

Developing Sustainability Circles

Preamble:

I decide to go further with IFTSP. Up to now, I produced a book based on a series of exercises talking about how the methodology would be spread by stories. I am curious to know how the methodology is put into practice, practically, when it is widespread. I ask to see a country where people regularly work towards sustainability.

Tapescript Supplementary Journey 1 part one

I see a grey lift. But lifts normally have open spaces in front of them. This has walls, rounded at the top that sort of funnel you in to the lift doors. Red lines in the metallic surface of the walls stretch towards the lift. The lift entrance looks like the front of a modern train with its headlights full on.

As I approach the lift doors I see how high they are. Like an entrance to a great cathedral.. I see people in cages being transported up but become confused as to whether this lift has any doors or not.

No buttons to press, you just get onto a cage. People are coming in and out so I follow one and get into a cage.

The lift rises up in a grey brick-lined shaft.

We arrive onto a wide open square, lined with cobblestones.

The square is built on the top of a hill to my right a church-like structure draws me over.

The church is built in a 1600s style. As I come up to the door, which looks firmly bolted and closed I get close enough to read the sign: "No religion".

(I had had thoughts that sustainability might induce the sort of fervor religion would. I interpret this as being told firmly I am wrong.)

To the left a serving trailer offers rock, trinkets, souvenirs etc.

I ask the guy behind the counter: "anyone working with sustainability?"

"Yes sure, over there." He points to another building on the square.

This seems to be old as well, guessing around the 1700s. I open the solid wooden door and descend down some steps straight into a meeting room.

.People are sitting around in a circle.

"Come in" they say, "and join us".

I sit down on the last empty chair in the circle.

"So today's question is...", says one of the delegates.

Silence. They are waiting for people to come up with the question.

The silence is not uncomfortable. The room reminds me of a town hall. Many windows. I get the impression of a twelve step program, expecting someone to say "I am Fred I am an unsustainable ..ic".

You might expect, working with sustainability, there to be whiteboards, flipcharts plans, priorities, process descriptions etc on the wall. I would expect that. But there is nothing.

In the middle of the circle nothing either.

I break the silence: "how does this work then?"

"We sit in a circle and we take whatever comes up" comes the reply.

"OK! My question is how do we get everyone working on sustainability?"

I feel that everyone is with me, giving me their support and attention. Trying to help, being there to help.

"So you mean er.... what do you mean?"

We need to frame the question more succinctly.

Surprised, I feel no animosity from them. I remember meetings I have been involved in at work you always felt people were out to find fault or get out of helping. This meeting feels more genuine and creative.

"How do you go from one single person wanting to do something towards sustainability to working in a group with others?"

The group is helping me along; "OK we're here, we're other people. We may well work with you. But you still need to be more precise."

"When they come together how do they run it, what process do they use?"

"So we are looking for a process", someone says, "Right?"

"I suppose you are right."

"The process would start with a question and end up with a proposal."

"What do you do with the proposal?" I ask

"It should end up with a voluntary action, which is tested and reported back."

"So we sit here, work out a suggestion and then report it back." I summarize.

"That's it!"

End of part one

Tapescript Supplementary Journey 1 part two

I have just written up the script from the first part of the venture to gain insight into how people can regularly work with sustainability.

A group exercise has just produced a methodology where you sit in a group, work out a suggestion and then report back how it has gone and what's been learned.

I ask: "can anyone join?"

The moderator replies: "yes, we just sit down and get started."

"Sounds good to me," I say. "Can we follow the same process around my question about how to run these sustainability processes?"

The group nods silently in agreement.

I start: "Do you call the meeting without an agenda?"

"That's right, that is to a take-up meeting. There, you take up anything you want. Then comes the report back meeting."

I rephrase the task as succinctly as I can.

"What process do we use to involve people in sustainability?"

My group works to frame the task: that we should focus on behaviour change. The output would lead to more sustainable behaviour in individuals. These individuals are acting either as consumers, citizens or in their job. I would like the focus to be not on the process but the interaction with the world.

Now, in my case I am asking the group for help in bringing about a change in behaviour that has to do with engagement. That is to say that people spend more time involved in sustainability and sustainable behaviour development.

It should be fun and stimulating to do. And feel like you are doing something important. It should be productive and involve everyone.

So we have started and formulated our question.

I ask for more suggestions, I see a woman wants to say something.

"So what can we try? Sit down and talk to friends?"

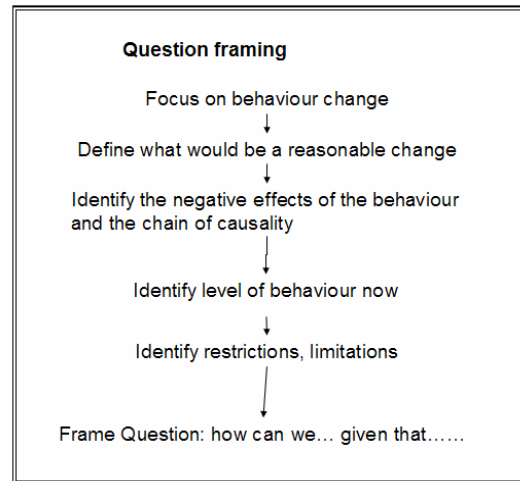
"We suggest you look at behaviour. Say what behaviour leads to non-sustainability."

Then we talk about behaviour.

At this point I realize that the proposal in front of us is to try what we are actually doing now. Non-sustainable behaviour is not to work with sustainability at all.

The group discusses what would be reasonable to aim for. We discuss once an hour, once a day, once a week, once a month.

The group agrees once a week for a couple of hours is reasonable to create momentum and focus.



Someone asks: "are we sure why the behaviour is damaging?"

"Well if we don't do it nothing will happen. So we need an hour or two a week."

The proposal is to try to define a way of working which would take us from no times a week working

with sustainability to once a week for a few hours, that feels reasonable for everyone.

I am struck by how easy it is to work with the group as they all genuinely want to help. No politics.

Someone starts writing it all up, to go out on the web, available for everyone to engage as well.

I ask for suggestions and proposals to now test the proposal.

A member suggests each of us take the written description of the steps involved, grab friends and go away and try it. We then report back to this group how it went and share experiences.

I feel I still have not reached completion, and again plea for help. "Can we trial it now or is something missing - let's review."

The group reviews:

Bring together a group of people to meet once a week. In a circle, anyone takes up anything. Frame the issue by defining the sustainability – negative behaviour and what would be a reasonable change. The group then works out suggestions how to reach a change and plan a trial.

"Good spot for a break", someone suggests.

I go out and go to the loo. I joke with the guy standing next to me that I find myself thinking about the urine I am producing - is it being drained away in a sustainable way? Am I even urinating in a sustainable way? I muse that the method has really got me focused.

End of tapescript Supplementary Journey 1

Tapescript Supplementary Journey 1 part two

Back in the room they are serving water and some juice, some green spirogyra.

I have been doing these exercises a long time but I must say this is one of the most interesting and enjoyable exercises I have been on since starting with PORENA.

Back to the circle

A guy at the other end speaks: "we now have a proposal, but could we evaluate the proposal by looking back on what we have done so far?"

More group input. You evaluate what you have done against the purpose.

"Let's evaluate the first part of circle. The purpose is to take up something which is not sustainable and to find ... to come up with ways to make it ... more sustainable. What went well?"

We agree that the framing the behaviour and setting clear goals was useful.

That everyone worked in a circle, and people were involved and genuinely engaged.

Documentation was not that important, but good as a one page reminder.

What could be improved?

Someone offers: "we could talk about rules of interaction between us all. Clarity of rules would make it easier to act in the group."

As an improvement suggestion we include a step where the group itself agrees on rules of interaction.

And agreement on purpose. We could have started with that.

Maybe questions are generated. We make a list and go away and find the answers.

Research. We add research to the method.

We have now tested the idea. What is next?

I ask. "How do big things get changed we are a group of individuals"

The answer is simple. Each large organization has a group member with a mandate. The group members go away with suggestions and questions to their organization.

I think I have this now.

They ask me if I have more questions.

"Have we evaluated the first session properly?"

We write the steps on a poster. (Are there twelve steps is that why I thought that earlier?)

My next question: "Do you use the PORENA visualization techniques?"

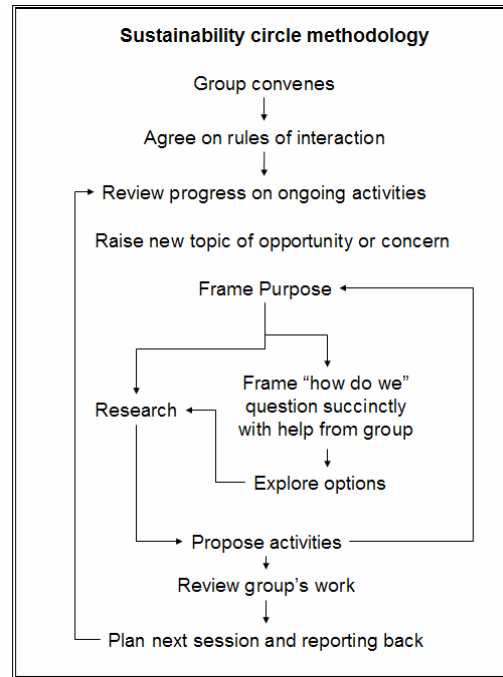
"We use them to come up with proposals."

Learning by doing. I actually learnt by doing. That is part of it.

I go back to twelve steps. If I remember correctly twelve steps are accompanied by twelve principles.

I start to read from the large poster on the wall.

- Each group formulates its own principles and rules.
- Each group is independent.
- Group members participate as individuals, mandated representatives of associations or organizations.
- Group members are responsible for their own behaviour
- We want to have fun and be creative
- We have a genuine desire to help each other.
- Each group is independently financed.
- Focus on change of behaviour.
- Learning by doing, the practical application of proposals.



End of Tapescript Supplementary Journey 1

Can't read the rest.

I still doubt it can be done in just the few hours these people are suggesting.

However, this exercise has actually been an illustration of the method and it didn't take that long.

We have succeeded in stating the issue, working out a solution and reviewing the proposals.

What we need to do now is test it again.

In our case we have a proposal. We could all go away and run similar groups to try it out.

I get an AHA feeling coming on. "In my case, I asked for a solution, have now got one and would need to go away and try it to follow the principle. Everyone takes responsibility for their own behaviour. Because I asked you for help I must now go try it out. Otherwise I would be wasting your time! And I will review it with you as you involved yourselves."

"You got it," says someone.

I thank everyone, get back into the lift and arrive back on the ground floor.