

Small Generative Circles for finding our own “next steps” toward Creative Social Action

Welcome, Overview, and Table of Contents

Thanks for being here! This is very much a “work in progress” at this point, and your input is most welcome.

I’ll start with a brief Table of Contents:

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Prologue

I don't know where to start.
I don't know where to start describing what it is,
that I am feeling called to bring into being...

(Which is where many of us are, in this liminal time..._

Yet yesterday, I started talking with a friend about this new idea I've been having... and what I was saying, seemed to make sense to her!

So, here goes...

And *this right here*, what I've just written, is a perfect example of how we can offer support to one another...
when we don't yet know, where to start.

I was feeling a bit overwhelmed, when I started writing this google doc.
And so I wrote down that first sentence. "*I don't know where to start...*"

And *then*, I remembered my conversation with my friend,
the previous day... and started telling you about that...

And *then*, I realized that *this*, in itself, was already an example,
of what I wanted to be writing about!

The power of listening...
open-hearted listening,
not "forced listening", nor "pretend listening",
nor judgmental listening-only-to-critique....

But the power of our freely-given, loving attention –
something which is so often unseen and untapped
(as well as vastly undervalued!) in our current culture....

Yet this power is something that we have a huge need to tap into – especially in these times of metacrisis.

Whether it's the upcoming elections, and/or the climate crisis, and/or the economic crisis... and/or, how these are all connected....

WE NEED ONE ANOTHER.

And, we need for *many* of us to become skilled and comfortable, at hosting supportive spaces where we can *each* feel that we belong, where we can each feel held by the small circle we are creating together, as we digest some bit of overwhelming information about crazy stuff out there in the world, that just came our way...

small circles where we can acknowledge and be present with our feelings about “the world” — whether the world of our community, or of our city, or of our state... or of our country, or even the planet as a whole.

And where there is no pressure either to “think big”, or to “think small”, but rather, where we can meet one another, right where each one of us is...

So that our organism, our own unique configuration of mind/heart/body/spirit, can find *its own way* to make meaning from whatever we have been encountering...

And where we can each feel safe enough, and unpressured enough, to begin to connect with our own creative spirit....

and the tiniest of creative action steps can begin to emerge, to be welcomed and celebrated.

As Meg Wheatley says, a place of “refuge and possibility”...

Given that much of my professional work has been (and continues to be) about “bridging divides” of one kind or another, I want to clarify here, how this is different – even though, paradoxically, it draws upon some similar skill sets and mindsets.

These “creativity incubators” I am envisioning, are NOT about bringing together, the most un-like-minded people you can find... instead, they ARE about, creating a welcoming space for the natural differences that can occur, even amongst generally like-minded people...

so that we can each find our own next steps, in our own time, toward a greater level of powerful action in the world.

THESE STEPS WILL BE DIFFERENT FOR EACH ONE OF US...

I am *not* writing here, about how to start a project team, where we are all working on a single project. Project teams are great!!! We need lots of effective project teams working on all kinds of wonderful creative projects to make the world a better place...

and given my line of work, I also happen to know some things about how to start project teams, and how to support and facilitate them. Maybe that will be another booklet, on the heels of this one....

Yet THIS is NOT that.

What I am writing about here, is about how to host small “incubator circles” – from 3 to 8 people, depending on our level of skill & experience – that can serve as creative incubators, for those of us who may be feeling the urge to find our way into the possibility of “doing something” ...

AND also, for those of us who may have been “active” for a while, yet are wanting to step into a different level of action, or a different *kind* of action, from what we have already been doing.

In other words, small circles for those of us who are feeling frustrated, or overwhelmed, or hopeless, or scared about what is going on in the world...

and who want a safe space where we can EXPLORE, with a few trusted others, what our own next steps might be. (Remember, these might well be teeny, tiny, baby steps... or maybe, somewhat larger steps... it *all* matters.)

Of course, when we take part in an “incubator circle”, we might get inspired and decide that we want to start an actual project.

And again, these projects are likely to be different, for each one of us!

Fast-forwarding here a bit – at that future point, for any of us who have gotten a clearer idea of what we want to do next, our next step might be to find a few others.

This *could* be people who are working on something like this already... maybe in an existing group or organization... *OR*, it might be inviting others who are *not* already working along those lines, but who might want to join in, as collaborators in a new project...

Yet the reason I am mentioning this now, is that I want to clarify that those “others” whom we might want to invite to join a particular project, would most likely NOT be from our own “incubator circle”.

In fact, part of the safety involved in creating an “incubator circle”, is that *none of us feel pressured in any way*, to join one another’s emerging projects!

We join an “incubator circle” to experience listening support, and to offer listening support to one another; this means we agree that we will NOT be “recruiting” one another, into joining anything beyond our little circle.

As I mentioned earlier, there's much that could be said, about this later stage, where we might be developing and managing a concrete project. And those of us who are developing and managing a project, definitely benefit from having a support circle for our project!

But that is a different *kind* of circle, and that would be a whole *other* document...

But THIS... this particular document, is about creating "incubator circles". And actually, my vision is not just about *ONE* incubator circle, but about creating a *movement* of "incubator circles"...

because it seems to me, that this is something that could be of value, for many of us...

What do you think?

Questions, comments, concerns?

(this doc is set to "comment" mode, to welcome any thoughts you may want to leave.

You are welcome to be honest – and, please also be kind. Since incubator spaces need good boundaries, I retain the right to delete any trolling or mean-spirited comments!)

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Current Plan

I am currently exploring with a few people who have expressed interested in co-hosting a prototype circle with me, along these lines. While still fleshing out the design, here are some initial thoughts:

It seems useful to do this in a modular way – inviting people to sign up for something like 8 weeks, for a once-a-week 2-hour small-group session. Then, at the end of that time, those who choose to continue, could sign up for another module.

We are thinking about making this either free of charge, or possibly asking for a small fee of \$5 - \$10 per person per session. In addition, for the second module, we are thinking we'd encourage folks to consider starting their own "incubator circle" – in addition to continuing to take part in ours.

That way, our circle could evolve into being a place where circle leaders who are starting their own groups, can meet for support and mentorship.

In the meantime, I will be writing more here, about how I am envisioning hosting this circle. The intention is to create a stand-alone guide, that you and others might feel inspired to experiment with, whether or not you have ever attended a circle like the one I am describing here. (However, attending a circle like this, or having some other similar experience, would be a good place to start.)

While I am designing this based on having decades of prior experience with many different kinds of group work, my intention is to create a format that is simple enough, that others who have a moderate level of experience and skill, will find the format useful and doable for leading their own groups.

In addition, I will be delighted if it inspires you to "do your own thing". There are many of us who are feeling called these days to create new forms of

group work. I would love to hear about any experiments that you or others may have already embarked on, whether you are doing this based on your own background and experiences... and/or, whether you have been inspired in some way by what I am describing here, and modifying it in whatever ways you might feel called to explore.

I will be sharing my own explorations and on-going learnings here, so that others can benefit from them, and I invite you to do the same....

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Future sections

As you might have noticed, I'm not waiting until I have a "finished product" before sharing this seed of an idea. 😊

I do know, I have a lot to say about simple and powerful ways of creating psychological safety... and also, about why that is key for the work of a "creativity incubator". So I will be writing more about that...

I also want to write about "holding space", and how holding space is key for us humans being able to process complexity. We are not meant to face these times alone...

I want to write about the role of the host / facilitator / accompanier, and why that role is key... and also, why the world needs to have many more of us, who are able to take turns holding that key role of host / facilitator / accompanier.

And, I also want to say more about how this work is different than the work of “bridging divides” – even though, paradoxically, it draws upon some similar skill sets and mindsets.

OK, that’s enough for now... I will be filling in these sections that I’ve not written yet, am just “pointing to them” for now!

Again, I welcome your thoughtful comments, concerns, insights, questions...

Thank you!

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Initial FAQ’s

A good friend asked me some of the questions below, after she read an earlier version of this doc:

1) *"it's not clear to me how these groups are different from so many groups around town?"*

Good question! I could simply say, “I don’t know, they may or may not be... I don’t know all the groups in the town you live in!” :-)

However, I do want to point out that many groups are built around the intention of *moving forward with a shared project*. Other groups might be

more of a support group, while others are formed to explore common interests, such as a book club.

Yet I have not seen many groups that are designed to be, *a support group for finding your own next steps toward action*. There do not seem to be too many groups for people who want to explore, *in their own time and in a safe, welcoming, and no-pressure environment*, what sort of action they *might* want to take.

That seems to me, to be a different **kind** of group, and one that could be very useful.

2) "How will I know participants are going to be trustworthy and good listeners?"

Well, that's a great question. I would imagine that most people will join this kind of small group, because they know the people who are offering to host the group, and they trust that person or persons.

And, they also trust that the hosts, have enough skill to create a positive group climate.

3) "What would happen if I end up in a group with all politically oriented people, and I'm more interested in (homelessness, climate change, etc....)."

That's a great question, too... we're going to be experimenting with this, as I have a hunch that some people would prefer to be in a group where everyone has a shared concern about a similar issue. *However*, the whole point of these groups is that we are NOT going to "all be working together" on ONE thing!

Instead, we're going to be creating a supportive space with others who are *generally* like-minded... as in, we are all concerned about the current state of the world, and think that democracy is worthwhile (either preserving it, or improving upon it, or maybe even reinventing it...:-)

and yet, we will also likely be different from one another, in a variety of ways – just because that's what life is like! Even generally like-minded people, don't all agree on everything.

And so, we are NOT going to be trying to convince anyone else in the group, to be more concerned about the particular issue that is most important to us.

Instead, we are simply going to be creating a supportive space, where **each** person can explore what their own next steps might be, in responding creatively to one of the concerns that most calls to them.

Here's a practical analogy from the personal realm, to illustrate this ***new kind of format***.

Supposing that you knew you wanted to be physically healthier. Well, you *could* join a group that's all about making changes in your diet, *if* you already know that's what you want to do. Or, you *could* join a group, that's all about getting more exercise, if you are clear that that's your intention. Or you *could* join a group, that's all about creating more work-life balance....

Each of those groups are fine and good, and very helpful for the people who know what they want. *But what if* you don't know what you want yet, and you just know, you want to get healthier? Of course you know ALL of those aspects are important, but what if *you don't know where to start*?

It might be helpful to learn, that there's a group where you *don't need to know*, where you can just come as you are, and where we'll be making room for where each person is – in a way that allows each person, to *find their own* “next steps”.

4) “Are these groups just for those of us who tend to vote for x party?”

Nope. These groups are not about persuading anyone to vote any particular way. We are offering a space where a small group of *generally like-minded people*, can come together – *not* to analyze their differences, nor even to explore their similarities – but simply to witness one another, in the kind of warm and caring way that allows each person to find their own “small creative next step” in the face of larger societal challenges.

OK, folks, keep them coming... your questions are welcome here, and I’m so very grateful as they help me clarify, this vision I’ve been entrusted with...

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About me...

Rosa here. If you want to know a bit more about me, here’s a link to the [bio on my website](#)...

From Convo between Rosa and Chuck:

Q: Would it make sense to be explicit about our own guiding principles, or might it be limiting to ppl, to have these presented as our “articles of faith”?

Where we ended up: Rosa leans toward the latter perspective. As an alternative, we could share something like what is on here:

<https://www.diapraxis.net/values/>.

How we got there: Here are Chuck's core principles from the "Bright Future Now" community:

1. There are no things, only processes. The map is not the territory.
2. All processes come out of an underlying unified field, which results in infinite variability.
3. We have the ability to be co-creators in this field.

Rosa's concerns: While I agree with the "Bright Future Now" principles, I'm concerned that people would think they have to take them on as "articles of faith", and I don't want people's belief systems to be an obstacle to their being able to benefit from this work.

At the same time, I also want to be transparent. Here are some principles I've written up before, and are on my website. Maybe it could work to share these with people as part of this project:

The working assumptions that orient our practice (at DiaPraxis.net)

These are the guiding principles and working assumptions on which all of our work is based:

- **Human beings are a gift.** As humans, our natural tendency is to care about one another and to want to contribute. Of course, whenever we are hurt, frustrated, or burnt out, we tend to hide how much we care.
- **Each person has a valuable contribution to make.** All of us are continually trying to make sense of the world around us, given the information we have available. Yet when we feel threatened, we can become protective and defensive.

- **No one likes feeling stuck.** All of us can get stuck in unproductive beliefs or unhelpful interactional patterns, yet feeling stuck is not fun for anyone. Often when we are able to bring empathy to all of the various parts of a stuck situation, shared understandings deepen and shifts happen.
- **Whenever we experience a shift in perspective, new possibilities become apparent.** As Einstein said, “We cannot solve our problems by using the same kind of thinking that we used when we created them.”
- **We can all learn to create spaces in which “shift happens”.** While clients often comment that this work “feels like magic,” my deepest satisfaction comes from helping others develop their skills in this area. My experience has been that shifts happen spontaneously, whenever we create a space that is conducive for shared meaning-making.