

RedQuadrant



Better conversations for better realities:  
learning loops to break the devil's bargain

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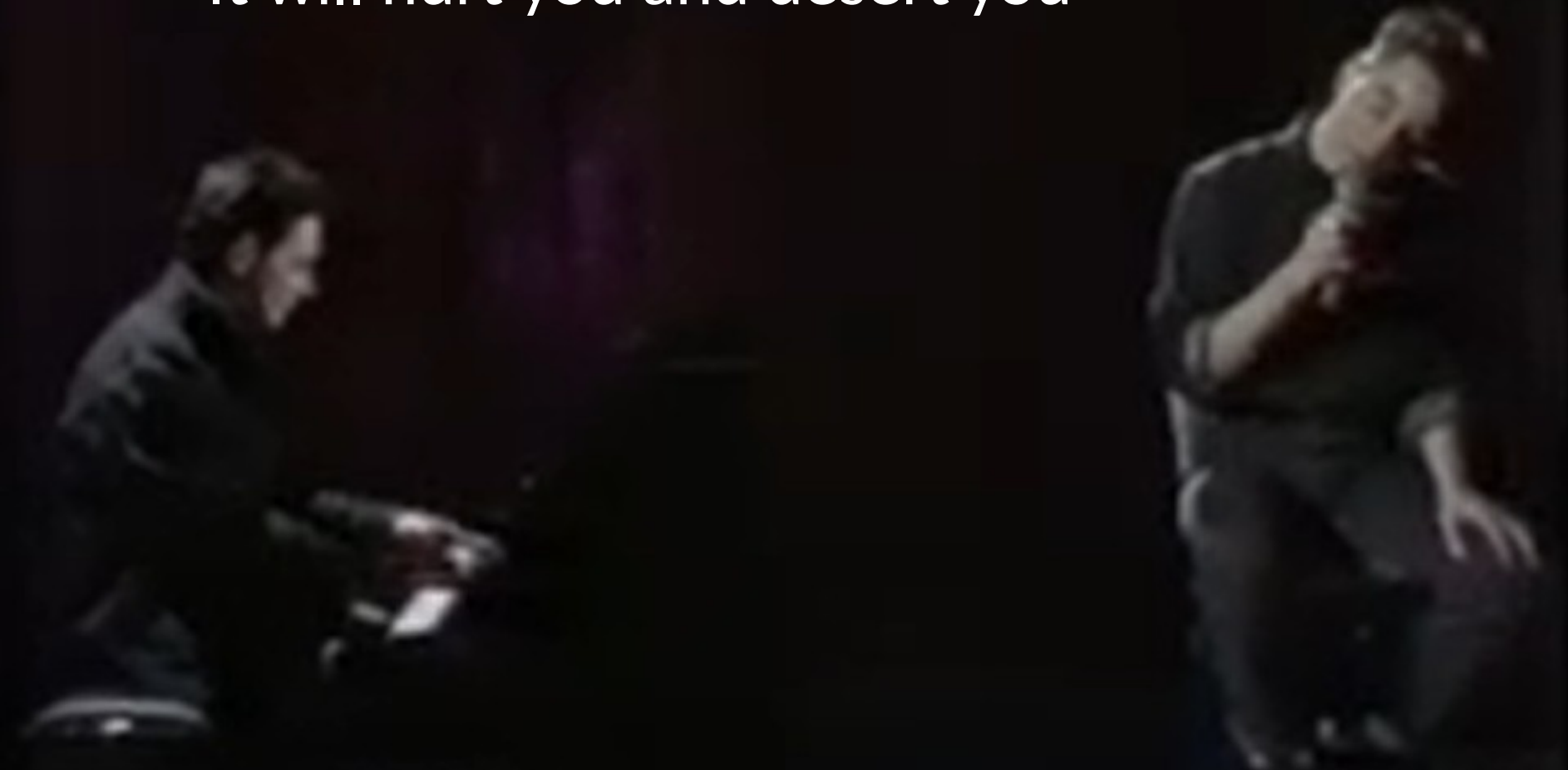
Push Hands, or Tui Shou (     )

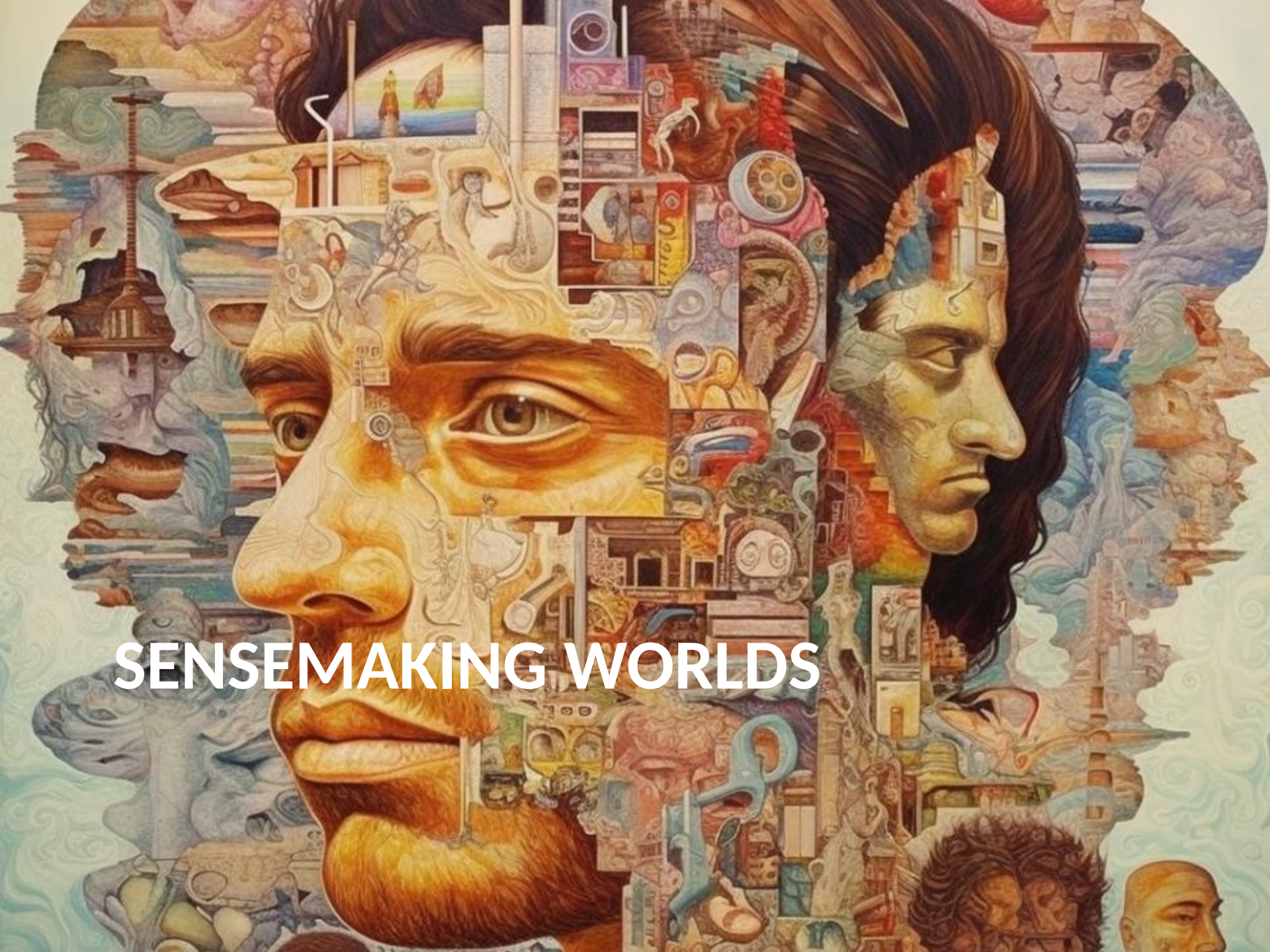


Are you welcome in your universe?

# **‘SENSEMAKING WORLDS’ AND THE ‘DEVIL’S BARGAIN’**

What you don't know always gets you  
It will hurt you and desert you





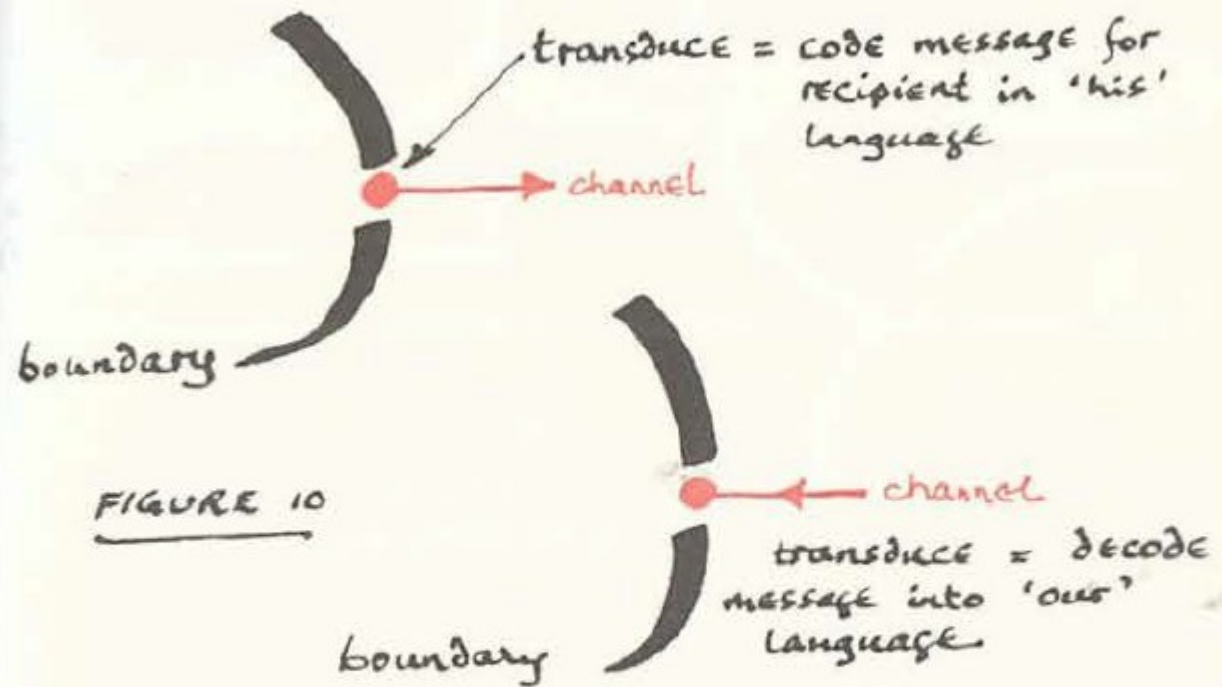
# SENSEMAKING WORLDS

# STAFFORD **BEER**



**DIAGNOSING THE  
SYSTEM**  
FOR  
ORGANIZATIONS

**TRANSDUCTION** is the word we need: 'leading across'. Each red blob is a *transducer*, and it has this function:



### The Third Principle of Organization

Wherever the information carried on a channel capable of distinguishing a given variety crosses a boundary, it undergoes transduction; the variety of the transducer must be at least equivalent to the variety of the channel.

# What the Frog's Eye Tells the Frog's Brain\*

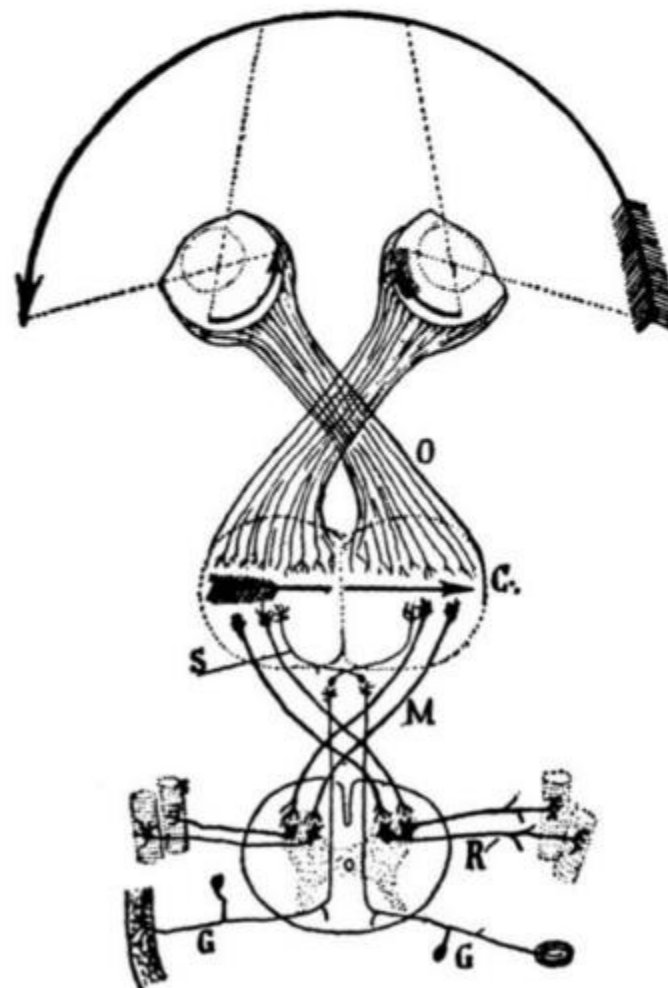
J. Y. LETTVIN†, H. R. MATURANA‡, W. S. McCULLOCH||, SENIOR MEMBER, IRE,  
AND W. H. PITTS||

*Summary*—In this paper, we analyze the activity of single fibers in the optic nerve of a frog. Our method is to find what sort of stimulus causes the largest activity in one nerve fiber and then what is the exciting aspect of that stimulus such that variations in everything else cause little change in the response. It has been known for the past 20 years that each fiber is connected not to a few rods and cones in the retina but to very many over a fair area. Our results show that for the most part within that area, it is not the light intensity itself but rather the pattern of local variation of intensity that is the exciting factor. There are four types of fibers, each type concerned with a different sort of pattern. Each type is uniformly distributed over the whole retina of the frog. Thus, there are four distinct parallel distributed channels whereby the frog's eye informs his brain about the visual image in terms of local pattern independent of average illumination. We describe the patterns and show the functional and anatomical separation of the channels. This work has been done on the frog, and our interpretation applies only to the frog.

## INTRODUCTION

### *Behavior of a Frog*

A FROG hunts on land by vision. He escapes enemies mainly by seeing them. His eyes do not move, as do ours, to follow prey, attend suspicious events, or search for things of interest. If his body changes its position with respect to gravity or the whole visual world is rotated about him, then he shows compensatory eye movements. These movements enter his hunting and evading habits only, *e.g.*, as he sits on a



## Report

# How *Much* the Eye Tells the Brain

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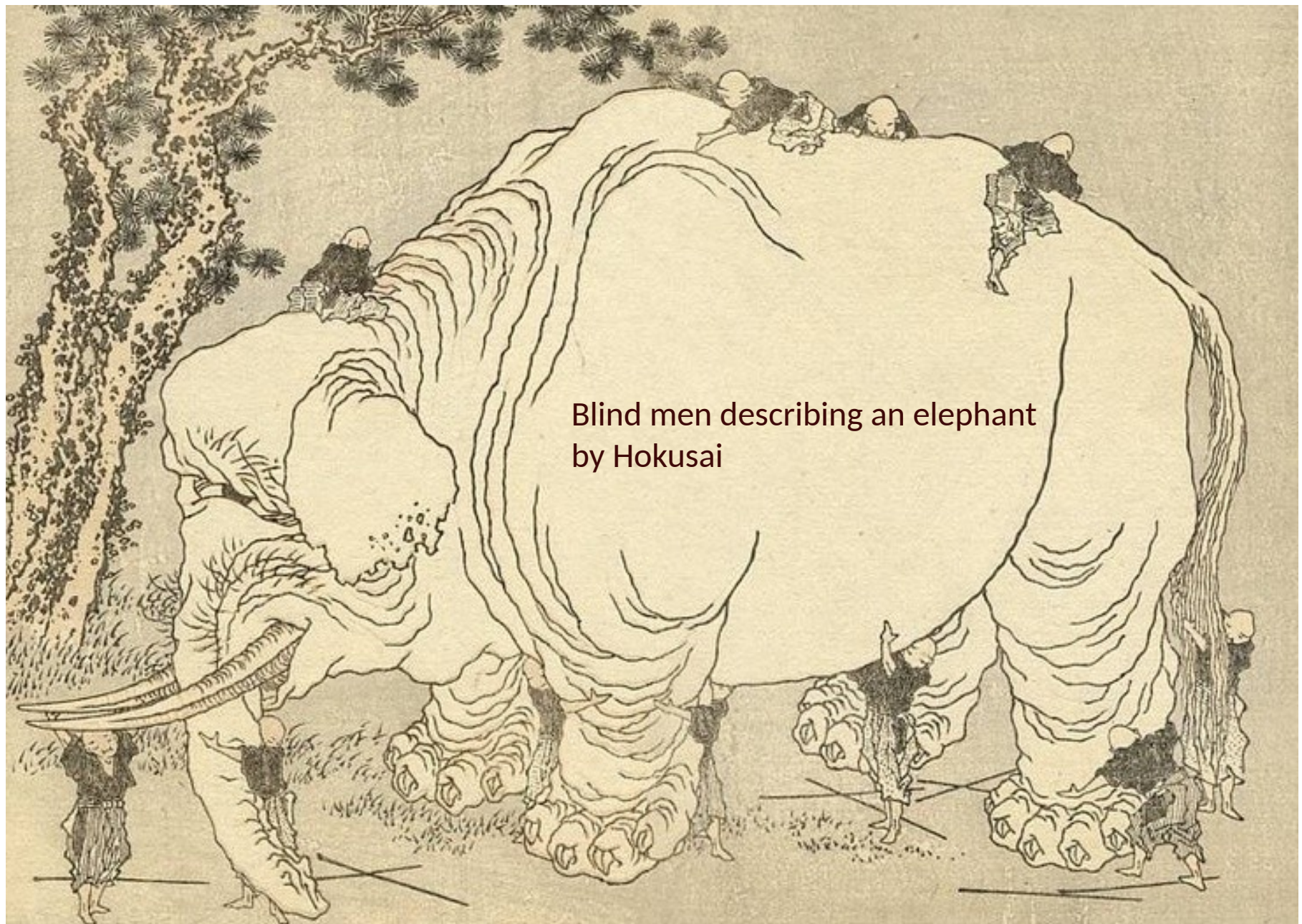
## Summary

In the classic “What the frog’s eye tells the frog’s brain,” Lettvin and colleagues [1] showed that different types of retinal ganglion cell send specific kinds of information. For example, one type responds best to a dark, convex form moving centripetally (a fly). Here we consider a complementary question: how *much* information does the retina send and how is it apportioned among different cell types? Recording

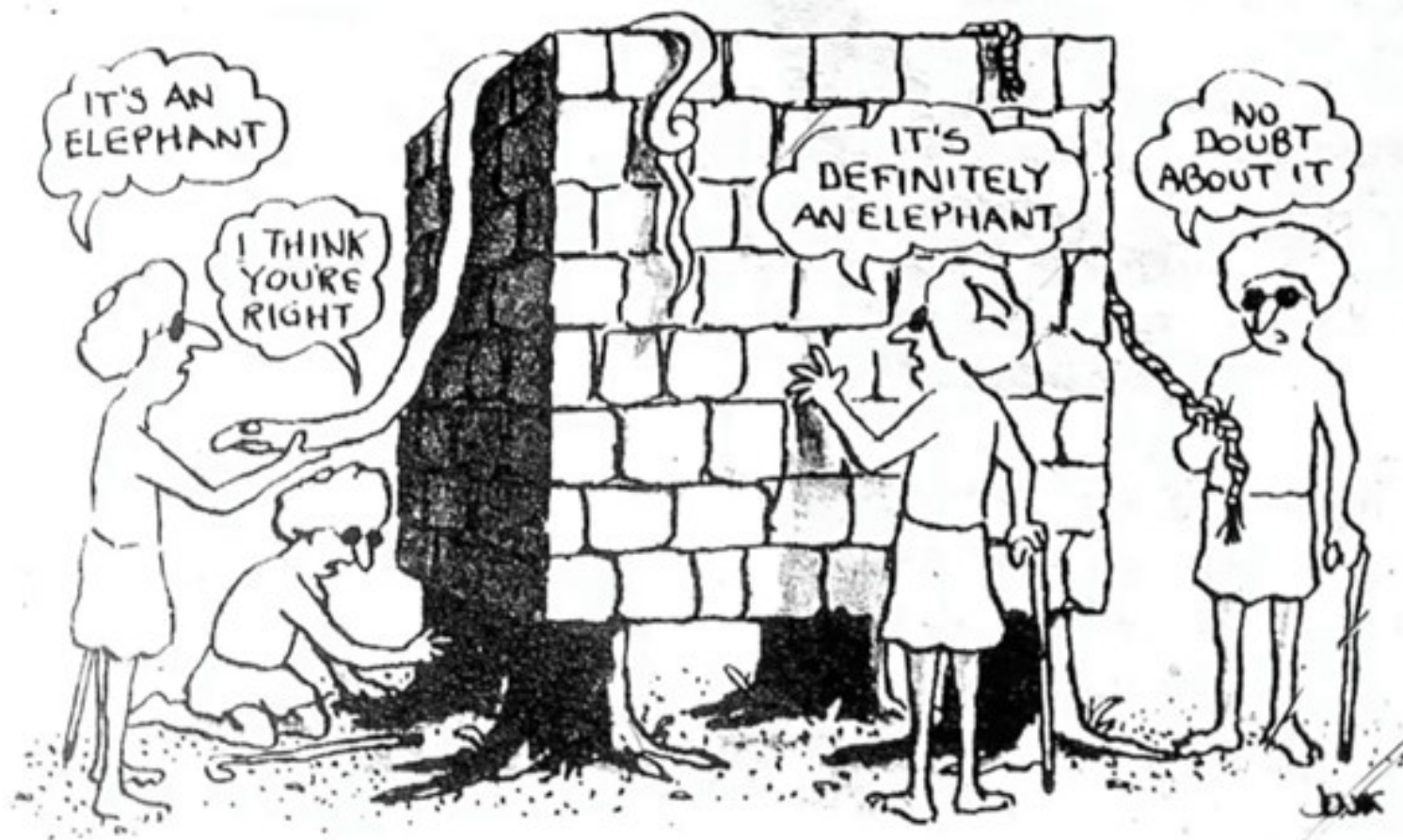
motion, and fixational eye movement. For these stimuli, the intensity distributions and the spatial and temporal spectra differed strikingly from white noise (Figure 1). Instead, like the distributions typical of natural images, they were skewed toward low intensities and low spatial and temporal frequencies.

## Responses Depended on Cell Type

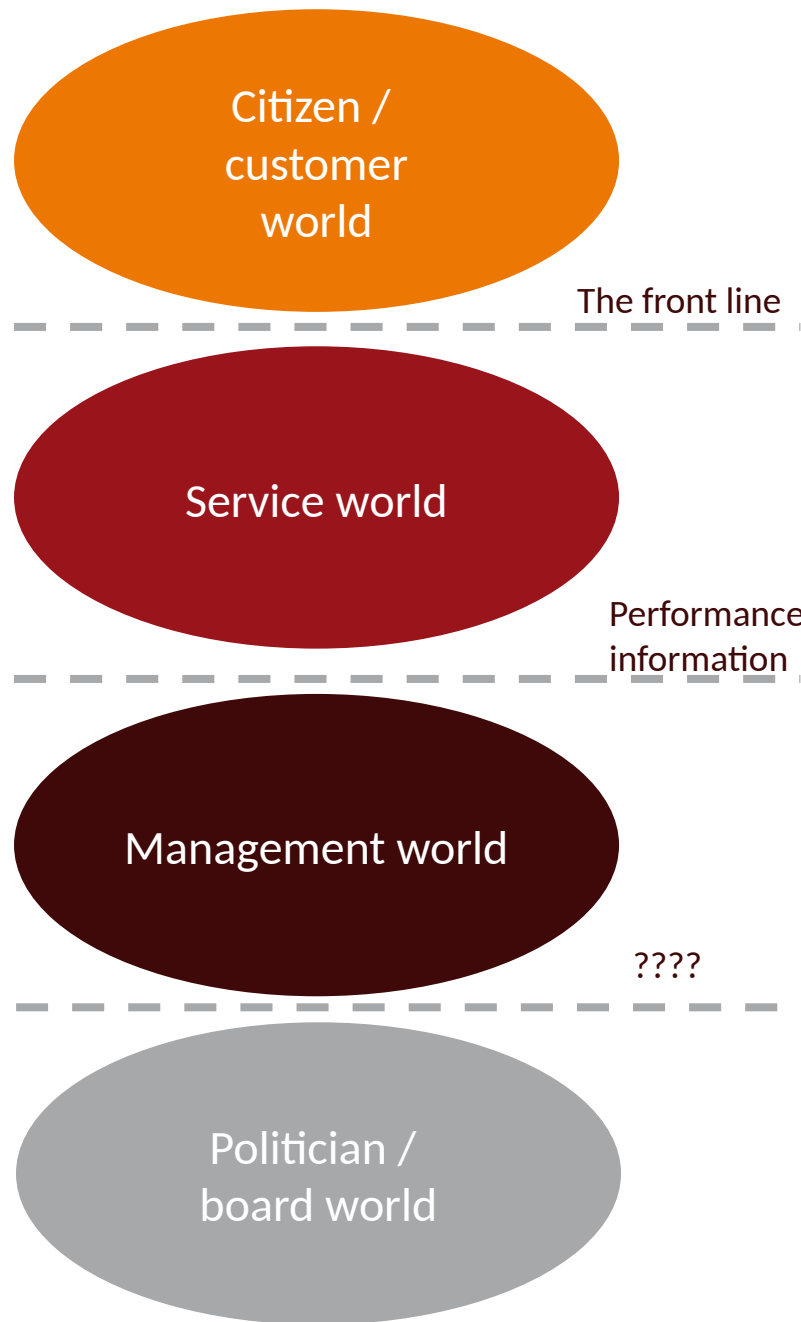
Various cell types were recorded simultaneously on a multi-electrode array [7] or singly with a loose patch electrode [2] and identified by their characteristic reverse correlograms and autocorrelograms (see Figure S1 in the Supplemental Data available with this article online) [8–10]. Comparing responses to a given stimulus across seven cell types, we found a characteristic response pattern for each type (Figure 2). For example, in response to the saccade stimulus, brisk-transient cells (both ON and OFF) fired spike bursts that peaked high in the PSTH ( $>300 \text{ spikes} \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ ), whereas brisk-sustained cells (both ON and OFF) peaked lower ( $\sim 150 \text{ spikes} \cdot \text{s}^{-1}$ ) and fired for longer periods (Figure 2). ON-OFF direction-selective cells fired with low jitter in spike timing across trials, whereas local-edge cells fired with considerable jitter (Figure 2 saccade, standard deviation of



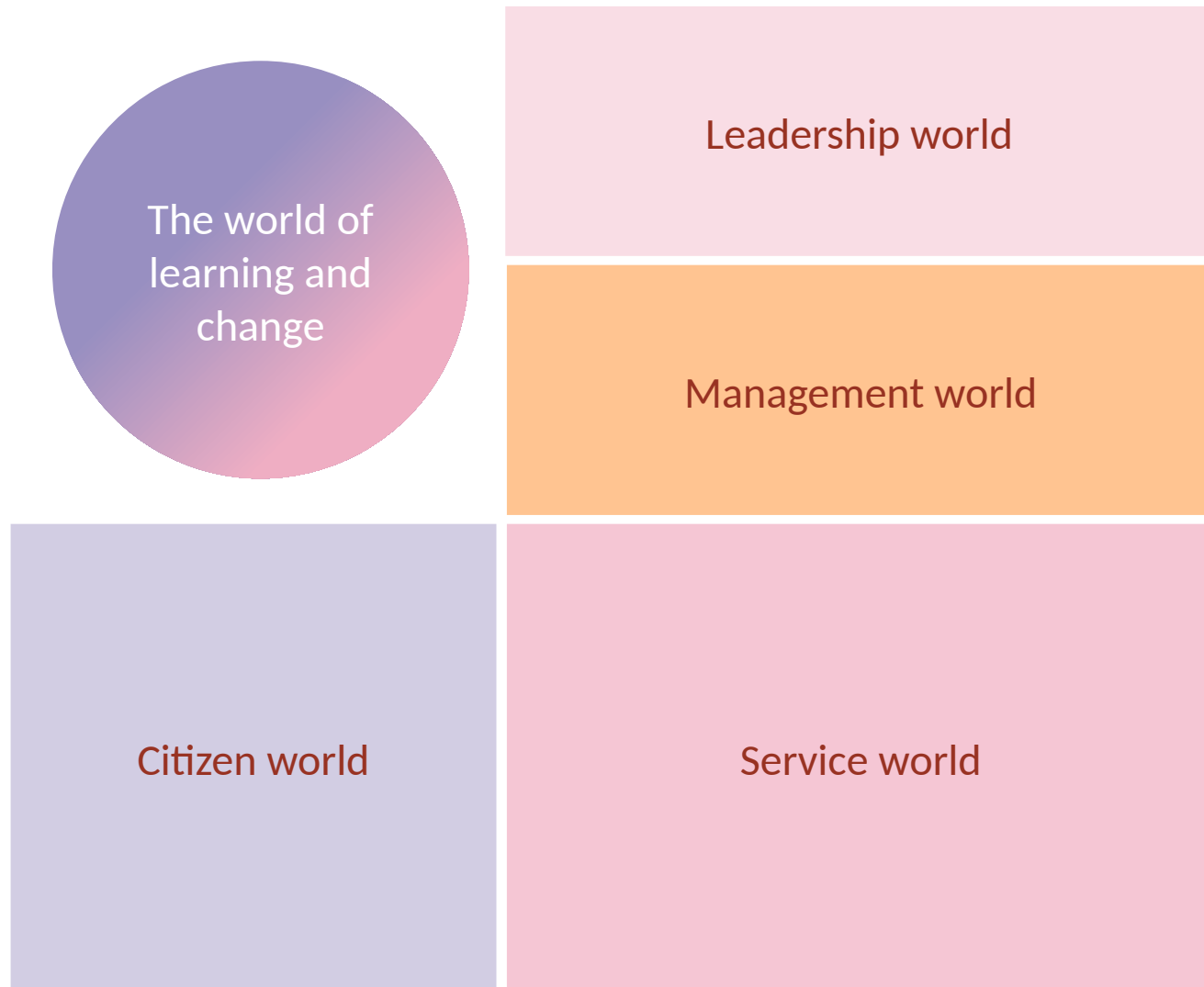
Blind men describing an elephant  
by Hokusai

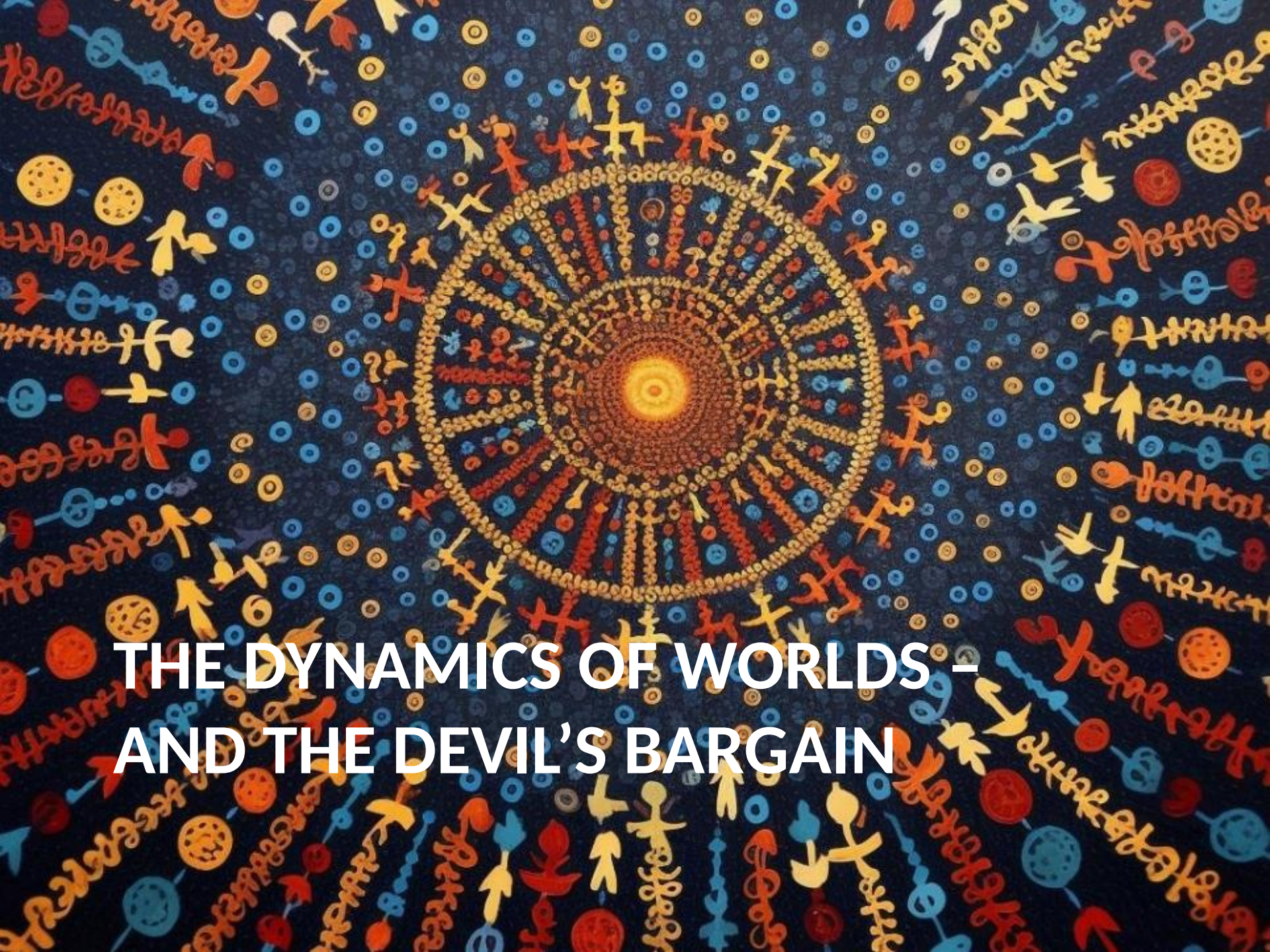


# Worlds matter



# Five worlds





# THE DYNAMICS OF WORLDS – AND THE DEVIL'S BARGAIN

'Stuff'  
Happens!!!

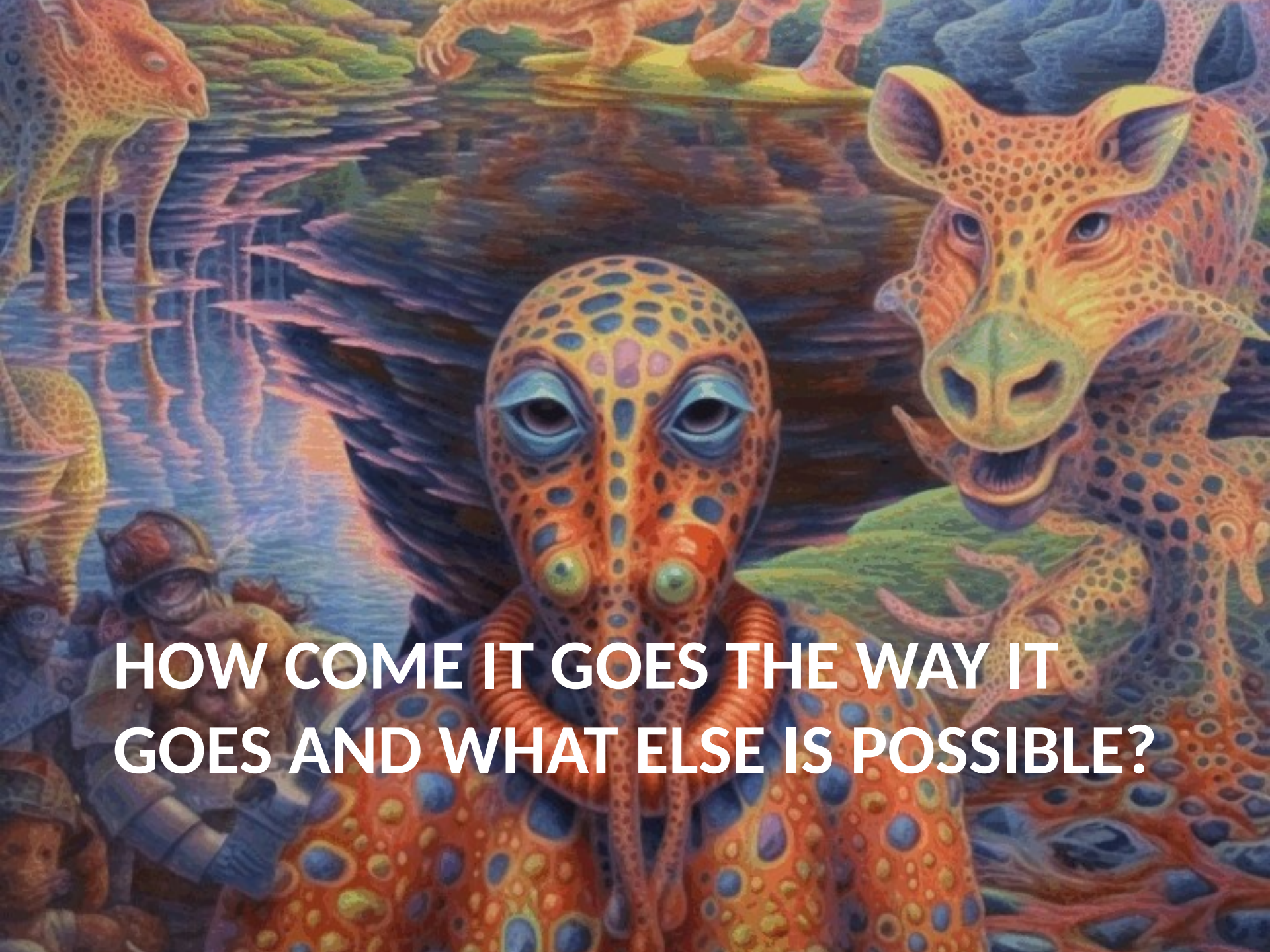
# When stuff happens, we react:

- + Make up a story
- + Evaluate the others
  - Malicious
  - Insensitive
  - Incompetent
- + Take it personally
- + React
  - Get mad
  - Get even
  - Withdraw
- + Lose focus
- + Partnership



**Different worlds** are predictable,  
but not inevitable.

**Partnership** is not predictable,  
but it is a human possibility.



**HOW COME IT GOES THE WAY IT  
GOES AND WHAT ELSE IS POSSIBLE?**

# Organisations as defenses against anxiety

- Organisations often create social systems as a defence against anxiety, which can manifest as collective conditions that protect members from distressing emotions.
- These defences can include denial, displacement, projection, rationalization, reaction formation, repression, and sublimation to cope with stress and reduce anxiety.
- The concept of 'social defences against paranoid and depressive anxiety' has evolved into a theory of social defences against emotions aroused by organisational tasks and dynamics.
- Organisational learning involves co-evolution of 'organisational container' and 'contained', with social defences created unconsciously by members through interactions in carrying out the primary task.
- The 'Secure Base model' suggests that just as children need a safe and secure environment, staff also need to feel safe and supported, especially when working with trauma, loss, disability, and justice systems.
- The small group is seen as the unit of transformation, with scale being a defence against transformation as it prevents the need for imagination or creation.
- Organisations can employ strategies to engage people through change, understanding how people tick and employing strategies to protect teams during times of change.

Isabel Menzies Lyth – 'The Functioning of Social Systems as a Defence Against Anxiety'

# Authenticity and honesty are scary – but generate safety

A 'devil's bargain' of unaccountability

- I'll never completely communicate what you need to do
- So we can both hide from responsibility
- I will never be satisfied by you
- But I can never fully hold you to account
- So we'll both be dissatisfied
- But we will be in a stable situation where nothing will ever change!
- We won't have to face the stress of accountability and change...

Authenticity and honest communication

- We'll have many more productive conversations where we can move forward together...
- But we might find out ways we don't fundamentally agree...
- Even ways we don't fundamentally respect each other...
- Do we want to know?

The initial effort can be scary – but the end result is greater security

**Productive conversations have all kinds of implications!**

# Being authentic (an example paraphrased from Block)

Authentic behaviour means you put into words what you are experiencing. This is the most powerful thing you can do to have the leverage you are looking for and to build commitment.

- **Client:** 'Glad you're here. It's not a big job – couple of days, I reckon. Wish I could steer you along, but I've got some really important things to do. My EA can get you the data you need, but please don't take too much time from the team, they're under real pressure at the moment'.
- **How it feels:** Like being disregarded and trivialised. This is important work and it's the work I do, whereas it's being considered as an interruption – and if I don't get buy-in here, I'll look like the idiot'.
- **A non-authentic response:** 'Look, this is a critical corporate project, and you were on the board who signed off the programme. It's mandated – and the transformation programme will fail if these reports don't come in on time and according to the design principles'
- **A more authentic response:** 'You're treating this as if it's trivial. I'd like you to recognise how important it is. If we're interrupting you, should we go back to the board to review the deadline?'

Could there be a **more** authentic response still?

**Being authentic is a genuine challenge – but genuinely simple**



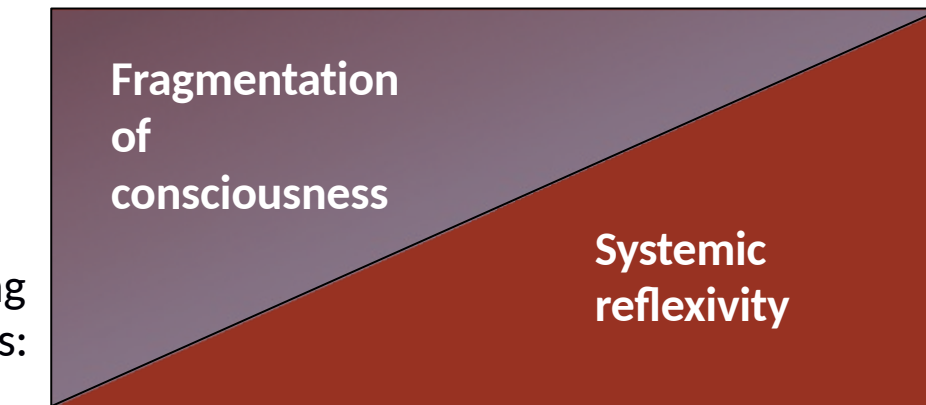
# **WAYS IN TO PARTNERSHIP**

# Ways in to partnership

|               | Avoidance<br>(‘there’s no conflict’)                                      | Productive<br>(creative surfacing of conflict)                                                                           | Explosion<br>(unproductive conflict)                 |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Vision        | Motherhood and apple pie with no real world reference                     | <b>Shared views, differences, achievable ambition</b>                                                                    | Unproductive conflict over form rather than function |
| Opportunities | Individual opportunities and ‘low hanging fruit’                          | <b>Valuable opportunities that require collaboration and generating real learning about working together effectively</b> | Identify where others have to change                 |
| Problems      | ‘There are no problems’ (or problems are located outside the partnership) | <b>Real problems that require collective action and generate learning</b>                                                | Blame and focus on the problems of the other         |
| Relationships | ‘There are no problems’ or ‘general unobjectionable principles’           | <b>Current strengths and weaknesses, productive learning, sharing of perspectives</b>                                    | Unproductive conversations, rehashing past conflict  |

# Coordinated Management of Meaning (Pearce)

- Poor meta-communication
- Incoherent storytelling
- Prefigurative & contextual force strong
- Coordinated patterns: reactive and paradoxical
- Two spaces: I/you



Systemic  
fragmentation

- Good meta-communication
  - Coherent storytelling
  - Practical and implicative force strong
  - Coordinated patterns: reflexive
  - Allowance of the third space of the relationship
- Systemic  
integration

Christine Olivera 2014

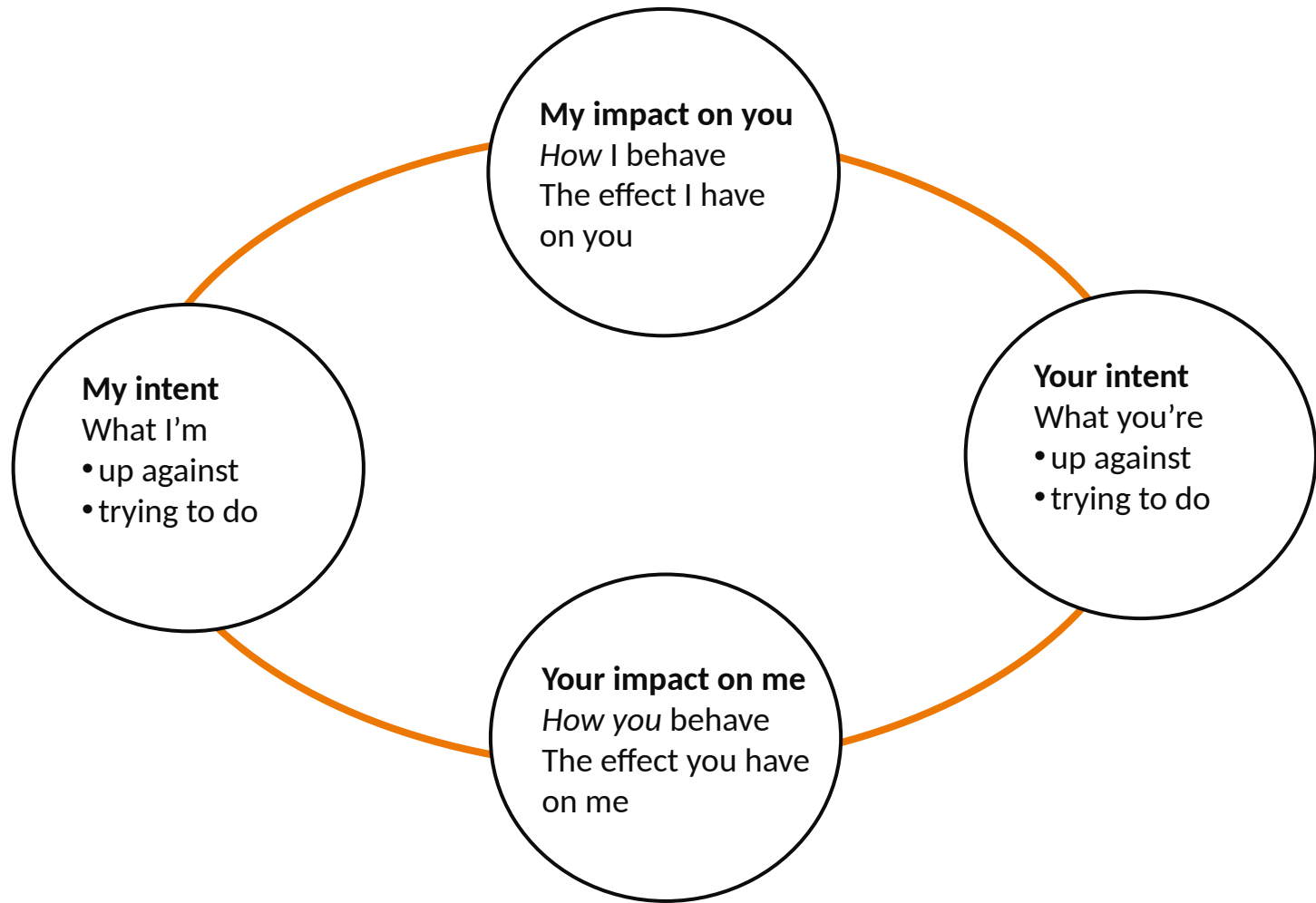


**BETTER CONVERSATIONS  
FOR BETTER REALITIES**

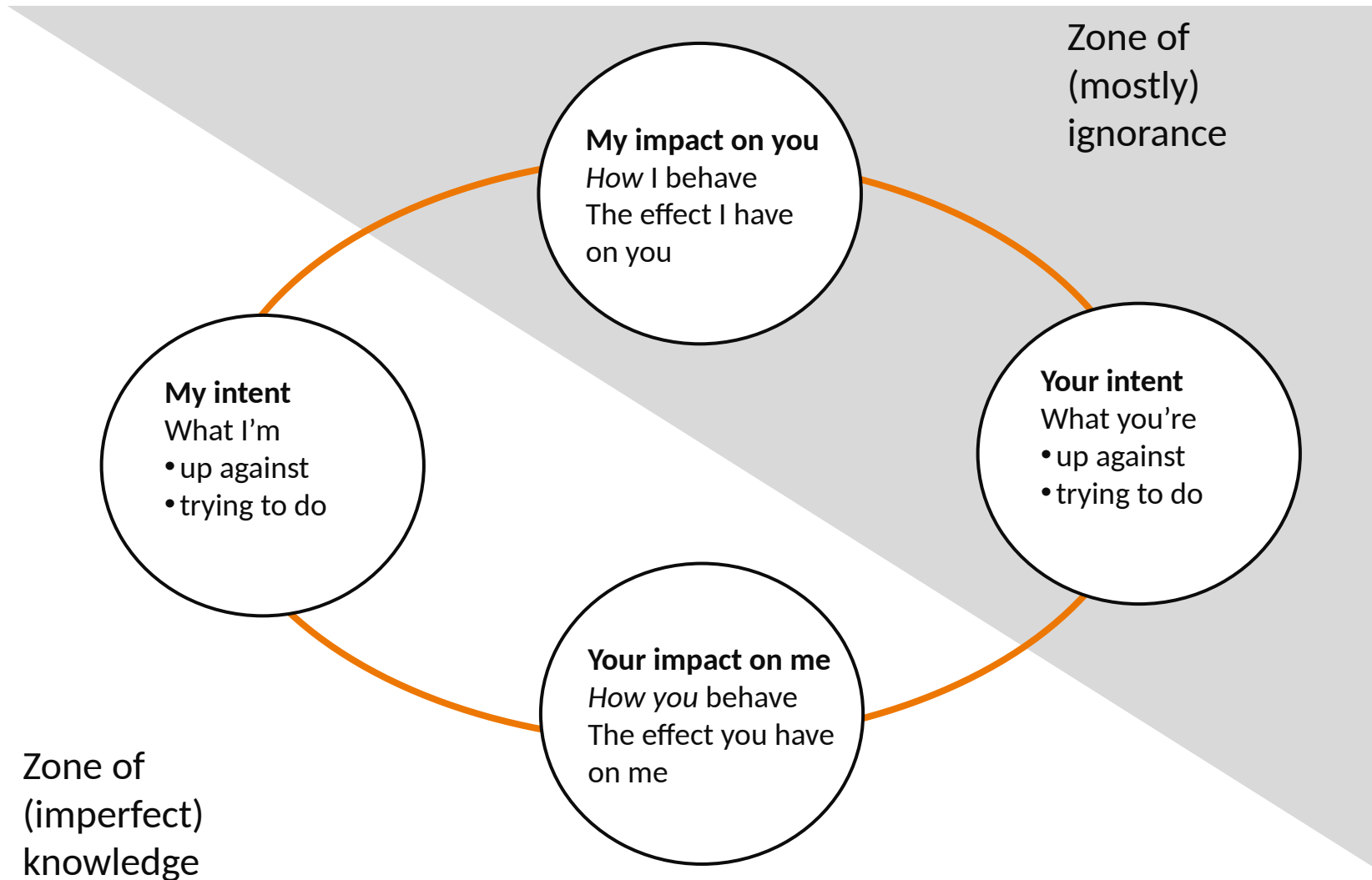


# **PATTERNS OF AWARENESS**

# Patterns of awareness: components of interaction



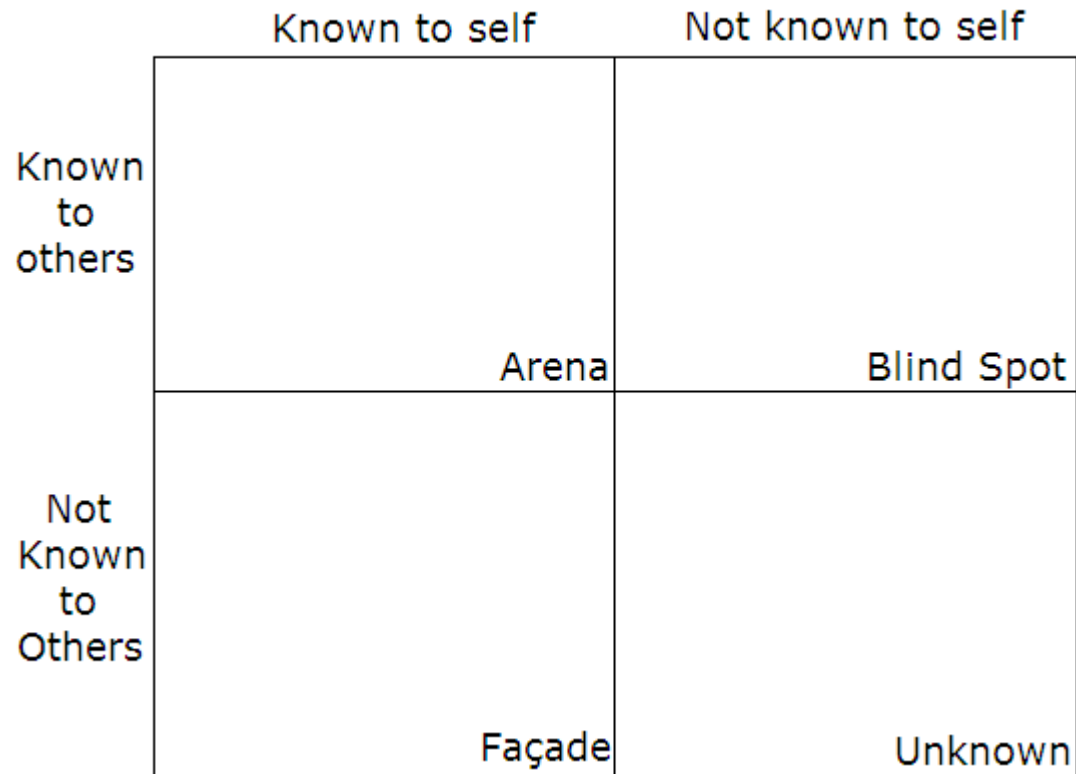
# The Betari Box





# THE JOHARI WINDOW

# The Johari Window

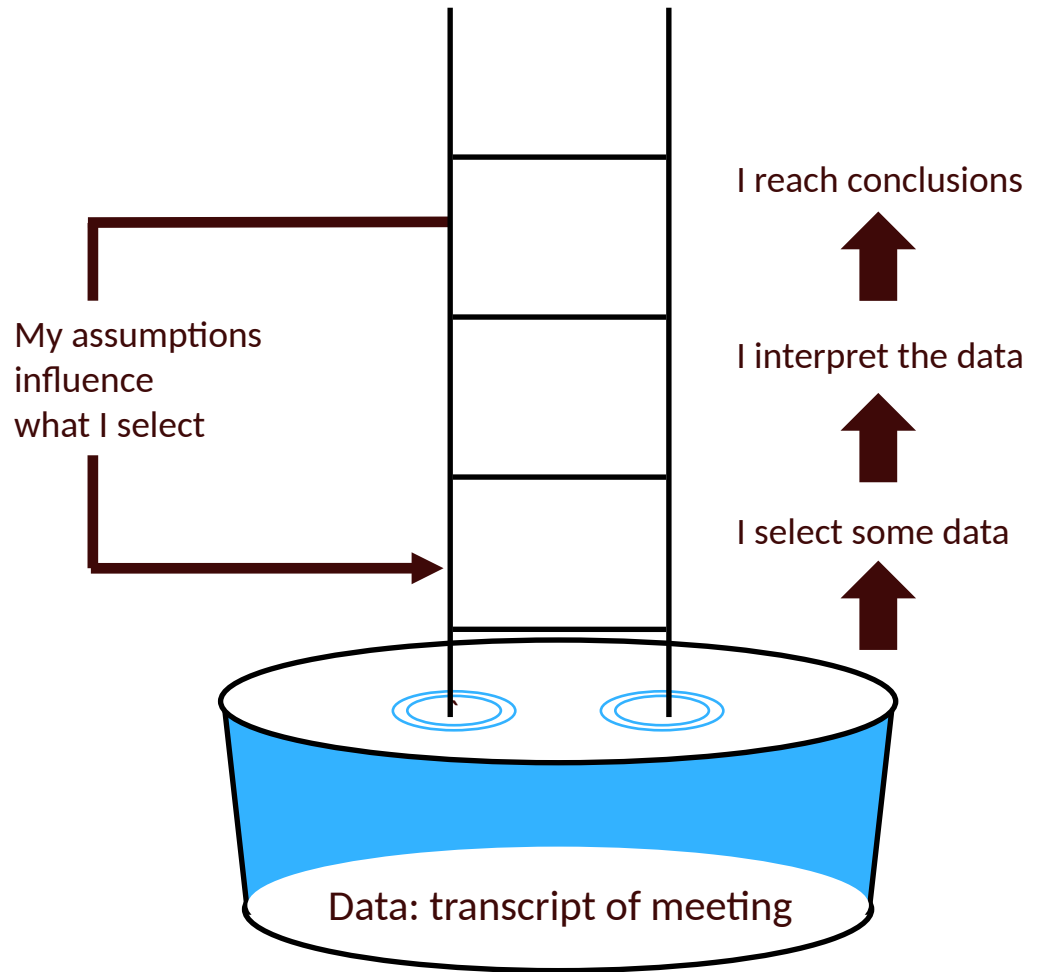




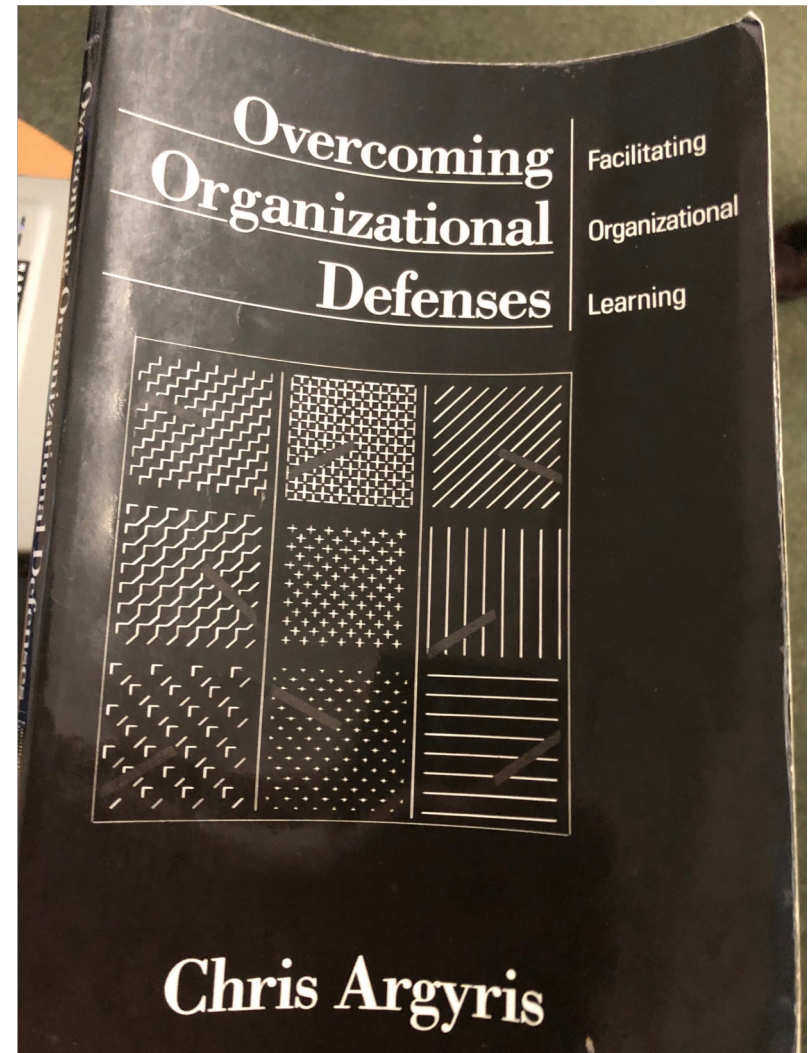
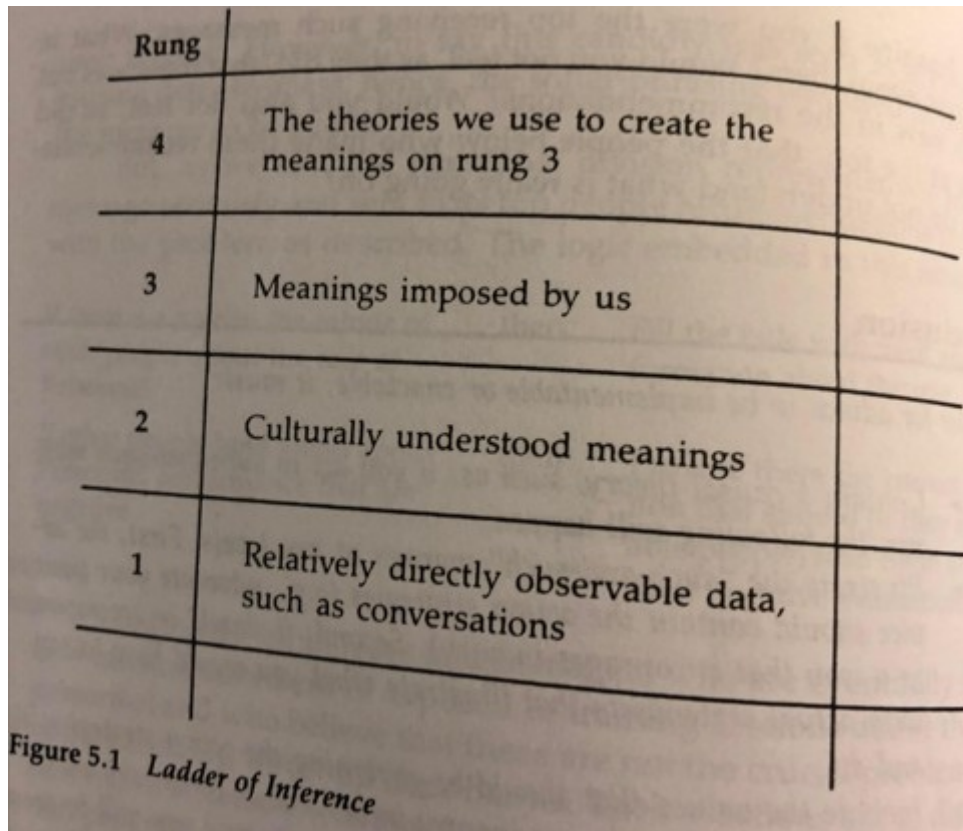
# THE LADDER OF INFERENCE

# The ladder of inference

- We make rapid and continuous inferences about other people.
- Understanding the data and logic that support our inferences helps us to test their validity.



NB This is the Argyris original



Overcoming Organizational Defenses, 1990



# **BREAKING THE CYCLE WITH ADVOCACY AND INQUIRY**

# Breaking the cycle

All interactions consist of two basic types of action:

- **Advocacy:** Stating an opinion, or making a point; e.g:
  - We are losing money because of a delay in procurement
  - We should outsource the street cleaning service as soon as possible because others can do it cheaper and better.
- **Inquiry:** Asking a question; e.g:
  - How much money have we lost because of the delay in procurement?
  - Why haven't you raised these concerns earlier?

# Balance – state and ask

- Balancing your advocacy with inquiry will foster mutual learning
- Ask for alternative views
- Look for examples that illustrate your views
- Ask for others' reasoning and data
- Not all advocacy and inquiry are equal. High quality advocacy and inquiry bring others' reasoning and data to the surface
- Challenge your own view with enquiry: 'Do you see it the same or differently?'
- Explain the steps of the reasoning by using the Ladder of Inference

## Advocacy

Share your data  
Tell others about reasoning  
Acknowledge your assumptions  
Test your conclusion, rather than stating them as facts  
Explore alternative interpretations of the data

## Inquiry

Ask questions that surface reasoning and data  
Search for alternative views  
Keep your curiosity going

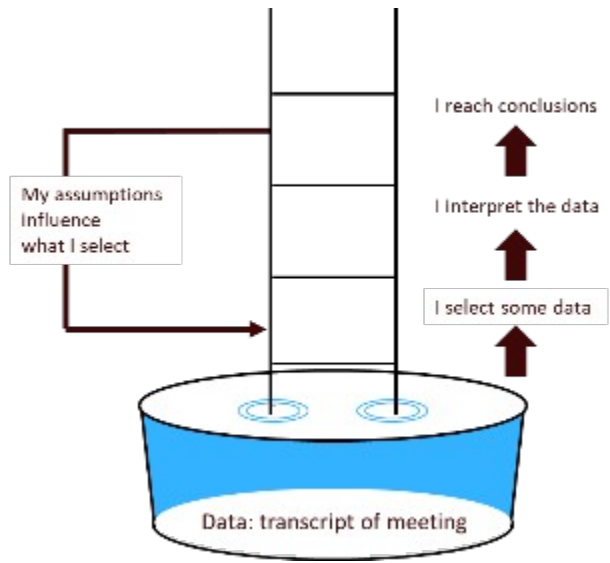


## Advocacy

- State your ideas, opinions, desires
- Make your assumptions known
- Reveal the steps in your thinking
- Give specific examples and illustrations
- Engage : Go to Inquiry

Advocacy provides a set of skills for slowing down the process and revealing to others how we draw our conclusions.

## The ladder of inference



To use the ladder  
Listen for conclusions or opinions  
Ask for the 'data'

(e.g., 'What is it that leads you to say that?')

Make the steps in your reasoning visible  
Gently demand that others do the same

Before you agree or disagree, check out the meanings of words (e.g. leadership, power, 'isn't working', be successful, etc.)

## Inquiry

- Inquire into other people's views
- Ask others to reveal the steps in their thinking
- Check out your 'interpretations'
- Encourage people to challenge your conclusions
- Genuinely listen and be willing to be influenced

Inquiry provides a set of skills for discovering how others reached their conclusions, and for understanding the impact of our actions on others.



# THE LEFT-HAND COLUMN EXERCISE

# Left hand column exercise

| What I thought and felt, but didn't say... | What was said                                     |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
|                                            | Three or four lines in a critical conversation... |

Find an example conversation and think it through...

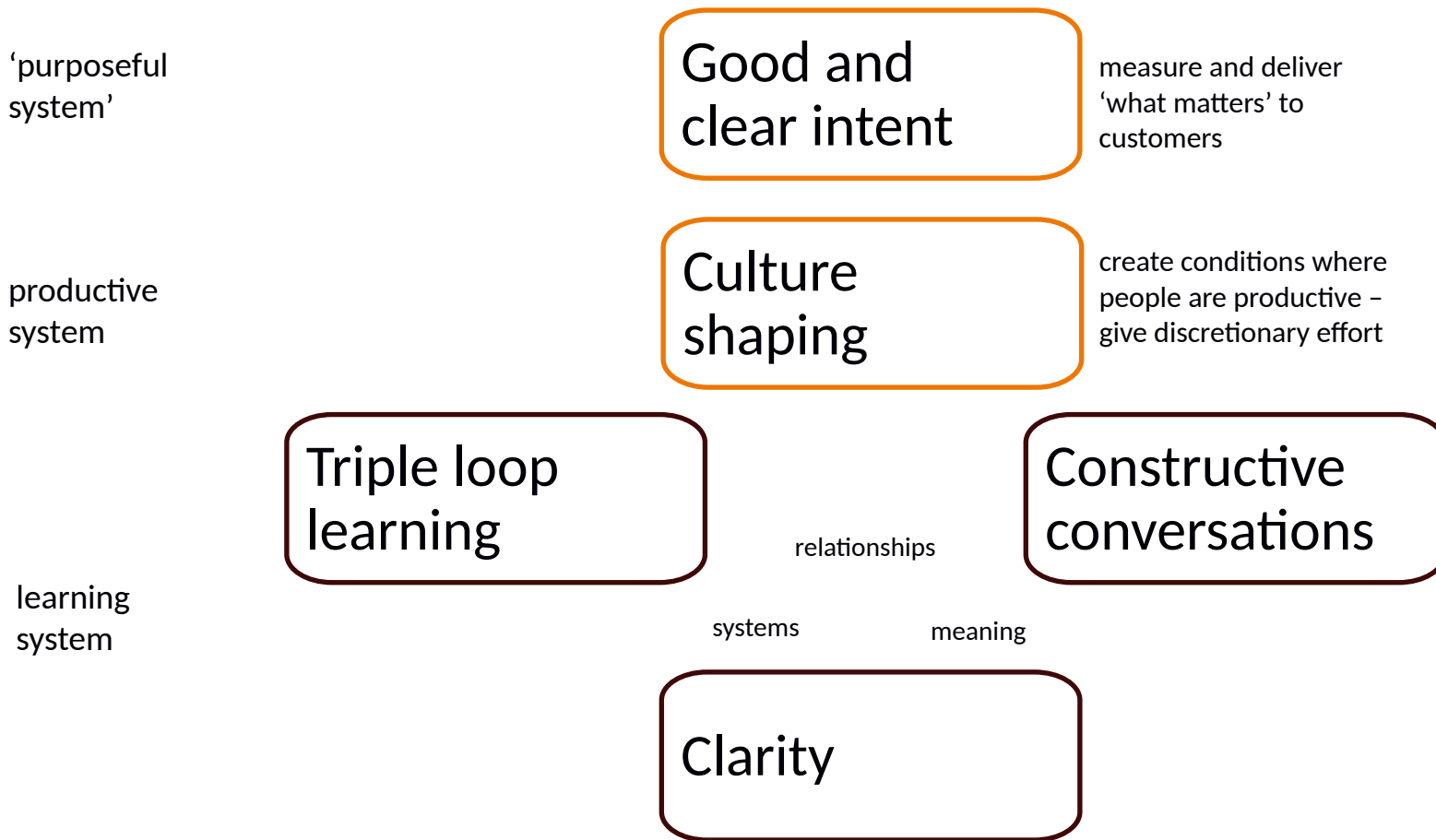


Why 'practices' are so important

The danger of double binds

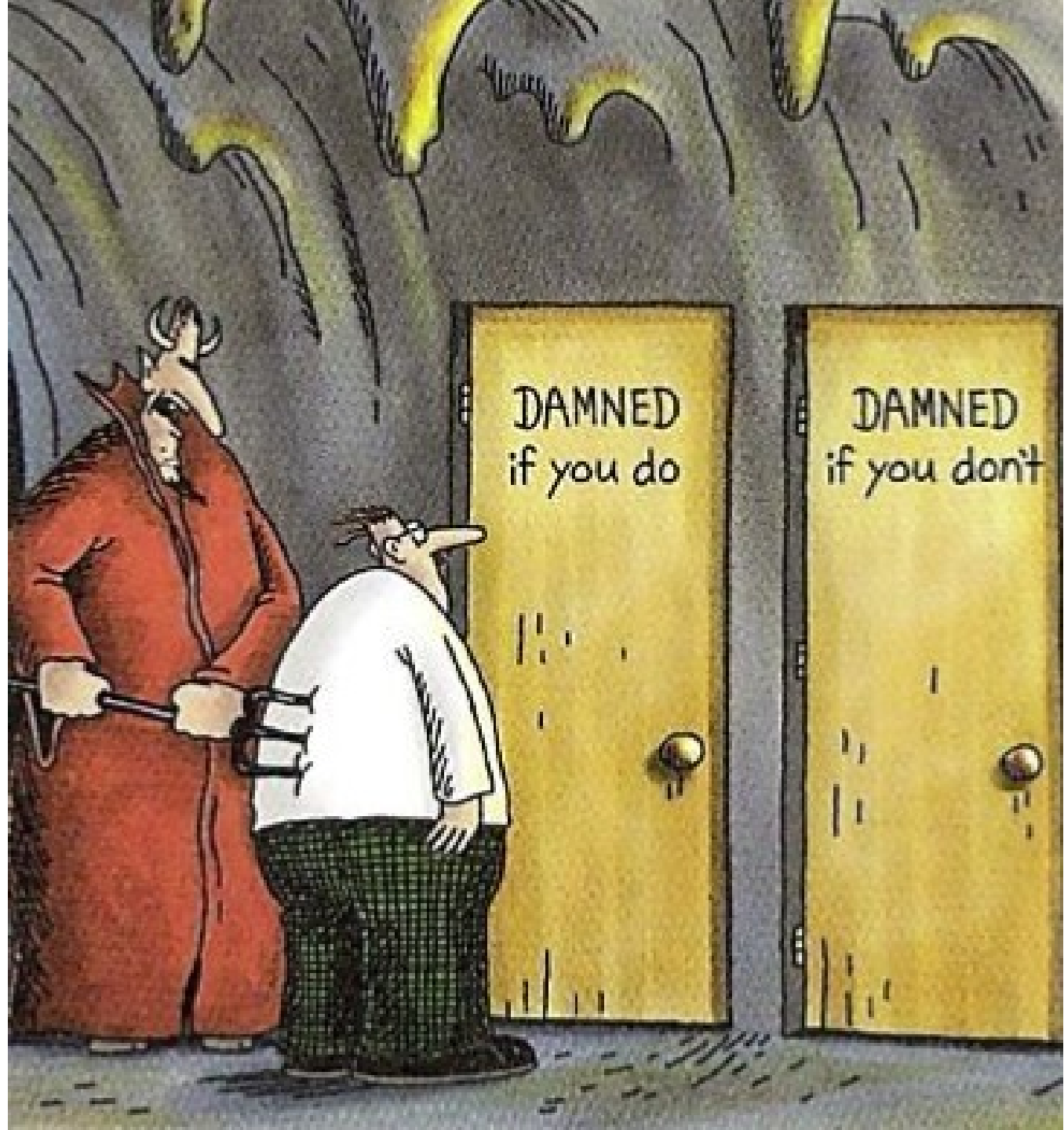
## **FIVE CORE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES**

# Core management and leadership practices



**Address danger / confusion / conflict / deficit / development as they arise**

The  
danger  
of  
double  
binds



'Practice  
practice  
makes  
perfect,  
perfect is  
a fault; in  
fault lies  
change'





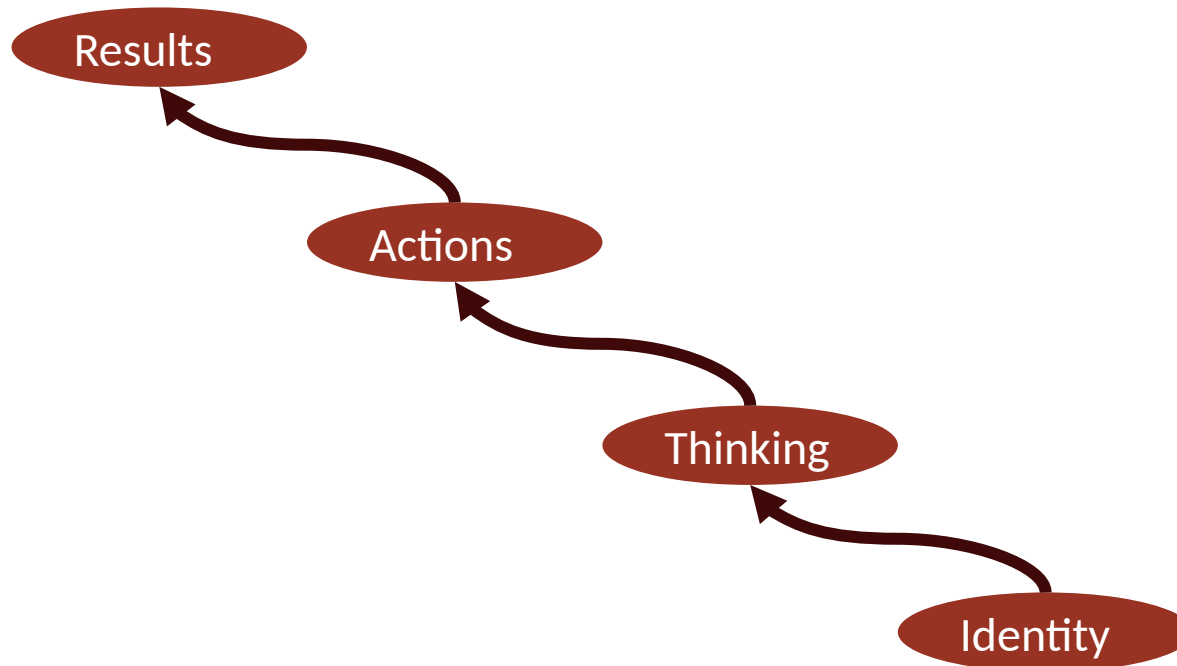
**LEARNING IS CHANGE,  
CHANGE LEARNING**

You never understand  
an organisation until  
you start to try to  
change it

Kurt Lewin

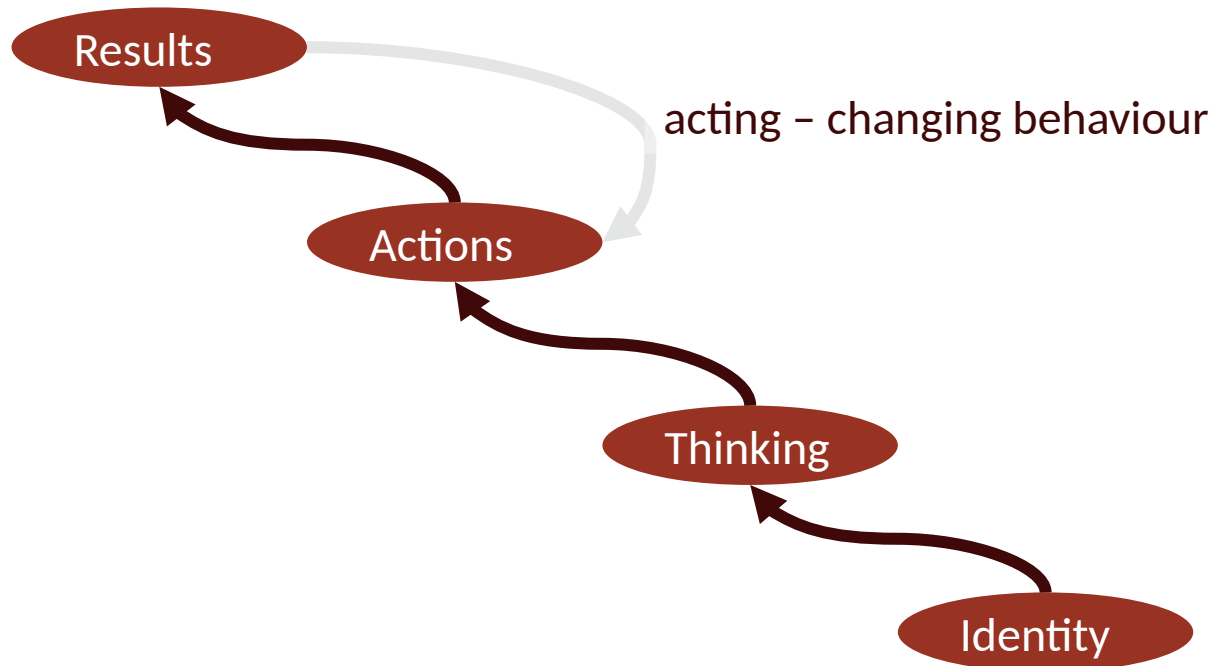
# Transformational learning – Argyris, Bateson

Our results are shaped by our actions, shaped by our thinking, our identity



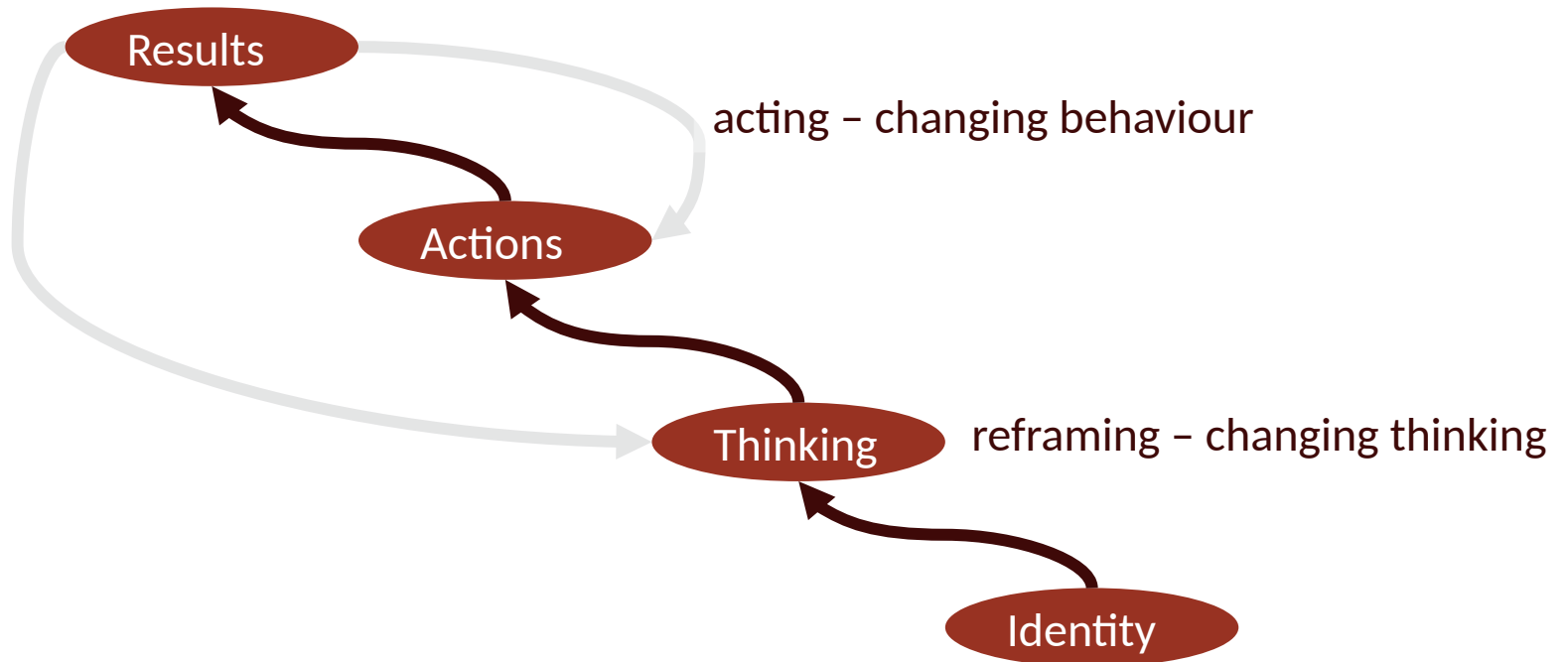
# Single loop learning

Changing our actions for better results



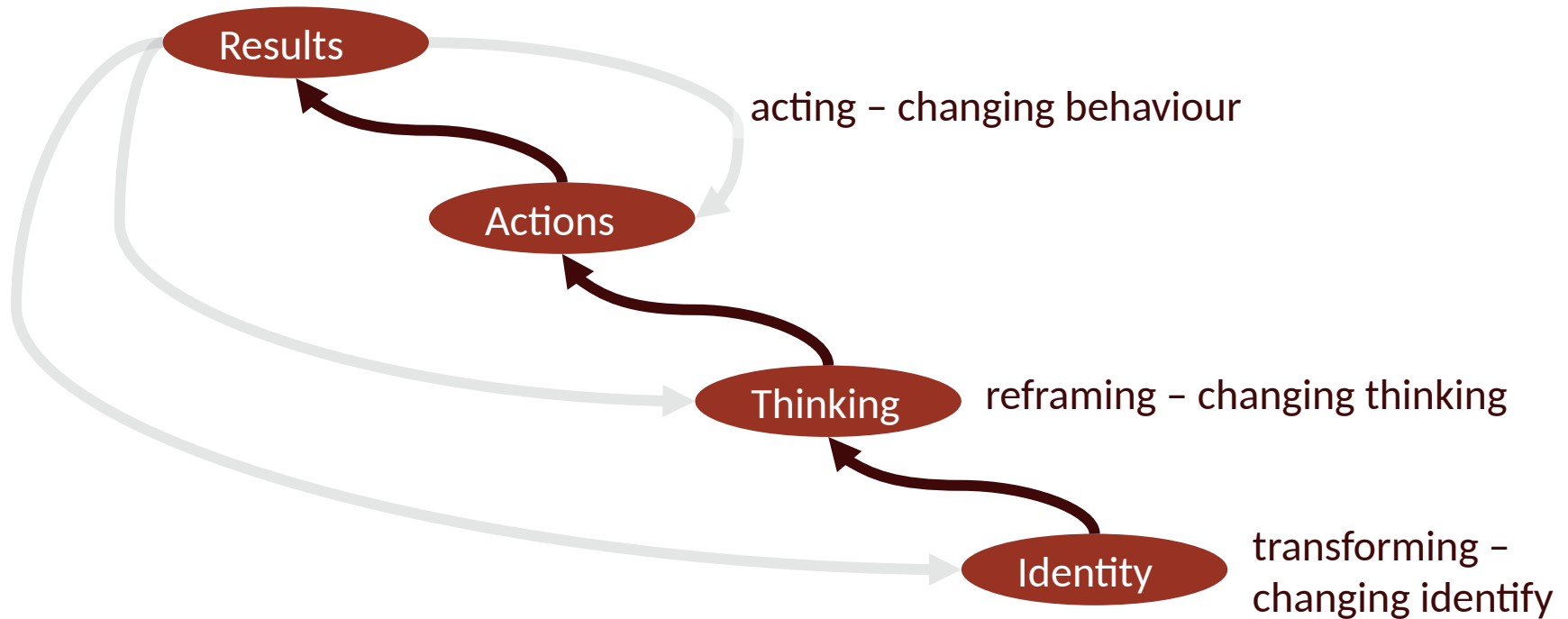
# Double loop learning

Changing our thinking



# Triple loop learning

Changing our identity



**No learning without planning. Innovation requires changing the rules.**



# SYSTEMS CHANGE

# Systems change

The big picture: outcomes arise from complex, adaptive systems

As we change the system..



Our identity, purpose, role naturally change

Identity and purpose. Who are we, what are we here for?

As we see the system, we might see our role differently or renegotiate boundaries



Our boundaries determine what the systems is and how we can look at it

Seeing the system – what works, what are the opportunities?

Intervening in the system helps up to see it better and from different angles



Seeing the system allows us to choose how and where to intervene

Intervening in the system – build on strengths, shape positively

The results of our interventions can make us question every level of the framework



Interventions generate learning about how to work at every level

Learning – at multiple levels

Is the system learning?

Are we learning?0

**These are logical levels, not linear steps – all working simultaneously**

# Level 7 Apprenticeship

Commissioning and leading for outcomes in complexity – convening systems change

*Exciting news!*

A tailored version of the **Level 7 Systems Thinking Practitioner Apprenticeship**, designed specifically for senior commissioners, system leaders, and transformation leads across health, care, local government, and public services.

Structured around powerful real-world tools:

- the **commissioning compass: system assessment for change**
- **demand management, seven ways to intervene, and the five worlds of commissioning**
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- Live virtual workshops, peer learning, coaching, and professional discussion
- Systems thinking training from leaders in the field, including PSTA, SCiO, and RedQuadrant facilitators
- Advanced Practitioner status with SCiO
- Optional fast-track MBA (additional fee)

**Time commitment?** Around half a day a week – all focused on the real work you're already doing, with support to deepen impact and accelerate change.

**Ideal for:** commissioning leads, directors, transformation managers, and those looking to take a system convening role across complex partnerships.

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<https://link.redquadrant.com/L7apprenticeship>

[info@publicservicetransformation.org](mailto:info@publicservicetransformation.org)

**SIX-MONTH ONLY offer – Apprenticeship levy funded**



## Always happy to talk...

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