

# HOW TO RUN A DRAGON DREAMING CREATION CIRCLE THE FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

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**ABSTRACT:** *The Dreaming Circle is one of the essential skills of Dragon Dreaming. It is the process by which, in a win-win fashion, the project of an individual becomes the project of the Dream Team*

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## INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEXT OF WHERE TO BEGIN?

In 1985, in Margaret River, in Western Australia, a group of 27 people came together over a weekend to look at the future of their community. Using a “Search Conference” approach, created by Fred Emery of the Centre for Continuing Education at the Australian National University, they finished up creating a “wish list” of 7 projects they wanted for the future of their community. People grew excited at their collective contributions to this list, and motivation grew as a result. Unfortunately, no strategy was put in place to achieve any of the list of projects, and nothing more was heard from the community until early 1991.

In that year there was a second planning workshop proposed for the Margaret River Community, and the facilitator wisely decided to look at past plans to see what had happened. The 1985 workshop results were presented, and the participants at the second workshop were astounded to find all 7 projects had been achieved, even without strategies to implement them. The “collective Dreaming” had been sufficiently powerful, and had been shared sufficiently widely, to have created its own momentum for implementation. A collective group culture had been established, into which people acted with intention to make the dream come true, even though they were unaware that they were doing so. The power of one’s intentions, by themselves, is a force that can be used for the good of the world. This example illustrates some of the power of the “Dream Circle” – one of the unique and individual process of the Dragon Dreaming method.

Working on a project that has been started by someone else always generates less personal motivation than working on a project collectively owned by a group. And yet every project is always started as the dream of an individual. All too often the dream is not shared. And yet as Carl Gustav Jung and Australian Aborigines knew, we rarely ask, “where do such dreams come from”. Failure to share our dreams in an appropriate way is one reason why 90% of all projects get blocked in the Dreaming stage. It is easier to work on “our project” than to work on “his project”, and yet every project starts as an idea of one person. How can this apparent paradox be resolved?

Catherine Baldwin calls this first process “calling” or “casting the circle”. This is the first stage in converting an individual intention into a collective one for Dragon Dreaming, and is a process by which “project ownership” is transferred from the individual to the group. Rather than a sense of possession, instead of the group becoming custodians of the collective dream of the project, the process is similar to the way in which Aboriginal people of Australia became custodians, owned by the dreaming trail of a particular song line or creation story. But to do this needs a “Dream Team”, an initial circle group can be drawn from friends, family, colleagues, neighbours, acquaintances, or people you have identified because of their possession of special skills, who come together to share a dream.

If your project is one that intends to reach out to a wider community, do not pick the traditional leaders of your community. These people have been socialised into a particular system of power and prestige, and all too frequently have become so identified with the “system” to which they belong, that they have little capacity for change. Such traditional leaders, in most societies, tend to be men aged 50 to 60, and are fairly comfortable economically. Belonging to specific leadership groups, their vision for the future

all too often is one of “I achieved what I have through sheer hard work, if only everyone else worked as hard as me they could have succeeded too.” But often one or two people from this group, often on the basis of some accident of personal biography, for example a suicide in the family, a disabled son or daughter, or some other tragedy, are aware that “easy formulae” from the past do not presently work. Such people may not know what needs to be done but they are aware that something new needs to be tried, and they are valuable additional members to have in your dream circle.

Every community generally has another group of people, generally 10-15 years younger than the first group, who, whilst not having the power or prestige of being treasurers, presidents or secretaries of associations, may nevertheless be on the committee. These people tend to be the “information brokers” of a community, passing (or occasionally blocking) the passage of information from one network to another. As “gatekeepers” they are the sort of people who would be important to ensure that information gets rapidly passed throughout the whole community. Generally 70% of this group tend to be women, no longer bound by the requirement to care for small children. Involving these people in your sharing circle will be essential.

There is generally one or more third group that should be involved in sharing circles. The leadership of this group is often not widely known by outsiders. This group may often be considered by the more powerful as “marginal” – it may be members of an ethnic minority, or be a group, by virtue of age gets frequently overlooked. Who for example is the leader of the 15 year old boys of a community. Generally any 15 year old boy could quickly tell you, but unless you had a 15 year old son yourself you may not have a clue. These people, often invisible to the outside world when invited to a dreaming circle, may at first be a little inhibited, but as the dreaming circle proceeds, their confidence will improve, and they will be powerful people who will get the others to consider aspects from perspectives that would otherwise be overlooked. Having such people in your Dream Circle will greatly improve the nature of your project. From experience, having one or more reasonably responsible and mature children in a dream circle visibly changes the outcome for the better. After all, they are the true residents of the future we are planning for! From experience, including articulate teenagers or young adults in a Dream Circle will significantly improve the benefits from the results.

Once you have identified people for your Dream Circle, pick a time and place that is convenient for them all, a place free from external distractions, and where excitement of the participants will not disturb others in the vicinity (a crowded restaurant is not advised!).

How big should a Dreaming Circle be? For the start of a project, from experience I generally recommend a group of 4-5 others, giving a total group size of 5-6. A group of seven or eight people at the start of a project is OK but groups larger than that may find that a small clique starts to develop of the most extroverted members, while the introverted ones may feel somewhat excluded, or tend to withdraw inwards. With larger groups it may be advisable to run two dream circles simultaneously. Later, as the project grows, more people may come to join the circle. A project that has started already may come to have as many as 12-15 people in the circle, but that happens frequently when the project has already a fair bit of internal momentum. Circles of even more people are possible, but in such cases it is usually important to break the group up, as with more than 12 to 15 people in a group the possibility of individual contribution is minimised and the more dominant members of the group will quickly take over,

in the presentation of ideas. In this case 2 groups of 8 are much preferable. In such cases it is important to have a way of sharing the results of the different Dream Teams at the end of the process.

There are a number of different ways this can occur. One way is through the Plenary Session, where all the groups come together and present their findings one at a time. This can be a very time consuming process and unfortunately often degenerates into a re-reading of the lists recorded.

Another way I often make use of is the “picture gallery”. Groups display the results of their Dream Circle in a prominent place (often walls, windows or stands erected for the purpose) and encourage others to circulate and read the walls. Often it is a good idea to have a “Gallery Curator” or member of the group to stand by their results to answer any questions or explain any difficult points that readers may not understand. It is important that this curatorial role be shared amongst group members to allow the curator to circulate too and see what others have produced.

When we were looking at Sustainable Planning for the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale with Gerard Siero of Landmark Associates in the early 1990s, multiple Dream Teams did their work and a small team of specialists led by the innovative Roman Catholic Sister Dr Veronica Brady, read all of the dreams of the “possible future” that people had produced and generated a synthesis report at the end of key breaks in the process. For large groups having a “Dream Circle of Dream Circles” is a useful strategy. This is comprised of one person drawn from each Dream Circle who have the responsibility of synthesising the results from each group. This group considers three questions

1. What do all the groups have in common? That has been repeated in each group
2. What is unique to a particular individual Dream Circle group?
3. What is obviously missing from all groups that may be important to consider.

In really big groups, such as those run by Dr Janet Hartz-Karp of Murdoch University in Australia, where over 400 people participated in a dream team exercise planning the future of the city of Perth, Western Australia, modern computer software can ease the burden of collecting and synthesising the information from many Dream Teams into a usable format.

As the initiator, convenor or facilitator (the “change agent”) of any future project you will be required to state your reason for bringing the group together. If you are an independent facilitator, share with the group the nature of all discussions you have had with the sponsor of the event prior to the time the group has gathered. It is important that the group understands the nature of these discussions, in order to create a feeling of honest transparency, and to equalise power relations amongst all members. When explaining the reasons for calling the group together avoid “put down words” (eg. I “*just*”, I “*am trying to*”, etc, (just in this circumstances lowers the power of what you are going to say next; you are not trying anything - you are doing it!)). These words minimise the importance of the task you are undertaking. We tend to use them out of an attempt to minimise being “knocked back” – if a project is “just” or “I am trying to” – then its failure won’t really matter. But as an effective and powerful community activist – you *want* to “make a real difference”. No false modesty here folks! Practice the skills of charismatic communication and Pinakarri here (See below).

Having clearly stated the nature of the project and the reason why the group has come together, it is important for the individual who called the group needs to resign as the exclusive leader of the project. This is the core of the paradox. You want the project to happen why should you resign? Firstly, you must realise that so long as this project is purely yours it will fail. No one has ever done a project entirely by themselves. As they say “A success has many parents, only the failures are orphans”. To bring your project to fruition will require the work and commitment of many others. So long as others see that person as the “leader” they will defer to his or her authority, assume that this person has all of the answers, or feel that they are in a position of inferiority. This prevents the expression of the collective intelligence and wisdom of the group from finding its true expression.

The great Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, said that for true development to occur the leader needed to “make his Easter”, to die as leader and be reborn a follower, so that the project could be reborn to achieve resurrection at the hands of the followers, who in this way become leaders in their own right. He showed how to attempt to maintain a position of control in such circumstances does not lead to people’s freedom and collective liberation, rather it leads to people’s domestication and exploitation. Martin Buber, in his book “I/Thou” considered that the task we have is to transform our moral relationships from I-It, where the other is considered merely as an instrumental object for one’s personal gratification, to an I-You, where you are considered as a subject with an independence of your own. In such circumstances rather than engaging in dialogue with a “you” who is free you choose, when people work on another’s project the initiator is considering the other as an instrument, an “it” who is to be ordered from a position of superior authority. Dragon Dreaming assumes that it is a project “Dream Team” of deep equals, in which we all contribute the skills and strengths we uniquely have.

## **THE “CREATION” OR “DREAMING CIRCLE”**

In leading a Creation Circle you therefore invite the proposed workshop organising team to contribute to building a joint vision for the project. It is important at this stage that you seek to make the project as inclusive, as personal and as inspirational as possible. It is good to use a Round Robin or a Talking Stick process here to prevent the “quickest” or the most dominant person from taking over those that take time thinking. It is important to also introduce the concept of “Pinakarri deep listening” here. Pinakarri occurs when all individuals are fully engaged with their intention on another individual, attempting to see and understand by “walking in his or her moccasins” or “seeing with their eyes”. Aboriginal Mandjilidjara Martu people of the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia call this process of Deep Listening “Pinakarri”, and it is an important part of their culture. It is very different from the everyday listening we are used to when while you are giving half an ear to what is being said, you are internally already preparing your response. It requires the silencing of the chattering individual voice within, and the giving of a deep empathy, to both yourself and the other. Often the insistence on a period of 20-30 seconds silence here can help. From the Deep Ecology “Work that Reconnects” of Joanna Macy or John Seed, we were taught that the Lakota Sioux North American Indians often used to say “Ho”, meaning “you have been heard”, and we adopted this for many years. Rather than expropriating the culture of another continent, in the Gaia Foundation of Western Australia, with the approval of the traditional

elders, we have adopted the practice of saying “Gaia” or “Kaya”, after each person who has spoken. In the Aboriginal Noongar language of the South West of Western Australia, this word meant “Yes”.

In such a Creation Circle, it is extremely important that no one can deny, refute, or disagree with what anyone has said. There is no one who understands a person’s personal viewpoint better than the person who has shared it. Only they are expert in being themselves, and in understanding their personal uniquenesses. The only interruption permitted is when one does not fully understand what a person has said, and in this case a question of clarification may be sought. The facilitator or scribe in this event, needs to write the essence of what each person says, together with their name. This will give the speaker the chance to check that the facilitator/scribe has indeed captured the essence of what they were trying to say. If the speaker disagrees they are free to add to, delete or correct in any way what has been written for them.

Participants in Dream Circles are often worried that contradictory visions will be expressed. This may indeed be the case. Such contradictions often arise as a result of incompatible strategies being adopted to meet deep personal needs. The Non-Violent or Compassionate Communication (NVC) of Marshall Rosenberg argues that at the level of personal needs there is no contradiction. Manfred Max-Neef shows that we human beings all share the same limited set of universal needs, that are invariant between individuals, historical periods and cultures. What differs is the fact that there are an unlimited number of potential satisfiers, or strategies by which these needs may be expressed.

Some people familiar with NVC insist that it is important to separate Needs from Strategies, but in Dragon Dreaming this is inadvisable. It would place a “rational” or a “conceptual” process, which runs counter to the spontaneous and creative process of the Dreaming Circle. Our Dreams are often contradictory, filled with images which may appear paradoxical. These paradoxes can be addressed later. In a Dreaming Circle it is important to let the images arise and be captured as they flow. To try to censor our dreaming will result in a stunted project; the “same old-same old” of Business as Usual (BAU), that fails to capture the spontaneous excitement of a good Dreaming Circle.

Start your Dreaming Circle by going around the circle once, giving everyone a chance to share their ideas. If someone has nothing to say they may pass. When you have finished with an initial round you will probably need to go around the circle a couple more times. One person's addition may stimulate new thoughts from the others in the workshop organising team. Build excitement here (you may find it quickly becomes a chorus of “me too”, and “ooh Yes!!!”. If someone does not want to add anything, after a thoughtful moment they just say “pass”. It is a good idea to have a scribe for this process, as if you get lost later on, you can bring this list out to remind and re-energise the group of what they wanted to do and get from the process.

In starting a project Dreaming Circle like this it is always a good idea to start with what Paulo Freire calls a “generative question”. This is a most powerful question, open ended in order to stimulate discussion. That question is “What would this project have to be in order for it to be one to which I could give my 100% commitment to it?” In other words, “What are my dreams that could make this project worthwhile for me to be deeply committed to?” A good sentence to begin the process of vision building with is – “given the amount of time we are going to spend together, (i.e. XX months or years) what is it,

that if we collectively created this for you, would enable you to say with enthusiasm ‘this was the best possible, conceivable way I could have spent my time’?”

At an early stage it is important to clarify the purpose of the dreaming circle. Is this a dreaming circle just for this particular event or gathering or is it for the project as a whole? For how long will the project run; for 6 months, 2 years, or indefinitely? If it is the latter, to which part of the whole period will the dreaming circle apply? It is a good idea to look at separating the initial Establishment Phase from the secondary Maintenance Phase of a Project, a second phase which may require its own new Dream Circle. Confusion at this stage can often mean that impossible goals are set upon a limited time.

Each person then speaks in turn and the results are written down. Thus one important role in a Dream Circle is that of a recorder. There are two ways in which this can be done. The recorder can firstly write what people say upon a flip chart. I find this method preferable as it allows all participants to see what has gone before, and allows them to see the flow of ideas. In such cases it is important to choose a recorder whose writing is fairly legible. If a flip chart is not available then the recorder can write down on a normal pad or book or loose sheets of paper what people say. The recorder writes the name of the person speaking and then the dream of that person. In new groups this is helpful in learning the names of all members, but it is also important later to be able to refer back to the person whose dream idea was captured. As a general rule, it is important that the recorder try not to get every word that is said, but to capture the “essence” or the “soul” of the idea that is shared. This is very important, as people can have a tendency to get very long winded in sharing their dreams. But in every case, it is important that the recorder give the person the chance to say whether the essence of their idea has been captured. In the second case this is done by reading back to the group what the recorder has written, and the person then has the chance to correct any error. “No, that isn’t quite what I was meaning, what I meant was....”. Often too the person may repeat an idea that has already been covered. In such cases it is sufficient to add an extra mark against the previous idea.

The attached is the record of one such group of young adults who came together to learn of the approach of Dragon Dreaming

## **RESULTS FOR ACTUAL DRAGON DREAMING COURSES**

- [Alexis]       •       To become enabled to take on any project I should ever set my sights on doing
- [Chid]         •       To gain knowledge – an understanding of the transformation connection with nature – to work with nature in leading to its flourishing
- [Jonathan]   •       To learn how to construct a karabirrdt – downloading the skills, wisdom and experience of John.
- [Ben]         •       To gain access to an awesome knowledge – to Dream, Plan, Do, and Celebrate – and become a facilitator of this work

- [Olly]
  - To come out of 100% intention – learning to function in the ground where passion and function interact and go swimming around –to participate in Gaia House University – soaking up the skills of us all
  
- [Bernie]
  - To learn techniques which bring people together to work effectively, efficiently and positively
  
- [Kat]
  - To learn ways to make projects work better
  
- [KA]
  - To learn how to get people together as a collective and to get the confidence to do it
  
- [Sandy]
  - To come along, check out the garden and the frogs and get inspiration
  
- [Tam]
  - To continue building from S & S and get confidence to make projects happen
  
- [Nic]
  - To extend my taste of the karabirrdt as an awesome way to achieve what I want – to become in essence what we want for the future
  
- [John]
  - To find a way forward in the creation and recovery of the true and ancient ways of learning, sharing, being and doing – we are heading into a time of a “dark age” to give birth to the foundation of a new civilisation
  - To acknowledge you all as amazing agents of change, I feel honoured and privileged to be working with you
  - To share with you all the experience of thirty years of activism, learned on three continents, in more than 10 countries.
  
- [Jonathan]
  - To build a collaborative way on the internet, that gives a chance to continue the work – a way of embedding our own individual stories, referring back on what happened week by week.
  - I dream of being able at the same time to communicate with the outside world, relating  
  
what I have learned to a close friend.
  
- [Ben]
  - To benefit from the passing on of knowledge – I am addicted to Community – Summaries of ideas making use where possible of audio-visual versions – a 6 week series – Gaia is with us, the birth of a new story – in six weeks we undertake to pass it on to others
  
- [Bernie]
  - All if this sounds great - To see, in this dark time, the fantastic way that things can be positively changed.
  
- [Kat]
  - To establish an “Academy” looking at taking it out within other learningcircles for projects to happen. A regular learning.



- [Sandy]
  - To support the idea of the Academy – I like the idea of Old Socrates just taking knowledge out to share with people he meets in the streets.
  
- [Tam]
  - To be self-reflective in our process in going forth as a group
  
- [John]
  - To promote the development of community knowledge through harnessing the wealth of collective experience of groups of ordinary people.
  - To see the “light in the eye” that comes with the experience of this liberation of community wisdom adds “real juice” to community situations
  
- [Alexis]
  - The idea of the Academy is in the nature of a fractal – giving us the ability to take out what we learn to the rest of the community.
  - He wants to learn of group process and dynamics especially those that promote sharing.
  
- [Chit]
  - Likes the idea of “Fractalising” – this could be a starting point for the creation of novelty
  
- [Jonathan]
  - This could be the start of a large circle for dreams – extending the learning on the ground through the peace protests with Coppers.
  - We are really currently divided up between ourselves. To get information “out” we send out fliers, emails which continue the distance. I dream of coming closer together – sharing face to face.
  - All through the coming weeks, I seek to use what I am learning in the projects I am already doing
  - To use this chance to inspire processes within our groups without losing sight of the enormity of the task
  
- [Olly]
  - To create a space for change – dealing with the tension that happens when creating spaces
  - The intention of a library is to spread things out of books into heads and then out into the world to make them real
  - To avoid being overwhelmed by concrete and newspapers and the media inspired daily living
  
- [Kat]
  - To continually be self-reflective of where people are up to and where people are at
  
- [KA]
  - To develop a new form of resistance, developing dreams for change
  - These are hard times, it is easy to become separated. How do we find new ways to resist the social structures?

- [Sandy]
- I am frustrated both as an activist and socially as well as personally – it comes with exhaustion. I seek a better way to be effective and get things handled.
  - Sitting here I am on the edge of despair and wonder – it feels like being on the edge, it is easy to slip, it is scary being on the edge of collapse. Lets be there – over the wonder pit.
- [Nic]
- To find a way of living into a “new way”, not to get caught in the urgency of the task
  - To look all the time at how we do stuff now
- [Alexis]
- To build a strong mental life for a strong person. Through community relations
  - This I see as a bucket for holding sand with no holes in it for making our sanity
  - Looking at self and community as a way of understanding personal psychology
- [Bernie]
- To be involved – seeing the dysfunctionality in the way things are and finding ways to change it.
  - It is strange being in a group that has the same intentions and ideals – what we want seems to be so similar.
  - I don’t want to get lost along the way – I want to keep these intentions true
- [KA]
- To include the element of play and fun – this can be serious but we need to allow for spontaneity and to have fun
- [Ben]
- I need a transitional point even though the end of the world as we know it may be nigh
  - I want this to be a group that recognises the importance of community
  - We need to walk the talk
  - It is hard to get out of old habbits – I need the support of a group
  - I need to become more grounded, and settled, and localised
- [Olly]
- I want this stuff to be a complement to Joanna Macy’s work, with the triangle of the hand (resistance to the forces of destruction), the head (conceptual work, building the new structures) and the heart (shift in consciousness, transforming the self)
  - The more we get our food right, the more we get an ability to organise peace camps right
  - Looking after ourselves with the right balance is possible

- [Jonathan]
- I want to fulfill all our dreams – we go too fast and don't spend enough time
  - I want an enhancement of this process with the people of the street
  - Lets get away from the situation where the outspoken speak most and the "doers" just write in their books what actions they will take. Other ways are possible
- [Sandy]
- I have 1,000 things to do that are half baked, I don't want this to be another way of doing my head in and see things decay into chaos
  - I want to see the gladness and take the time-out to acknowledge what is. I need to simplify, simplify – this has been going around in my head for moths.
- [Alexis]
- From Gandhi "I want to be the change in the world I wish to see".

## RESULTS FOR A 30 DAY LONG TRAINING PROGRAM

Another example (without the names of the participants) is the Dreaming Circle for the 30 day long Workshop in the "Work that Reconnects" "Seeds for the Future: A Journey into Deep Time, Dream Time, Lunar Time", organised by the Gaia Foundation in January-February 2005.

- To be a Seed bed of creative ideas
- Gathering of the leading minds in the "Work that Reconnects"
- Synergy
- When a group is gathered it creates its own living being
- To nurture that being and be nurtured by it
- Spiritual pilgrimage
- Gift giving in gratitude to the community of Denmark
- Dana gifting to Denmark for something the whole community holds dear
- Opportunity for a special community healing
- Experiencing the slowing of time to the living cycles of the planet
- Experiencing the clarity of vision and living in that space for 30 days

- For the barriers that separate us from experiencing more and deeper, to come down
- To experience a permanent continuing oneness with the physical world and seeing with new eyes, experiencing with the whole of oneself.
- Radical trust in the world, addressing the deep fear that prevents us fully living in our own power
- To be in the mind set for the rest of my life so that wild animals feel safe in my presence. Opening in the heart
- To have all of this now
- The surrender of clock time – a ritual of treating each person as extraordinary – “Give to you the gift of me and honour your gift” (Jean Vanier)
- A Convocation of Bodhisattvas
- Something of Completion
  - Germination and Birthing
  - Generating renewal
- To honour Joanna by gifting to her our own birthings of the work that reconnects
- For Australia, the gift the continent brings to the Work that Reconnects through the “Dream Time” – gathering in unique energies and insights to the germinating and composting of an Australian Way
- To cope from strength to look the monster in the face – to have the spiritual tools to transform
- Doing it now! We need it now!
- Finding a balance in unbalanced times. Enlarging the vessel of the thirty day that holds it powerfully. Huge integrity. Perseverance
- Responses to the battlefield – how to be able to act appropriately and do what needs to be done
- Facing it with the strengths and skills to look at it all with fearless compassion
- Inner strengths for flourishing in the in the space where others freeze, fight or take flight.
- Finding your way through the minefield of things that are meaningless. We are reacting to unconnected fabrications of greed and fear that comes from mata maya – from peoples minds. We seek not to condemn anyone but to name it.
- We are in terror because of the narrowness of our contexts. Time is of the essence. Re-anchoring life-times
- Future beings calling us forth

- Re-indiginisation
- Re-awakening to indigenous roots
- Below the concrete when it goes the seeds of the flowers will bloom again
- Wants to come out of the 30 day feeling strong, centred, because she feels things will get worse before they get better
- Joanna's work is needed
- Shambhala Training
- Becoming residents of Everywhen
- On the edge of a continent – living “on the edge”.
- Unnamed – finding words to express it but feeling the energy of it.
- The more we accept what is happening, the more transcendent and flowing it becomes, rather than solidifying it with judgement.
- Not condoning what is happening by our acquiescence
- Beyond Freeze, Flight and Fight to the energy of Flourish
- To learn new care in the use of words
- Transforming our “cultural common sense” away from terminal illness
- The heroes path – from innocent, to orphan, wanderer, warrior, and martyr to magician.
- Holding the energy in the crucible, later widening it to include others – dream about what it looks like – the boundary of commitment

## **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DREAM CIRCLES AND BRAIN STORMS**

Many people when a Dream Circle is explained for the first time confuse Dream Circles and Brain Storming Sessions. There is much in common, but there are also important differences. For example both Dream Circles and Brain Storms generates lists of ideas for the future. But the difference is that in a Brain Storming Session, the most vocal extroverts, alive in dreaming, dominate the less vocal introverts, or those who are more practical and less theoretical. In this way a Brainstorming Session polarises between these groups.

Secondly, through the practice of a Dream Circle because we see each person, rather than being focussed on the Board, there is a far richer and far greater range of interpersonal communication and relationship building in a Dream Circle. The emphasis on the “deep listening” of Pinakarri, the way in which the ritual of passing something that gets passed from person to person, creates a sense of the sacred which emerges naturally in good Dream Circles.

## WHAT CAN GO WRONG IN A DREAM CIRCLE?

Such Dream Circles all share the property that the final collective dream is always larger, more exciting and more inclusive than the intention of the initial dream of the organiser who brought the team together in the first place. A Dreaming Circle, however, is not a substitute to being clear about a project. If one is not clear in advance of running the Dream Circle what the project is about, the Dream Circle can quickly become too nebulous or too unfocused to give participants any clear path. The clearer one can be the better.

In the Dragon Dreaming process, of which the Dream Circle is an important part to generating awareness and motivation for a project, it is generally unwise to invite into the initial Dream Circle people who are known to be actively antipathetic to the project. The process of Confronting the Dragon, in which the antipathy of such people gets directly addressed by your group is necessary first. Once this has occurred, inviting such a person to a second and subsequent Dream Circle, can bear amazing fruit.

Another problem confronting Dream Circles occurs as a result of the way in which our culture is embedded in “Win-Lose” games. People who are a little uncertain about the validity of their project, may feel that they have to compromise, and so the Dream Circle may shift in a direction that leaves them feeling vaguely dissatisfied. In a dream circle, as with other win-win strategies, you should be “totally uncompromising” about your needs, goals and visions. As mentioned above, Marshall Rosenberg, the founder of Nonviolent Communication, and Manfred Max Neef, Chilean Ecological Economist have demonstrated, it is the strategies, or the “satisfiers” that come later, that require “give and take”, although that too happens a great deal less in Dragon Dreaming than one would suppose.

A fourth weakness to Dream Circles occurs when people are unaware of the likely length of a project. In such circumstances the goals and visions of the project will multiply to such a degree that it will seem that “Halleluiah, utopia begins tomorrow!” Individuals in sharing dreams may sometimes also spin out of a sense of reality into clouds of unachievable fantasy. In such circumstances, as facilitator it is useful to remind the participant of the length of the project, and ask do they really think that such can be achieved in the time allotted. If they persist with their dream, do not dismiss it, Dreaming Circles can and frequently are full of surprises, and you may just find that this person’s dream, with the right amount of effort will come true.

Another weakness can happen when the group debates too long about whether the reporter has accurately captured the essence of what was shared. This then becomes an analytic exercise rather than a creative one. In groups in which there are a large number of “thinkers” or “theoreticians” this may be a problem, as people start debating whether the idea written down is exact enough a reflection of what the previous speaker said. Such “perfectionism” will take away from the “playfulness” that is an important part of a Dream Circle. An important principle here is the Dragon Dreaming quote “Perfectionism is the enemy of the Good!” In this case it is important that the only person who can make a correction to the idea the recorder has written is the person who made the original statement.

A final weakness occurs when one or more people prepare a long list of factors for the project in advance, and reads their list in total to the group. In such circumstances one can really feel the loss of group motivation, they feel cheated and manipulated, and the person who does so is not responding to the serendipity of the magic of the moment.

## VARIATIONS ON DREAM CIRCLES

**The Meshworks Method:** Apart from the variations on Dream Circles, mentioned above when dealing with dream circles for really large groups there is a number of innovations you may like to try. One, used by the people of “Meshworks”, a group from the Centre for Human Convergence in the Netherlands, is to create a wall in which an anonymous group of people post as many of their answers to generative questions as they wish. This system of generating and capturing people’s dreams, however, from experience does not capture the group spirit and motivation of the group as discussed above. In such cases it is important to have a way of separating with two separate generative questions, the issue of “What should be done?” from “What I will do personally?” and to have a way of capturing contributors names and addresses. At the Copenhagen Climate Summit, at December 2009 Klima Forum, Meshworks had the cards in the shape of a jigsaw puzzle where people could consider their dreams as a piece of an overall puzzle. Reading the puzzle wall stimulated a great many other contributions. Having a big pile of these in the centre of a circle and having individuals write up their ideas, discuss what they have created and sticking them to a wall creates an artistic way different than the lists of dream circles that are normally generated. The Transition Town Movement makes a big use of “Post-It” notes for the same reason.

**Ulrike Reimann’s modification:** At the Second Train the Trainer session held at Sieben Linden Ecovillage in 2010, rather than having a single reorder, Ulrike had the recorder be a second person who rotated as the speaker rotated. This approach makes the process a lot more playful, and can lead to playful mock conflict when someone passes.

Another innovation of Ulrike's is at the completion of a Dream Circle rather than just reading through what everyone has written, the group takes turns to read what the others have written, changing it from the future tense of a Dream, into a past tense, as though it has already been achieved.

## WHERE TO FROM HERE?

During a Creation Circle, a skilled facilitator will notice a shift in the language used by participants. Participants often start by saying "what the project should do is....", but will shift to saying "what we will do is...". When this happens this is a sign that the Creation Circle process is working successfully. You will often be aware that there is a general rise in group energy. People in the circle seem to grow more excited as the full enormity of the amazing project becomes apparent to them. Motivation in the room rises, as their commitment to the project also grows. The project is truly becoming a project of the group rather than being the "property" of a single individual.

At the beginning of an activist's workshop or meeting, it is a good idea to gather the information of the dreaming circle as it helps establish the criteria of success for the activity. Sometimes activists just gather agenda items and then wonder why people leave the meeting feeling unsatisfied. This happens because deep personal needs have in some way been neglected or not addressed. Not addressing these needs as soon as possible at the meeting will make meetings drag, people will keep returning to agenda items that the group has already discussed, and meetings that should take half an hour may drag on for hours. Addressing the issues on the dreaming circle list before you address any issues of the official agenda, has the reverse effect. Meetings that you expect will take hours, and agenda items that people expect will take a lot of heated discussion – get resolved in minutes. In such cases, it is important at the end of the gathering to return to the results of the dreaming circle to see if the promise has been kept and 100% of the goals set at the beginning have been achieved. If they have not identify what has not been achieved or is still outstanding and consider a strategy by which these dreams can be met. This may range from including it on the business of the next meeting, to organising some additional procedures to ensure that all dreams are achieved.

If the dreaming circle is for a major project, it is important that this remain a living document. As such it needs to be retrieved at major transitions in the project, usually those from Dreaming to Planning or from Planning to Doing for example. It is also important that the Dreaming Circle be brought out and presented to any new people who may later come to join the Dream Team of the project. At such times it is important that these people add their own dreams to the circle and this may stimulate a new round or two amongst the originators. At such times it sometimes (though rarely) may happen that an individual may delete an earlier dream they had for the project, either because it has already been achieved or because it is no longer relevant to their current lives.



The retrieval of the results of the dreaming circle are also important at the time of celebration. At this time it provides important information to the final debriefing session as to whether the project has lived up to its initial promise. If the dreaming circle results have become a living document, a familiar safe haven or secure harbour from which we can venture forth on the adventure of the project, then there is every likelihood that 100% results will be achieved for each point.

The results of the dreaming circle also need to be updated each time a new person joins the group. It is important that they add their dreams to the project too. As a person possessing unique individual skills, they may have seen an opportunity in this project that has been missed in the collective euphoria generated earlier.

Secondly, the dreaming circle results should be kept in a prominent place. (We will keep it on the “Files” section of our list server established for each project. Successful consensus building requires us **not** to sort or prioritise this list (because sorting and prioritising it will lead to a diminution of the importance of some of the ideas and an augmentation of the importance of others). This is people’s hopes, thoughts, wishes and desires at a fixed moment in time. To be a successful change agent is to get the whole group to agree to achieving **all** of these, otherwise someone will feel that in some way they have been left out. At the end of the workshop or the meeting we need to return to our list of points gathered during the dreaming circle. From experience I find it useful to ask each person “To what extent do you feel we have achieved this goal?” I quite often find it is useful to get the people to express this as a percentage. The next question is, “What needs to happen to get it to 100%?” The answer is usually “More time and practice”. Designing appropriate follow-up is then essential.

Thirdly, stating what you want in black and white has immense power. As H.M. Murray, in his Himalayan expedition wrote *“Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back-- Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth that ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one’s favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. I was to learn a deep respect for one of Goethe’s couplets. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now.”* Putting your dreams down on paper – through a “Dream Circle” will surprisingly lead to the fulfilment of many of the dreams, like those of the people of Margaret River often **without you needing to do anything else.**

Finally, when the going gets tough it is easy for a particular task or activity to consume all of our thoughts and our imaginings. We can, in this way, lose sight of the reasons as to why we are doing things. This “mind displacement” may cause us to hate what we are doing because we have lost sight of how it contributes to the whole.

There is an apocryphal story that suggests a number of working men were interviewed about what they were doing. One said “I am putting this brick on top of this other one”. A second said “I am building this wall”. A third said “I am building a church”. A fourth said “I am building this Cathedral of Chartres that will be an inspiration to millions for a thousand years.” For instance the heavy work of project

“bricklaying” may cause us to lose sight of the “palace” of a project that we are in fact building! Having the dreaming or creation circle results visible and available at these times helps us touch base again with “why am I doing this?” It enables us to push through to completion with a greater degree of grace and ease than you could do otherwise.