

# **Whole Systems Change**

Peggy Holman

The Open Circle Company

[peggy@opencirclecompany.com](mailto:peggy@opencirclecompany.com)

425-746-6274

[www.opencirclecompany.com](http://www.opencirclecompany.com)



# What is whole system change?

Processes that engage people from all aspects of a system – organization or community to...

- Enable emergence of what is most important, individually and collectively;

and

- Increase the likelihood for achieving it by growing people's capacity to care for themselves, others and the whole.

# systems View

“I understand how we fit together”

**Wisdom**  
“Among us, we have the knowledge and skills we need or know how to get it”

**Shared Vision/Purpose**  
“We are doing something meaningful”

**Collective**

**Communication**

**Public Information**  
“We shape the story together”

**Being**

**Doing**

**Connection**

**Whole Person**

“I can be myself; who I am matters”

**Individual**

**Contribution**  
“I see what I can do”

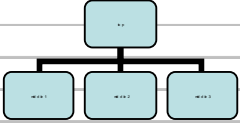
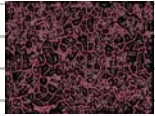

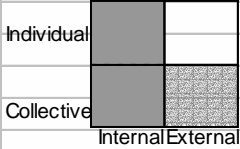
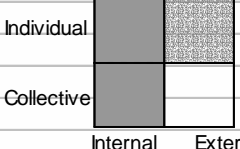
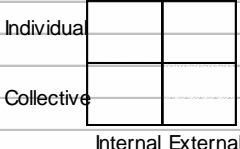
“We continually learn and change together”

**Change is a Process**

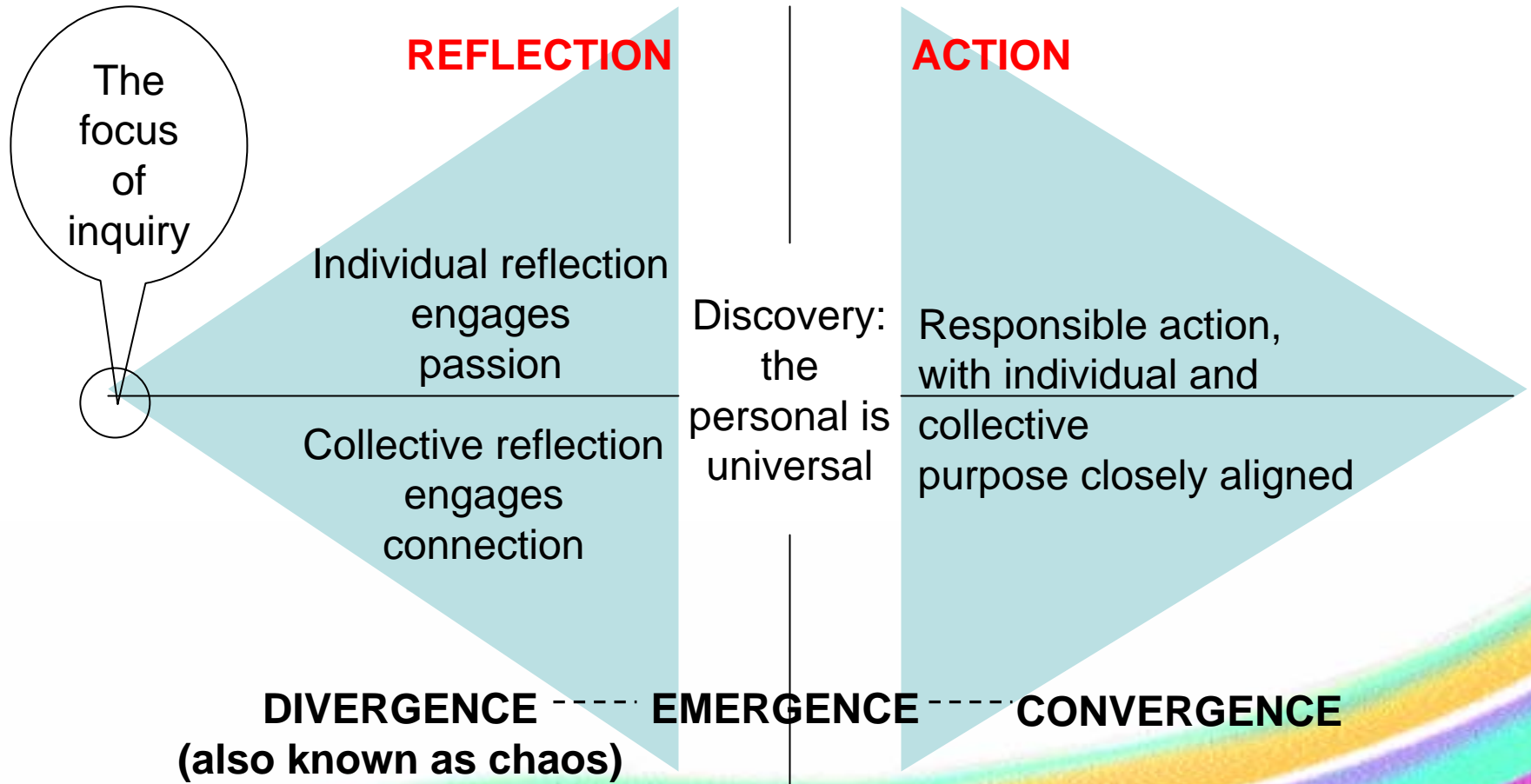
# The Shifts

Characteristic	Old assumption	New assumption
<b>The foundation</b>		
Vision/Purpose	They own	We own, making meaning
Contribution	I just do my job	What can I do?
Whole Person	They just want my hands/head	I can be myself; who I am matters
Wisdom	They hire an expert	Among us, we have the knowledge and skills we need or know how to get it
<b>The boundaries</b>		
System	I know my part and that's all I need to know	I understand how we fit together
Process	That was a nice event, now back to the real work; flavor of the month	We continually learn and change together; how does this build on what came before and feed what comes after?
<b>The center</b>		
Communication/ Connection	Need to know; information oriented	Public; stories shape our understanding of each other and our world

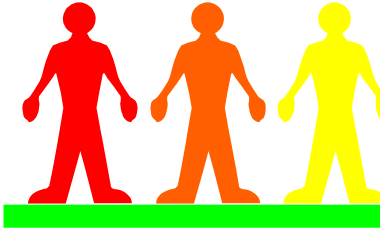
# The fear and the potential

	The current state	The fear	The potential
	Hierarchy (pre-determined structure & leadership)	Mob Rule	Differentiated whole (individual & collective needs fully embraced)
<b>The form</b>	Stable---Rigid 	??? - that's the fear 	Fluid; self-organizing; connections via strange attractors 
<b>The focus</b>	Order---control	Chaos	Emergence
<b>What guides the whole</b>	Service to the boss	??? - that's the fear	Service to meaningful purpose
<b>What guides individuals</b>	Responsibility---Accountability	Passion run rampant	Passion & Responsibility
<b>The quadrants</b>	 Individual Collective Internal External	 Individual Collective Internal External	 Individual Collective Internal External

# The Dynamics of Emergence

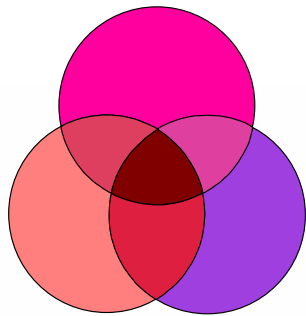
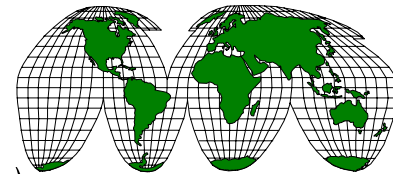


# How does it work?



Perception that all are equally human  
*(discovered through self-reflection)*

Perception of a shared world  
*(discovered through collective reflection)*



Perception of an open dialogue  
*(experienced through stepping into the mystery  
& speaking from passion)*

-Solomon Asch, as interpreted by Fred Emery, through Marv Weisbord

# Getting Started



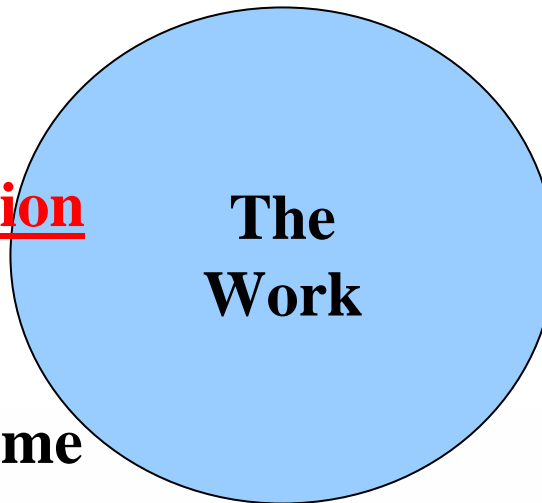
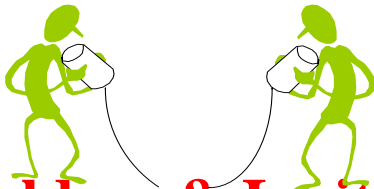
**Purpose: Theme & Intent**

**Aspirations;  
Expectations for  
Outcomes**



*How will results be used? What degrees of freedom for action does the group have?  
How will you determine that the work made a difference?*

**Stakeholders & Invitation**



**The  
Work**

**Strategy for  
Sustaining the  
Results**



*What forms of communication, management will support people and their work?*



**Process & Timeframe**

**Givens**

*What is not open for change? (Strategy, policy, legal, structural, process, financial)*



# Evolution of Emergence

- Emergent ideas and relationships  
(new connections)
- Special projects  
(temporary structures and leaders)
- Self-managed teams  
(new structures, fluid leadership)
- Emergent organization and governance  
(fluid form, fluid leadership)

# Change to what?

A system that consistently achieves what is most important to it, individually and collectively by...

continually increasing its capacity for emergence through...

people caring for themselves, others and the whole...

in service to a meaningful purpose

# The Work

*Generosity of spirit*

*Simplicity of design  
(what's one less thing to do and still be whole?)*

*Welcome disturbances*

*Pay attention to what's emerging*

*Let go of the need for immediate answers*

*Ask great questions*

*Name the patterns as you notice them*  
**REFLECTION**

Discovery:  
the personal is universal

*Take responsibility for what you care about*  
**ACTION**

*Invite passion & responsibility*

*Say yes, and...*

*Welcome silence in the collective*

*Assume abundance  
Give power away*

*Invite the people of the system*

*Identify purpose that serves self, others & the whole*

**DIVERGENCE** ----- **EMERGENCE** ----- **CONVERGENCE**  
(also known as chaos)

# The Voice of the Devil

All Bibles or sacred codes, have been the causes of the following Errors.

1. That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body, & that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

But the following Contraries to these are True.

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
3. Energy is Eternal Delight.

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1789