



## Council Style Leadership Best Practices

---

*Council is an ancient cultural practice, still in use in modern contexts, with roots based in the models & wisdom traditions of diverse indigenous and village based cultures around the world. Councils invariably include strong "circling" practices that recognize the inherent inter-connectivity of humans, as well as more-than-human communities, and value collective intelligence and sense-making between distinct perspectives. When council is a matured practice within a community, it becomes a seamless part of community life- functionally, culturally and spiritually.*

*Council as a practice offers a way of communicating that encourages attentive listening, as well as honest and considerate expression. It makes room for new insights and understandings, leverages diverse wisdoms in decision making, and promotes healing of conflict and separation. As an interpersonal practice, a group process, and a life-pathway, Council is an intrinsic catalyst to awaken deep inter-relational capacity and grow collective intelligence.*

---

### **Way of Council Best Practices**

**Speak from the Heart-** When words come from the heart, there is a tangible sense of presence within a circle. Posturing is dropped and connection is established. Listen deeply to your inner knowing and share from a space of authenticity.

**Practice Active and Present Listening-** Be fully present and receptive to what someone is offering instead of just thinking ahead to the next thing you would like to offer. Listening is more than just hearing words - it is feeling the intention and emotion behind words and efforting to relate to the speaker and their experience.

**Be Lean of Expression-** Be brief, concise and find a means of expression that serves both the speaker and the circle. Do not distract from the topic or purpose by wandering into story or hoarding the air time for soap box rhetoric or preaching on topics you prefer to move to. There

is an elegance in find the most relevant words to convey your perspective.

**Spontaneity and Emergence-** Ask yourself: Will speaking this serve me? Will it serve the circle? The greater good? Be present to the moment, "listening" to and sensing the needs of the moment and what is emerging through the shared dialogue and offer your truth/ insight to add to the shared sensemaking.

**Make Space for All Voices-** Some people are very comfortable sharing and others may need some spaciousness or invitation. Be conscious to make space for and be inclusive of quieter voices. Those who generally hold back in conversations can also be conscious of proactively joining the conversation and adding their perspectives.

## **Practices for Sense-making and Field Building for Councils**

### ***Presencing***

Taking a few moments or minutes to establish full presence at the beginning of a meeting allows for each member to connect to their own body or breath, arrive fully, and to "tune in" to themselves and the shared field of the group. In our often busy world, this moment to recenter is usually welcomed and allows for more effective conversations. This can be a simple or more elaborate practice that supports each person to be more grounded and ready to engage.

### ***Spiral***

This practice includes taking turns with a "round" of brief shares about a point of discussion to ensure circular listening and gathering of collective intelligence.

A team member brings an inquiry or topic to the group with basic facts, considerations, and potential impacts.

Each person in the circle takes a (brief) turn at offering insight, concerns, affirmations, etc. The idea is to move the conversation through the circle efficiently, giving each person a chance to be heard and share perspectives rather than any one person speaking at length.

A spiral usually includes several rounds where each person can have a few opportunities to share- building additional insights based on hearing other voices in the circle in order to have the "best thinking" from the group.

## **Resonance**

This practice includes a member of the circle sharing the context of an initial idea, proposal, inquiry or point of discussion and then opening to a "round" of brief reflections from each member of the circle to ensure circular listening. This gives each person a chance to be heard and share perspectives. A spiral usually includes additional rounds to build off of each person's share until a resonant decision can be arrived at. Usually if rounds need to go more than 3 times without a sense of shared resonance- it's an opportunity to acknowledge that something is not aligned and for a breakout conversation between the person bringing the idea and the person(s) who are not in resonance to continue to discuss further to see if they can find alignment or compromise. Letting a discussion turn into a breakout let's people have more spaciousness to explore and try to find common ground while allowing the energy of a meeting to continue to move forward while acknowledging that a point of discussion needs more time before it can be decided upon.

While there are specific resonance decision making practices, resonance can also be a light touch tool for getting a quick sense of whether people are feeling aligned in a discussion. After sharing some form of information to be considered, you can use the "agree", "neutral" or "not resonant" hand signals to gesture where a group stands on a concept or topic. This can then lead to more authentic discussions to find out where the group is out of resonance and open pathways to finding a path to mutuality. (*\*See the "Resonance Decision Making" for more information and best practices.*)

## **Intentional Pause**

This is a practice where anyone can call for a "pause" during a discussion to create space in a conversation if there is a sense of needing to slow down a conversation for a deeper "listening" or allowing space for other voices to contribute. This doesn't mean interrupting someone who is speaking, instead when the conversation has a natural point to interject, any group member can ask for the pause.

Simply pausing for a few moments can often help group members to connect to other intelligence centers besides the mind, integrating the conversation, and allowing for creativity or revelation. This can also allow voices that are sometimes slower to join the conversation a chance to bring their thoughts into the conversation.

## **Guidelines for Honoring Integrity of the Circle**

\*\*\*\*Referenced from the [Ojai Foundation- http://www.ojaifoundation.org/](http://www.ojaifoundation.org/)

- Confidentiality
- Examine Your Motivations
- Talk about topics- not about personal stories
- Stick to your own experience
- Invite curiosity
- Ensure inclusivity of diverse perspectives
- Avoid leaks between council sessions
- Make clear agreements
- Deal with broken agreements quickly
- Encourage transparency