

Organic Choirs

artistic and social diversity in musical ecosystems

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artistic and social diversity in musical ecosystems

- from competition to **playfulness**



by Peder Karlsson

version: Sept 24th, 2014

TIP: open this PDF in fullscreen mode in your computer,
and use arrow buttons to navigate. Have fun!

One who is very powerful
must also be very kind.

Astrid Lindgren

The Great Book, always open
and which we should make an effort to read,
is that of Nature.

Antoni Gaudí

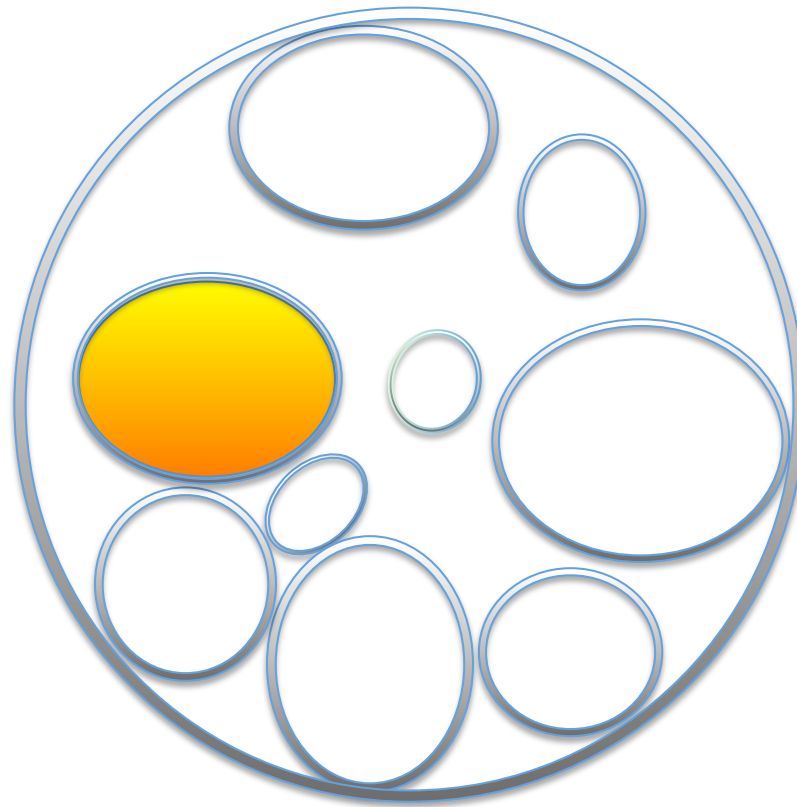
My client is not in a hurry.

Antoni Gaudí

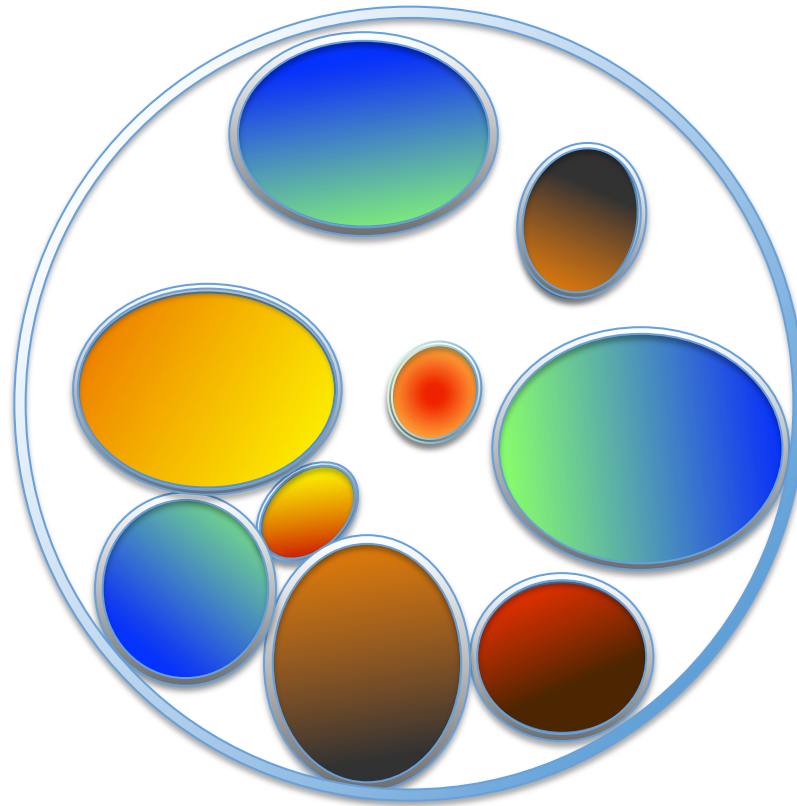


La Sagrada Família

every voice makes a difference



every voice contributes to harmony



Unique artistic expressions

In an organic choir or vocal ensemble, ideas can be shared by all members and developed through collective creative efforts.

This is possible in groups where the members assume individual responsibility and have learned how to manage rotated initiative.

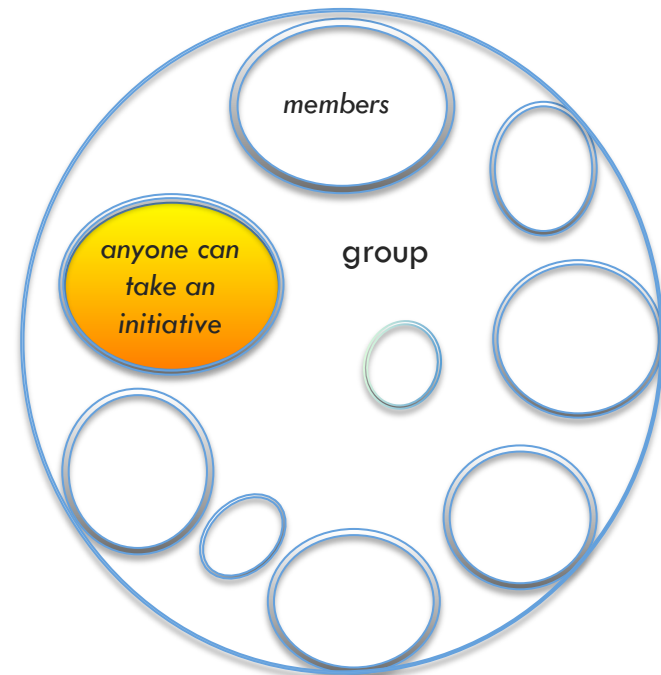
To set such collective creative processes in motion, it is important that group members first learn how to provide each other with a sense of emotional security.

Before singers are ready to express a variety of musical expressions, each member needs to feel comfortable to share feelings of joy, and to be allowed to express what makes them feel uncomfortable.

A sense of security for singers is a necessary starting point for exploration of a *diversity* of individual sounds and personal expressions that form the basis for development of a unique artistic collective identity.

Rotated initiative is a form of shared leadership. Leadership requires a sense of responsibility.

If a new idea has long-term consequences, then the responsibility for realization of the idea lies upon the singer who suggested it.



Goals



For many people, singing in a choir or vocal group can provide a balance to pressure and stress of personal and professional lifestyles.

When discussing goals for your vocal ensemble or choir, *qualitative* values can provide inspiration.

Whereas goals expressed in *quantitative* terms often lead to a feeling a guilt, of not being “good enough”. Which adds to the stress that singers already suffer from in their daily life.

Organic Choirs - ideas overview

The “Organic Choirs” concept is open to interpretation and further collaborative development

- No branding
- Openness to any musical style

Musical and artistic development

- Preparation and improvisation
- Embodied singing; physical grounding

Natural organization

- Rotated leadership
- Group identity and musical expressions based on members' voices
- New music developed without microphones

Trial-and-error approach

Singers are encouraged to explore ideas beyond the “comfort zone”, in creative group processes where failure is seen as a necessary part of success.

Why “organic”?

Because we consist of organs, that consist of cells, that consist of molecules, that consist of atoms, that consist of...

When people form a group, then we become the “organs” of that group.

When group members assume different responsibilities and functions spontaneously as the group develops in a natural process that changes over time, then the group has an *organic* structure.

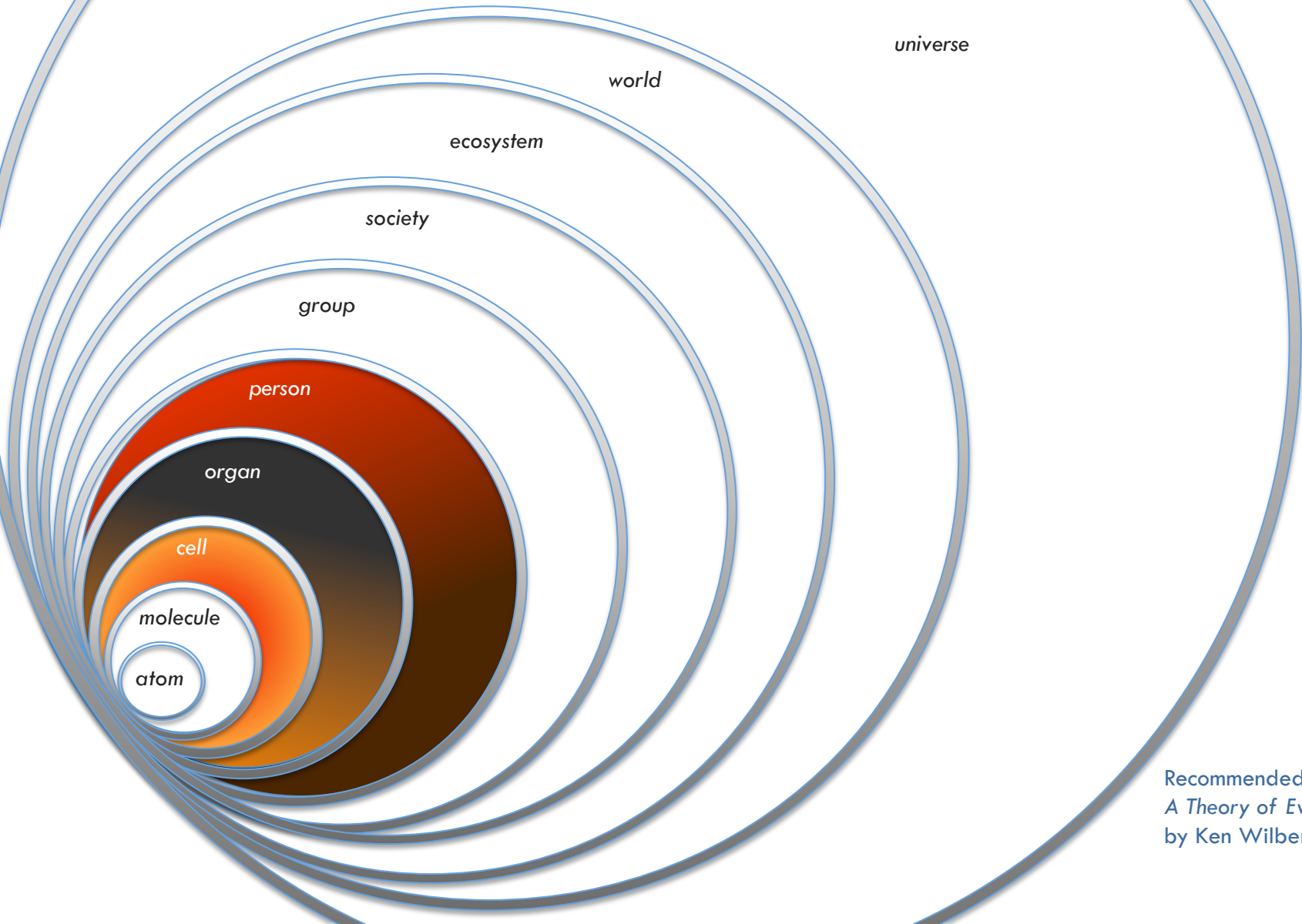
The whole world is in a process of change from *dominance hierarchy* to *natural organization*.

Sustainability of the ecosystems of the Earth depend on the success of such transition, in all countries and societies.

The “Organic Choirs” concept reflects this global process of change.

Recommended book:
The Great Turning
by David Korten

Natural organization



Recommended book:
A Theory of Everything
by Ken Wilber

Transformation of modern society

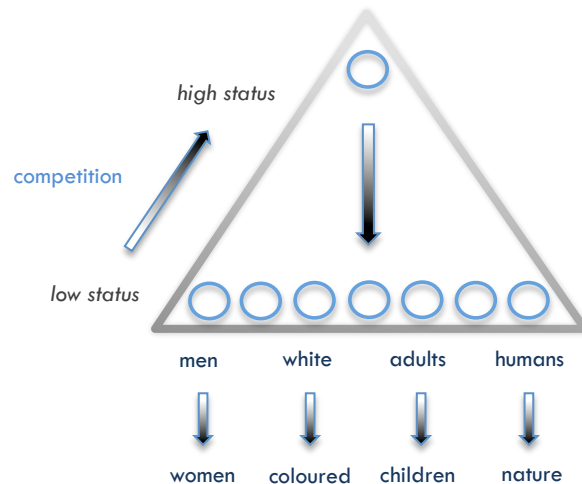
*In order to change an existing paradigm, you do not struggle to try and change the problematic model.
You create a new model and make the old one obsolete.
That, in essence, is the higher service to which we are all being called.*

- Buckminster Fuller

NOW

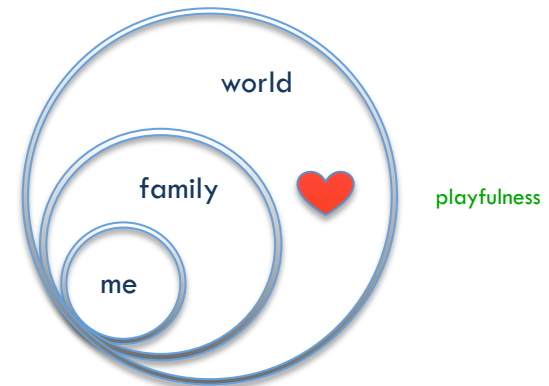
economical, political, cultural, educational and religious structures that have grown out of balance

*application of power by force;
with money, influence or violence*



FUTURE

a diversity of lifestyles. We live, love and create according to natural principles of balance



Recommended books

The Power of Partnership - by Riane Eisler

The Ascent of Humanity - Charles Eisenstein

This Changes Everything - by Naomi Klein

Earth is Our Business - by Polly Higgins

Treading Lightly: The Hidden Wisdom of the World's Oldest People
- by Karl-Erik Sveiby and Tex Skuthorpe

Dominance hierarchy

“Dominance hierarchies”: the default pattern in economical, political, religious, cultural and educational structures of modern society, all the way from the top to the bottom.

And in families.

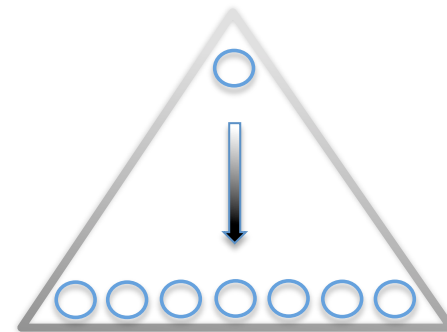
Natural co-operation is over-riden by control and competition in order to achieve power over others.

Maintenance of authority by application of force inevitably leads to alienation and to blockage of communication between people.

“One who is very powerful must also be very kind” – do you embrace this approach in your leadership?

In my workshops, I give examples of concrete rehearsal methods that can serve as an inspiration for transformation of choir leadership styles from “dominance hierarchy” and competition to *playfulness*.

*application of power by force
makes mutual exchange
very difficult*



Guidelines for myself as a leader

Feedback types:

- Positive reinforcement
- Help
- Stop

Positive reinforcement shall be given first. I can give it at any point, spontaneously while the choir sings, or after the choir has sung. This provides encouragement to the group, especially when I point out *specific* things that I like or think is good.

If I point out a problem, then I must also present a solution, or ask for help, or improvise.

Help (or “constructive criticism”) shall be helpful to the singers, must always be specific, and shall always be given in a matter-of-fact, neutral tone of communication.

I shall say “*Stop!*” – or “*No!*” – when someone does something that I do not accept from a leadership point of view, or when somebody does something that violates the group rules.

Rehearsal methods

- five main areas

Five main areas

In the workshop, I will give concrete examples from the following areas of musical parameters, as well as describe processes of how to assimilate knowledge physically, visually and intellectually.



General guidelines

- Practise one item at a time. Then the group has a chance to improve.
- Identify a couple of problematical bars, a short section of a song.
- Be specific about what the current item of focus is, as well as which of the main areas is currently being practised. Ignore temporarily the other four areas.
- Sing the short section, followed by an evaluation.
- Sing at least three times.
- When the singers feel that the group gets better within a specific area, then the group gets stronger.
- Since a cappella music does not provide a clear reference point for intonation and pulse, help the singers as much as you can.
- Play reference notes on the piano.
- Let singers take turns being the reference for intonation or pulse.

Creative expression

- development of identity

any instantaneous moment

imagination

fun

inspiration; inner glow

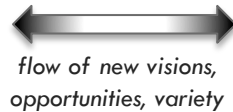
emotion

motivation

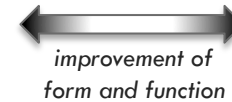
intuition

improvisation

silent observation



identity



sequences of time

curiosity

skills

physical, sensual experience

structure

responsibility

logic

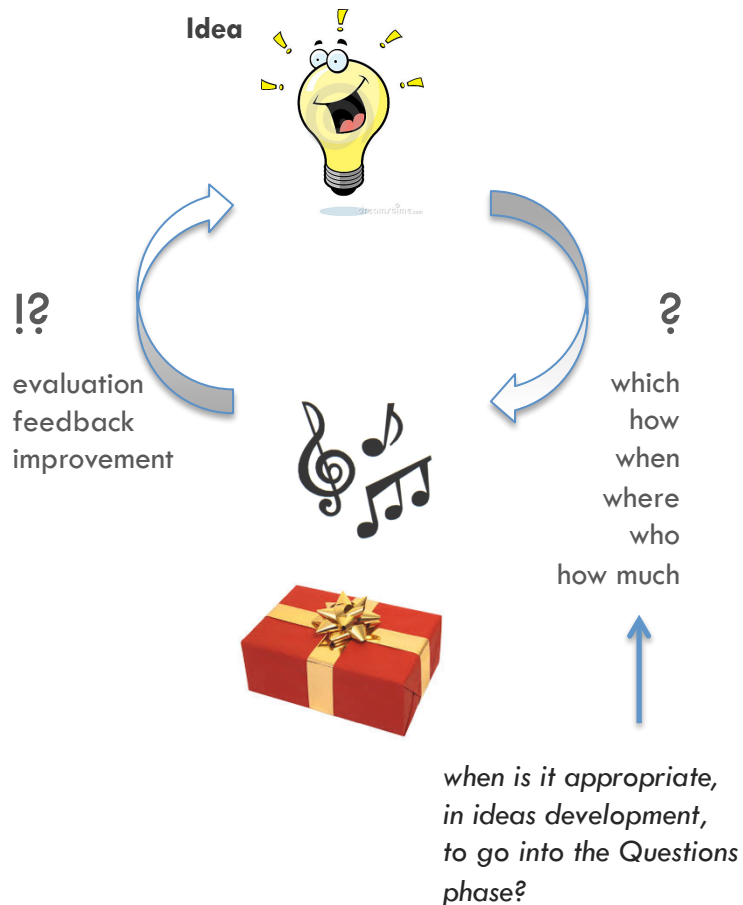
planning

focus

release
response from others
failure, success
identity check
acceptance

From idea to gift

cycles of ideas development



Possible responses to ideas

YES!

= fast-forward
→ positive reinforcement of an idea

NO!

= stop
→ possible death of an idea

MAYBE
...

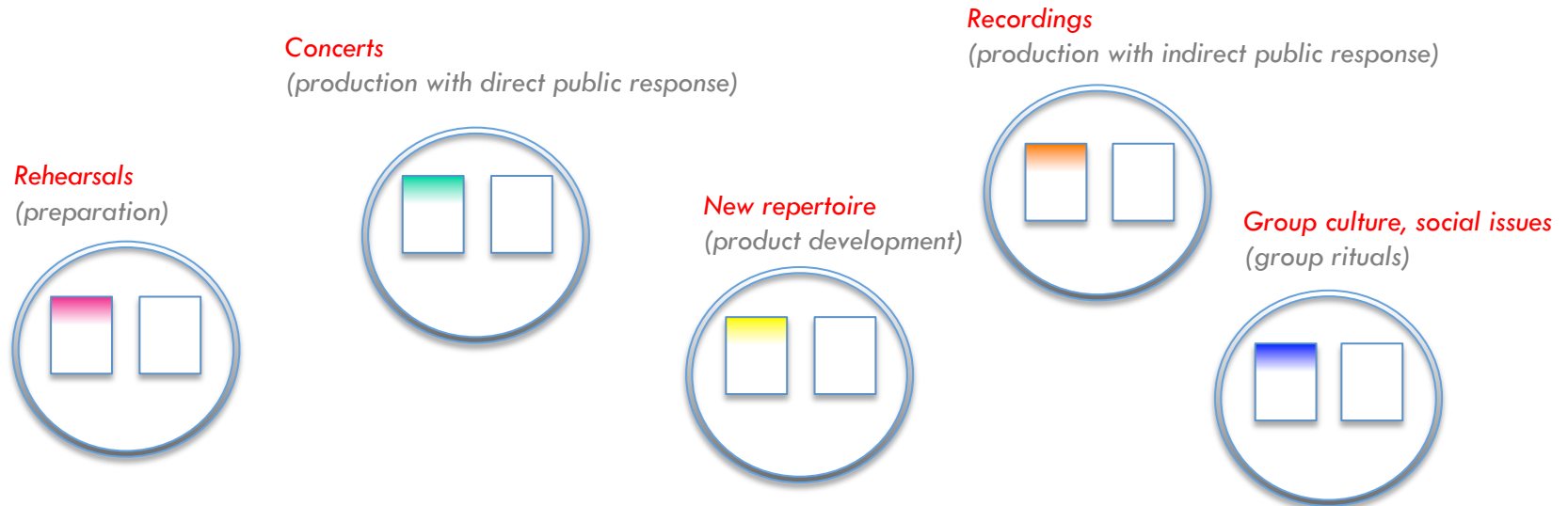
= slow-forward
→ the idea stays alive
→ yes/no decision can be made later

silence

= unclear response
→ the sender of an idea
must interpret the meaning –
whether it is a quiet “yes”, “no”,
or a “maybe”

Collaborative Game

Group inspiration session. Brainstorming. Suggested duration: 20-90 minutes



Games guidelines

- Feel free to play around with this format to fit your group and present circumstances.
- **Allowed responses to ideas: “Yes” and “Maybe”.**
- A “tablemaster” at each table writes down all ideas on paper. This person is allowed to say “Stop! Next idea, please”, when needed.
- Write down ideas on two types of papers at each table: Any idea and *Specific area*
- Go to the table that applies to your idea and talk with the people there

- **Specific areas** = areas of intended creative results; core activities; plz adapt area titles to your group.
- Any idea: not related to specific areas.

- Beginning: 2-6 persons per table

GOAL: to stimulate ideas flow in the group by creating a space to share ideas where you don't have to assume responsibility for the outcome. This is possible when saying “No” is not allowed.

Reference books

“The Great Book of Nature”

Julia Cameron - *The Artist's Way*

Ken Wilber - *A Theory of Everything*
an integral vision for business, politics, science and spirituality

Riane Eisler – *The Power of Partnership*

Charles Eisenstein - *The Ascent of Humanity*

Naomi Klein – *This Changes Everything*

Polly Higgins - *Earth is Our Business*

Karl-Erik Sveiby and Tex Skuthorpe - *Treading Lightly: The Hidden Wisdom
of the World's Oldest People*

David Korten – *The Great Turning*

Dutch Organic Choir



Dutch Organic Choir

met: Merel Martens

& Peder Karlsson (ex-Real Group)

Elke donderdag
19.30-22.00 in Utrecht
Start 25-09

Stijl?

Eigen, stijlvrrije a cappella muziek
Geen dirigent, roterend leiderschap

Wie?

Alle leeftijden
Verschillende achtergronden
(Klassiek/Pop-jazz/instrumentaal)
Amateur en professional

Auditie?

Jouw vermogen om te improviseren
en anderen exact te schaduwen
11/18/19-09

Aanmelden via www.merelmartens.eu

 The Royal Academy
of Music
Aarhus / Aalborg

THE
Real
GROUP
ACADEMY

Dutch Organic Choir

project plan

Master's education Project Plan

by Merel Martens

Version 1.5 – May 10, 2014

*Version 1.3 was approved by professor Jim Daus
Hjernøe, Royal Academy of Music, Aalborg, Denmark
on 25th April 2014*

Group type

A new music group (a cappella)

Repertoire

50% Original repertoire

50% Circle song/improv

Non-copyrighted music

Process-oriented arranging; openness to change
after the songwriter provides the basic material

Introduce a starting point, and work collectively from
that

Pre-created frameworks, for example harmonies. Or
riffs

Music shall be developed without mics. But
microphones can be used once the music has been
developed

Style and sound

Style free ("blue world"): open borders between
what is arranging and what is improvisation

Combine vocal techniques, harmonic structures
etcetera from different styles and genres

"Pure body music"; expressions and sounds that come
natural to humans, regardless of which part of the
anatomy that creates the sound

No literal translation from instruments to vocal sounds

Members

All ages and types of experiences are welcome

Various backgrounds.

Combine classical and rhythmical singers and
instrumentalists.

Both professional and amateur

Auditions

Check singers capability of improvising as well as of
"shadowing"; in other their capacity to balance
individual and collective expression

Max 30 singers. Min depending on auditions

Dutch Organic Choir

project plan

Performance

Audience participation

Songs developed including audience lines

If possible, audience improvisation. Perhaps as a result of the development of a performance

In some pieces the audience could create the framework, and the artist group improvises. Or vice versa.

One type of audience could be children

Leadership structure

Shadowing

Rotate leadership; voice part leaders, rehearsal leadership

Improvisations: multiple people make choices

Conductors also sing in performances

A 'me' and 'us' culture, that can transcend group boundaries (temporarily)

Group will be monitored by Peder Karlsson via Skype monthly. Goal is to have Peder over at least once in the process. In the meantime we can exchange rehearsal recordings.

Ideas / discussions

Evaluation with children in different age groups. For ex 5/12/20(after may 2015)

Discussion item: how make money within this concept?

Singers pay a monthly contribution for the rehearsal room

How to put in words the 'roles' Peder and Merel have
Involve people that take an interest in the project by blogging/posting on social media from the start.

Ask interested people to be our advisors/counselors, let people give feedback musically; out in the open.

Ask people to join the rehearsal and give feedback?

Timeframe

Now – summer 2014: preparations

Sept 2014 auditions in Utrecht

Late Sept – start rehearsals: Thursday's, weekly 19.30-22.00

Late feb/early march 2015 – first concert. Perhaps 30 minutes or so.

March 2015: evaluate with children, write evaluation

April 1st 2015: hand in Paper/Master's Project

Merel Martens

I am a choir leader and arranger from Holland. I currently study for my Master's degree in Rhythmic Choir Conducting in Denmark under the tutelage of Jim Daus Hjernøe and Jesper Holm.

Next to that, I have been influenced and inspired by Peder Karlsson during the last three years. I totally like the combination of Jim's 'Intelligent Choir' and Peder's knowledge and experience when it comes to creativity in groups. We have been talking about leadership a lot, exchanging ideas and examples from daily life.

In Holland I am the conductor of Pitch Control and VOÏSZ Vocal Projects, among others, and Peder knows both groups.

When Peder explained his ideas about 'Organic Choirs' the whole thing immediately made sense to me. Somehow it feels like the next step to take, yet at the same time we go back to basics. Music without microphones, influenced by musicians from various



backgrounds and rotated leadership. Being in the moment, making embodied music that is style-free, hopefully, involving everyone that feels like it - this can be a dream scenario.

Of course there are many 'but how's'. Therefore my project might be more about the process rather than the result. I'm hoping that "Dutch Organic Choir" will become a permanent group. Let's find out. Let's do it!

Peder Karlsson

Merel suggested that I write something about how the ideas for “Organic Choirs” got started, from my point of view.

“Organic Family” is a title that Kaichiro Kitamura (vocal percussionist from Japan) gave to visions and ideas discussed during the Vocal Asia conference in Taiwan in August 2013, in an ad hoc meeting initiated by Clare Chen and me. Topics:

How to spread new ideas and make things happen in our local communities.

How to make new global connections via friends’ and friends-of-friends’ circles, with a focus on mutual support and inspiration.

Clare Chen, the leader of Vocal Asia, often asks “how can we help each other?”. That is typically the starting point for our discussions. I really like her approach - both visionary and practical.

That first “Organic Family” meeting had a “round table”-style; with Christine Liu and Wuming Chen (Taiwan), Chan Xiang Ju (Singapore) , Clare, Kaichiro-san (“Kai-san”) and me.



Peder Karlsson
photo: Mats Bäcker

Peder Karlsson

Later, inspired by the talks we'd had, I was involved in various discussions on Facebook and other places about this vision called "Organic Family".

From September 2013 I immersed myself into the very hectic and hands-on lifestyle of Perpetuum Jazzile, and our preparations for concerts in Arena Stožice, Ljubljana, November 9th and 10th.

20000 people saw our show; two sold-out unforgettable nights.

I guess that was one of the biggest public a cappella concerts ever made with just one group. Quite far from the "Organic Family" visions about local community activities... perhaps.

But I felt then, and still feel, that Perpetuum Jazzile could play an important role for local choirs around the world, somehow.

After catching my breath from Arena Stožice, the ideas and visions from August slowly came back to me. A few months ago I had a Skype session with Merel, where I gave her an overview about various visions and ideas that I had picked up, packaged into a slightly more concrete title - "Organic Choirs".

Merel came back a week later and said that she

wanted to try this as a master's project, with me as her mentor. An idea that her professor Jim Daus Hjernø gave his whole-hearted support to.

Kai-san's title for a visionary concept has grown into a concrete project - in less than a year!

For me personally, it started many years ago.

The Real Group is an "organic choir", I think.

We always rotated leadership functions.

Various competences within the group were developed by individual preference, in an asymmetrical creative style.

My brother Fredrik is an important role model for me. He is an exceptionally inspirational, natural leader, I think, and he has learned about enthusiasm and wits from our father Janne, another natural leader. From an early age, we were invited by our parents to a say-so in important decisions. I think we are an organic family. My mother Eva used to say "What do you think, Peder?".

She was my first role model.