”practitioner” is often seen in a professional role

✳ The Southern Tradition is seen as ideological and political

- A conflict/protagonist view of society
- Development of society and of change processes, including a feministic branch
- The ”practitioner” can be anyone, from professionals to public, clients, patients, pupils

Dual perspective

A general characteristic of action research is the need for the researcher to hold a dual perspective. S/he is at one and the same time an active participant *and* an observer and analyst. This may or may not also be true of the practitioners/ subjects, depending on the approach chosen, but is of necessity true of the researcher. There is an analogy to the kind of psychotherapy where the therapist consciously enters into an active relationship with the patient/client and simultaneously needs to hold responsibility for the process.

Thus, the practitioner/subject may in principle take full responsibility for *evaluating* the course of events, including formulating research questions and criteria for success; but the researcher always retains overall responsibility for the broader analysis.

Some open questions

It could be claimed that all research concerned with people and their behaviour (and indeed also some other kinds of research) are of necessity "action research" – and would potentially benefit from a recognition of this fact, enabling the impact of the researcher *and* the insights of the practitioner to be included as parameters without jeopardizing scientific quality.

This is however not to propose that such inclusion is easy. There are many open questions on the topic of ensuring the quality of action research, including questions concerned with

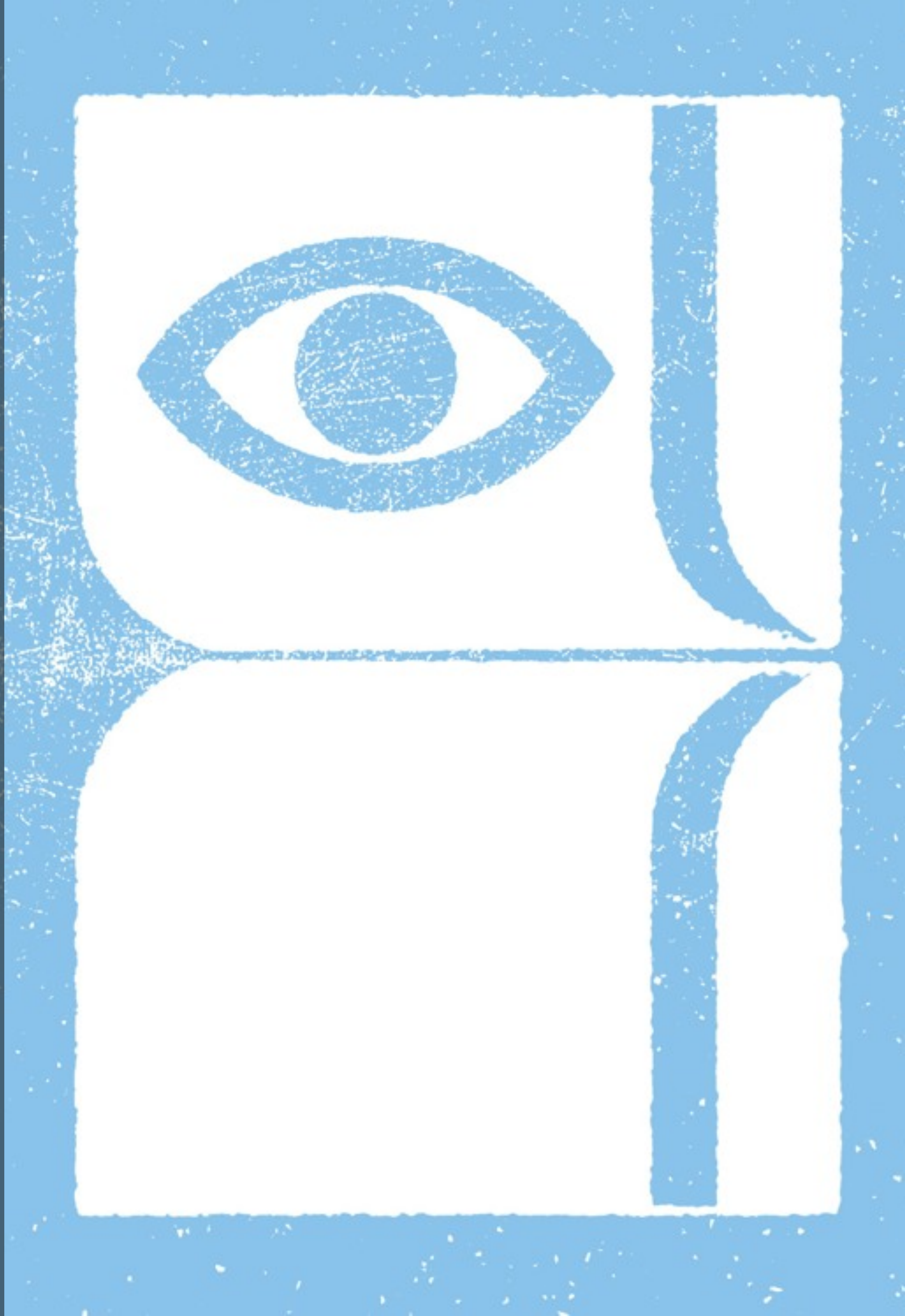
- Communication and dialogue
- Involvement and distance
- Connections and boundaries between 'facts', 'opinions' and 'feelings'

Who is doing action research today?

One of the areas most often mentioned in connection with action research is education/ schools. In this arena a change process is initiated by practitioners, who engage researchers to support them.

There seems at times to be some fuzziness between action research and Action Learning. A useful distinction is that Action Learning is something you do for yourself: I learn through action/ experience, and through seeing the results of my actions. Action research, on the other hand, is concerned with learning for the benefit of others. The experience and results must be replicable and transferable – offered, taught – to others not part of the original practitioner population.

Further reading



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Global Action Plan International

Global Action Plan (GAP) International is an NGO network that has worked with sustainable behaviour change since 1990. To accelerate learning, GAP has been developing the concept and practice of “Learning for Change”. It goes beyond simply sharing “best practice”, and is a systematic approach to enabling practitioners to make their learning accessible to others by focusing on patterns of behaviour, and in particular on mental patterns that shape behaviour.

SWEDESD

SWEDESD is the Swedish International Centre of Education for Sustainable Development. One of its objectives is to have ESD practitioners and researchers examine in depth the elements of an effective SD pedagogy, to critically explore its boundaries and to experiment with new approaches and methods.

Alan AtKisson

Author of several books, over twenty years of international experience in sustainability innovation and leadership, and well known as an inspiring speaker and presenter - with a passion for helping others succeed.

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André Benaim

Andre Benaim is passionate about facilitating personal and collective development. Currently, with Global Action Plan (GAP) International, he works primarily with initiatives that promote learning from experience.

The work entails project management, facilitation of workshops, as well as the refinement of content and methods. Andre is also a tutor for the Master's in Strategic Leadership for Sustainability (MSLS), in Karlskrona Sweden; and a PhD student with Lund University.

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Chip and Dan Heath

Chip Heath is the Thrive Foundation of Youth Professor of Organizational Behavior in the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University. He is the co-author of Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard, which debuted at #1 on the New York Times and Wall Street Journal bestseller lists. The Heath brothers previously co-wrote the critically acclaimed book Made to Stick, which was named the Best Business Book of the Year, spent 24 months on the BusinessWeek bestseller list, and has been translated into 29 languages, the last of which was Slovak.

Dan Heath is a Senior Fellow at Duke University's CASE center, which supports social entrepreneurs. He is the co-author of Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard, which debuted at #1 on the New York Times and Wall Street Journal bestseller lists. The Heath brothers previously co-wrote the critically acclaimed book Made to Stick, which was named the Best Business Book of the Year, spent 24 months on the BusinessWeek bestseller list, and has been translated into 29 languages, the last of which was Slovak.

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Christopher Alexander

An architect noted for his theories about design, and for more than 200 building projects around the world. Reasoning that users know more about the buildings they need than any architect could, he produced and validated (in collaboration with Sarah Ishikawa and Murray Silverstein) a "pattern language" designed to empower anyone to design and build at any scale.

The concept of a generic 'pattern language' has since been applied in different disciplines, including for instance computer software development.

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Section 3 - Pattern Language

Etienne Wenger

Etienne Wenger is a globally recognized thought leader in the field of social learning theory, communities of practice, and their application to organizations. He has authored articles and books on the topic, including Situated Learning; Communities of Practice: learning, meaning, and identity; Cultivating Communities of Practice: a guide to managing knowledge; and Digital Habitats, which tackles issues related to the use of technology.

Etienne's work is influencing both theory and practice in a wide range of disciplines. Cultivating communities of practice is recognized as a key component of a learning strategy in a rapidly growing number of organizations across many sectors. Etienne helps organizations apply his ideas through consulting, public speaking, and workshops. He is also active in the academic sphere.

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Section 2 - Community of practice

Frans Lenglet

Frans Lenglet is the Director of SWEDESD. He brings to his assignment a PhD in International Development Education and Communication from Stanford University and more than 35 years of international experience in the domain of education and development.

Lenglet's experience includes work with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNESCO, the World Bank and the International Labour Organisation. He has lived and worked in a variety of countries in Africa, Asia, North America and Europe. Under his direction, SWEDESD has contributed to developing and disseminating the Learning for Change methodology.

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Kay Tift

Kay Tift is author of a PhD thesis on the topic of Group Dynamics, and until her retirement held many workshops on this subject. She is the originator of the ’I, We, It’ model described in section 3.

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Marilyn Mehlmann

Marilyn Mehlmann is head of development and training at Global Action Plan International. She was awarded the Rachel Carson Prize 2011 "… for her long-term efforts to involve individuals, companies and NGOs in acting sustainably." Her experience combines psychosynthesis, empowerment and action research to co-create new methods and tools for personal and professional development, including the 'Learning for Change' methodology.

Ms. Mehlmann is a Vice-President of the Union of International Associations (UIA), and a member of several advisory boards.

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Robert Fritz

Robert J. Fritz (born 1943 in Cambridge, Massachusetts) is an author, management consultant, composer,[1] and filmmaker. He is known for his development of "Structural Dynamics," the study of how structural relationships impact behaviour from individuals to organizations. His books, starting with The Path of Least Resistance, develop the theory and application of Structural Dynamics and the creative process.

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Shepherd Urenje

Shepherd Urenje works as a Programme Specialist in education and learning at SWEDESD. He has a broad experience of materials development, course development and research from working with Education for Sustainable Development in Southern Africa, South East Asia and Europe.

His professional background includes over 25 years teaching geography, environmental science and development education. He is currently pursuing a doctorate in International Education at the University of London.

Urenje is part of the international team developing and facilitating Learning for Change.

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Warren Ziegler

A world renowned futurist, researcher, teacher, author, and enspirited envisioner, Warren Ziegler served as Regional Director of Eastern Nigeria for the Peace Corps in the 1960s. He was Director of the Educational Policy Research Center at Syracuse University, a senior fellow to the Center for Discovery and Invention at Long Island University and a senior fellow of the Learning Center for Creative Change at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. Warren also held a senior position with the U.S. Agency for International Development in Washington, D.C. He taught at university level in the U.S., Canada, Denmark, England, Venezuela, and Yugoslavia.

Warren published extensively in the fields of lifelong learning, post-secondary education, civic literacy, leadership and policy planning, futures work, creative conflict and enspirited envisioning. He pioneered enspiriting techniques and is the author of numerous futures books and workbooks. He developed (i.a.) the Deep Listening method, and worked with Global Action Plan facilitators for a decade.

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