

Building the CircleBeing: The Container for Collective Wisdom

Come out of the circle of time. And into the circle of love.
Rumi

Our story

In June of 2000, a sentence came to my mind “I want to work in a team.” Being a self-employed psychotherapist with a lot of clients, I didn’t know what it meant, at first.

But I wrote an invitation to four dear friends whom I knew for many years. All women, we had already come together for several years within a larger group: Kris, Rein, Marita and Theresia. We started our journey ‘in circle’: a transforming and healing journey. De Vijfster (The Five Star) was born.

Sitting in circle or coming together in a circle means that nobody is the boss, that nobody has more power than anyone else. It means that you sit together, literally, in a circle without any tables. Most of the time it means that everybody focuses on the common purpose in the middle and not on each other. The circle is held together by this ‘sacred’ middle. We trust in this and always come back to it.¹

We sat in the circle, not knowing on the conscious level where to go, where we were heading, what was the next step to take.

We walked, step by step, together, and we built a strong container. A container that can hold anger and joy, that is built out of love and commitment, that is strong, vulnerable and flexible. The best thing to name it is: the CircleBeing². In my opinion, the CircleBeing is the best and only structure to let Collective Wisdom arise when we intend it--not only by accident or just now and then. For me, wisdom is knowledge linked with Love, or intelligence that is life affirming; realising that we are embedded in the evolution of the universe and acting from there.

Looking back at these past five years it becomes visible what we have done; what processes we went through, what was needed and what were mere sidetracks.

We always used the same questions:

“How do we do this – no matter what – so that it is done out of deep respect and love?”

“How can I reply out of love when I don’t like what you said?”

“How to show respect to others when I am in a hurry?”

Hundreds of situations needed these questions and truthful answers to them, so we became wiser and more compassionate as we built the container.

A collective container

Why don't we ask these questions every day and in every situation?

But even more important: Why don't we live up to the answers that our heart whispers silently?

Why is it more difficult to be together wisely – especially when we are together for a longer time – than to read about it or tell it to our friends?

There is a big difference.

Everybody can FEEL it.

Because we are involved--with all of our being. We cannot hide. We cannot be our 'normal, conditioned self anymore. We have to change.

Transformation of the world, of our organisations, of my relationships, asks for transformation of myself, of ourselves. Nothing more, nothing less. It's about the transformation of our being together, of the group, and of the community.

Love is the only emotion that expands intelligence.
Humberto Maturana

Strong containers are needed in the world of today. Strong containers to hold chaos and turmoil, to hold the complexity of today's world, to give shelter to the members to express love and to be vulnerable.

First of all we need individuals who are strong containers. That means people who take responsibility for their emotions, their bodily energy fields, their thoughts, their own wills. People who are containers for themselves. Individuals who can witness all this, even when the charge is high, very high.

In a group we need the same: strong group fields that can hold, can contain strong energies. The available energy in a group reflects the collective potential of the group. But with higher potential there is more at stake, so emotions can get very charged. Therefore, groups with a strong vision and a high potential need to invest in building strong, yet very flexible containers.

The CircleBeing can be the body/mind structure of a group³.

We need to learn and practice how we can clear and heal this body/mind/soul structure on a group level. When my body, mind and soul are aligned I feel joyful, wise and relaxed. For a group we need the same: a transparent group field. The group or the community is our next playfield for transformation: our next challenge and opportunity to experience wholeness. "For in a group we begin to experience the ecosystem of the soul."⁴

The CircleBeing is a jointly built structure, created through respect, trust and love. It generates the field that is open to receive the Wisdom of the Whole. The CircleBeing is the womb out of which Collective Wisdom can be born and accessed again and again.

Yin and Yang

Writing this article about our experiences, trying to make them known and available to others, I am aware of their yin and yang. Trying to grasp the essence of the different parts of the process, it became clear that I could always look at them from a feminine and from a masculine side. I tried to distinguish them, but they are not separated, they are intertwined. So I searched for feminine and masculine language: an experiment.

As we are used to analysis in our masculine-oriented Western world, I have tried to distinguish processes, movements, layers and areas or movements of life itself.

But how to build this CircleBeing?

This article will show you some maps that can clarify the big field of living it.

You will find circular maps and a square one (page 14). Use them as you like; none of them can replace the actual experience of building together this beautiful group condition that will allow more and deeper wisdom than we've known up to now.

The table on page 17 may lead you to the idea that everything goes in a straight line, that you can plan it from 1 to 4; that it will be a clear process. It will not be. It is stated many times: The map is not the territory.

In real life it will be chaotic, messy, with people experiencing a lot of resistance.

The old forms or habits of feeling – thinking – knowing try desperately to survive; although another part of our being wants to learn something new, something better, something wiser.

In the process of becoming the CircleBeing all distinctive parts can be present in the same moment: they are all part of one integral experience.

The circular maps (page 18-19) reveal better the complexity and the wholeness of the experience.

I tried to find stories, to use images and words that can give you a glimpse of this deep, unfolding experience. If you want to feel it, start the process, sit together in a circle, go step by step, and build the container as you travel ...

Learning and healing

All steps, all movements in this journey are needed for healing and for learning. We will nurture and help each other and we will learn as we travel together.

Every distinctive movement that will be outlined further on, is there to clear away what is separating us from 'what is': phenomena as they are, without any interpretation.

We simply cannot move from our conditioned habits in a group to the living of Collective Wisdom in one step. It needs learning, practice, commitment, compassion, and a lot of love. All our conditioning in feeling, thinking, doing has separated us and

divided us. It has put a veil on the wholeness. As LaChapelle stated: “A considerable portion of any group’s energy is devoted to the remediation of these various veils.”⁵ If we want Collective Wisdom to emerge, each member needs to find this ever deepening, inner experience of wholeness or interconnectivity. Mental knowing alone will not be enough.

For that we don’t need to be enlightened beings. Openness and the intention to rely on the subtle levels will inform us and teach us during the journey. A few people in a group with easy access to these levels can ‘infect’ the others. We learned, step by step, to rely on information from this subtle level. Many times we didn’t share information to find out later, that it was a missing piece in the whole. When one or two did take their images, words, impulses for ‘real’, the others were inclined to do it also. This phenomenon is called ‘entrainment’. Mostly we are familiar with it from the negative side: how a few aggressive people can engender aggression in a crowd.

This article is a first attempt to bring our collective experience to others. People who are acquainted with the latest theories and articles about leadership, circlework, collective wisdom, integral thinking etc. will recognize elements from these fields. I feel very grateful for all the books and articles that helped me and gave words to our experience and inner knowing.

Collective Leadership

... the feminine moves to improve the dream by improving the conditions, and the masculine moves to improve the dream by improving the depth of recognition.
David Deida⁶

The first title of this article was: The feminine side of Collective Wisdom. I changed it because it made the content too limited.

I called it ‘feminine’ because of the practical, enabling side: the acting – out of love and compassion – in every moment; not only in meditation, not only for the time of a workshop, but in every moment of your life, including work; even when we do the dishes together, when we have to make an appointment or when we are in a hurry. The feminine side is like the mother holding the child in her love, in her energy field. She creates the conditions in which the child can grow. And when the field is rather open and cleared, the child blossoms and the mother knows what to do. The CircleBeing is this holding space, the container in which Collective Wisdom can be born and grow.

As mentioned before: nobody is ‘the’ leader, not even the wise one. Everybody is the leader; the collective is the leader. This may be a strange concept, but it will be the next step in leadership evolution.

The collective will be leading. The group will lead itself, together. No more one guy who is supposed to know it all or to know it better or to have the brightest vision. But it will be a celebration of diversity on the highest level of business and leadership.

And throughout in society: everywhere people coming together in circles to improve their lives, their work, their neighborhood. Because they love it, they are motivated, and they enjoy creating together.

This is very different than sitting together and enjoying each other's company. It is about Leadership. It is about acting in the world. It is about accomplishing what we want.

So every step in this process is crucial, every move is important. To become a group with mutual respect and love on a deep level is not an easy thing to accomplish.

We embarked on our shared journey supported in the beginning by a facilitator. He brought in some masculine energy and off we went: going step by step, stimulating each other to go beyond our 'normal' behaviour. And we did it: we reached Collective Leadership. And we are also still learning. The Circle of Seven had a similar journey without an outside facilitator⁷. So other groups could do it by themselves too. Our skills as psychotherapists and healers, our rich resources of methods and a long history of personal growth helped us tremendously. New forming groups can speed up their process by asking a facilitator, a process leader to help. But transformation takes time, even with help. The Bushmen of the Kalahari have a term, 'to grow slowly'. If you rush, you abort the element that will make synergy [and community] stick.⁸

These facilitators – of course – need to know out of their own experience what this journey is about, they need to master all the skills required.

Becoming the CircleBeing: Unfolding Authenticity and Living Interconnectedness

Building together this container, which we call the CircleBeing, can be seen as a process, unfolding along two dimensions.

One line, Unfolding Authenticity, invites us to become aware of what is real, and to clear away that which prevents us from being present. It is the unfolding of our own, and even collective, authenticity.

As a parallel process we learn to open and connect ourselves with an ever-expanding reality; all the way from I, myself, to the future and the universe: Living Interconnectedness

These two lines of Unfolding Authenticity and Living Interconnectedness expand and grow intertwined; as two spirals uplifting and supporting each other.

The CircleBeing is not built at once. We need to go through different layers or phases. We need to broaden our focus before we finally arrive where the magic can take place.

These layers are nested in each other and depend on one another. They are like holons. The layer or the inner movement of accepting 'transforms and includes' the inner movement of acknowledging. It is not possible to turn this upside down. The direction of development through these different layers is one of unfolding more and more authenticity. An invitation to each of us!

Further on you will find an elaboration of the content and process of these two dimensions I describe Unfolding Authenticity as a movement from acknowledging (1) to accepting (2), then honouring (3) and last but not least, living (4). I continue with

explaining Living Interconnectedness: from Myself (1) over Relationships (2) and the Group (3) to Evolution (4). The four parts of both dimensions cross each other at different points. That makes 16 different squares on the map (p.17) or 16 different attention points in this unfolding journey. Each of them is described in depth. Every movement has a masculine and a feminine viewpoint; which both need attention as two sides of one coin.

The masculine side I named 'focus on': to direct the attention to the point or field that needs to be witnessed. The feminine side is named 'opening to'. It's about receiving; about letting things happen, moving away from controlling.

One dimension: Unfolding Authenticity

Of course we didn't reinvent the wheel: acknowledging, accepting, honouring are part of many practices of personal and/or spiritual growth. We added to that the 'living': discovering and designing new behaviour in the here and now, within the group context.

Acknowledging what is

Focus on : the here and now

Opening to : seeing, hearing, (inner) knowing, experiencing, feeling

Wanting change, wherever you need or want it, starts always with acknowledging 'what is'; which is, in the same moment, acknowledging 'what is not'.

The movement of acknowledging is a big and deep movement of focused attention. In our Western world, we mostly are very far away from being in touch with 'what is'. Most of the time our attention is immersed in our thinking: the storage of our ideas, our prejudices, our remembering... of everything that has been. Our attention is rarely with what we are experiencing right here and now. People who practice meditation master a lot of it, although some are mostly trained on the mental level. They often lack the same skill on the bodily side of the here and now. What is really new for the field of Collective Wisdom is a focused attention and feeling for the energy field and purpose of the group: what do I need to do in support of the group and in support of what is emerging through us?

Accepting what is

Focus on : broadening

Opening to : the subtle

Accepting is one little step further than acknowledging.

If I acknowledge that what I feel and think is really from me, and that what the other thinks or feels is really his or her truth, and if I accept both as really true, than we are challenged to suspend our 'normal' frames of feeling, thinking, and willing. We have more freedom at our disposal; something bigger looks to be 'true'. The increasing of our framings goes on, and on, and on. We feel the web of interconnectedness more, and we experience more deeply that we are connected and are held by the bigger Whole.

This is all about the discipline of being present and 'presencing'. My journey in thinking and writing about our own experience started with my enthusiastic discovery

of the U-process. I feel deeply grateful for the contribution of Otto Scharmer⁹ and encourage you to read his work. It has a deep grounding that cannot be shown in this article.

Honouring what is

Focus on : deepening

Opening to : interconnection

If there is real acceptance - of myself, of the other, of the group as a whole, of life in its fullness – then we are ready to honour it totally.

This asks for engagement/commitment: to show oneself fully, to learn to let the other fully be him or herself. It asks engagement in deepening the communication, which we are not used to do. The deepening is a devotion to connect to these deeper layers of myself and of course to the deeper layers of the other and of the bigger whole in which we work or live together. This devotion, this really accepting and honouring, brings us to an ever-expanding authenticity.

Living what is

Focus on : sharing and expressing

Opening to : authenticity

To live what is, is giving form, giving shape in the acting right here and now. One form that we – in the Western middle class – know very well, is talking. But talking, although it is done respectfully and carefully, is just one piece of life. We have experienced that through doing many other things together, our gathering deepened very much. This deepening cannot be done in conversation alone. Think of a partnership in which we would only engage in talking... Wherever you look in the world: real communities eat together, they sing and they dance, they have rituals to mark important moments in life: they create their own culture. Every group that wishes to come to Collective Wisdom shall, gradually, create its own culture.

Another dimension: Living interconnectedness

As the layers of Unfolding Authenticity are developing out of each other, so are the different domains of Living Interconnectedness.

We have to open ourselves before we can really connect with the other. And that needs to be mastered before I can live love and respect on a group level. And we need some practice in this before we can live – together – what wants to emerge through us.

These domains are not areas with clear-cut boundaries. It is better to see them as movements, as processes, as they intertwine with the movements of the Unfolding Authenticity.

The overall development here is one of more and more interconnectedness.

Myself

Focus on : my inner being

Opening to : opening

On the surface it looks like we know a lot of 'I', the 'me' that I represent in the world every day. Never before in history have we heard so many times this little word 'I'.

But who is this 'me' really?

How well do I know, how much am I aware of what is really going on inside me? Is my attention is grounded in my senses, in my feelings and not in my thoughts? How many times do I only know *after* the fact what happened inside of me?

Most disciplines of therapy, personal growth and spirituality beckon us to go inwards with our attention: to witness the deeper layers of this entity we name 'I'. And it is always a dis-cover-y. These deeper layers show hidden aspects that have never been fully in the light, some very beautiful, and others that look awful. But even these shadowy sides – that the 'I' wants to hide – are so essential for our true authenticity. It hides in its shell a pearl of wisdom and great vision. That is what is needed to be present in this world.

Relationships

Focus on : the inner being of the other

Opening to : connecting

Of course we know how to behave, how to handle conflict, how to shy away when it is needed. That's what I call our surviving patterns. Mine differs from yours, sometimes they are opposite, but they all have one thing in common: we don't relate really. We see others somehow as enemies, as 'really' different from me, as ignorant, as

It's a big thing to get the notion of 'everybody has her own truth' really under your skin. Whenever we are touched in a vulnerable spot our defence, our fight, starts and all notion of different views on reality disappears. Every time we need the courage and the conscious choice to open up for this other 'I' and try to find a way of connecting.

When I can see through my own patterns and reveal the hidden parts of myself, it's so much easier to see these hidden places in the other and be open and loving with it. After all he is just as human as I am, only a different expression, a different colour and different shape.

When we can start to be curious toward this diversity and see our complementarity, then we establish a relationship.

The group

Focus on : the group field

Opening to : loving

The group is formed out of a number of people, but more than that, it is shaped by the relationships between all; by the mutual influences that goes – unnoticed by the conscious mind – at light speed.

By group I mean here the team, the family, people gathered for improving the neighbourhood, the whole of an organisation.

We have to be trained to observe, to sense, to become aware of the group's identity. Even when a group is formed around a specific task, like a project team, it has its own flavour, its own culture.

How can we learn to set aside this 'I' and give my interventions and contributions only in service of the well being of the group and its task? It's a big step beyond our Western individuality, but it is not regressing to a primitive tribal state. It is the next step in consciousness: from dependent, to in-dependent, to inter-dependent.

I need you all, and you all need the best from me. I have to give my full potential to bring the group to its highest results. I am the leader when my area of knowledge is at hand, and then you are the leader in another topic and we all know. Leadership is rotating or is taken by the collective. We all are leaders and we share the overall responsibility. An Authentic Group is born.

Evolution

Focus on : emergence

Opening to : becoming

Although we don't know many Authentic Groups, we can visualise them. It seems possible to get there. The next step, opening the group's consciousness to what Evolution is asking of them is another piece of cake!

If we want to feel, to sense, to presence what life is telling us about the group's higher or Authentic Purpose we need a lot of group silence. This not only means individuals who don't speak, but a group-connecting-in-silence reaching out to collective wisdom.

We needed a lot of training, and a lot of courage and willingness to voice our own sparks of wisdom and to see other's information as wisdom too. To see this is still relatively easy to accomplish, but to act on it, to arrange our life according to it... we are still struggling with that.

Cross points of the two dimensions: Connecting Unfolding Authenticity and Living Interconnectedness

1. Acknowledging what is - in myself

In our human, physical form acknowledging what is, starts on the physical level. I focus my attention on my internal experience: my physical sensations and the feelings that arise. As most Westerners are not used to giving attention to their bodies and the information the body provides, it is good to start a spiritual/bodily training, such as aikido, tai chi, yoga, dancing, dynamic meditations and so on. Acknowledging the body is to take its signals and information seriously; using the information of feeling as equal and complementary to the information provided by our thinking.

The physical body is, on the one hand, a storehouse of old memories and, on the other hand, a very good receptor of information of the fields around us. We, therefore, need to become good listeners, to be able to discern what is old and what is really here and now.

The importance of the awareness of the body for the grounding of wisdom cannot be overestimated. As in any team sport, the training of the body is not the ultimate

purpose, but is in service of the team playing as a whole. In the end it is in my body, as container, that I can hold the energies of feeling, thinking, chaos, wisdom and so on.

2. Accepting what is - in myself

We can summarise the movement of accepting on the personal level as the suspending of the habitual emotional re-actions.

Most of our emotional reactions are literally re-actions: doing the same again. As Scharmer calls it beautifully: downloading. There is nothing new about it; we have been there hundreds of times.

Accepting means that we focus our attention on broadening our view. It is not the other who makes me angry, sad, anxious... these emotions were already there in me, in my memory. It is not an easy task to accomplish: to take full responsibility for my own feelings. There is nobody or nothing outside of me that can stir my emotions if I stay centered in myself. But it is tempting to make the other responsible, so I don't have to change.

This has a big consequence on how we put our feelings into words. The challenge is to share the feelings without any interpretation; especially not about the feelings of the other(s); and even not about our own feelings. Accepting what is, is naming the obvious, nothing more.

This I call emotional maturity: it is my emotional wound; it is my pain; and I hold it by myself. When we do this, we settle deeper into compassion and love. The heart is opening: in the first place for ourselves and in the same movement for every human being, and even beyond that.

The opening of the heart establishes a ground floor. We experience being carried by, and being held in our emotions by the whole.

3. Honouring what is - in myself

Honouring what is in myself is sharing my deepest emotions, the deeper layers that are mostly hidden away. It's about being totally congruent – or intending to be – between my words and my feelings.

My shadow, that part of me which was not allowed to be present, is not 'bad'.

Because it had to hide in the dark and was not permitted to be visible it is loaded with a lot of emotional charge, which hides away the beauty of its essence. We will be amazed: by opening up to our shadow we find a precious gift: our core quality.

When I dared to feel that deep inside I always thought of myself as better, as knowing more, as having more personal growth than others. This felt deeply painful. I could share this with my best friends, and only then, by acknowledging and really accepting (not judging) the mistrust I had in others, I became my real self. Caressing myself instead of judging or feeling guilty or be ashamed is of utmost importance. And the gift of humble leadership became visible and sensible in myself.

This sharing of deeper feelings is not as easy for most men as it is for women and both should regard this as a fact: our brains differ. As women, let's honour every attempt of men to try to be congruent in their giving words to emotions. It is opposite in other areas of life.

4. Living what is - in myself

After honouring my deeper self the only possible next step is living myself to its full potential.

In talking I share my highest dreams and my deepest aspirations. And along with the talking I show my creativity: my dance, my poetry, my deep insights, my inner knowing, my cooking, my arrangement of flowers, my

5. Acknowledging what is - in relationship

The core quality here is: listening. We were not taught to listen to the deeper meaning, or the essence of my speaking partner. We were trained in conversation-fights and discussions. Acknowledging the other is listening with full attention and observing the other beyond the spoken words. Not only listening to the words, but to the meaning they have for the speaker.

It is listening without thinking about a counterargument for winning the speaking-game.

It is listening without prejudice.

It is listening with the respect that everybody deserves and that we all hope for when we talk.

Most difficult is listening without giving advice or trying to fix it.

Used to giving advice and 'to help' as psychotherapists, coaches and trainers we had to teach one another just to witness. We learned to trust the deeper power of witnessing; to rely on the integrity of the emergent process.

6. Accepting what is – in relationship

Deep listening can bring you to real acceptance. To see the other as another human being, with his or her own history, own failures, own qualities, own viewpoints.

These different viewpoints are many times the stumbling blocks. Accepting what is, in this case means: to suspend your judging, all your prejudices, to see your own beliefs as only one part of reality. This requires an opening to the field of not-knowing, connecting to something as yet unseen.

Besides leaving behind these judgments of each other it also means to become conscious of the deeply held, common assumptions and mental models. Because we share them, they stay underground, but they are still forces that create our common reality. If a group can take this step, a new way of thinking, acting, creating will unfold.

7. Honouring what is – in relationship

To honour you while you say something that makes me angry is a core capability that we have to develop.

This is a very fundamental piece of the group's evolution: keeping clear the interpersonal field between all members of the group! This is a big commitment.

We found out that what is disturbing between 2 people needs to be voiced and named. Not in an offensive or attacking way but integrating the listening and the not-knowing we just described.

It is trying and learning to see the other as being more than her personality; to see her or his essence, even when we are in a conflict, when I feel irritated by you and so on...

It also means to dare to address the issues that the other is blind to see. It is connecting on the level of: "I see you are a human being, just as I am."

The underlying mechanism that needs to be transcended is projection. We see in the other something we don't like or even can't stand. If looked upon, it is a part of us that is not integrated yet; that we don't want to be part of our own humanness. The first movement is to become aware of your projections. The next is taking the decision to withdraw yourself from the projection; and then come back to your own inner balance. The movements from 1 till 3 are very much needed here!

This means also that you have to expand your awareness to the subtleties of what is going on between you and the other. Not sweeping 'little' issues under the rug. If not named, not brought to the surface, they will 'grow' in their own way and probably burst to the surface. Honour them and they will contribute a lot toward mutual understanding and trust building.

8. Living what is – in relationship

When you live-what-is in yourself and truly honour-what-is in relationships, then you become aware of the big diversity that is present in your group.

Acknowledging the diversity, and not staying at the point of: "we are all the same, how nice!" also means introducing and accepting different ways of sharing and expressing. Besides the normal talking, step-by-step, each of us came up with their own contribution: proposed a dance, invited the others in a constellation exercise, introduced herself with some writing or poetry. It enabled us to get to know each other and show ourselves more. And more than this, the modes of expressions that are not so familiar with me, teach me a lot of unknown richness inside myself.

9. Acknowledging what is – in the group

Up to here most of what I have described is already known in circles of personal growth and collective intelligence. Focusing attention at the group level, is something known by most expert trainers and facilitators. In our way up to collective leadership it is required that we all learn this competence. We have to increase our awareness up to the group level and beyond – as we will see further on.

Acknowledging what is in the group can be named as observing the group field. You need to train your physical and inner senses to perceive this field.

What is going on between the others?

What is playing at a deeper level in the group?

Besides focussing on what is kind of disturbing, another very important quality is becoming aware of when is the right moment to bring in your own contribution in service of the group and in support of the group's field.

We are still in the process of learning this. We don't have any rules to give. But when it is done, you can feel the flow in the conversation, in the meeting, in the whole day. Suggestions for agenda change are easily agreed on, even welcomed, because they 'fit'.

10. Accepting what is – in the group

When a great deal of trust is built and a shared culture is establishing itself, something like the group's will shows up. A new entity, a new spirit is conceived and tries to let itself know and be known.

At that point we need to broaden our own perspective. My own, old and personal identities and intentions are positioned now in this larger field. My own will doesn't need to be excluded, but aligned with and included in the group's will. This asks for a process of tuning in, which is largely an inside, inner movement or awareness; a kind of inner negotiating or finding balance.

This group's will is – of course – not visible. It can be perceived in the subtle realms, after we open our hearts and minds and we start to experience interconnectedness.

11. Honouring what is - in the group

When we acknowledge our own contribution and open ourselves to the group's will, we get a sense of being responsible for bringing in our own highest potential, our own field of leadership, to use it in service of the group's highest potential.

As a women's group we want to emphasize that, besides the 'normal' and known forms of leadership, there are a lot more tasks and areas of work and attention where high levels of leadership support the group's outcome. We call them the feminine forms of leadership: cleaning and taking care of the environment, beautifying it, providing nurturing food, organising feasts and rituals, organising trips together and so on.

If everybody else takes his full share in this, I can totally relax and deepen my trust in the group as a whole. I can open to the group as a community that takes care of me in the fields where I am not the leader. I trust and can follow the ideas and suggestions of others in these other fields of life or work.

It seems contradictory that it is only when we learn to act out of our unique, authentic place that we then experience the full holding of the group. This kind of holding is from a higher level (trans) than the holding that is wanted by the baby (pre). It is a deeper connection with the mutual inter-dependence as the next stage in development beyond dependence and independence.

Being aware of your own leadership means also to be conscious of your own needs; to voice them and to act on them. If you need to move your body to become centred again – and nobody else joins you in that – just do it, as long as you don't disturb the others. Leadership means taking responsibility for your own good feeling, not out of egotism, but ultimately in service of the whole group.

12. Living what is – in the group

Now we begin to see clearly what defines the special flavour of this group. If everybody brings in her fullest potential we get a unique blend of qualities, a rich buffet of different and complementary ingredients.

In this group field nobody is the boss. Everybody takes responsibility when needed, when her competencies are called for. Responsibility is shared and leadership is rotating.

On the speaking level a lot of new social technologies have already proven their usefulness: sitting in Circle, Open Space Technology, World Cafe, dialogue.

On the expressing side the group creates its own rituals in how things are done, in where they meet and so on. I want to emphasize this point very much as we – in Western society – are so used to ‘the talking culture’ that we don’t see anymore that it is just that: ‘a culture’; and that we can create it differently if we want to.

All the habits in shared eating or not, in time spent on having fun, or on informal talking, and using different kinds of expression can be looked upon very consciously and likewise changed according to what fits best for this group or organisation. Then we can see the birth of an Authentic Group.

We did a lot of rituals together where we connected all levels of our being: physical, emotional, mental, spiritual. We took the time to invent and create them together and we all experienced them as very, very important. Looking back we see that we did rituals for honouring the different phases in the group’s process, and their influence was so deep that we will never forget any of them.

So we tried out different forms between ourselves, but the future will require that we expand this body of knowledge.

13. Acknowledging what is – in Evolution

What does it mean: focus on the here and now in Evolution? To open up to ‘becoming’? First of all it asks for a deep quality of listening. Deeper than being sensitive to what is happening on the group level, it asks for a listening to signs out of the future. In fact it is not the active art of listening towards something specific, but finding the stillness inside yourself. And once you are there, connecting with the others in the same field of stillness. In this stillness we open ourselves, or we open the common field for receiving what wants to be known. So the movement is active in searching and finding this inner experience of deep silence, and also the active outreach to connect with the others in this realm. The passive side is the receiving part: acknowledging that we can hear – see- know things out from the future. Or that we can have a feeling of the energetic blueprint that is already out there in space, waiting for us to see it, and to manifest it.

14. Accepting what is – in Evolution

Acknowledging that Evolution has a direction means that not only my own, personal vision has to be stretched; but that our common vision has to be broadened too! This vision is mostly built out of former experiences, memories, and gathered knowledge. ‘Accepting Evolution’ makes it clear that there is another source of ‘knowledge’ besides that.

This is the point where synchronicity comes in. Synchronicity can be seen as little or bigger ‘signs’ for this kind of knowing: the subtle realm of knowledge. It means seeing the signs, the phenomena, as valid information out of the bigger Vision (or Evolution). We need a kind of training to perceive these phenomena and not categorise them as not functional, but rather to valid them as meaningful for the tasks at hand or the focus question. As LaChapelle says so beautifully: “Humbly recognise the presence of wisdom...”

I want to emphasize here that this is different from some New Age credo that “everything, every situation, has (to have) a meaning”. What I am referring to here is born out of the deeper silence, the common field of stillness. No more ego here that has ‘a need for meaning’.

15. Honouring what is – in Evolution

The phenomena are not only ‘out there’ but in stillness a lot of images, stories, impulses come to the surface. We need to learn to see them as part of the collective wisdom. To acknowledge that I can receive wisdom, that I am always connected with it.

As this is sometimes hard to do, we can even have a harder time to recognise the input of others as wisdom too!

All these words, images, and information are available for everyone in the deeper levels, which we can access in these meditative states.

Honouring this information asks for the courage to live by it: to voice it, and to act on it.

Connecting with this information, which was not processed by our analytical, mental mind, indeed asks for a strong belief in this bigger wisdom.

16. Living what is – in Evolution

How do we live Evolution? I don’t claim that we have ‘the’ answer, but I can share the method we used a lot of times.

Inspired by the contribution of William Isaacs in the Fifth Disciple Workbook, I ‘invented’ what we came to call the ‘container meditation’.

Out of the shared silence, the shared stillness and centering, we would focus on a question or issue that is important to us at that time. We learned to speak or to voice the wisdom we could gather in this way. Indeed, deep spiritual truths came to the surface and had a deep personal meaning for all of us.

We are now in the process of using this method for seeking guidance on the very practical level of our life. Seeking information is very easy. The answers will be given if you learn to listen, but living up to the answers is sometimes difficult! It asks for decisions that don’t always fit in your normal schedule.

So the container we built together, going through all the states and stages, is ready now to receive the Collective Wisdom. The next step is to act on the received information.

Living Collective Wisdom: the next step

Becoming a CircleBeing is not a purpose on its own. It is creating the container. It is preparing the ground and receiving the information. In the language of the U-process it is the Sensing and the Presencing. Next step is the acting ‘in the world’, the Realising in the U-process.

I/we don’t know how to describe in detail the process of acting out of the Collective Wisdom; out of the Authentic Group Purpose. My guess now is: you act on it, or you don’t. If you don’t, you ‘step out’ of the interconnectedness again; at least you act as if you are not connected.

The Authenticity in this level is shown in the collective, higher Purpose for this particular group. This specific container, this group is meant to be the birthplace of something unique, as every individual is unique. I have come to think about it as the TaskBeing.

I see it as the next level of complexity that is reachable, the next level of emergence.
And all this is in service of Evolution.
As Bohm explained: the universe is a participating universe: it becomes as we live it.

The story will unfold...

Closing

In a business context it will be very fruitful to train the skills of the first three areas (Myself, Relationship, and The group), and take as a fourth area the business, the task, the problem that must be solved. The translation of this whole body of knowledge applied in a business context will be the focus of another article.

What I tried to communicate in this short article could be a topic for a whole book. There are so many links that could be discovered more in depth!

To name just a few:

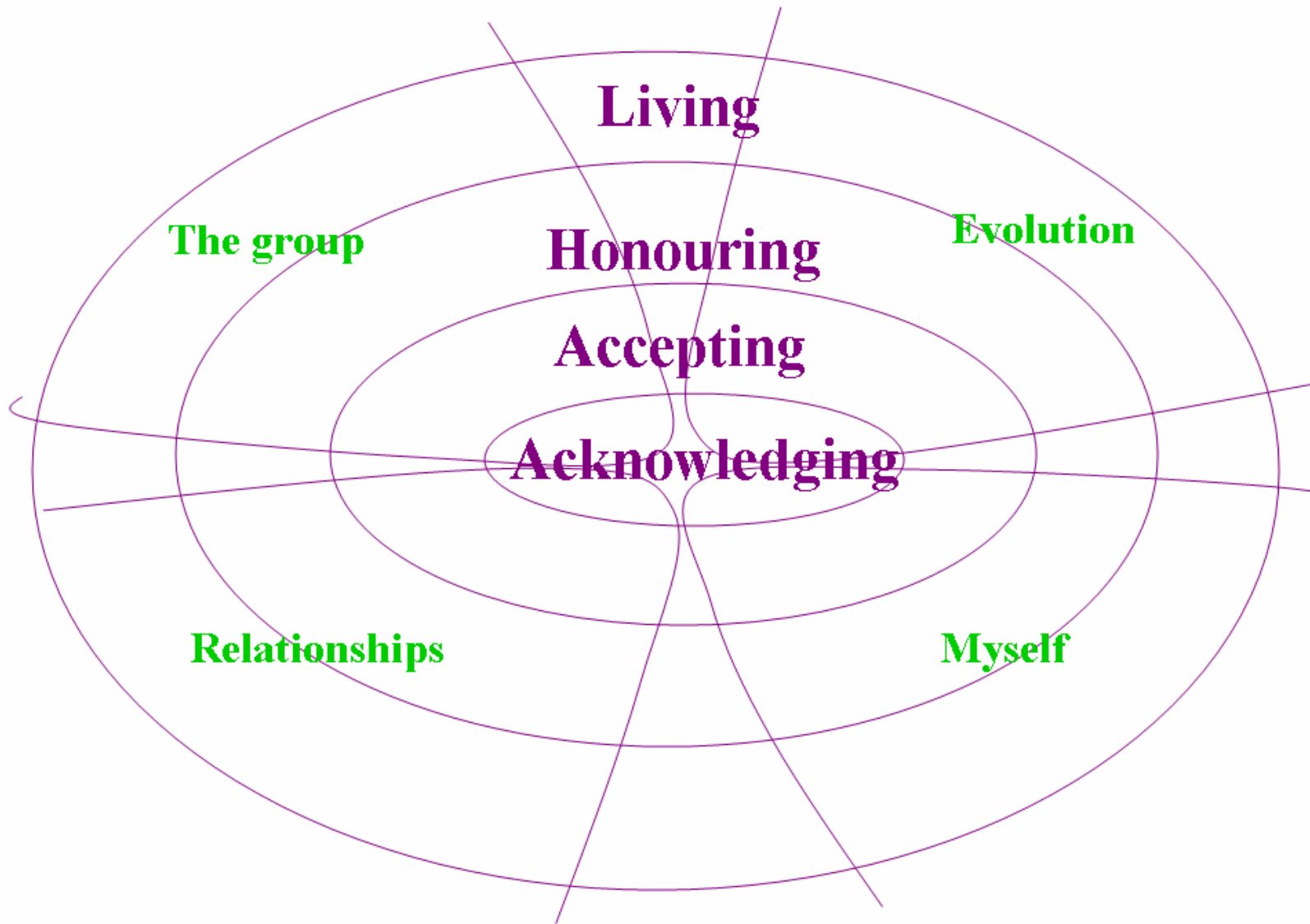
- Presencing and the U-curve (Scharmer)
- Circle Wisdom (Baldwin)
- Dialogue (Isaacs)
- Integral Psychology (Wilber)
- Spiral Dynamics (Beck)
- Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider)
- Community Building (Peck)

Besides that, as time passes by, I discover new depths, new pieces in this evolving puzzle. Even now, by ending this article, I don't have the feeling that I am finished with it. But I already passed my deadline months ago and I want to offer it to the world.

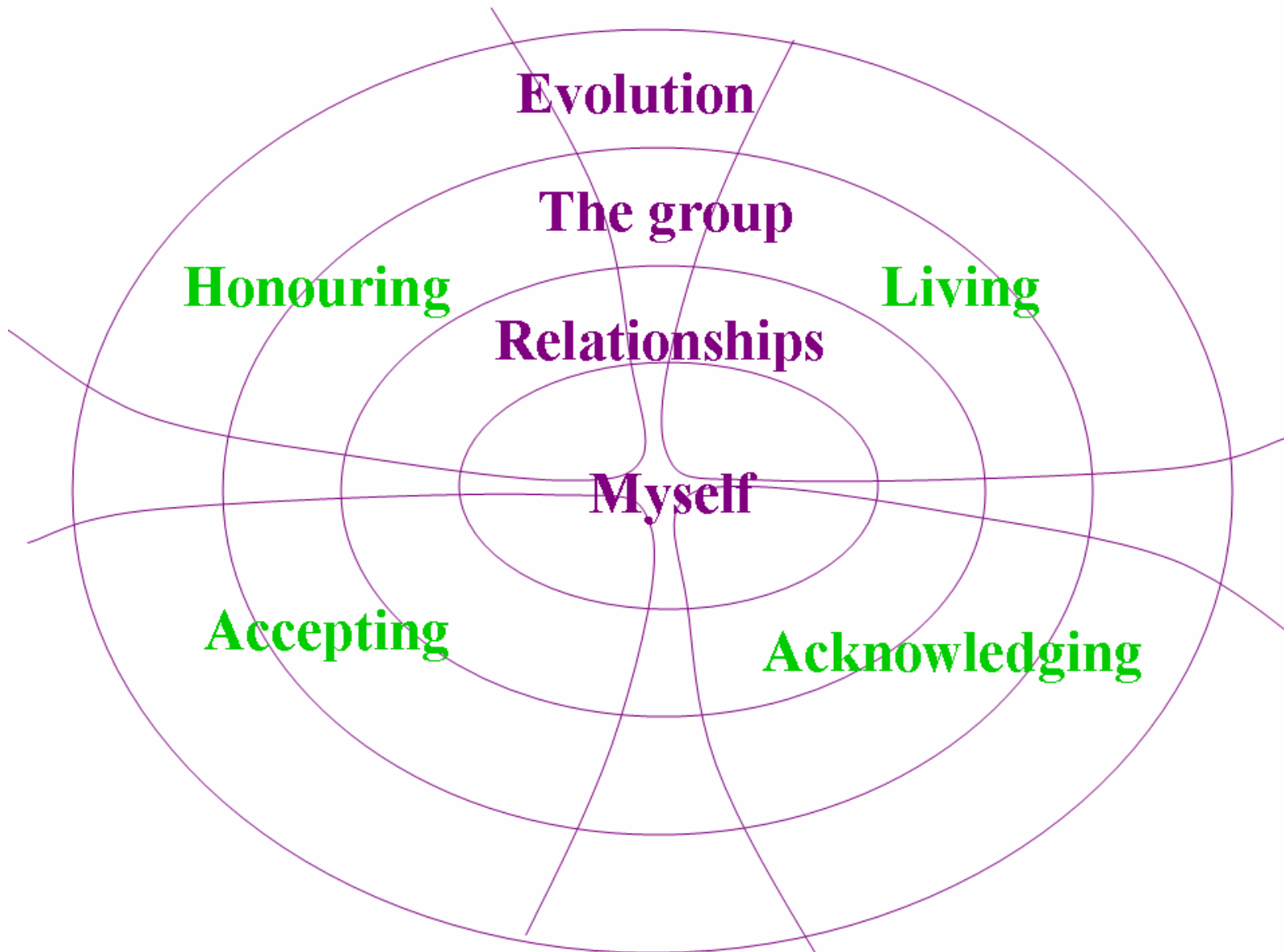
I hope a lot of people can sense the inner wisdom of it and find some pieces that help them to complete their own puzzle on their way to Collective Wisdom.

Belgium; Bekkevoort
09.03.2005

	Living Interconnectedness			
	Myself	Relationships	The group	Evolution
Building the CircleBeing: The container for Collective Wisdom	Focus on: my inner being Opening to: opening	Focus on: the inner being of the other Opening to: connecting	Focus on: the group field Opening to: loving	Focus on: emergence Opening to: becoming
Un- folding Authen- ticity	Acknowledging what is Focus on: the here and now Opening to: feeling	Inner observation of bodily and emotional signals To see, to hear, (inner) knowing = to feel	Listen with attention, beyond words Opening up to the other	Observing the (invisible) group field Opening up to one's own contribution in service of the group
	Accepting what is Focus on: broadening Opening to: the subtle	Witness your own emotional re-actions Opening of the Heart	Discern prejudices Opening up to not-knowing	Witness your own will (the little will) Opening up for the group's Will
	Honouring what is Focus on: deepening Opening to: connecting	Being vulnerable , the deep layers in our self (shadow) Connecting with our inner treasure	Clearing the interpersonal field See the other as more than his/her personality	Aware of full potential and own leadership Opening up to be held by the group
	Living what is Focus on: sharing and expressing Opening to: authenticity	Sharing dreams and inspirations Opening up to the Authentic Self	Acknowledging and appreciating diversity Opening up to Authentic Relationship	Shared responsibility and rotating leadership Opening up to this Authentic Group
				Focus on stillness Opening to what wants to emerge
				Focussing on broadening the vision Opening up to perceive the phenomena
				Be conscious of own inner impulses Opening up to the courage to live your impulses
				Higher group Purpose Opening up to Collective Wisdom



Building the Circlebeing. The Container for Collective Wisdom.
Ria Baeck
Winter 2005



Ria Bæck
Winter 2005

on this subject at [Peerspirit](#).

² I borrowed this name from [The Circle of Seven](#), with their permission.

³ [David LaChapelle](#) has a lot of interesting things to say about this.

⁴ Idem

⁵ Another interesting article from [LaChapelle](#) on: Theory and Practice for the Generation of Group Wisdom.

⁶ www.deidasource.com

⁷ You can read the interview of Otto Scharmer with The Circle of Seven, which gives a good view on their process and on what they actually do.

⁸ This I found in an article by [Robert Kenny](#).

⁹ See "Presence: Human Purpose and the field of the future." By: Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, Joe Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers. Published by The Society for Organizational Learning, Boston, MA. 2004