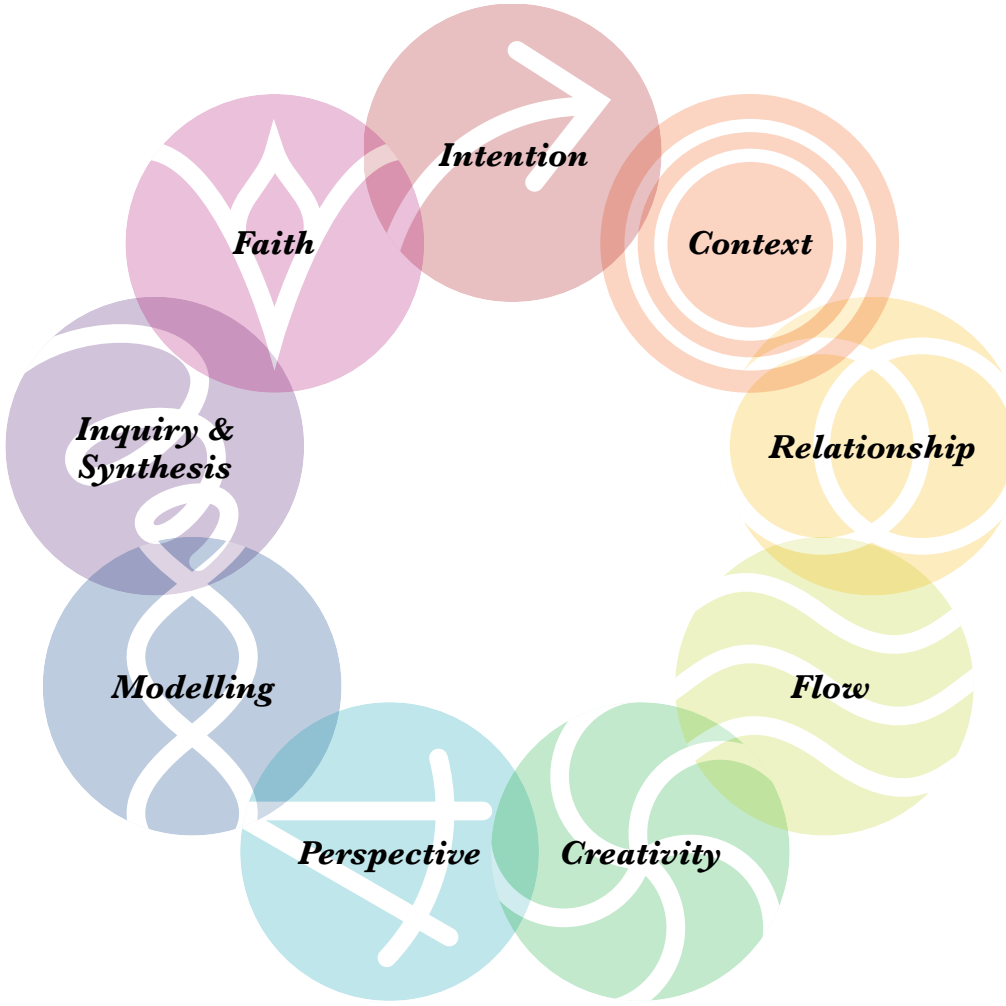
Introduction to Group Works

A Pattern Language for Bringing Life to Meetings & Other Gatherings



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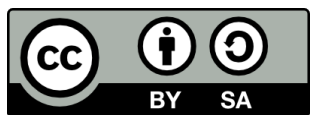

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Introduction **5**

About this Book **6**

Other Versions of Group Works **7**

Learning the Patterns **8**

The Pattern Categories **11**

Intention **13**

Purpose 14
Commitment 15
Invitation 16
Priority Focus 17
Setting Intention 18

Context **19**

History and Context 20
Aesthetics of Space 21

Circle **22**

Gaia 23
Group Culture 24
Nooks in Space and Time 25
Power of Place 26
Whole System in the Room 27

Relationship **28**

Tend Relationships 29
Appreciation 30
Breaking Bread Together 31
Celebrate 32
Good Faith Assumptions 33
Honour Each Person 34
Hosting 35
Power Shift 36
Shared Airtime 37
Transparency 38

Flow **39**

Divergence and Convergence Rhythm 40
Balance Process and Content 41
Balance Structure and Flexibility 42
Closing 43
Follow the Energy 44
Iteration 45
Opening and Welcome 46
Preparedness 47
Reflection-Action Cycle 48
Rest 49
Right Size Bite 50
Ritual 51
Seasoned Timing 52
Subgroup and Whole Group 53
Trajectory 54

Creativity **55**

Generate Possibilities 56
Challenge 57
Expressive Arts 58
Improvise 59
Mode Choice 60
Playfulness 61
Power of Constraints 62

Perspective **63**

Viewpoint Shift 64
Common Ground 65

Embrace Dissonance and Difference 66
Fractal 67
Go Meta 68
Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees 69
Time Shift 70
Translation 71
Unity and Diversity 72
Value the Margins 73

Modelling ***74***
Holding Space 75
Appropriate Boundaries 76
Courageous Modelling 77
Discharging 78
Dwell with Emotions 79
Guerrilla Facilitation 80
Listening 81
Mirroring 82
Not about You 83
Self-Awareness 84
Shared Leadership and Roles 85
Simplify 86
Taking Responsibility 87
Witness with Compassion 88

Inquiry & Synthesis ***89***
Inform the Group Mind 90
Deliberate 91
Distilling 92
Experts on Tap 93
Feedback 94
Go Deeper 95
Harvesting 96
Inquiry 97
Mapping and Measurement 98
Moving Toward Alignment 99
Naming 100
Story 101
Yes, and 102

Faith ***103***
Emergence 104
All Grist for the Mill 105
Dive In 106
Letting Go 107
Magic 108
Presence 109
Silence 110
Spirit 111
Trust the Wisdom of the Group 112

More Information… ***113***
About the Group Pattern Language Project 113
What is a Pattern Language? 117
What is a Pattern? 119

Index by Category ***123***

Index by Alpha ***126***

More Detail on Patterns ***129***

Photo Credits ***131***

Introduction

Why is it that some meetings bring life to your soul, while others leave you wishing you'd never stepped in the room? What happens at the best ones, that makes them productive, fulfilling, sometimes even magic?

The *Group Pattern Language* names what skilled facilitators and other participants do to make things work—when the *Group Works*. The 91 group process patterns represented here reflect generations of accumulated wisdom that lie at the heart of successful meetings, conferences, retreats, town halls and other group sessions, large and small. Much of our collective work depends on conversations: quality interchanges by which we together envision, shape and begin to enact the world we desire.

The content here is more specific than values and less specific than tips and techniques, cutting across existing methodologies with a designer's eye to capture the patterns that repeat.

You can use these patterns to support your process as a group designer, facilitator or participant. Use them to plan your next event, distill lessons from a past group experience, find creative insight in the middle of a process, or deepen your learning about the nature of groups.

About this Book

Introduction to Group Works: A Pattern Language for Bringing Life to Meetings & Other Gatherings is offered as alternative to the original card deck version of *Group Works*. The eBook (Kindle & ePub) and PDF editions have many internal links for you to see the connections between patterns and categories, and the print edition is a small and handy portable reference. In addition, these editions may serve as a starting point for a longer reference work about the *Group Pattern Language*.

The original Group Works was created by more than fifty volunteers (the Group Pattern Language Project) from diverse organizational backgrounds, who collaborated over three years to express the core wisdom at the heart of successful group sessions. This project was led by Tree Bressen, Dave Pollard, and Sue Woehrlin. For more information about the origins and creators of Group Works, see GroupWorkDeck.org/acknowledgements.

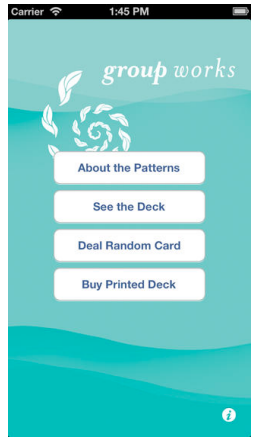
To learn more about the patterns, and participate in the future, join the Group Pattern Language Project at GroupWorksDeck.org/participation.

Other Versions of Group Works

This book is available for free as an Enhanced PDF that is downloadable as part of the demo showcase for the Infinite PDF for the Mac and iPad at InfinitePDF.com.

You can purchase Group Works: A Pattern Language for Bringing Life to Meetings and Other Gatherings as a printed deck, along with supplementary materials. It is also available for free download to print yourself at GroupWorksDeck.org.

An iPhone application is available from the iPhone App Store: https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/group-works/



Learning the Patterns

The most important place to start is to know is "why" these patterns were created. The answers are contained in these questions:

- *Why is it that some meetings bring life to your soul?*
- *While others leave you wishing you'd never stepped in the room?*
- *What happens at the best ones, that makes them productive, fulfilling, sometimes even magic?*

So begin your learning journey by remembering one of those great meetings. Don't worry about how or why, just recall that powerful feeling after a successful group meeting. It is that feeling which 50+ facilitators over three years attempted to distill their best practices to understand and repeat. These are the patterns they came up with.

The next step we recommend is to look more deeply at two patterns. Look quickly through the book and find one that calls to you as a skill that you have some strength in. Then quickly pick one in which you feel you are weak. Don't worry too much about choosing them—instead, once you have picked two patterns spend a little time to learn more about them.

Understand that every word and every part of the pattern has meaning. It can also be useful to go to the website and click on the pattern name at GroupWorksDeck.org/patterns_by_name and see what has been written up about it. You can even contribute your own experience or links there.

This gives you two starting points of knowledge about the patterns—how do you grow your knowledge from there? We suggest you start by learning the categories.

The Category Keystones:

The next chapter briefly describes each of the 9 categories of patterns. They are in rough order of when you need to think about them in a group process. Read the description of each category, and look at the boldface "Keystone" pattern card for each category. The Keystone that has been chosen the most representative pattern for that category.

Start with just these 9 Keystone patterns. Read one a day or week and try to embody some aspect of that Keystone pattern for that period of time.

Once you understand the Keystones, it becomes far easier to understand the rest of the patterns.

Here are some more things you can do:

For each category:

Take a Keystone pattern and look all other patterns in the same category. Try to understand how the other cards add to the Keystone to fill out the category.

Like you did with your opening exercise, pick one that is a strength and one that you need to work on. Identify why you are strong with one and weak with another. Can you share something you've learned that makes you strong in that pattern? Maybe post it in your blog or on the website. Do you have a question about a pattern that you don't understand well or have a weakness in? See if it is on the website, and if not, ask a question on the pattern email discussion list about it.

For each Keystone:

Pick a Keystone pattern. Take a look at each of the Related patterns for that Keystone—each was chosen if it would be helpful or supportive to implement that pattern. Look in particular at those patterns that are not in the same category as the Keystone. Ask yourself the question of how this pattern serves the rest? How else are these patterns are connected? What do they have in common, how are they different?

More activities:

From here there are a wide variety of activities that you can do to better understand the patterns, at GroupWorksDeck.org/activities. When you are starting out, we particularly recommend the following activities as they do not require a group:

GroupWorksDeck.org/intuitive-guidance

GroupWorksDeck.org/self-assessment-and-self-directed-learning

GroupWorksDeck.org/learning-while-observing

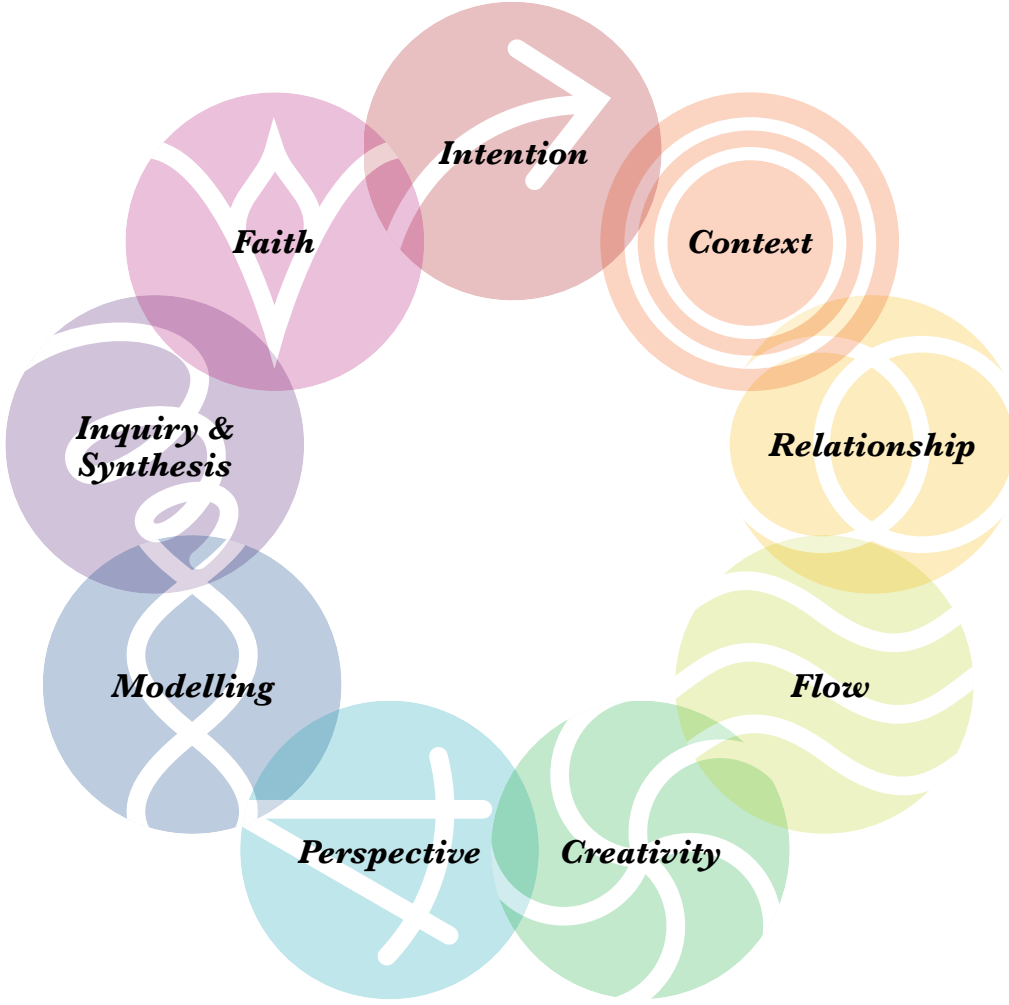
GroupWorksDeck.org/it-depends-exercise

Most of the activities listed above are group activities, but if you don't have a local group to talk with them about, consider learning how to do a Google Hangout and inviting friends, colleagues and participants of the Group Works email list to join you to work through one of these activities. Up to 10 people can be in the same Hangout and it is free.

The Pattern Categories

The patterns of the *Group Pattern Language* are divided into 9 categories (each with corresponding icon and colour). The category represents a group need addressed by that set of patterns.

The categories are listed in the rough order in which they might naturally be considered in event design; starting with ***Intention***, leading to ***Flow*** to finish with ***Inquiry & Synthesis***—all surrounded by ***Faith***. Of course reality is a bit more complex.



While categories will aid in your learning the *Group Pattern Language*, one could make the case for including some patterns in two or even three categories. For the purpose of simplifying the overall list, we determined one primary category for each pattern here.

Each category is named in ***bold-italic***, followed that category's "Keystone" pattern in **bold**. Other pattern names are plain text.

Category	**Key Pattern**
1. ***Intention***	**Purpose**
2. ***Context***	**History and Context**
3. ***Relationship***	**Tend Relationships**
4. ***Flow***	**Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**
5. ***Creativity***	**Generate Possibilities**
6. ***Perspective***	**Viewpoint Shift**
7. ***Modelling***	**Holding Space**
8. ***Inquiry & Synthesis***	**Inform the Group Mind**
9. ***Faith***	**Emergence**

Intention

Serving and attending to the larger purpose for the gathering and how it is manifested, including addressing its longer term meaning and consequence. Why are we here, what's our shared passion, and what we are aiming to accomplish.

Keystone Pattern: **Purpose**

Patterns: Commitment, Invitation, Priority Focus, Setting Intention

Purpose

Purpose is the destination we choose from a sea of possibilities. Shared purpose calls us together and focuses us, evolving as understanding deepens. It gives impetus and energy to our work—when we're connected with genuine purpose, energy flows and things happen.

Key Pattern for Category: ***Intention***

Related: Commitment, Priority Focus, Setting Intention, Common Ground, Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees, **Holding Space**, Spirit

Commitment

A group dedicated to its work persists through obstacles, distractions, and lulls. Remind yourselves of your larger purpose and what you really care about. As the group moves toward action, support effectiveness by getting clear on who will do what by when and how to ensure it really happens.

Category: ***Intention***

Related: **Purpose**, Setting Intention, Honour Each Person, Closing, Courageous Modelling, Shared Leadership and Roles, Taking Responsibility

Invitation

Bring people together by expressing a clear call toward shared purpose, tuned to getting the right people into the room with shared intent. Let people know why this is important and what to expect, while requesting the honour of their presence.

Category: ***Intention***

Related: **Purpose**, Setting Intention, **History and Context**, Whole System in the Room, **Tend Relationships**, Common Ground, Appropriate Boundaries

Priority Focus

Guide the group's energies, pace, and trajectory appropriately to achieve the stated intention and purpose. Help the group set and stick to priorities, recognizing that what's most important to the group sometimes shifts.

Category: ***Intention***

Related: **Purpose**, Setting Intention, Trajectory, Balance Process and Content, **Holding Space**, Appropriate Boundaries, Moving Toward Alignment

Setting Intention

Envision and name what will be done to reach toward or achieve the purpose of the group. Setting Intention reminds us of our responsibilities, guiding us to actions that fulfill the reason for which a gathering was called.

Category: ***Intention***

Related: **Purpose**, Commitment, Invitation, Priority Focus, Opening and Welcome, Ritual, **Holding Space**

Context

Understanding and working with the broader context and circumstances both in place and in culture.

Keystone Pattern: **History and Context**

Patterns: Aesthetics of Space, Circle, Gaia, Group Culture, Nooks in Space and Time, Power of Place, Whole System in the Room

History and Context

History and Context hugely influence how the rest of the patterns are invoked. Pay attention to why things are the way they are and what the people coming expect. Tune in to discern when to respect the existing culture vs. when it benefits to stretch toward something new.

Key Pattern for Category: ***Context***

Related: Group Culture, Opening and Welcome, Preparedness, **Viewpoint Shift**, Naming, Story, All Grist for the Mill

Aesthetics of Space

Gathering places that are beautiful, comfortable, functional, and creatively designed to serve the purpose of the meeting call forth participants' best life energy to contribute. Thoughtfully arrange the space and decor to inspire, focus, and sustain the group's work.

Category: ***Context***

Related: Circle, Gaia, Nooks in Space and Time, Power of Place, Hosting, Preparedness, Power of Constraints

Circle

A Circle is a safe, solid, yet permeable space with an inside, an outside, and a focus that moves from person to person. A welcoming form where everyone can see each other and all voices are heard, it creates a field that invites sharing and story.

Category: *Context*

Related: Aesthetics of Space, Group Culture, Power Shift, Shared Airtime, Opening and Welcome, **Holding Space**, Shared Leadership and Roles

Gaia

The presence of nature in group activities—through natural settings, altars, decorations, and more—provides grounding, beauty and inspiration. Nature gives perspective, letting us know we are one small part of a very large whole, always connected.

Category: *Context*

Related: Aesthetics of Space, Nooks in Space and Time, Power of Place, Rest, Mode Choice, Silence, Spirit

Group Culture

Groups tend to develop their own culture over time, based on knowledge, beliefs, practices and behaviours their members hold in common. Awareness of shared culture builds trust, cohesion, and a sense of safety among the members, thus furthering collaboration.

Category: ***Context***

Related: **History and Context**, **Tend Relationships**, Breaking Bread Together, Celebrate, Ritual, Unity and Diversity, Story

Nooks in Space and Time

Incubate creativity and nurture relationships by encouraging unstructured time and semi-private space. Insight arises fruitfully during times of open-ended conversation or in solo musing at the edges of a group. Can be designed ahead, or may arise in the moment.

Category: ***Context***

Related: Aesthetics of Space, Subgroup and Whole Group, Embrace Dissonance and Difference, Value the Margins, **Inform the Group Mind**, Go Deeper

Power of Place

The location, setting, and beauty of the site for an event have a major impact on the group's energy, attentiveness, and ability to connect. Do your best to choose a place that is the right fit and expression for your intention.

Category: ***Context***

Related: **Purpose**, **History and Context**, Aesthetics of Space, Gaia, Group Culture, Nooks in Space and Time, Hosting

Whole System in the Room

A critical mass of diverse stakeholders working together helps the whole system adapt and learn more effectively. Spark transformative change by gathering a cross-section of the organization or community to coordinate visioning, innovate novel solutions, make more informed choices and motivate quick implementation.

Category: *Context*

Related: Invitation, **History and Context**, Preparedness, Subgroup and Whole Group, **Viewpoint Shift**, Common Ground, **Inform the Group Mind**

Relationship

Creating and maintaining quality connection with each other, honouring our full selves, and recognizing power relations. Includes being authentic and sometimes foregrounding emotional needs in the moment rather than task.

Keystone Pattern: **Tend Relationships**

Patterns: Appreciation, Breaking Bread Together, Celebrate, Good Faith Assumptions, Honour Each Person, Hosting, Power Shift, Shared Airtime, Transparency

Tend Relationships

We take care of each other to reach the goals we are striving for—to get there in one piece, together. Balancing a focus on task and product with nurturing relations between people sustains organizations and movements for the long haul.

Key Pattern for Category: ***Relationship***

Related: Appreciation, Breaking Bread Together, Honour Each Person, Good Faith Assumptions, Listening, Mirroring, Witness with Compassion

Appreciation

Enthusiasm and thankfulness are infectious, deepening trust and connection. Positive energy provides the most generative base for whatever comes next. Look for the good in what's happening and who people are, then work from there.

Category: ***Relationship***

Related: Group Culture, **Tend Relationships**, Celebrate, Good Faith Assumptions, Honour Each Person, Listening, Feedback

Breaking Bread Together

Gathering over a meal is one of the most ancient forms of community process, as people sharing food appreciate each other at a profound level. Nourished bodies and relationships pave the way for better collaboration and higher quality work.

Category: ***Relationship***

Related: Group Culture, **Tend Relationships**, Celebrate, Hosting, Rest, Ritual, Common Ground

Celebrate

With joy and zest, publicly celebrate milestones and recurring events. Affirming shared history, we nourish community, crystallize a sense of accomplishment, and build group identity by unifying our stories and common goals. Can be planned and ritualized, or as spontaneous as a group cheer.

Category: ***Relationship***

Related: Group Culture, Appreciation, Breaking Bread Together, Ritual, Playfulness, Common Ground, Story

Good Faith Assumptions

Assuming others' good intent increases trust and effectiveness. Instead of interpreting "negative" actions as attempts at manipulation, insult, or power-play, we choose to believe people are doing the best they can and look for underlying values or needs in common. Searching for a better story, we find or create one.

Category: ***Relationship***

Related: Setting Intention, Appreciation, **Tend Relationships**, Common Ground, Not About You, Taking Responsibility, Witness with Compassion

Honour Each Person

Respect each person's essential human dignity. View others' unique beliefs, approaches and concerns as a resource for group wisdom. Tolerate and even embrace idiosyncrasies, knowing that each person brings their gifts to the whole more fully when affirmed and appreciated.

Category: ***Relationship***

Related: **History and Context**, **Tend Relationships**, Appreciation, Good Faith Assumptions, Listening, Mirroring, Shared Leadership and Roles

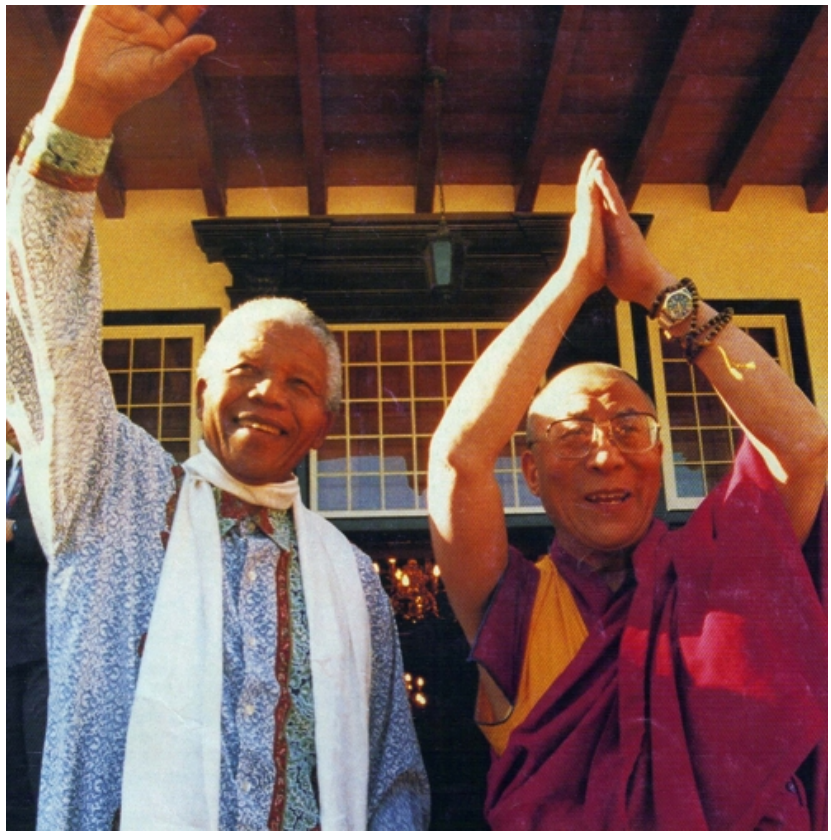
Hosting

Help the session feel like home. Making a place and arrangements comfortable for everyone supports accomplishment of the group's work. Attend to the well-being of each person and the whole.

Category: ***Relationship***

Related: Aesthetics of Space, Group Culture, Breaking Bread Together, Honour Each Person, Opening and Welcome, Preparedness, Rest

Power Shift



Critical awareness and transparency around existing power differences can, if held well, allow the group to adapt authority structures to best reflect their values or serve their aims. Sharing power isn't always easy, but the rewards for groups who do so can be profound.

Category: ***Relationship***

Related: Circle, Shared Airtime, Transparency, Challenge, Value the Margins, Shared Leadership and Roles, Naming

Shared Airtime

Everyone deserves to be heard, and everyone has a piece of the truth. Find ways to invite sharing from all, not just the loudest, most senior or most articulate. Actively draw out the wisdom of quieter or hesitant participants.

Category: ***Relationship***

Related: Circle, Honour Each Person, Balance Structure and Flexibility, Subgroup and Whole Group, Value the Margins, **Holding Space**, Listening

Transparency

Be open about what's real: feelings, experiences, how decisions get made, finances, and more. Transparency arises from a belief that the free flow of information and taking action in direct and honest ways best serves group needs. Handled well, openness nurtures trust, collaboration, and authentic community.

Category: ***Relationship***

Related: Power Shift, **Inform the Group Mind**, Courageous Modelling, Self-awareness, Shared Leadership and Roles, Taking Responsibility, Naming

Flow

Covers rhythm, energy and pacing. When we do what and for how long. Things to pay attention to both in anticipating the event and in responding to circumstances in the moment, to support movement along the intended trajectory toward the desired outcome.

Keystone Pattern: **Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**

Patterns: Balance Process and Content, Balance Structure and Flexibility, Closing, Follow the Energy, Iteration, Opening and Welcome, Preparedness, Reflection-Action Cycle, Rest, Right Size Bite, Ritual, Seasoned Timing, Subgroup and Whole Group, Trajectory

Divergence and Convergence Rhythm

Diverging widens perspective, explores new terrain and opens up options. Converging coalesces collective wisdom in moving toward focused decisions, concrete outcomes, and the end of the session. Good group process naturally cycles between these two, so be thoughtful about which to engage when.

Key Pattern for Category: *Flow*

Related: Iteration, Seasoned Timing, Trajectory, **Generate Possibilities**, Embrace Dissonance and Difference, Distilling, Moving Toward Alignment

Balance Process and Content

Content refers to what you are talking about and the results of a session. Process is how the conversation happens. Like two wings of a bird, both are needed for balance, lift, and progress.

Category: *Flow*

Related: **Purpose**, Priority Focus, Transparency, Follow the Energy, Go Meta, **Holding Space**, Dwell with Emotions

Balance Structure and Flexibility

Structures, such as a clear agenda, time limits, or raising hands before speaking, can create safety, focus, and a form for the group's energy to pour into. Yet to sustain the life of a group, this must be balanced with a great openness to change, dancing between the two as needed.

Category: ***Flow***

Related: **Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**, Balance Process and Content, Follow the Energy, Improvise, Power of Constraints, **Holding Space**, **Emergence**

Closing

The formal ritual that concludes the collective time and space by completing the cycle of a group process. Include everyone, acknowledge the end of the time together and mark the transition point, ushering in a shift to what follows.

Category: *Flow*

Related: Commitment, Celebrate, **Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**, Ritual, Feedback, Harvesting, Moving Toward Alignment

Follow the Energy

What does the group really want in this moment? Let your observation of cues and "vibes" guide your response and steering of topics and process. Paying attention to where the life is, you help it flower.

Category: ***Flow***

Related: Balance Process and Content, Balance Structure and Flexibility, Improvise, **Emergence**, Feedback, Presence, Trust the Wisdom of the Group

Iteration

Try it a second time, even a third. Outcomes of one round of activity or conversation inform the next, deepening, expanding, and generating new understandings and possibilities. For more powerful effect, repeat a process multiple times in the moment, or revisit at a later time.

Category: *Flow*

Related: **Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**, Reflection-Action Cycle, Trajectory, **Emergence**, Feedback, Go Deeper, Inquiry

Opening and Welcome

The beginning sets the tone. Start intentionally, in a manner that invites group members to connect with one another, enter their voice into the circle, and participate as their authentic selves. Attend to building enthusiasm, focus, and commitment for the work to come.

Category: *Flow*

Related: **Purpose**, Setting Intention, **History and Context**, Aesthetics of Space, Group Culture, Hosting, Story

Preparedness

Anticipate what might happen and be ready for it. Do this both before the event, and in your ongoing alert attention. Think through how the agenda will unfold, and do what you can to ensure the right people and resources are present.

Category: *Flow*

Related: **Purpose**, **History and Context**, Hosting, Trajectory, Experts on Tap

Reflection-Action Cycle

Consider. Enact. Debrief. Experiment further. Effective processes that move groups forward often involve cycles of reflection, followed by action, leading to additional reflection, and so on. Alternating in this manner fosters engagement and integration, deepens experiential learning, and promotes adaptive problem-solving.

Category: ***Flow***

Related: Iteration, Trajectory, Deliberate, Distilling, Feedback, Inquiry, Mapping and Measurement

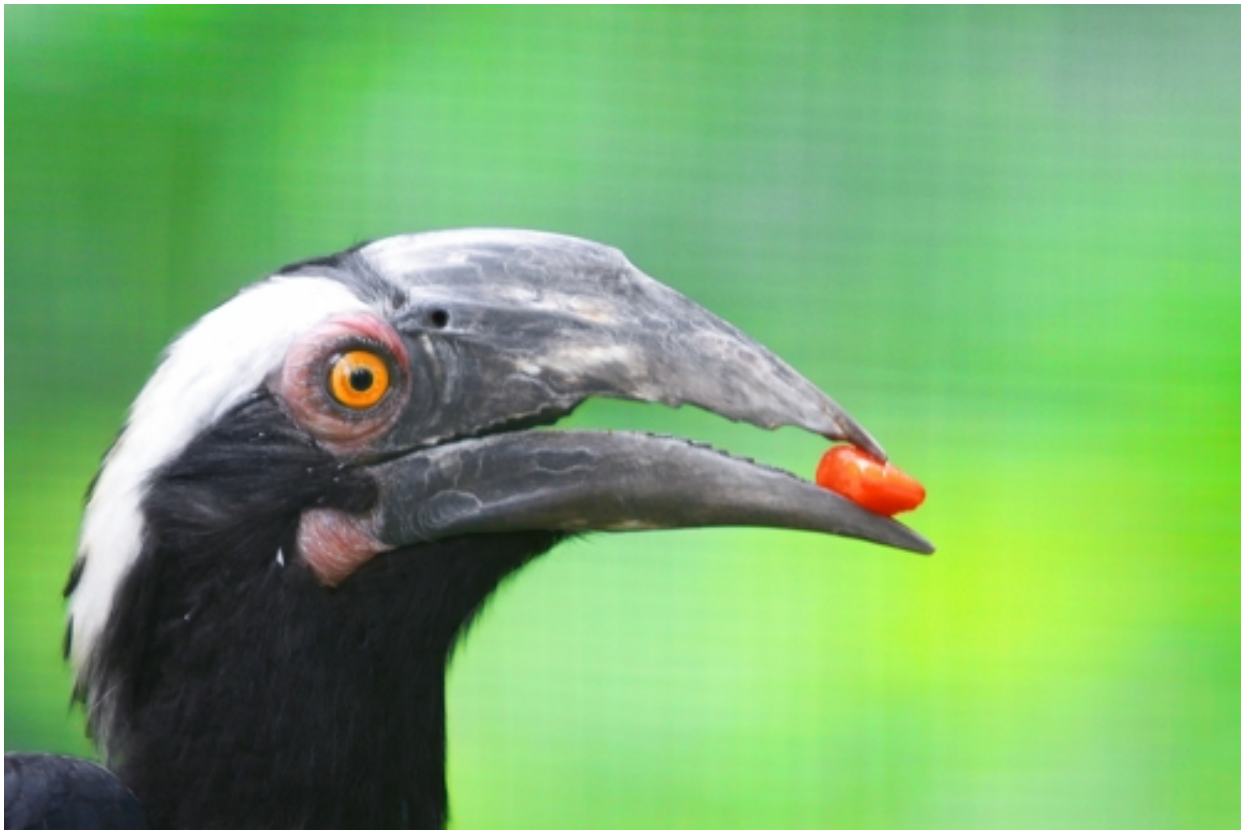
Rest

Create unscheduled times for rest, reflection, integration, and nurturing important social connections. Building sufficient "down time" into group process yields better overall results, as participants return to group sessions renewed and often with new insights and ideas.

Category: *Flow*

Related: Gaia, Nooks in Space and Time, Breaking Bread Together, Hosting, Follow the Energy, Reflection-Action Cycle, Silence

Right Size Bite



Break tasks, processes, and content to be absorbed into chunks that are an appropriate match for the time and people you have. Tackle complex topics and larger goals piece by piece.

Category: *Flow*

Related: Priority Focus, Subgroup and Whole Group, Preparedness, Trajectory, Fractal, Power of Constraints, Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees

Ritual

Ceremony is primal; it grounds, connects, and deeply nourishes group spirit. Use it to mark opening, transition, cycles, milestones, or closing. Ritual is also the formal or habitual repetition of intentional practices that have proven their value.

Category: *Flow*

Related: Gaia, Breaking Bread Together, Celebrate, Closing, Opening and Welcome, Mode Choice, Spirit

Seasoned Timing

When is the right time to propose an idea, switch processes, end discussion, challenge someone to go deeper, or bring in an outside expert or facilitator? Sense the timing of things to swim with the flow, instead of against it. Be patient and alert for ripeness. When the time is right, act.

Category: *Flow*

Related: Priority Focus, **Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**, Follow the Energy, Trajectory, Balance Process and Content, **Holding Space**, Feedback

Subgroup and Whole Group

Small subgroups are ideal for involving all participants, accomplishing specific tasks, and creating a safer space for sharing. Convening in the whole group provides context, meaning and convergence at critical junctures. Strategically shift between the two to take advantage of their complementary natures.

Category: *Flow*

Related: Nooks in Space and Time, Shared Airtime, Mode Choice, Common Ground, Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees, Unity and Diversity

Trajectory

Group work is a collective journey. How long will it take, and what will be the shape of the path? Consider what happens before, and after. Structure agendas in light of anticipated stages, choosing activities that align with each phase. Complete the arc to arrive at your desired destination.

Category: *Flow*

Related: **Purpose**, **Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**, Balance Structure and Flexibility, Iteration, Reflection-Action Cycle, Right Size Bite, Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees

Creativity

Using multiple intelligences and a variety of modes to open up creative possibilities.

Keystone Pattern: **Generate Possibilities**

Patterns: Challenge, Expressive Arts, Improvise, Mode Choice, Playfulness, Power of Constraints

Generate Possibilities

Freedom and stimulation help creativity blossom. Climb out of the box! Shake things up with brainstorming, play, improvisation, art, and unusual questions. What is possible now? Invite an abundant flow.

Category: *Creativity*

Related: **Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**, Subgroup and Whole Group, Mode Choice, Playfulness, Power of Constraints, **Viewpoint Shift**, Inquiry

Challenge

Challenging something—accepted wisdom, ideas, information, practices or ways of looking at things—provokes learning and new thinking, surmounts complacency and blind spots, and engenders creativity. It also invites us to reexamine our uncritical acceptance of convention and the status quo.

Category: *Creativity*

Related: **Tend Relationships**, Embrace Dissonance and Difference, Listening, All Grist for the Mill, Trust the Wisdom of the Group

Expressive Arts

Linear discussion only takes us so far. For a more intuitive, holistic experience put on skits, write songs together, do art, listen to poetry, experiment with movement. The arts can move and teach us, inspire and engage, bringing a group to places we would never otherwise reach.

Category: *Creativity*

Related: Group Culture, Mode Choice, Playfulness, Go Deeper, Harvesting, Story, Dive In

Improvise

For all our careful planning, sometimes circumstances call upon us to wing it. Ad lib. Extemporize. Spontaneously invent a new approach. Making it up as we go along may lead to unexpectedly desirable outcomes. Be open, and ready!

Category: *Creativity*

Related: Follow the Energy, Seasoned Timing, Courageous Modelling, All Grist for the Mill, Dive In, Letting Go, Presence

Mode Choice

Rather than default to general discussion, consider what mode of interaction—visual, auditory or kinaesthetic, formal or informal, a dialogue circle or a roleplay—is the best fit to support the group in reaching its intention. Strategically shifting formats energizes participants, accesses different ways of knowing, and advances the work.

Category: *Creativity*

Related: Group Culture, Shared Airtime, Expressive Arts, Playfulness, Subgroup and Whole Group, **Viewpoint Shift**, Dive In

Playfulness

Invite light-hearted and high-spirited interaction to exercise mind, senses, imagination and body, to engender creativity, and deepen relationships. Playfulness may be evoked through structured but fun ways to engage relevant topics, or restorative breaks that allow laughter free reign, or may simply show up as humour.

Category: *Creativity*

Related: Expressive Arts, Follow the Energy, Rest, Improvise, Mode Choice, Dive In

Power of Constraints

Embrace limitations and boundaries as a source of inspiration. Appreciating the obstacles helps you see more fully how to overcome or adapt to them. Accepting constraints, they can morph into useful forms that open up new possibilities, spurring creativity.

Category: *Creativity*

Related: **Generate Possibilities**, Improvise, **Viewpoint Shift**, Taking Responsibility, Inquiry, All Grist for the Mill, Letting Go

Perspective

Noticing and helping the group more openly and thoughtfully explore different ways of seeing an issue. Watching, understanding, and appreciating divergent viewpoints, ideas, values and opinions. The key is in how you look at something.

Keystone Pattern: **Viewpoint Shift**

Patterns: Common Ground, Embrace Dissonance and Difference, Fractal, Go Meta, Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees, Time Shift, Translation, Unity and Diversity, Value the Margins

Viewpoint Shift

Step from your usual perspective into another, in order to better understand someone, shift energy, reframe meanings, open up new ideas, or simply see a situation with new eyes.

Category: *Perspective*

Related: Expressive Arts, Embrace Dissonance and Difference, Go Meta, Time Shift, Value the Margins, Witness with Compassion, Story

Common Ground

Consciously decide to give more attention to where we agree than where we don't. By tuning in to what we share, we find the way to make progress together.

Category: ***Perspective***

Related: Commitment, Breaking Bread Together, Good Faith Assumptions, Embrace Dissonance and Difference, Unity and Diversity, Not About You, Moving Toward Alignment

Embrace Dissonance and Difference

Encourage your group to honour contradictory viewpoints, sitting with the uncertainty and ambiguity this brings. Acknowledge all perspectives as equally valid and explore them as fully as needed, especially when tensions are high and agreement seems far away.

Category: *Perspective*

Related: **Tend Relationships**, Honour Each Person, Good Faith Assumptions, Challenge, Common Ground, Listening, Go Deeper

Fractal

Phenomena tend to repeat at a variety of scales. For example, a team dynamic manifests in the whole organization, or an issue arising during a planning session shows up at other times, too. Astute group members observe patterns at one level or time, and use these insights to make changes at another.

Category: *Perspective*

Related: **History and Context**, Whole System in the Room, Iteration, Subgroup and Whole Group, Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees, Go Deeper

Go Meta

Sometimes we benefit from changing to a wider lens of analysis: from tactics to strategy, this year's planning to a ten-year horizon, or from content to process reflection. If the current level of focus seems inadequate, consider shifting outward.

Category: ***Perspective***

Related: **Purpose**, **History and Context**, Balance Process and Content, **Viewpoint Shift**, Fractal, Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees, All Grist for the Mill

Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees

Shepherding a group discussion includes discerning when the group needs a wider view vs. when to sink down into the details. Zoom out to see vision, patterns, and overall trends; zoom in for examples, specific data, and other particulars.

Category: *Perspective*

Related: **Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**, Subgroup and Whole Group, Right Size Bite, **Viewpoint Shift**, Go Meta, Fractal, Go Deeper

Time Shift

Invite people to consider events and possibilities from the vantage point of either the past or the future, in order to change assumptions about what is possible in the present.

Category: *Perspective*

Related: **History and Context**, Expressive Arts, **Viewpoint Shift**, Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees, **Inform the Group Mind**, Story

Translation

Translation forms a bridge of understanding from one person or group to another. Overcome barriers of difference in social standing, culture, language, life experience, or communication style by using neutral wording, metaphor, Story, or otherwise converting something into terms others can more easily grasp.

Category: ***Perspective***

Related: Good Faith Assumptions, Honour Each Person, **Viewpoint Shift**, Value the Margins, **Inform the Group Mind**, Listening, Mirroring

Unity and Diversity

Hold simultaneous awareness of both what is shared in common and what is unique. Sometimes it is more important to honour the distinctions and hear the differences; other times it is crucial to focus on similarities and common territory. Both are needed.

Category: *Perspective*

Related: Honour Each Person, **Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**, Subgroup and Whole Group, Common Ground, Embrace Dissonance and Difference, Value the Margins, Moving Toward Alignment

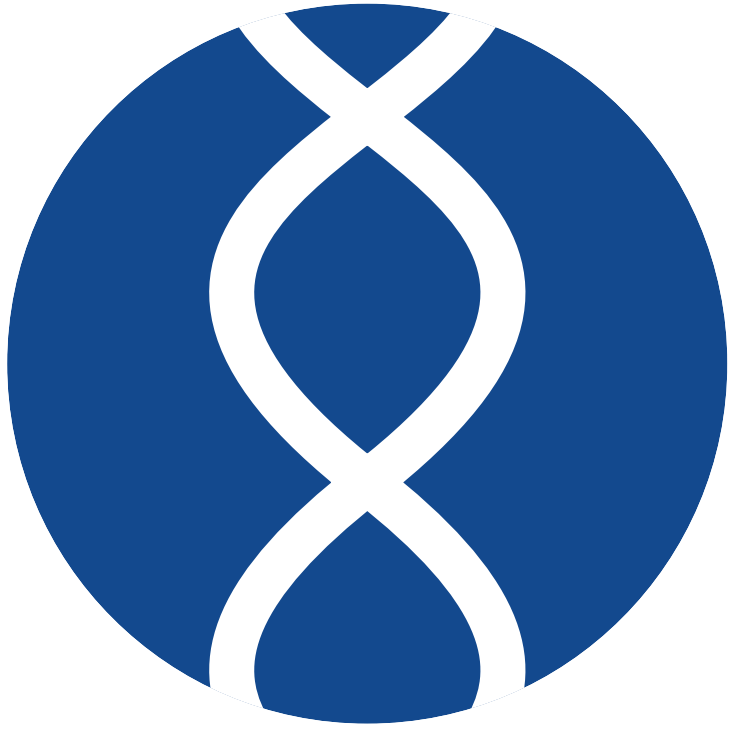
Value the Margins

Edges of ecosystems are fertile ground for adaptation. Similarly in group dynamics, growth often comes from generative disturbances at the margins, perhaps from participants less invested in the status quo. Welcome and embrace people and ideas that may at first seem alien.

Category: *Perspective*

Related: Whole System in the Room, Honour Each Person, Challenge, Embrace Dissonance and Difference, Translation, Unity and Diversity, Listening

Modelling



The essential skills and responsibilities for both facilitator and participants, to demonstrate good group practice and ensure the process goes well. Includes monitoring, nurturing and mentoring the group, enabling their effective personal and collective self-management.

Keystone Pattern: **Holding Space**

Patterns: Appropriate Boundaries, Courageous Modelling, Discharging, Dwell with Emotions, Guerrilla Facilitation, Listening, Mirroring, Not About You, Self-awareness, Shared Leadership and Roles, Simplify, Taking Responsibility, Witness with Compassion

Holding Space

Be fully present, aware of what's happening in the whole gathering right now—physically, energetically, emotionally, and intellectually. Open and hold the psychological and spiritual space to provide a steady centre and container. Calmly maintain trust, safety, and focus.

Category: ***Modelling***

Related: Priority Focus, Opening and Welcome, Balance Process and Content, Embrace Dissonance and Difference, Appropriate Boundaries, Dwell with Emotions, Presence

Appropriate Boundaries

As stewards of the process, maintain safety and integrity of the container by drawing lines when needed. Compassionately acknowledge individual suffering to open the group heart, while reaffirming the group's purpose to keep it on track. Face membership questions with clarity and candour.

Category: ***Modelling***

Related: Priority Focus, Nooks in Space and Time, Balance Process and Content, Follow the Energy, **Holding Space**, Not About You, Witness with Compassion

Courageous Modelling

Someone needs to risk going first: to speak out, try a new behaviour, raise concerns, welcome feedback. Be honest, open, authentic, bold, and smart about it. You can catalyze forward movement by taking the lead to show others it can be done, and how.

Category: *Modelling*

Related: Power Shift, Transparency, Challenge, Taking Responsibility, Feedback, Naming, Dive In

Discharging

Blocked by frustration, anger, hurt, fear, or despair, we acknowledge and let go of what grips us in order to shift and move on. Tune in to discern whether to do this directly (such as making space in a meeting to express tough feelings), or indirectly through humour, breathing, or taking a walk.

Category: *Modelling*

Related: Challenge, Embrace Dissonance and Difference, Dwell with Emotions, Mirroring, Not About You, Self-awareness, Witness with Compassion

Dwell with Emotions

Let emotions be expressed and acknowledged, without jumping in to "fix" or change them. Explore strong feelings to find what drives the passion underneath them and ensure important values and perspectives aren't glossed over.

Category: ***Modelling***

Related: Balance Process and Content, Discharging, Listening, Witness with Compassion, Presence

Guerrilla Facilitation

Guerilla Facilitation arises in gatherings with no formal leadership structures or when designated facilitators are inadequate or floundering. Any participant might sense how to advance a group's work by stepping up and constructively intervening in the moment.

Category: *Modelling*

Related: Priority Focus, Follow the Energy, Improvise, Courageous Modelling, Shared Leadership and Roles, Taking Responsibility, Trust the Wisdom of the Group

Listening

Listen from genuine curiosity, welcoming the expression of thoughts, opinions, and especially feelings. When we listen with our whole selves to more than the words, people feel heard and their energy moves into new channels, naturally weaving connection.

Category: *Modelling*

Related: Honour Each Person, Shared Airtime, Inquiry, Mirroring, Not About You, Witness with Compassion, Presence

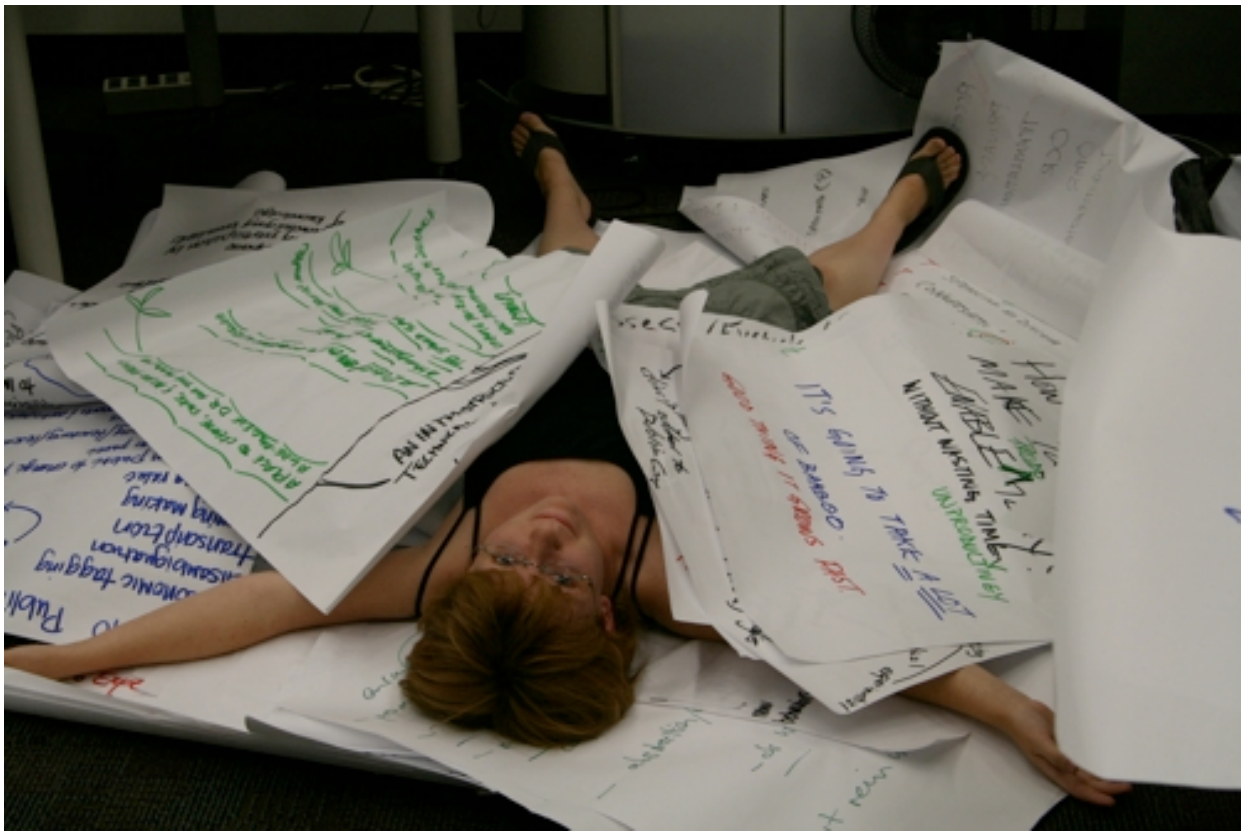
Mirroring

Empathically reflect back the essence of what someone has said so the speaker feels heard, genuinely acknowledged and appreciated. Honouring people's gifts can heal individuals and relationships, unblock stuck places, and get energy flowing again.

Category: ***Modelling***

Related: Good Faith Assumptions, Listening, Not About You, Witness with Compassion, Distilling

Not about You



Don't take things personally. Separate what is said or suggested from the person who said it. Leave the baggage of interpersonal relationships and disagreements at the door to consider ideas on their own merits. Work on the same side, together against the problem or challenge.

Category: *Modelling*

Related: **Tend Relationships**, Good Faith Assumptions, Common Ground, Listening, Witness with Compassion, Letting Go

Self-Awareness

The more you know who you and your group really are, the more effectively you can engage, make choices that are the right fit, and achieve your goals. Discover your values, feelings, dreams, needs, biases, and more.

Category: *Modelling*

Related: **History and Context**, Transparency, Reflection-Action Cycle, Mirroring, Not About You, Feedback, Presence

Shared Leadership and Roles

Rotate facilitators. Trade off note-taking. Let a voice at the margin take centre stage. Sharing responsibility increases participation and investment, taps the gifts of all group members, and leads to better results. Nurture equity and empowerment by sharing power, skills, and collective care for the whole.

Category: *Modelling*

Related: **Purpose**, Whole System in the Room, Appreciation, Power Shift, Subgroup and Whole Group, Mode Choice, Experts on Tap

Simplify

A simple process allows you to stay focused on your purpose. A clear understanding of your purpose allows you to do what is needed, no more, no less. Include only the details that are significant, so participants will understand what is and is not important.

Category: ***Modelling***

Related: **Purpose**, Circle, Preparedness, Distilling, Letting Go, Presence, Silence

Taking Responsibility

Taking Responsibility keeps a group connected with its own power, both collectively and individually. Regardless of who did what, when, let us ask, "What can we do here and now?" And, if you see something that needs doing, step up!

Category: *Modelling*

Related: Commitment, Setting Intention, Good Faith Assumptions, Embrace Dissonance and Difference, Guerrilla Facilitation, Shared Leadership and Roles, Letting Go

Witness with Compassion

Grounded in your heart, offer gentle observations free of judgement. With kindness and presence, place attention on what you notice happening, rather than your reaction to it.

Category: ***Modelling***

Related: Listening, Mirroring, Not About You, Dwell with Emotions, **Holding Space**, Story, Presence

Inquiry & Synthesis

Discovering coherence and moving toward convergence. From gathering in information to exploring knowledge to arriving at consensus, shared meaning. understanding, or clear outcomes.

Keystone Pattern: **Inform the Group Mind**

Patterns: Deliberate, Distilling, Experts on Tap, Feedback, Go Deeper, Harvesting, Inquiry, Mapping and Measurement, Moving Toward Alignment, Naming, Story, Yes, and

Inform the Group Mind

We gather facts, feelings, and perspectives to reveal and deepen the group's awareness of itself and its world. The most helpful information comes from diverse sources and is accurate, relevant, accessible, and compelling.

Key Pattern for Category: *Inquiry & Synthesis*

Related: Whole System in the Room, Deliberate, Distilling, Experts on Tap, Feedback, Harvesting, Inquiry, Mapping and Measurement

Deliberate

Take time to reflect on the issues at hand and make wise decisions. Done well, thinking things through together helps us understand a bigger picture, so we can deal capably and creatively with changing realities.

Category: ***Inquiry & Synthesis***

Related: Reflection-Action Cycle, **Inform the Group Mind**, Go Deeper, Inquiry, Letting Go, Silence

Distilling

To keep a conversation or inquiry focused, regularly summarize and synthesize what has been said or learned. Articulate the common ground of meaning. Assess what it all adds up to. Distill elements to an essential, integrated whole.

Category: ***Inquiry & Synthesis***

Related: **Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**, Common Ground, **Inform the Group Mind**, Harvesting, Mapping and Measurement, Moving Toward Alignment, Naming

Experts on Tap

Experts play excellent supporting roles, providing technical help and judgements based on specific training. Respect their value as one resource to draw on, while recognizing that ultimately as stakeholders we must empower ourselves, relying on our own experience, values, and commitments to deliberate and make decisions on the issues that affect us.

Category: *Inquiry & Synthesis*

Related: Whole System in the Room, Power Shift, Shared Airtime, **Inform the Group Mind**, Shared Leadership and Roles, Inquiry

Feedback

Feedback is offering and receiving information in various forms that enables adaptation and learning, both for individuals and the group as a whole. Feedback lets us know what's working and what's not, helping us stay on track for achieving our goals.

Category: ***Inquiry & Synthesis***

Related: Appreciation, Follow the Energy, Listening, Mirroring, Harvesting, Mapping and Measurement

Go Deeper

Recognize and attend to what calls out for more intensive exploration. Take the time to unpack comments, drill down into issues, peel back the layers, delve further into underlying dynamics or feelings—in search of the crux of what matters most.

Category: ***Inquiry & Synthesis***

Related: Iteration, Subgroup and Whole Group, Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees, Courageous Modelling, **Holding Space**, Listening, Inquiry

Harvesting

When the process is complete, the harvest is what you hold in your hands. Collect and disseminate what has been said, done, debated, decided, left undecided, or agreed upon as next steps. Record the collective memory of the event.

Category: *Inquiry & Synthesis*

Related: **Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**, Reflection-Action Cycle, Mode Choice, Unity and Diversity, **Inform the Group Mind**, Distilling, Mapping and Measurement

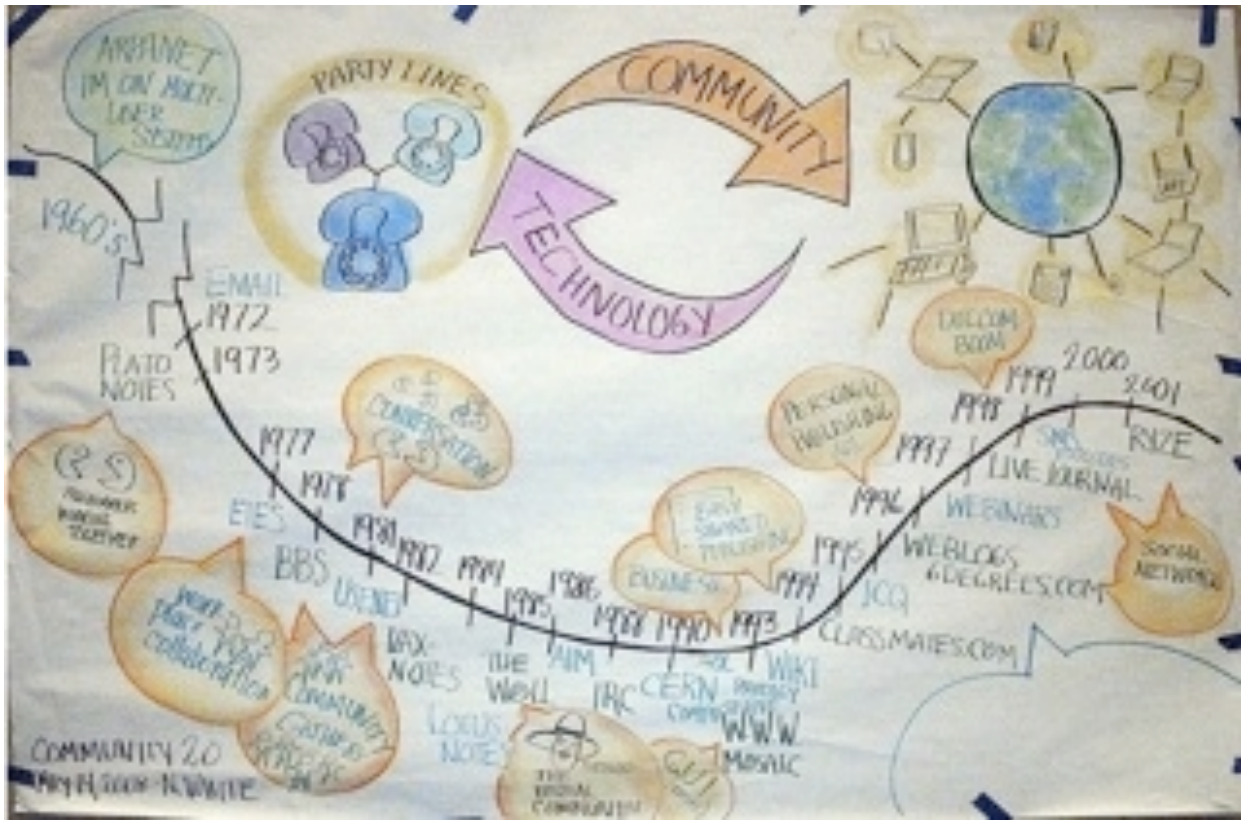
Inquiry

Choose to cultivate a curious attitude. Great questions frame and provoke, opening us to new pathways. Many successful methods have questions at their core, such as: "What's at the heart of the matter?" and "If you were czar, what would you do?" So what's the most powerful question we could ask right now?

Category: ***Inquiry & Synthesis***

Related: Follow the Energy, **Generate Possibilities**, **Inform the Group Mind**, Go Deeper, Deliberate, Story, Letting Go

Mapping and Measurement



Show the past, chart collated data, sketch what lies ahead. Skilful use of record-keeping, timelines, graphs, murals, videos, etc. directs our attention, helps us make sense of our experience, reinforces collective memory, and enables us to share group outcomes with people who weren't there.

Category: *Inquiry & Synthesis*

Related: Preparedness, Reflection-Action Cycle, Mode Choice, **Inform the Group Mind**, Distilling, Experts on Tap, Harvesting

Moving Toward Alignment

To act jointly, we journey from disparate places to a coherent, collective sense of what is real, what we desire, and what we will do to accomplish it. Group alignment emerges through conversations that generate shared stories, understandings, and decisions.

Category: ***Inquiry & Synthesis***

Related: Commitment, Setting Intention, **Divergence and Convergence Rhythm**, Trajectory, Common Ground, Distilling, Letting Go

Naming

Call it out, stating directly what is perceived. Naming functions to birth things not yet recognized by the group, sometimes things that are taboo. Akin to an alchemical process, to name can be to transform, and brings change in its wake.

Category: *Inquiry & Synthesis*

Related: Power Shift, Transparency, Seasoned Timing, Courageous Modelling, Listening, Not About You

Story

Stories, metaphors, and myths convey complex ideas, context, meaning and nuance that simple data cannot. By telling personal stories we build trust and connection, encourage imagination, and express the essence of who we are. By telling cultural stories we connect ourselves to others' experience and interact with whole systems.

Category: Inquiry & Synthesis

Related: Group Culture, Shared Airtime, Opening and Welcome, Mode Choice, Expressive Arts, **Inform the Group Mind**, Yes, and

Yes, and

Build on what someone just said to offer encouragement and carry it further. Affirm their ideas, then extend them to a deeper understanding or add a new twist. Create momentum by saying "Yes, and …"

Category: ***Inquiry & Synthesis***

Related: Follow the Energy, Listening, Moving Toward Alignment, Go Deeper, Distilling, Deliberate

Faith

Trusting and accepting what happens in a spirit of letting go and letting come. The mystery, magic and ineffable, complex magic of emergence. You can invite it, but you can't control it. Felt as a deep sense of connection not only to those assembled and to the work's purpose but to the larger universe as well.

Keystone Pattern: **Emergence**

Patterns: All Grist for the Mill, Dive In, Letting Go, Magic, Presence, Silence, Spirit, Trust the Wisdom of the Group

Emergence

Welcome the spaces between rigid structure and unproductive chaos, numbing familiarity and paralyzing anxiety. To work with complexity as a generative cauldron, encourage flexibility, self-organization, and mutual discovery. Embracing what arises, the group gives birth to new insights and forms.

Key Pattern for Category: *Faith*

Related: Whole System in the Room, Follow the Energy, Value the Margins, Inquiry, Letting Go, Presence, Trust the Wisdom of the Group

All Grist for the Mill

Play the ball where it lands. Handled well, everything that happens—mistakes, upsets, tangents, jokes, confusion—is potentially useful fodder for learning, surfacing truth, and community bonding.

Category: ***Faith***

Related: Appreciation, Balance Process and Content, Follow the Energy, Improvise, **Emergence**, Feedback, Letting Go

Dive In

Sometimes, when the way ahead is a little murky, choosing to just begin and try things out is the best way to approach the challenge, task, or issue at hand. With a commitment to learning from whatever happens, Dive In to discover the path ahead.

Category: ***Faith***

Related: Trajectory, Improvise, Go Deeper, Inquiry, All Grist for the Mill, Presence, Trust the Wisdom of the Group

Letting Go

Release preconceived notions, your ego and your fears, to be fully open without attachment to outcome. As a clear channel, you allow whatever needs to come through in order to be of service to yourself, your group, and the world.

Category: ***Faith***

Related: Gaia, Rest, Not About You, Self-awareness, Silence, Spirit, Trust the Wisdom of the Group

Magic

At certain moments, something beyond the group emerges, accompanied by a sense of awe… and resulting in a unanimous feeling of astonished accomplishment. Conditions inviting Magic include shared passion, urgency, openness, energy and trust—yet the quality is always mysterious, never guaranteed.

Category: *Faith*

Related: **Purpose**, Whole System in the Room, Improvise, **Emergence**, Letting Go, Presence, Spirit

Presence

Bring your full being to this very moment. Offering total attention, and deep listening, you are wholly open and connected with the here and now. From this grounded place love and service flow.

Category: ***Faith***

Related: Follow the Energy, Opening and Welcome, **Holding Space**, Listening, Self-awareness, Letting Go, Spirit

Silence

The rests between notes make the music. Take a quiet moment to tune into yourself or the group. Invite Silence to slow the process, make space for questions, transition, or simply deepen.

Category: *Faith*

Related: Nooks in Space and Time, Rest, Listening, Go Deeper, Letting Go, Spirit

Spirit

To work with Spirit is to invite the deeper forces of the universe to be with us as co-creators. Bringing in this wider perspective keeps us in touch with what's most important and provides wisdom, inspiration, and support.

Category: ***Faith***

Related: Gaia, Ritual, **Emergence**, Letting Go, Magic, Presence, Silence

Trust the Wisdom of the Group

When the path is uncertain, seek intelligence, intuition, and direction from the collective. No matter the problem, with patience and good listening a group usually generates the needed solution, options, or route forward.

Category: *Faith*

Related: Whole System in the Room, Follow the Energy, **Emergence**, Inquiry, Letting Go, Presence

More Information…

…from the Group Works website (GroupWorksDeck.org):

About the Group Pattern Language Project

Group Works is designed to support your process as a group convener, planner, facilitator, or participant. The people who developed the *Group Pattern Language* spent several years pooling our knowledge of the best group events we had ever witnessed. We looked at meetings, conferences, retreats, town halls, and other sessions that give organizations life, solve a longstanding dilemma, get stuck relationships flowing, result in clear decisions with wide support, and make a lasting difference. We also looked at routine, well-run meetings that simply bring people together and get lots of stuff done. We aim here to name the core wisdom of what makes deliberative group work successful.

Why are we doing this? Our world is, to a very real extent, based on dialogue. Every action taken that involves more than one person arises from conversation that generates, coordinates, and reflects those actions. Those actions have impact. If our human world is based on conversations, then the work of creating and supporting those conversations is central to shaping a world that works. Designing and conducting meetings and other group sessions well is vital to determining our common future. This project grew around a shared understanding that in an urgent way, our survival depends on our ability to work and play well together, and on discovering and creating group processes which are at the same time effective and life-affirming. Because this is easier said than done, we wanted to deepen and spread the insights, skills, and capacity to make that promise real.

The following core beliefs guide our work:

- Seeing a world in flux and deep need, we believe the work of facilitators, both formal and informal, can make a significant difference to the quality and outcomes of essential conversations. Thus we accept a responsibility, as facilitators and participants in group process, to act for the common good.
- We expect conveners of group process to act with full transparency regarding the motives and expected results of the sessions we organize and run. With honesty and humility, we strive to continuously improve the calibre of our work.
- We choose to assume the best of people. We believe people flourish when entrusted with the opportunity to authentically self-manage, collaborate, and make decisions collectively, as true respected equals. Because the most critical issues facing us in the world and in our organizations are complex and interconnected, we need each other to do this—the challenges we face are beyond solving by leaders or experts in isolation. We believe in sharing power, that we are wiser when we work together.
- We believe that effective group processes are clearly driven by the purpose for which they are called. We respect participants' life energy by invoking processes that productively use their time, resulting in cooperative sessions that meet a high standard in engagement, achievement and connection. We draw on experience and knowledge to create elegant designs with great care, yet remain flexible and open to change as the circumstances, will of participants and flow of events may dictate.
- Good process builds strong communities. Our work is an act of love in service to the world.

We were inspired by Christopher Alexander and the other co-authors of *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction*, who in 1977 published a seminal work on how to create built spaces that nourish people's souls. They were seekers after wholeness, grace, "the quality that has no name" which they asserted was both deeply subjective and empirically verifiable. Their book was beautiful in form, accessible to the layperson, and aimed to democratize their field. It took the arcane knowledge of how to design the best possible human-scale architecture and crystallized it into 253 principles that have influenced a generation of builders. Their book was also deeply interconnected, listing which patterns connect to each other and how, long before the advent of the World Wide Web made such thinking commonplace. Our project aims to apply the same approach to deliberative group process, and takes advantage of tools (such as wikis) that weren't available in the 1970s.

There are already plenty of good books and models out there to help people run good meetings, and we do not want to replicate them. The *Group Works* expresses shared wisdom underlying successful approaches that is more specific than general values and less specific than tools and techniques.

Because of space limitations, each pattern description aims only to name the essential What and Why of that particular element. In order to actually use the patterns, you'll need to come up with the How. A lot of Hows are supplied on our website GroupWorksDeck.org, where you will find a growing pool of information about the patterns represented in this deck. Some patterns have plenty of resources already on the website, while others remain to be fleshed out. Over fifty people were involved in the creation of the *Group Works*, and we'd be delighted for you to join the circle by helping explain how to apply the patterns—see more on this below.

The people who put this together engaged in a multi-year, collaborative process alternating between in-person meetings and work online, learning as we went. We are a cross-section of North Americans from a variety of organizational backgrounds including: higher education, software development, communal living, corporate finance, youth groups, indigenous tribes, political activism, nonprofit management, government agencies, faith groups, and more.

Note on Spellings: As a mixed group of volunteers located north and south of the US/Canadian border, after some deliberation we chose to go with uniform Canadian spellings.

Want to learn more? Go to our website :

- Activities GroupWorksDeck.org/activities
- Method Maps: GroupWorksDeck.org/methodmaps
- Get Involved: GroupWorksDeck.org/participation

What is a Pattern Language?

A Pattern Language is an attempt to express the deeper wisdom of what brings aliveness within a particular field of human endeavor, through a set of interconnected expressions arising from that wisdom. Aliveness is one placeholder term for "the quality that has no name": a sense of wholeness, spirit, or grace, that while of varying form, is precise and empirically verifiable.

The term was originally coined by architect Christopher Alexander, who, together with five colleagues, published *A Pattern Language* (PatternLanguage.com) for building in 1977. Others have since applied the term to economics, software design, liberatory communication, wikis and more.

Notable features of Alexander's pattern language that we hope to emulate include:

Accessibility: The original book and the others by Alexander that followed it are completely understandable by an interested layperson, requiring no technical knowledge of architecture. They essentially represent a democratization of the field, which perhaps explains why they have been wildly popular except among professional architects.

Beauty: As books, *A Pattern Language* and its sequel *The Timeless Way of Building* themselves embody "the quality that has no name." They are both simple and complex—elegant, inspiring works that draw the reader into a world of discovery. This ability to enact the qualities they are describing gives them a sense of integrity that has not necessarily been matched in other pattern language efforts.

Connection: It is clear from the text that Alexander's book was written in "hypertext" decades before the technology existed to support it. Each of the 253 patterns listed includes links to other patterns it is embedded in, relates with, or supports.

A pattern language is not a collection of methods or techniques. It's more than a set of tools in a toolbox. It moves beyond a list of processes, to seek activities or qualities that repeat across many of those processes. We explore the commonalities that cross boundaries of method, in an effort to home in on what works. It is an interconnected whole, that when applied coherently, brings "the quality that has no name" into a field of human endeavor.

By way of analogy, you might be able to learn a few words of French, and throw them into English conversation. But if you learn the language of French to fluency, then each word of the language is given meaning by the interpretations of the words around it. While a translation dictionary may be helpful, no one would say that a foreign language is merely a list of words with translated definitions beside each one. Rather, taken as a whole, the learning of a new language opens up a new perspective on the world, brings one into a different relationship than was possible before.

Not all of the patterns listed by Alexander, *et al.*, apply to any particular building project, and likewise not all of our patterns here apply to every group conversation. The aim is to provide a deep well for inspiration, and a set of doorways into the "core commons" of deepening group conversation.

What is a Pattern?

For the purposes of this project, a pattern is a feature we believe shows up repeatedly in group processes that result in deepening, connection, and a fulfillment of purpose.

Scope: Our scope is the realm of deliberative/dialogic group processes aimed at goals such as decision-making, input, feedback, strategizing, visioning, and conflict resolution, that take place in the context of meetings, conferences, and other convenings that have these goals. Thus there are many times when people gather together that are beyond our zone of exploration (weddings, soccer matches, choir practice, etc.), although some of the patterns we come up with might also sometimes apply beyond our chosen domain.

While recognizing that there is a lot of overlap between patterns of face-to-face and online interaction, we are focused on face-to-face settings.

While we believe that many of these patterns show up cross-culturally, we do not make the claim that our pattern language is universal. This language is being written by a cross-section of North Americans from a variety of group backgrounds (political activism, communal living, and other alternative cultures; higher education; corporate experience in finance, software, and other fields; religious organizations; nonprofit management; indigenous tribes; public agency work; etc.). That diversity lends strength but falls far from addressing all places and groups. Any session takes place within a specific cultural context, and our assumption is that users of this language will take what inspires them and adapt appropriately.

Range: If you think about everything that goes into making a group conversation fulfilling, there is a vast range of things to pay attention to, from the most general to the most specific. In crafting this language, we ask people to focus on a particular middle section within this range, and hold your thinking at that level. We want to avoid being too general: For example, values such as democracy and cooperation, or principles such as Schwarz's "valid information" and "free and informed choice," are assumed or embedded rather than explicitly considered in the body of this work. We also want to avoid being too specific: There is a level of detail that is already well-represented in the existing literature and that we do not seek to replicate, namely:

- listing and explanations of methods (e.g. The Change Handbook);
- catalogues of tools and techniques.

Of course within our list of potential patterns, some of them are more general and some are more specific, just as Alexander's architectural pattern language includes patterns ranging from "Independent Regions" to "Different Chairs."

Rather than listing methods or techniques, we look for behaviors and qualities that repeat across methods and approaches. What is it that happens over and over again in group processes that work? And then we try to give some guidance for how to do that behavior or evoke that quality. Preferably in straightforward language, using as little jargon as possible. Essentially, we are aiming at the core wisdom of what makes group work successful. And we want it to sing.

THE HALLMARKS LIST (aka "The Pruning Tool")

The following list of questions are here to help guide the pattern writing and editing process. While it's not required that every pattern necessarily be able to answer yes to every question on this list, these are hallmarks that have been noted across many of the patterns.

Does it further the goals of the project?

- Support purpose-driven design
- Deepen the skills of those who serve as group process guides
- Serve as a resource for those who are teaching others
- Increase process literacy among people who are users of process(es)

Does it point us toward "the quality that has no name"? Does it describe a feature that shows up repeatedly in group processes that result in "deepening, connection, and a fulfillment of purpose"?

Does it feel resonant? Is it evocative? Does my gut respond to this with a sense of recognition?

Does it happen across methods/approaches? Is it a common piece underlying multiple methodologies? This is like stacking functions in permaculture, where one element contributes to many yields.

Can it take a large variety of forms? "Each pattern describes a problem which occurs over and over again in our environment, 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."—*A Pattern Language*

Is it fractal? That is, does it show up at more than one scale (such as within one item of a meeting and again within the meeting as a whole)?

Is it a distinct creature? That is, once grasped, it stands out as its own thing, coherent, and not merely a result of other aspects of process. While it may take a while to first "see" a pattern, its essential "shape" should be easy to recall once understood. Is it unifying? It may bring together what previously seemed like separate aspects of group process.

Does it describe an action that can be consciously undertaken by conveners and/or participants? Rather than, for instance, a dynamic to be passively observed. Does knowledge of this pattern increase the skill of practitioners?

Index by Category

A Category

A Keystone Pattern

A Pattern

Intention

Purpose

Commitment

Invitation

Priority Focus

Setting Intention

Context

History and Context

Aesthetics of Space

Circle

Gaia

Group Culture

Nooks in Space and Time

Power of Place

Whole System in the Room

Relationship

Tend Relationships

Appreciation

Breaking Bread Together

Celebrate

Good Faith Assumptions

Honour Each Person

Hosting

Power Shift

Shared Airtime

Transparency

Flow

Divergence and Convergence Rhythm

Balance Process and Content

Balance Structure and Flexibility

Closing

Follow the Energy

Iteration

Opening and Welcome

Preparedness

Reflection-Action Cycle

Rest

Right Size Bite

Ritual

Seasoned Timing

Subgroup and Whole Group

Trajectory

Creativity

Generate Possibilities

Challenge

Expressive Arts

Improvise

Mode Choice

Playfulness

Power of Constraints

Perspective

Viewpoint Shift

Common Ground

Embrace Dissonance and Difference

Fractal

Go Meta

Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees

Time Shift

Translation

Unity and Diversity

Value the Margins

Modelling

Holding Space

Appropriate Boundaries

Courageous Modelling

Discharging

Dwell with Emotions

Guerrilla Facilitation

Listening

Mirroring

Not About You

Self-awareness

Shared Leadership and Roles

Simplify

Taking Responsibility

Witness with Compassion

Inquiry & Synthesis

Inform the Group Mind

Deliberate

Distilling

Experts on Tap

Feedback

Go Deeper

Harvesting

Inquiry

- Mapping and Measurement
- Moving Toward Alignment
- Naming
- Story
- Yes, and
- ***Faith***
- **Emergence**
- All Grist for the Mill
- Dive In
- Letting Go
- Magic
- Presence
- Silence
- Spirit
- Trust the Wisdom of the Group

Index by Alpha

A Category

A Keystone Pattern

A Pattern

Aesthetics of Space

All Grist for the Mill

Appreciation

Appropriate Boundaries

Balance Process and Content

Balance Structure and Flexibility

Breaking Bread Together

Celebrate

Challenge

Circle

Closing

Context

Commitment

Common Ground

Courageous Modelling

Creativity

Deliberate

Discharging

Dive In

Divergence and Convergence Rhythm

Distilling

Dwell with Emotions

Embrace Dissonance and Difference

Emergence

Experts on Tap

Expressive Arts

Faith

Feedback

Flow

Follow the Energy

Fractal

Gaia

Generate Possibilities

Go Deeper

Go Meta

Good Faith Assumptions

Group Culture

Guerrilla Facilitation

Harvesting

History and Context

Holding Space

Honour Each Person

Hosting

Improvise

Inform the Group Mind

Inquiry

Inquiry & Synthesis

Intention

Invitation

Iteration

Letting Go

Listening

Magic

Mapping and Measurement

Mirroring

Mode Choice

Modelling

Moving Toward Alignment

Naming

Nooks in Space and Time

Not About You

Opening and Welcome

Perspective

Playfulness

Power of Place

Presence

Purpose

Power of Constraints

Power Shift

Preparedness

Priority Focus

Reflection-Action Cycle

Rest

Relationship

Right Size Bite

Ritual

Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees

Seasoned Timing

Self-awareness

Shared Leadership and Roles

Simplify

Subgroup and Whole Group

Setting Intention

Shared Airtime

Silence

Spirit

Story

Taking Responsibility

Tend Relationships

Time Shift

Trajectory

Translation

Transparency

Trust the Wisdom of the Group

Unity and Diversity

Value the Margins

Viewpoint Shift

Whole System in the Room

Witness with Compassion

Yes, and

More Detail on Patterns

The following are links to GroupWorksDeck.org for each each pattern. The goal of the project is to eventually provide in-depth descriptions and further links for exploration on every pattern; at the time of this publication, a few of those have been completed, some are in progress, and many have not yet been started. Please get involved if you'd like to help flesh these out.

Aesthetics of Space
All Grist for the Mill
Appreciation
Appropriate Boundaries
Balance Process and Content
Balance Structure and Flexibility
Breaking Bread Together
Celebrate
Challenge
Circle
Closing
Commitment
Common Ground
Courageous Modelling
Deliberate
Discharging
Distilling
Dive In
Divergence and Convergence Rhythm
Dwell with Emotions
Embrace Dissonance and Difference
Emergence
Experts on Tap
Expressive Arts
Feedback
Follow the Energy
Fractal
Gaia
Generate Possibilities
Go Deeper
Go Meta
Good Faith Assumptions
Group Culture
Guerrilla Facilitation
Harvesting
History and Context
Holding Space
Honour Each Person
Hosting
Improvise
Inform the Group Mind
Inquiry

Invitation
Iteration
Letting Go
Listening
Magic
Mapping and Measurement
Mirroring
Mode Choice
Moving toward Alignment
Naming
Nooks in Space and Time
Not about You
Opening and Welcome
Playfulness
Power of Constraints
Power of Place
Power Shift
Preparedness
Presence
Priority Focus
Purpose
Reflection-Action Cycle
Rest
Right Size Bite
Ritual
Seasoned Timing
Seeing the Forest, Seeing the Trees
Self-Awareness
Setting Intention
Shared Airtime
Shared Leadership and Roles
Silence
Simplify
Spirit
Story
Subgroup and Whole Group
Taking Responsibility
Tend Relationships
Time Shift
Trajectory
Translation
Transparency
Trust the Wisdom of the Group
Unity and Diversity
Value the Margins
Viewpoint Shift
Whole System in the Room
Witness with Compassion
Yes, and

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