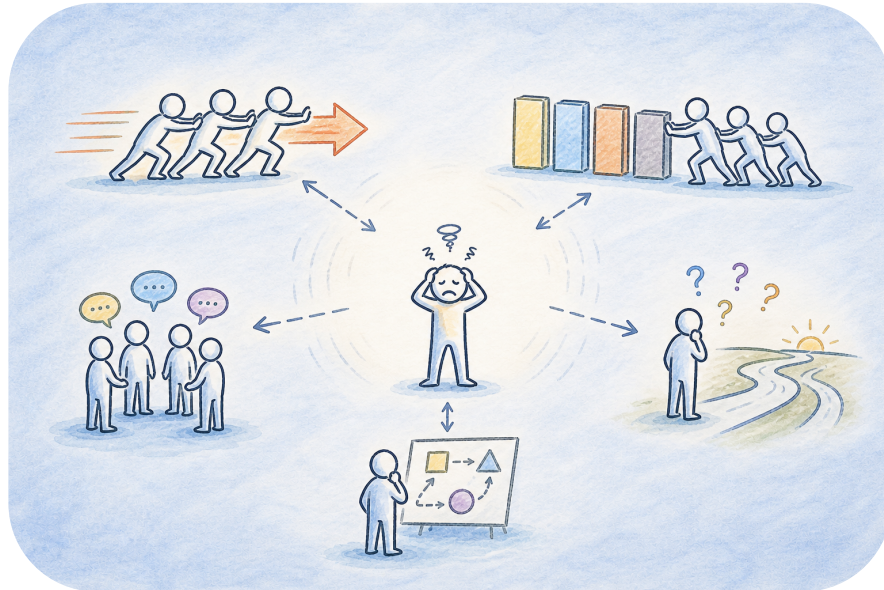
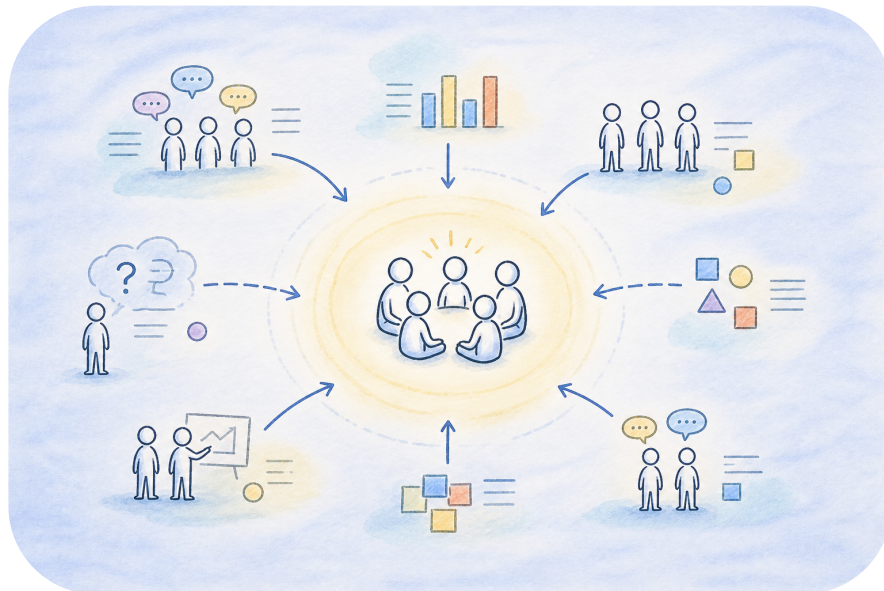


# Circle3



*A Pattern Language for Leading Change in Complex Environments*



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## **Abstract**

In complex, change-saturated environments, initiatives often stall not because people don't care, but because they are operating from different interpretations of what is happening. Priorities compete, conversations fragment, and decisions do not hold long enough to become practice.

Circle3™ is a compact pattern language for restoring coherence under these conditions. It offers Three Guiding Moves™—Establish the Circle, Balance the Conversation, and Reconcile the Intention—that help groups form shared perception, work tension productively, and translate emerging clarity into commitments that stick.

This paper presents the Three Guiding Moves™ alongside Three Leadership Lenses™ (sense-making, energy awareness, and session intention) that support facilitation and sense-making in the same environments.

## **Keywords**

pattern language  
change leadership  
organizational change  
complexity  
sensemaking

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## Introduction

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This paper is a workshop submission to PLoP/PLoPCon. It presents Circle3™, a compact pattern language for leading change when progress is constrained less by effort or expertise and more by fragmented interpretation, scattered attention, and misaligned intention.

The paper includes Three Guiding Moves™ (patterns) and Three Leadership Lenses™ (reflective exercises). The Moves describe repeatable configurations that help groups make change clearer and more aligned; the Lenses support facilitation by sharpening what leaders notice in real time.

### ***Audience and boundaries***

Circle3 is aimed at leaders, facilitators, and change agents working across teams and roles—especially when a change effort is widely discussed but shared understanding and durable commitments are not forming.

Circle3 is not a replacement for governance, program management, organizational design, or incident response. Its purpose is more precise: create enough coherence that decisions and commitments hold beyond a single meeting.

### ***How to read and use the language***

A typical progression is:

1. Establish the Circle — form a recurring nucleus where coherence can develop
2. Balance the Conversation — keep conversation generative under tension and time pressure
3. Reconcile the Intention — anchor alignment through an artifact and iterative conversation

The Lenses are optional supports that can be used before sessions (preparation) and between sessions (diagnosis of drift).

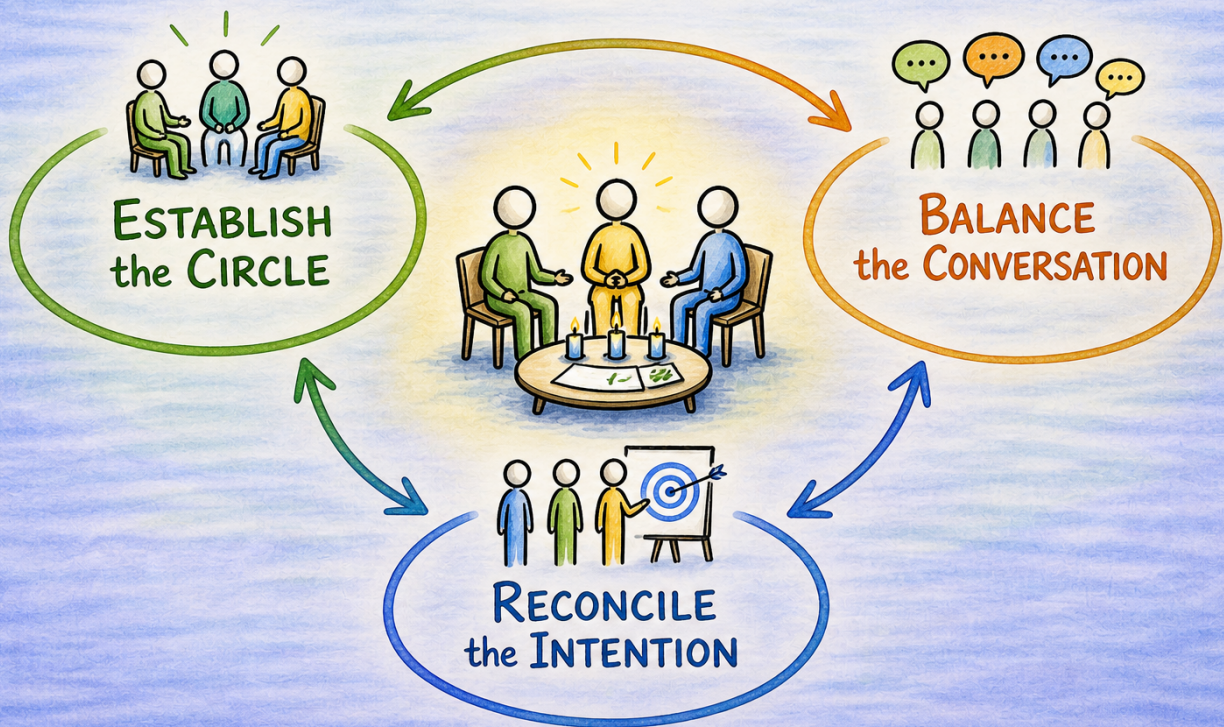
### ***Feedback requested at the writers' workshop***

Feedback is requested on:

1. Pattern quality: are the Forces credible, and do the solutions read as repeatable patterns grounded in use?
2. Language design: do the three Moves form a coherent minimum language with clear relationships and sequencing?
3. Fit and presentation: do the Lenses belong in this submission, and is the paper framed clearly for a PLoP/PLoPCon workshop?

# THREE GUIDING MOVES FOR COHERENCE

Michael Basil



# ESTABLISH THE CIRCLE

Michael Basil



**Three-Person Nucleus**  
At least two perspectives  
+ skilled facilitator



**Recurring and Small**  
Held at a consistent time



**Sense, Reflect, Align**  
Reason, listen, and clarify  
the change

# Establish the Circle

*For leaders, facilitators, or change agents when people care about the change—but can't connect, align, or move together.*

## Summary

---

Create a small, recurring gathering where a few participants come together to reason about a change initiative. They represent multiple perspectives and are guided by a skilled facilitator.

The Circle surfaces tensions, builds shared understanding, and gradually connects isolated champions. Over time, it becomes a nucleus of alignment, fostering coherence and momentum across the organization.

## Story

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A large enterprise organization was attempting to introduce a new initiative affecting multiple teams. Leaders wanted faster progress while maintaining safety and governance. Practitioners were overwhelmed with competing priorities. Stakeholders held conflicting interpretations of what the change meant.

Conversations about the initiative occurred everywhere—project meetings, hallway conversations, and internal messaging channels—but rarely in a place designed for shared understanding.

As a result, awareness was uneven, desire was fragmented, and potential champions remained isolated.

A change leader introduced a simple practice: a weekly gathering called the **Circle**.

At first, only three people attended: a technical practitioner, a second subject matter expert from another perspective, and a facilitator skilled in guiding reflective conversation.

The sponsor was aware of the effort but only loosely involved.

Week by week, the group reasoned together about the change. They surfaced tensions, listened to concerns, and gradually invited others when it made sense.

Over time the Circle became the place where people came to make sense of the change. Champions began connecting with each other. Shared language emerged.

Gradually, small islands of coherence began forming across the organization.

But it all began with one move:

## **Establish the Circle.**

### **Context**

---

You are leading or supporting change inside a complex organization.

Multiple initiatives compete for attention. Stakeholders hold different mental models of the change. People experience the initiative through different roles, incentives, and pressures.

Most enterprise organizations are structurally hierarchical. Decision authority sits higher in the structure, while the lived experience of change occurs deeper in the system.

Meanwhile, organizations often lack spaces designed for collective sense-making.

Traditional change communication spreads information but rarely creates shared understanding or alignment.

Without deliberate intervention, organizational energy becomes fragmented.

### **Problem**

---

How do you create coherence and momentum for change when:

- people hold different interpretations of the change
- champions are isolated from one another
- leadership is structurally distant from lived experience
- the organization is saturated with competing initiatives

Large meetings often become performative rather than reflective. Broadcast communication increases awareness but rarely creates commitment.

You need a small relational space where coherence can actually form.

### **Forces**

---

#### ***Speed vs. Safety***

Leadership wants faster delivery while still maintaining reliability, governance, and control.

#### ***Hierarchy vs. Experience***

Decision makers sit high in the structure while those experiencing the change operate deeper in the organization.

### ***Coordination vs. Attention Scarcity***

The organization needs coordinated change, but people's attention is already fragmented across many initiatives.

### ***Structure vs. Emergence***

Formal change structures provide legitimacy but can slow down learning and adaptation. Informal networks move faster but may lack visibility or support.

### ***Expertise vs. Integration***

Different subject matter experts understand different parts of the system, but few spaces exist where their perspectives can be integrated.

### ***Action vs. Reflection***

Organizations reward action and execution, yet meaningful change requires time for reflection and sense-making.

## **Solution**

---

### **Establish the Circle.**

Create a small recurring gathering where participants reason together about the change in real time.

The Circle begins with a **three-person nucleus**.

Between these three participants, the group must contain:

- multiple subject matter perspectives (at least two)
- facilitation capability
- confidence and credibility within the organization

The third role is critical: an **integrative facilitator**.

This person is skilled in guiding conversation, sensing energy in the room, and helping participants move between:

- grounding and expanding
- inquiry and action
- listening and integration

Ideally this facilitator has experience with reflective or conscious conversation practices.

The Circle meets **weekly at a consistent time**.

Participation is intentionally small. Three is the center. The group may grow to five to seven regular participants, with others occasionally joining when relevant.

The sponsor or senior stakeholder is typically **informally involved at first**—aware of the Circle and supportive but not dominating the conversation.

Within the Circle participants:

- explore tensions around the change
- share different perspectives
- surface concerns and uncertainties
- gradually build shared understanding

Participants invite others when it becomes useful for learning or progress.

## Resulting Context

---

When the Circle works well, something shifts.

Participants develop a shared language for the change.

Potential champions discover one another and begin collaborating.

Stakeholders gain a place to bring questions and concerns before conflicts escalate.

Over time the Circle becomes a **nucleus of alignment** within the organization.

As understanding grows, the group may evolve into:

- a champion network
- a change coalition
- a community of practice
- or a formal change working group

Small islands of coherence begin forming across teams as shared understanding spreads through relationships.

But the essential move remains simple:

**Establish the Circle.**

## Known Uses

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The story above comes from enterprise change work, but the core move—creating a small, recurring space for collective sense-making—shows up in many domains.

This pattern appears in practice in organizational, community, and personal settings where change requires ongoing collective sense-making rather than one-time communication.

Examples include:

- Agile, DevOps, and organizational transformation efforts within enterprise IT organizations, where recurring Circles connected isolated champions across teams.
- Financial-services technology organizations navigating competing priorities, resource constraints, and complex stakeholder environments.
- Learning communities such as the Mindset and Agile Dojo, where Circle gatherings supported reflection, peer learning, and cross-functional relationship building.
- Governance settings such as homeowner association and condominium boards, where recurring conversations helped stakeholders build shared understanding before decisions.
- Community dialogue and Authentic Relating experiments exploring collective reflection, belonging, and relational coherence.
- Informal family and friendship systems where a recurring conversational container helped participants navigate ongoing tensions and change.

## Key Characteristics

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- begins with three people
- includes at least two subject matter perspectives
- includes an integrative facilitator
- meets weekly
- operates initially informally
- invites participation as needed

## Failure Modes

---

### ***The Circle Becomes a Status Meeting***

*Description:* Conversations focus on reporting progress rather than reasoning together, turning reflection into routine updates.

*Mitigation:* Refocus on inquiry and sense-making; the facilitator guides participants to explore tensions and perspectives, not just report status.

### ***Dominance by Authority***

*Description:* Senior leaders or sponsors overpower discussion, reducing psychological safety and stifling honest dialogue.

*Mitigation:* Ensure leaders participate lightly; the facilitator actively creates space for all voices.

### ***Lack of Facilitation***

*Description:* Without a skilled integrative facilitator, discussions drift, become unfocused, or are dominated by the loudest voices.

*Mitigation:* Include an experienced facilitator to guide conversation, surface tensions, and help the group move between reflection and action.

### ***Excessive Growth***

*Description:* Too many participants dilute intimacy, making conversations shift toward presentation rather than exploration.

*Mitigation:* Keep the core group small (3–7 people) and invite others selectively when their perspectives are needed.

### ***Isolation from the Organization***

*Description:* If the Circle becomes disconnected from the broader system, insights fail to spread and the Circle loses its coherence role.

*Mitigation:* Encourage participants to share insights outside the Circle and connect with relevant stakeholders.

### ***Premature Formalization***

*Description:* Rapid institutionalization can squash openness, turning the Circle into a rigid governance body.

*Mitigation:* Maintain informality initially; allow the Circle to evolve naturally before codifying structures.

### ***Overstaying Its Welcome***

*Description:* Continuing the Circle after its purpose is fulfilled can drain energy, create redundancy, and stifle emergent structures.

*Mitigation:* Periodically review the Circle's relevance; adjourn, evolve, or spin off new groups when the original goal has been achieved.

## **Related Patterns**

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- [Balance the Conversation](#) – Balanced conversations ensure diverse voices are heard and tensions are productively surfaced, supporting the Circle's nucleus.
- [Reconcile the Intention](#) – Aligning on shared principles or artifacts strengthens the Circle's output and ensures early insights are codified and actionable.

## ***Fearless Change Patterns***

- *Ask For Help*: Engage key participants early to strengthen the nucleus and expand reach.
- *Study Group*: Form a small learning or reflective group to support iterative reasoning.
- *Go-To Person*: Identify people who can unblock issues and bring critical perspectives to the early Circle.
- *Future Commitment*: Encourage participants to make small commitments that sustain engagement over time.

# BALANCE THE CONVERSATION

Michael Basil



**Ground Ideas**  
Focus on practical  
next steps



**Invite Broader  
Dialogue**  
Open siloed  
perspectives



**Pause for Integration**  
Allow silence and  
reflection



**Surface What's Felt**  
Name tension and  
emotions

Aligned Action Emerges

Guide Energy in the Room

# Balance the Conversation

*For facilitators, team leads, or change agents when everyone wants progress—but energy and focus are stuck in fragmented conversations.*

## Summary

---

Guide attention, surface perspectives, and shift tension so insight flows. Without this balance, drivers clash, organizers silo, collaborators disengage, and ideas fail to translate into action. By intentionally observing and shifting energy, a facilitator helps the group integrate perspectives, make decisions, clear outdated priorities, and move toward aligned action.

This pattern is **both independent and foundational**, nourishing the effectiveness of the Circle itself. It enables subsequent moves like *Reconcile the Intention* and creates the conditions to **establish, evolve, or adjourn a Circle**, forming a more collaborative and responsive conversation system.

## Story

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In a large enterprise, a team had been meeting for months, generating ideas but failing to act. Visionaries dominated with unbounded ideation. Drivers clashed over priorities. Organizers focused on silos. Collaborators withdrew, feeling unheard. Decisions stalled, and outdated priorities persisted, leaving frustration and confusion in their wake.

A change leader entered the conversation and observed the group's dynamics. They intervened with small shifts: grounding ideas, inviting cross-silo perspectives, and creating space for quieter voices. Using **affect labeling** ("It seems like we're frustrated") followed by **dynamic silence**, the group began to surface and process stuck tension.

Over time, participants cleared out ideas and priorities that no longer made sense, integrated perspectives, and made aligned commitments. Strategic initiatives that had stalled began producing tangible deliverables—completed, showcased, and connected to broader goals. Conversations shifted from fragmented debate to a **collaborative, flowing system**, where energy, insight, and action moved in harmony. The group became capable of learning, adapting, and responding to volatility and ambiguity in real time.

## Context

---

You are facilitating or participating in a group navigating complex change, where initiatives are fragmented, attention is scattered, and priorities are unclear. Conversations may be energetic but misaligned; some participants dominate while others withdraw, and action stalls.

Through this pattern, the group develops **higher-order awareness**—of each other, stakeholders,

customers, and strategic initiatives. Outdated priorities are released, decisions become actionable, and deliverables begin to be completed and showcased. Over time, a **more collaborative and responsive conversation system** emerges—one where attention stabilizes, priorities become clearer, and work begins to connect across initiatives.

## Problem

---

How do you guide a conversation when:

- drivers clash while organizers silo their perspectives
- visionaries dominate and collaborators disengage
- ideas accumulate but fail to integrate, and outdated priorities persist
- tension or frustration blocks aligned action

Without balancing the conversation, discussions remain fragmented, performative, and unproductive, preventing aligned action and learning.

## Forces

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### *Speaking vs. Listening*

Some participants dominate the conversation while others hold back, limiting shared understanding.

### *Speed vs. Reflection*

The group pushes toward decisions before perspectives are integrated, or reflects without moving forward.

### *Hierarchy vs. Openness*

Formal roles shape who speaks, even when broader input is needed for clarity.

### *Control vs. Emergence*

Attempts to direct the conversation can restrict insight, while too little direction allows drift.

### *Divergence vs. Convergence*

Ideas expand rapidly but struggle to integrate into clear priorities and action.

## Solution

---

### **Balance the Conversation.**

- Observe energy in the room; notice dominant, quiet, or disconnected voices.

- Adjust interventions to shift the conversation toward productive equilibrium:
  - Ground ideas with practical next steps.
  - Introduce focus to prioritize and commit to action.
  - Open siloed perspectives to broader dialogue and integration.
  - Surface stuck energy using **affect labeling** (“It seems like we’re frustrated”), followed by **dynamic silence** to allow reflection and reorientation.
- Guide the group to **acknowledge and release outdated ideas or priorities**, allowing movement toward clarity.
- Practice active listening, reflective questioning, and ongoing calibration of the conversation.

These shifts require practice—developing awareness of group dynamics and the ability to respond in the moment.

## Resulting Context

---

When conversation balancing works:

- People are energetically and emotionally connected.
- Tension becomes productive rather than personal.
- Outdated ideas and priorities are cleared, and aligned action emerges.
- Siloed perspectives integrate into shared understanding.
- The system becomes **more collaborative, responsive, and adaptive**.
- Awareness of peers, stakeholders, and customers deepens, creating a **higher-order operating environment**.

Over time, in a change-saturated environment where initiatives are fragmented and attention is scattered, balanced conversations enable critical outcomes to emerge. Strategic initiatives begin to move forward, connect, and deliver tangible results. Progress becomes visible, and alignment strengthens across the organization.

A Circle session—and any conversation—becomes a space to practice and reinforce this skill. This supports the establishment, evolution, and adjournment of a Circle, and strengthens subsequent moves like Reconcile the Intention.

## Known Uses

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The story above is set in an enterprise team, but the facilitation challenge—integrating diverse perspectives and keeping dialogue productive under pressure—recurs across many domains.

This pattern appears in practice wherever groups need to integrate diverse perspectives, work through tension, and maintain productive dialogue under uncertainty.

Examples include:

- Enterprise transformation initiatives where leaders, practitioners, and stakeholders needed to reconcile competing priorities.
- Cross-functional planning and decision-making sessions where dominant voices, siloed thinking, or unresolved tension limited progress.
- Facilitation of Agile, DevOps, and systems-thinking workshops involving participants with different roles, incentives, and mental models.
- Mindset and learning communities that use facilitated dialogue to support reflection, peer coaching, and collective learning.
- Community dialogue and Authentic Relating environments focused on developing deeper listening, awareness, and mutual understanding.
- Informal mediation and relationship-repair conversations among families, friends, and volunteer organizations.

## Key Characteristics

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- Focuses on group energy, not just content.
- Facilitator attuned to patterns, pauses, and dynamics.
- Acts as a harmonizing force rather than a controlling authority.
- Supports diverse perspectives and participation styles.
- Iterative and adaptable within each conversation.
- Enables the Circle to emerge, evolve, and sustain aligned action.

## Failure Modes

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### ***Over-Pressing***

*Description:* Pushing too hard to rebalance leads to resistance or withdrawal.

*Mitigation:* Pause, observe, and gently guide energy shifts.

### ***Over-Loosening***

*Description:* Allowing imbalance to persist can stall decisions or diffuse accountability.

*Mitigation:* Introduce structure or focus when appropriate.

### ***Personalization of Conflict***

*Description:* Tensions escalate into personal disputes.

*Mitigation:* Reframe conflicts around ideas, deepen understanding, and coaching of individuals.

### ***Avoiding Commitment***

*Description:* Participants hesitate to make decisions or articulate priorities.

*Mitigation:* Facilitate small, low-risk commitments to build confidence.

### ***Ignoring Field Dynamics***

*Description:* Failure to read group patterns causes interventions to miss the mark.

*Mitigation:* Continuously observe, reflect, and adjust facilitation.

## **Related Patterns**

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- [Establish the Circle](#)
  - Balanced conversations are critical to forming and sustaining the initial nucleus; without a small, recurring gathering, efforts to manage group energy have no stable home.
- [Reconcile the Intention](#)
  - Balanced facilitation ensures alignment exercises surface all perspectives, making artifacts meaningful and actionable.

### ***Zen Leadership Patterns***

- *Driver:* Brings focus, urgency, and movement toward decisions and action.
- *Organizer:* Creates structure, clarity, and coordination across people and work.
- *Collaborator:* Builds connection, inclusion, and shared understanding across perspectives.
- *Visionary:* Expands possibility, introduces new ideas, and challenges current thinking.

### ***Fearless Change Patterns***

- *Time for Reflection:* Use structured pauses to observe group energy and recalibrate.
- *Plant the Seeds:* Introduce ideas strategically to encourage participation and contribution.
- *Personal Touch:* Engage individuals meaningfully to surface otherwise silent perspectives.
- *Just Do It:* Small iterative interventions maintain momentum without overplanning.

## **Practical Resources**

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Developing the ability to balance a conversation requires both reflection and exposure to complementary lenses and practices.

### ***Sense Making Reflection***

Understand how different interpretations of a situation shape coordination, decision-making, and alignment—and where misalignment emerges when people are operating from different sense-making frames.

- [Explore](#)

### ***Energy Awareness Reflection***

Build awareness of how relational energy is showing up in your conversations—and how your interventions influence attention, tension, and participation.

- [Explore](#)

### ***Two Sides Reflection***

Recognize the core polarities present in every conversation—such as speaking and listening, control and emergence, or divergence and convergence—and learn to work with them rather than resolve them.

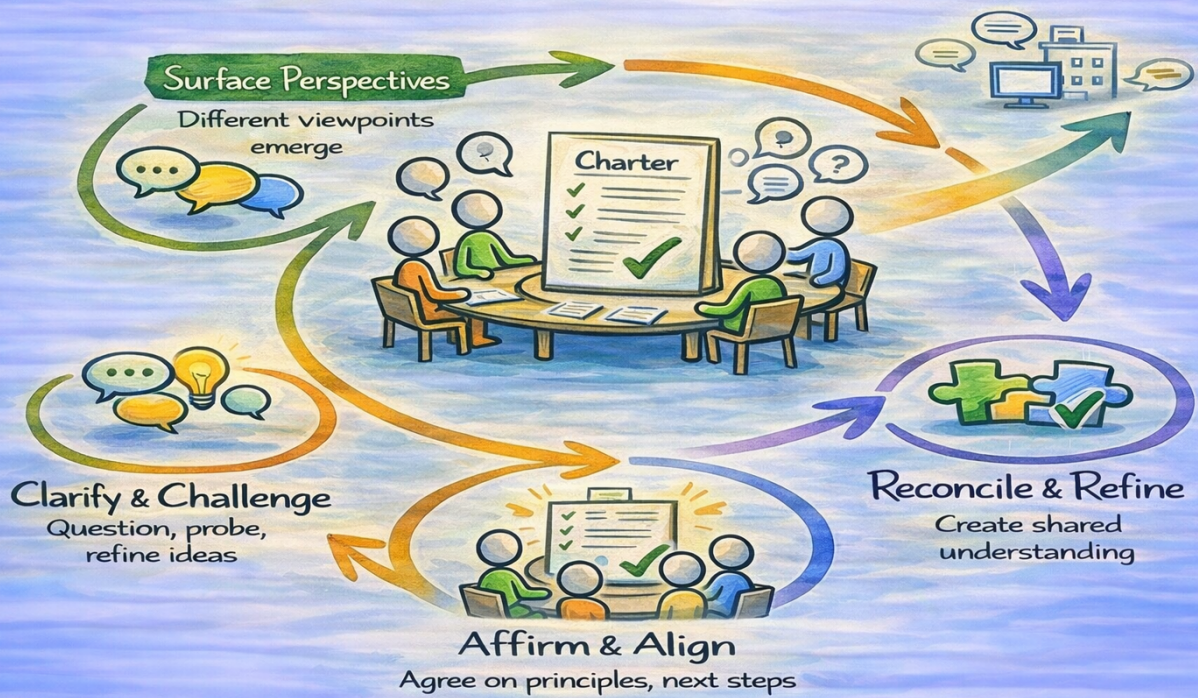
- [Explore](#)

### ***Accessing Energy Patterns***

Explore practical patterns for working with relational dynamics in real time as a core facilitation move.

- [Explore](#)

# RECONCILE THE INTENTION



# Reconcile the Intention

*For leaders, facilitators, or change agents when a group struggles to act cohesively due to ambiguous priorities, fragmented mental models, or misaligned intentions.*

## Summary

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Guide a group through structured, iterative conversations anchored on a **visible alignment artifact**—a charter, principles document, or other codified intention. The focus is on the **conversation itself**, surfacing ambiguity, reconciling perspectives, and creating shared understanding. Over time, this strengthens culture, clarifies roles, and aligns actions within and beyond the group.

## Story

---

A department led a major initiative spanning multiple teams. They had a charter and principles on paper, but in practice, people held different interpretations. Misalignment caused duplicated effort, missed opportunities, and occasional friction.

A change leader introduced a **series of conversations** centered on a visible artifact—a living charter. Over several sessions, key participants revisited principles, clarified roles, and reconciled differences.

Some social leaders were quiet at first, others vocal. Each engaged through successive iterations until they could affirm the final artifact: “This captures our intent—and here’s why and how it helps in my role.”

As alignment grew, collaboration improved. Conversations with other teams became smoother. Decisions were clearer. The artifact became a **reference point**, visible to others, guiding interaction, supporting management decisions, and even providing context for automated systems downstream.

The result: **a culture of iterative alignment and clarity**—not just a document, but a living conversation that strengthens collective action.

## Context

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You are leading or supporting change inside a complex, ambiguous environment.

Existing charters or guiding documents may be stale, incomplete, or misunderstood. Mental models across the group are fragmented. People pursue initiatives in isolation. Stakeholders outside the group need clarity to collaborate effectively. Organizational culture rewards action but lacks structured spaces for alignment.

Without intervention, ambiguity persists, decisions remain reactive, and opportunities for coordinated impact are lost.

## **Problem**

---

How do you help a group align when:

- principles are unclear or inconsistently understood
- key voices are isolated or not sufficiently aware of each other
- cultural norms drift away from formal charters
- leadership focuses on outputs rather than fostering shared understanding
- the organization lacks mechanisms to revisit performance, success metrics, or impact regularly

Conventional meetings or status updates rarely surface misalignment or build collective clarity. Without structured conversation, ambiguity persists, decisions remain reactive, and opportunities for coordinated impact are lost.

## **Forces**

---

### ***Iteration vs. Completion***

Alignment requires revisiting, refining, and iterating; premature “agreement” hides ambiguity.

### ***Visibility vs. Safety***

Publishing an artifact signals intent but invites scrutiny; it must balance clarity with psychological safety.

### ***Structure vs. Emergence***

Formal documents provide reference and legitimacy, but alignment emerges through conversation and shared sense-making.

### ***Internal vs. External Alignment***

Principles must resonate within the group and also be interpretable by others interacting with or depending on the group.

### ***Cultural Codification vs. Adaptation***

Artifacts should capture culture and intent, but remain flexible to reflect new experiences, members, or priorities.

## **Solution**

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**Reconcile the Intention.**

Create a structured, iterative process around a **visible alignment artifact**:

- Identify or create the artifact (charter, principles, guiding document).
- Convene key participants, including social leaders and subject matter experts.
- Facilitate conversations that surface ambiguity, clarify principles, reconcile differences, and invite critique.
- Iterate until all key participants can **affirm the artifact**: “This is right, here’s why, and how it helps in my role.”
- Publish or share the artifact with relevant audiences to guide interaction, decisions, and future alignment.

The **conversation is the value**, not the artifact alone. Each iteration strengthens shared understanding, culture, and collective action.

## Resulting Context

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When the pattern succeeds:

- Mental models are aligned; ambiguity is reduced.
- Participants share a common language for intent, priorities, and principles.
- Interactions with other teams or departments become smoother, more predictable, and effective.
- Leadership gains a clear reference point to guide decisions, set priorities, and support the group.
- Teams understand which metrics matter, track progress over time, and revisit performance to inform alignment.
- The artifact becomes a **living, iterative tool**—anchoring culture, decision-making, and ongoing alignment across the organization.

## Known Uses

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Although the story above comes from an enterprise initiative, the underlying move—iterative alignment through recurring conversations anchored on a shared, visible artifact—shows up in many domains.

This pattern appears in practice in settings where groups rely on recurring conversations around a shared artifact to create alignment and coordinated action.

Examples include:

- Enterprise technology organizations seeking shared language around DevOps, systems thinking, and cultural transformation.
- Leadership teams aligning around strategic priorities, decision-making frameworks, or measures of success.

- Agile and organizational transformation efforts using charters, principles, working agreements, or operating models to guide change.
- Governance environments where boards or committees use documented agreements to guide decisions and stakeholder engagement.
- Learning communities that periodically revisit principles, practices, and expectations as participation grows and evolves.
- Emerging community experiments that use shared values, agreements, or purpose statements as living artifacts for ongoing alignment.

## Key Characteristics

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- Focuses on **conversation over documentation**
- Uses a **visible artifact** as a touchstone for alignment
- Engages key participants iteratively, not just once
- Strengthens culture through repeated reflection and affirmation
- Provides clarity for external stakeholders and downstream systems

## Failure Modes

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### *Premature Agreement*

*Description:* One meeting creates the illusion of alignment; key voices haven't fully engaged.

*Mitigation:* Iterate, revisit, and engage social leaders multiple times until affirmation.

### *Artifact as Output Only*

*Description:* Document exists but conversations never occur; culture remains misaligned.

*Mitigation:* Center the artifact on discussion, not completion.

### *Ignoring Cultural Ambiguity*

*Description:* Subtle misalignments remain unaddressed; principles drift from practice.

*Mitigation:* Surface disagreements openly; revisit regularly.

### *Lack of Visibility*

*Description:* Artifact remains internal; others interacting with the group remain unclear on intent.

*Mitigation:* Share with relevant audiences while balancing safety and scrutiny.

### *Overformalization*

*Description:* Artifact becomes rigid, stifling reflection and adaptation.

*Mitigation:* Maintain iterative, conversational approach; allow principles to evolve.

## Related Patterns

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- [Establish the Circle](#) – Alignment artifacts rely on a functioning Circle for iterative review, discussion, and surfacing key tensions.
- [Balance the Conversation](#) – Balanced facilitation ensures the artifact accurately reflects diverse perspectives and produces actionable alignment.

### *Fearless Change Patterns*

- *Evolving Vision:* Periodically revisit vision and priorities to maintain alignment over time.
- *Concrete Action Plan:* Define concrete next steps that anchor aligned intentions in observable outputs.
- *Small Successes:* Celebrate iterative progress to reinforce alignment and build credibility.
- *Big Jolt:* Showcase alignment achievements visibly to create momentum and influence adoption.

## Practical Resources

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As Circle work unfolds over time, there will be moments when a specific session benefits from a clearly articulated intention designed ahead of time.

This helps shape how the conversation opens, what it focuses on, and how it closes.

### *Session Intention Reflection*

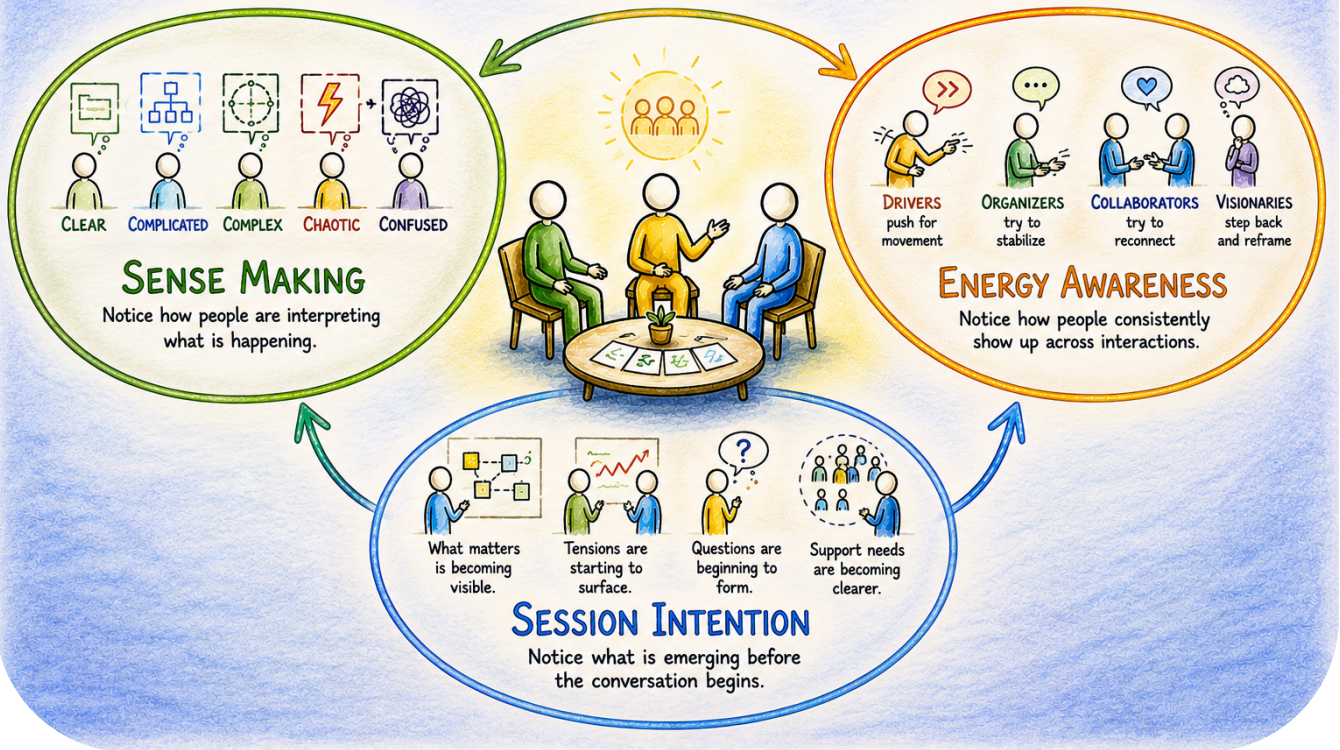
Use this exercise when preparing for a Circle session where you want to be more intentional about the purpose and framing of the conversation.

It helps translate what is emerging in the work into a clear, grounded intention for that specific session.

- [Explore](#)

# THREE LEADERSHIP LENSES FOR COHERENCE

Michael Basil



# SENSE MAKING REFLECTION

A Reflective Exercise for Understanding How Reality Is Being Interpreted

by Michael Basil

## COMPLEX

probe → sense → respond  
Emergent Practice



## COMPLICATED

sense → analyze → respond  
Good Practice



Confused  
Disorder

## CHAOTIC

act → sense → respond  
Novel Practice



## CLEAR

sense → categorize → respond  
Best Practice



# Sense Making Reflection

*A Reflective Exercise for Understanding How Reality Is Being Interpreted by Michael Basil*

This exercise helps you notice how a person, group, or organization interprets what kind of situation they are in—and how that interpretation shifts across different conditions.

In complex situations, difficulty often comes less from the situation itself and more from people operating in different sense-making domains at the same time.

This can lead to friction, misunderstanding, and frustration—even when intentions are aligned.

This reflection helps make those underlying interpretive differences visible.

## Framing

### *Sense-making domains*

The framing below is based on the [Cynefin framework developed by Dave Snowden](#).

Each domain reflects a different way of interpreting and responding to reality.

**Clear** The situation is stable and understandable. Cause and effect are known, and established rules or best practices apply.

Approach: sense → categorize → respond using known practice.

**Complicated** The situation requires analysis or expertise. Multiple possible answers may exist, and understanding emerges through investigation.

Approach: sense → analyze → respond using expert judgment or good practice.

**Complex** The situation is uncertain and evolving. Cause and effect can only be understood in hindsight, and outcomes cannot be predicted in advance.

Approach: probe → sense → respond through adaptation.

**Chaotic** The situation is unstable or highly disrupted. Immediate action is required to restore stability or create direction.

This may show up as:

- **Reactive Chaos** — stabilizing disruption quickly
- **Generative Chaos** — intentionally disrupting patterns to create new possibility

Approach: act → sense → respond.

**Confused (Disorder)** There is no shared clarity about what kind of situation this is. Multiple interpretations exist at the same time without a shared frame.

This often appears when sense-making has not yet stabilized.

## The exercise

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Take a moment to settle your attention before beginning.

Use a short mindfulness practice—such as following the breath, feeling the body, or sitting in quiet awareness—to help you slow down and become present.

- Suggested exercise: [One Breath](#)

Let your attention shift from immediate thinking into memory.

Engage the following prompts from that state of awareness.

### ***1. Who is this reflection about?***

Bring the person, group, or organization clearly into mind.

This might be: - an individual you are working with - a team or leadership group - a wider organization - or yourself in a specific context

### ***2. Default sense-making***

When this person, group, or organization encounters situations in general, how do they tend to interpret what is happening?

- Clear
- Complicated
- Complex
- Chaotic
- Confused

### ***3. Under uncertainty or change***

When situations become unclear, shifting, or ambiguous, how does their interpretation tend to change?

- Clear
- Complicated
- Complex
- Chaotic
- Confused

#### ***4. Under pressure or disruption***

When urgency, conflict, or instability increases, how does their interpretation tend to shift?

- Clear
- Complicated
- Complex
- Chaotic
- Confused

#### ***5. Stability of sense-making***

Across situations, how consistent is their way of interpreting what is happening?

- Stable — consistent framing across contexts
- Partial — some shifts depending on context
- Variable — frequent shifts in interpretation
- Fragmented — multiple frames competing without coherence

#### ***6. What stands out***

Looking across what you've noticed:

- What is their dominant way of interpreting situations?
- Where does their interpretation stay stable?
- Where does it shift most strongly?
- Where might others be operating from a different sense-making frame in the same situation?

### **Reflection**

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As you look across your responses, this reflection is pointing toward a working hypothesis about how sense-making is happening in this system.

You may begin to notice that what feels like resistance, confusion, or misalignment is often not about intent or capability—but about people operating from different interpretations of what kind of situation they are in.

When these differences become visible, coordination often becomes easier, even if the difficulty itself remains.

Take a moment to notice:

- what feels coherent
- what feels inconsistent
- and where interpretation itself may be part of what is shaping the experience

### **Sharing**

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One perspective brings useful clarity.

A second perspective adds contrast, and that contrast deepens understanding.

When reciprocal reflections are shared, you can begin to see:

- where interpretations of the situation align
- where they diverge
- and where different Cynefin domains are operating in parallel

If you choose to share it, you might begin simply with:

*Would you be open to exploring how we are each interpreting what kind of situation this is?*

And invite the other person, group, or team to complete the same reflection from their side.

# ENERGY AWARENESS REFLECTION

A Reflective Exercise for Understanding Energy in Conversation

by Michael Basil

*Joy*

*Fear*



**DRIVER**



**ORGANIZER**



**COLLABORATOR**



**VISIONARY**

*Anger*

*Sadness*

Notice how feelings can shape how energy shows up—like weather moving through a moment.

# Energy Awareness Reflection

*A Reflective Exercise for Understanding Energy in Conversation* by **Michael Basil**

This exercise helps you reflect on how another person tends to show up across your conversations over time and in different emotional contexts.

It helps you notice patterns in how their presence shifts or stabilizes across different emotional conditions.

You'll rate how strongly each type of energy shows up on a scale from 1 (barely there) to 10 (very strong).

## Framing

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### *Ways energy shows up*

The framing below is based on the [Focus Energy Balance Indicator \(FEBI®\)](#) by Ginny Whitelaw.

A person may move through all of these depending on the situation or emotional context.

**Driver** Driver energy is about action and forward movement—initiating, deciding, and helping things move.

**Organizer** Organizer energy is about structure and clarity—planning, shaping, and making things workable.

**Collaborator** Collaborator energy is about connection—listening, aligning, and building shared understanding.

**Visionary** Visionary energy is about possibility—imagining, reframing, and opening up new directions.

## The exercise

---

Take a moment to settle your attention before beginning.

Use a short mindfulness practice—such as following the breath, feeling the body, or sitting in quiet awareness—to help you slow down and become present.

- Suggested exercise: [One Breath](#)

Let your attention shift from immediate thinking into memory.

Engage the following prompts from that state of awareness.

### **1. Who is this reflection about?**

Bring the person you are reflecting on to mind.

If you notice anything arising about this person, you might also pause and ask:

*What am I actually noticing, versus what am I assuming?*

### **2. Joy**

*Feeling open, engaged, or at ease*

When joy is present across conversations, how strongly does each type of energy show up?

- Driver (1–10)
- Organizer (1–10)
- Collaborator (1–10)
- Visionary (1–10)

### **3. Sadness**

*Feeling low, quiet, or withdrawn*

When sadness is present across conversations, how strongly does each type of energy show up?

- Driver (1–10)
- Organizer (1–10)
- Collaborator (1–10)
- Visionary (1–10)

### **4. Fear**

*Feeling uncertain, cautious, or on edge*

When fear is present across conversations, how strongly does each type of energy show up?

- Driver (1–10)
- Organizer (1–10)
- Collaborator (1–10)
- Visionary (1–10)

### **5. Anger**

*Feeling activated, frustrated, or in tension*

When anger is present across conversations, how strongly does each type of energy show up?

- Driver (1–10)

- Organizer (1–10)
- Collaborator (1–10)
- Visionary (1–10)

## 6. *What stands out?*

Looking across your responses for this person:

- What patterns do you notice in how this person shows up across emotional contexts?
- Where does their energy shift most strongly?
- What remains consistent over time?

## Reflection

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This reflection represents your current perception of how this person shows up across conversations in different emotional states.

This can support clearer awareness of what is happening between you, relief from interpretations carried from past interactions, and new possibilities for how you understand and engage with this person going forward.

## Sharing

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One perspective brings useful clarity.

A second perspective adds contrast, and that contrast deepens understanding.

When a reciprocal perspective is added, you can see both what is shared and what is different. New dimensions emerge, and understanding between you becomes clearer and more complete.

If you choose to share it, you might begin simply with:

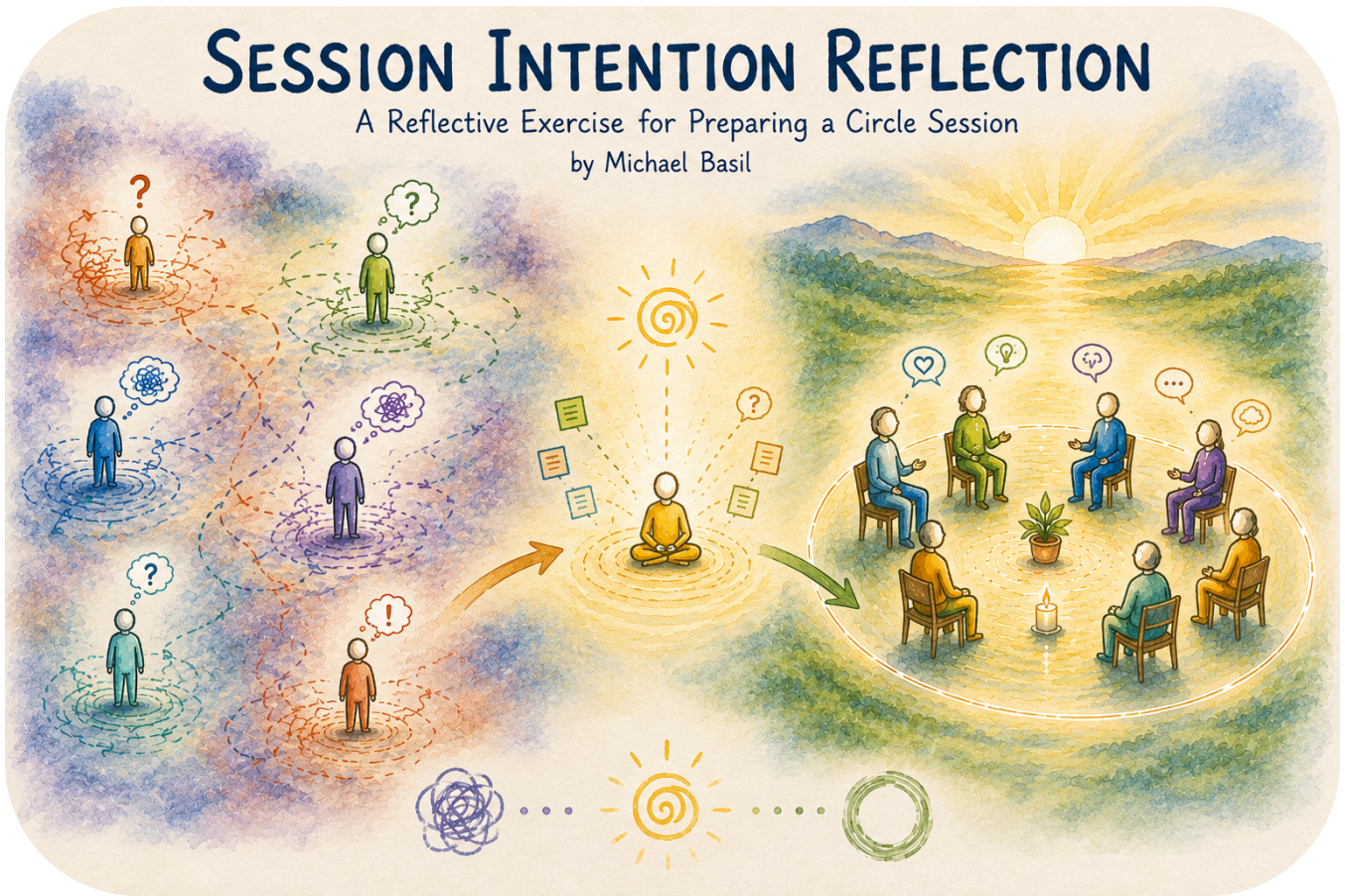
*Would you be open to hearing a reflection I've been sitting with?*

And invite the person to complete the same reflection from their side.

# SESSION INTENTION REFLECTION

A Reflective Exercise for Preparing a Circle Session

by Michael Basil



# Session Intention Reflection

*A Reflective Exercise for Preparing a Circle Session by Michael Basil*

This reflection helps you prepare a Circle session by identifying what is becoming important in a group and shaping the conditions for a meaningful conversation around it.

In complex situations, people often enter the same conversation with different assumptions, priorities, concerns, and levels of readiness.

Progress rarely begins with immediate agreement.

More often, it begins when people can better see:

- what matters
- where tensions exist
- what others are noticing
- and what the group may be ready to engage together

A Circle session helps create the conditions for that kind of shared awareness.

## Framing

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### *Grounding lenses*

Before beginning, it can help to revisit two related reflections:

- [Sense Making Reflection](#) → how people may be interpreting the situation differently
- [Energy Awareness Reflection](#) → how people may be showing up in relation to the situation

Together, these lenses help reveal how the conversation may need to be held.

## The exercise

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Take a moment to settle your attention before beginning.

Use a simple mindfulness or grounding practice to slow down and become present.

- Suggested exercise: [One Breath](#)

Allow your attention to move from immediate problem-solving into broader awareness of the people, relationships, and dynamics involved.

### **1. What is becoming important right now?**

What feels increasingly important, unresolved, or difficult to ignore?

Where do you sense genuine interest, concern, energy, or readiness to engage?

## ***2. How are people interpreting and responding to the situation?***

Using the [Sense Making Reflection](#), where are perspectives aligned or diverging?

Using the [Energy Awareness Reflection](#), what energies are most present? What may be missing?

How might these dynamics shape the conversation?

## ***3. What questions could help open the conversation well?***

What question—or small set of questions—could help people ground together while remaining open to discovery?

Strong questions often:

- invite curiosity rather than defensiveness
- keep multiple perspectives visible
- support shared attention
- avoid forcing premature conclusions

## ***4. How should people arrive into the conversation?***

What conditions will help the conversation become productive rather than reactive?

Consider:

- the level of listening required
- emotional or relational sensitivity
- grounding or arrival practices
- structures that can help tension become useful rather than divisive

## ***5. If people want to go deeper, what support should be available?***

If strong interest or readiness emerges, what additional support may help?

This might include:

- breakout conversations
- facilitators or subject-matter support
- smaller working groups
- reflection or integration practices
- pathways for continued exploration

## ***6. How will the session move toward meaningful next steps?***

If the group begins developing greater clarity or alignment, how will that momentum be carried forward?

What would help the session conclude in a way that supports both individual and collective next steps?

## Reflection

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As you look across what you've named, notice what picture is beginning to form.

You may begin to see:

- what the group is ready to explore
- where tensions or opportunities are concentrated
- what conditions may help the conversation become productive
- and what kinds of support may help shared understanding develop

Rather than trying to control the conversation, this reflection helps you prepare to guide it with greater clarity, responsiveness, and care.

## Sharing

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Before the session, consider sharing your emerging framing with 1–2 trusted people.

Additional perspectives can help reveal:

- blind spots
- missing tensions
- overlooked readiness
- opportunities for stronger alignment

This can help strengthen both the intention of the session and the conditions being created for the group.

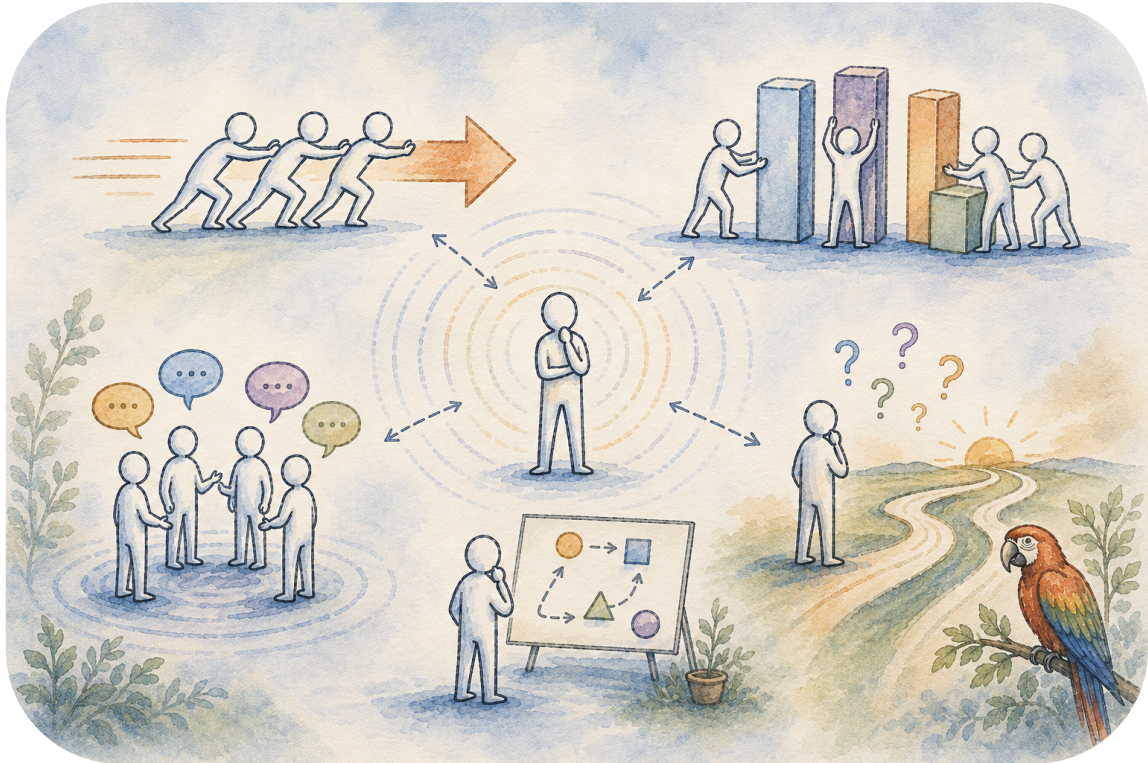
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  - <https://zenleader.global>
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  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guZa7mQV110>
- Coaching influences: Doug Knoll's work on difficult conversations was a practical influence.
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rL\\_m78zdXMQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rL_m78zdXMQ)

## Origin and Ongoing Evolution



Circle3 did not begin as a framework.

These moves emerged from repeated experience in real change efforts—especially where pressure fragmented attention, meaning, and coordination—and coherence had to be rebuilt from lived conditions.

If you want the deeper context—where these patterns came from, what shaped them, and how they continue to evolve—read the Origin Story.

**Read the Origin Story:**

<https://circle.basil.one/origin>