Practices of Dynamic Collaboration
Inspiration Session 2

The Meeting Dialogue:

How to Improve the Balance of Asking and Telling: Double Listening

Observable Reality
-
External workplace

Content
What is said

Process
How things are said
Emphasis shown
Feelings conveyed

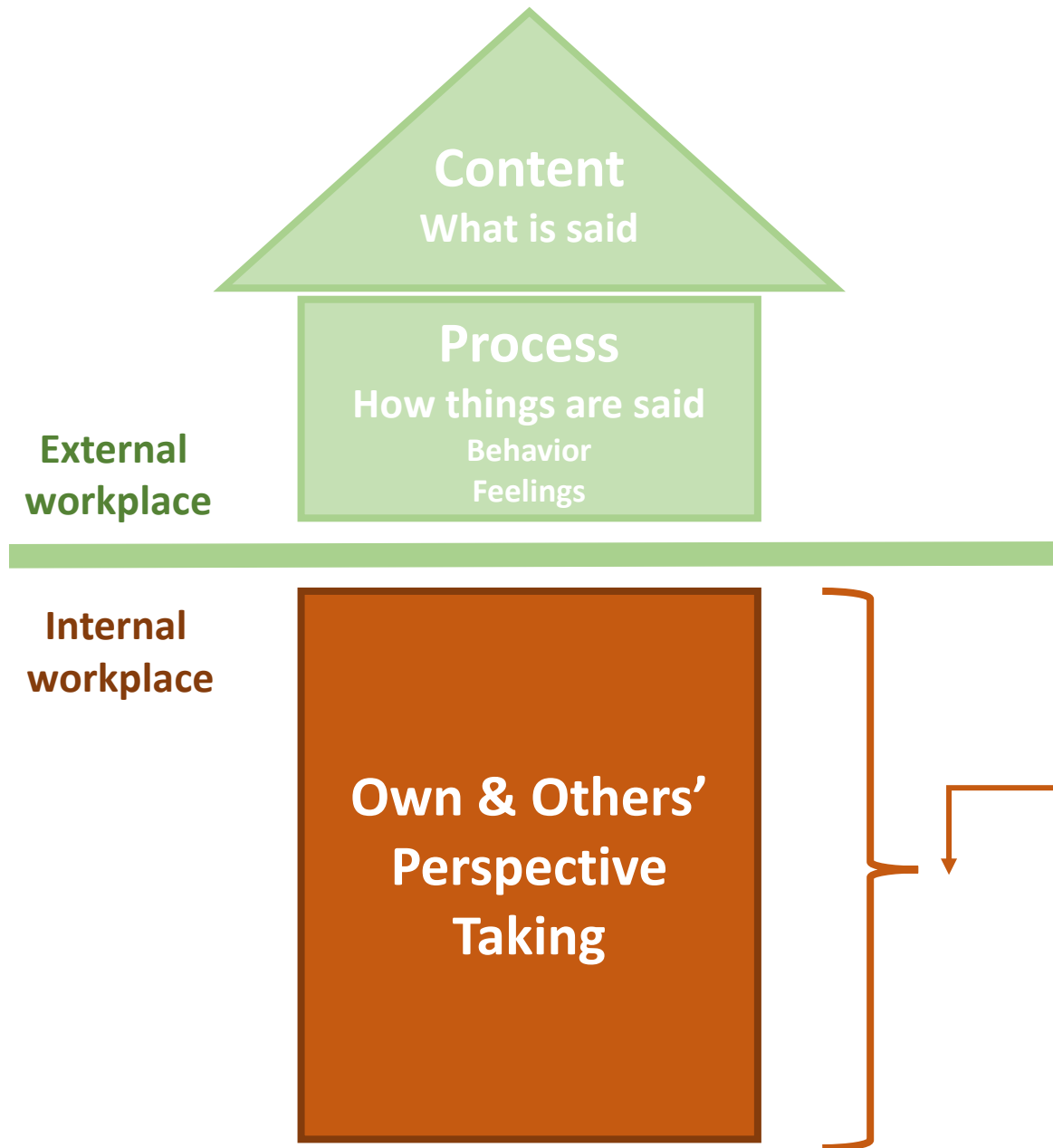**Deeper Reality based on the Quality of One's Awareness**
-
Internal workplace

Own & Other's Perspective taking

How do you listen in a meeting?

vs. how you *could* listen

(and what questions do you ask?)

Content
What is said

Process
How things are said
Behavior
Feelings

External workplace

Internal workplace

Own & Others' Perspective Taking

The quality of your perspective depends on the scope of your awareness

- It narrows or broadens focus of attention and what is 'seen'

- It directs focus of attention

- It may not be adequate to the complexity of the 'reality' to be captured

- Snafus: we are easily misled by :
  - Looking for logical simplicity
  - Needing to 'be right'
  - Craving agreement with others

Differences in perspective inform professional differences

You can learn to improve how to address professional differences

There exist good cognitive tools that help transcend professional differences ... but they require deeper, 'double', listening *both to yourself and others* ...

Learning to hear what complex thinking sounds like …
What differences do you observe in the thinking that underlies the speaker's utterances?

- "When we bought Acme's service business, it was clear that if we didn't build efficiency into the combined network, we'd fail. Efficiency means reduced overall costs, more revenue from our customer base, and less work overlap. Now we can price our products more competitively, knowing we can continue to build our revenue stream through service contracts. And providing that service will keep us close to our customers for equipment lifecycle planning and utilization analyses. If we can keep our eyes focused on managing costs and delivering quality, the results will be there."

- "When we bought Acme's service business, it was clear that one of the immediate advantages would be in building a more efficient network. By integrating product and service sales, we become a more complete operation, and customers will see us in a new light. However, we also become more vulnerable to a lack of integration until we can define that new business model and manage re-training and re-directing our sales force. Even then, perhaps customers may feel we're not as focused on our huge new service operation as was Acme. And Engineering is committed to reducing maintenance and Manufacturing to driving up quality; that may mean we'll have to branch out to include servicing competitors' products to justify the new service infrastructure and manage the overhead. Would customers see that as a dilution of our commitment to our own products? We're juggling many more things than before, and risk over-extending ourselves. How we balance customer perceptions, cost efficiencies, and product development will be a challenge, but we can succeed if we plan carefully and give it our best shot."

Two different approaches to what we listen for in what others share with us

- Complicated thinking – taking what is being heard for the truth
  - Linearity; cause-and-effect
  - Can be reduced to parts
  - Problems described as technical, well structured
  - Outcomes can usually be predicted by knowing the starting conditions

- Complex thinking – listening in the negative space, that is, critically:
  - High degree of differentiation and integration
  - The same starting conditions can produce different and unexpected outcomes
  - Problems described as ill structured or wicked
  - Require complexity of thinking, creativity, tolerance for ambiguity, agility and adaptability

The essence of dialectic discovery procedures: *Negative Space Thinking*

"Negative space" may be most evident when the space around a subject, not the subject itself, forms an interesting or artistically relevant shape. Such a space is often used to artistic effect as the "real" subject of an image.

In many organizational issues, the negative space consists of the broader context, emerging changes, essential structural relationships and the development potential of systemic interventions. Negative space questioning brings to the foreground what is 'absent' in a dialogue but influences perspective taking and decision making.

Four sets of tools for discovering negative space

- **Procedure 1: Part of a Big Picture**: In what way an issue is part of a broader context, and the nature of that context.
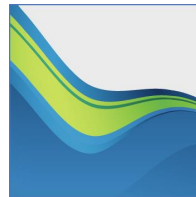
- **Procedure 2: In-Motion**: In what way an issue is still emerging, creating unforeseen problems.

- **Procedure 3: In-Relationship**: How an issue is shaped by its function in a totality of intrinsic and extrinsic relationships, thus sharing common ground with other issues.

- **Procedure 4: In-Transformation**: How tensions, disequilibria, and developmental challenges create risks as well as a potential for transformations.

Can you identify the four classes of thought structures in this interview fragment?

- Once we decided to buy Acme's service business, we knew that there were a lot of ramifications to consider that could only incompletely be foreseen right away. We knew that in many ways we had considerably complicated not only our in-house way of working, but also the market environment in which we would have to function. While on the one hand, we were clearly striving to become a more complete operation, we had previously been on safer ground since our business model had been thoroughly tested and validated, and we had a reasonably clear view of who our customers were and what they expected of us. But once we integrated Acme's service business, we had to rethink almost everything we had learned to take for granted. There were questions of attunement of our workers to the company's new mission, but also of customers to the broader agenda we now came to be identified with. We were also introducing new goals for our internal business process and put in jeopardy the balance of the parts of our operation which had already been quite complex when focusing on product sales alone. So, there now was a multiplicity of contexts to consider that were only partly known to us initially. Essentially, the effect of this was that we became much more sensitive to relationships, not only between parts of our operation, but to relationships between product and services, work force and customers, business process and financial process, not to speak of systemic interactions that tested the limits of stability and harmony of our operations. We now had to coordinate a larger number of subsystems, and these subsystems tended to transform in a way that was not initially foreseen or even foreseeable. As a result, we felt we would lose out if we didn't succeed in developing multiple perspectives on almost every aspect of our organization.

Which of the four classes of thought structures do you find in the two text fragments below?

- Example 1: "Division of labor has three different immediate consequences: (1) loss of craftsmanship on the part of employees, (2) separation between managerial and contributors' work as well as of policy and implementation, and (3) extension of managerial control over the production process implying, as well, that of workers themselves."

- Example 2: "Division of labor leads to several oppositional organizational patterns: (1) specialization paid for by loss of high-level craftsmanship, (2) increase of control together with loss of overview (holistic understanding), and (3) higher demands made on individual managers linked to a larger supply of low-skilled standardized jobs".

Thought structures enhance self-awareness.
Who amongst the two speakers is the most self-aware?

- I am presently in a situation where lots of folks think they need to criticize me and take me to task. And while this is frustrating, even painful, to experience such opposition, I am more open to such criticism than I was a year ago. So I am realizing that I have to expand the view I have of myself, to put these criticisms to rest. Without addressing them in a constructive way, I won't get anywhere.

- I structure my opinion of myself according to how my actions are reflected off other people. That is the only way you can ever find out what you are like anyway, to take what bounces off other people, form a picture of them, and see how they jive with how you feel about yourself, and then reassess things. In short, you need to take your opinion of yourself and jive it with that of other people, to arrive at a more objective view of yourself and of the reality you are presently in.

Using the four sets of dialectical tools for asking *Mind Opening Questions*

- CONTEXT (C)
- Big Picture: How an issue is part of a broader context?
  - Parts vs. the Whole?
  - Layering?
  - Virtual dimensions?
  - Frame of Reference used?
  - Multiplicity of contexts?

- PROCESS (P)
- In-Motion: How an issue has become a 'problem'?
  - Inclusion of hidden opposites?
  - Unseen, neglected dimensions?
  - Embedded in correlated or simultaneous processes?
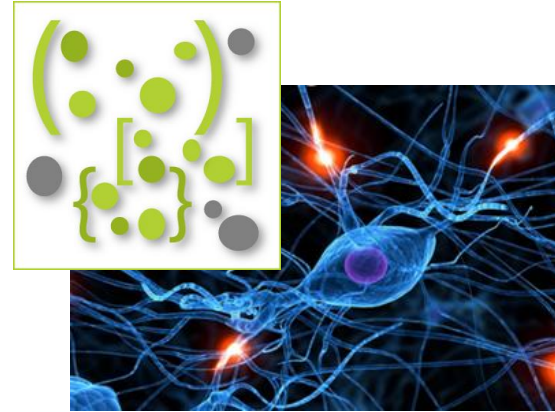
- RELATIONSHIP (R)
- Totality – sets of dense relationships that hold things together. How one issue is shaped by another?
  - Value of establishing relationships?
  - Structure of relationship?
  - Patterns of interaction?
  - Reductionism?

- TRANSFORMATION (T)
- Human agency – Which are the tensions, disequilibria, and transformational challenges an issue provokes?
  - Limits of stability?
  - Function of conflict?
  - Potential of re-emergence through breakdown?
  - Logics of coordination?
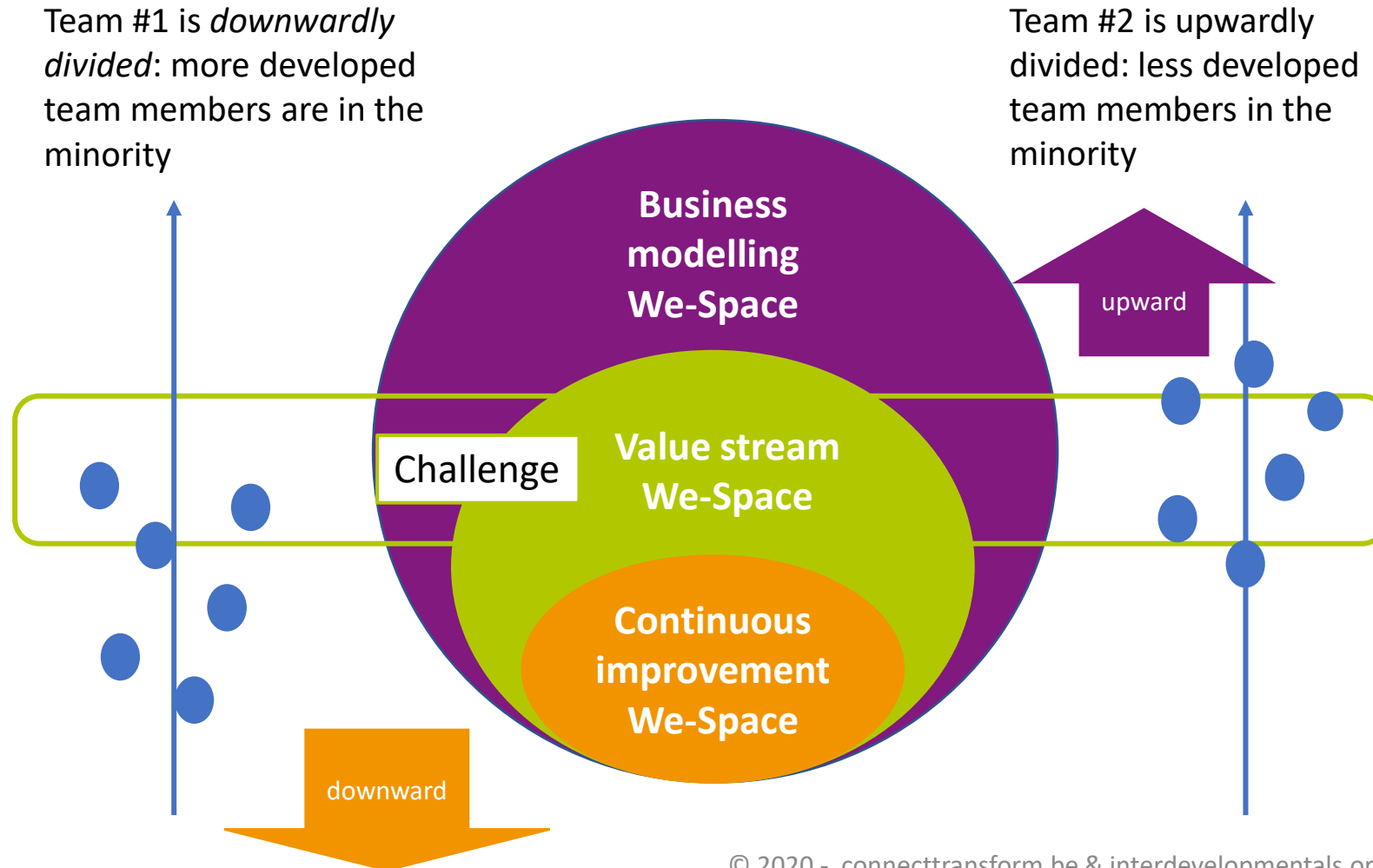 - Integration of diverse factors?

Team Dynamics

At any moment team members differ in the breadth and depth of their perspective taking (on account of their different uses of thought procedures)

The perspective of a dominant subgroup or coalition, even that of a single person in a position of power, tends to narrow or broaden an entire group's way of seeing a situation or issue.

The prevailing perspective (often silently adopted) influences the *quality of dialogue,* and thus decision making, in a team.

Developmentally unified teams are a fiction: Teams are diverse by nature.
We can distinguish two types of teams.

Team #1 is *downwardly divided*: more developed team members are in the minority

Team #2 is upwardly divided: less developed team members in the minority

Business modelling We-Space

upward

Challenge

Value stream We-Space

Continuous improvement We-Space

downward

- Results in Team #1:
  - Team unconsciously narrows assignments due to lack of maturity and fluidity of thinking

- Results in Team #2:
  - Marriage of maturity and fluidity of thinking enhances team agenda

Both potentially create tensions with other teams that operate in related We-Spaces.

The balance between telling and asking:

Wherever there is an absence of conscious use of thought structures, telling overwhelms asking.
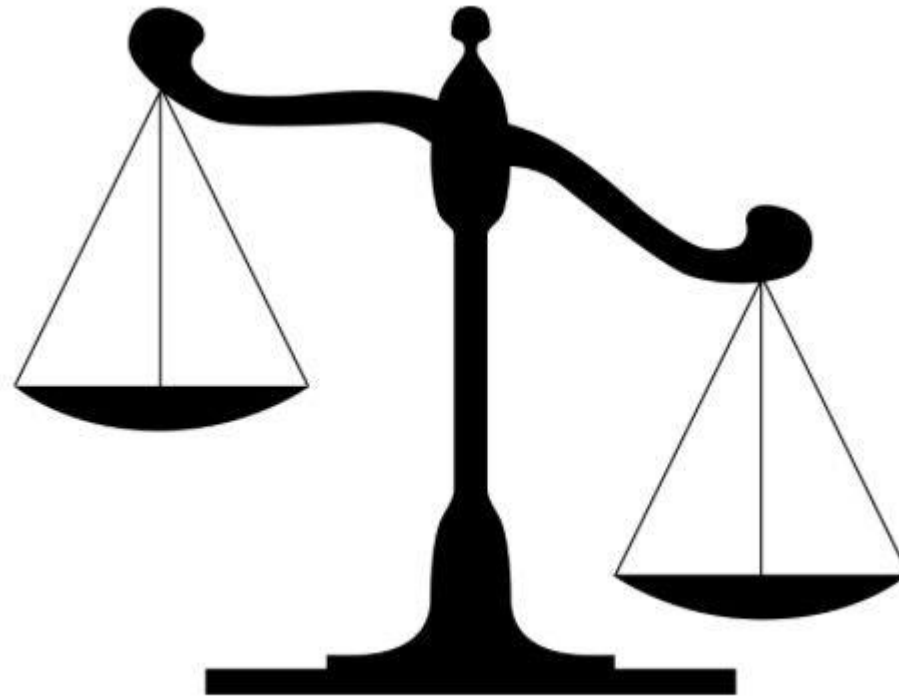
Urgent to become developed

Asking (thinking together)
Double listening
Each thought structure is the
    potential origin of a large
    number of (mind-opening)
    questions
Complex thinking

Asking can be learned

Currently dominant
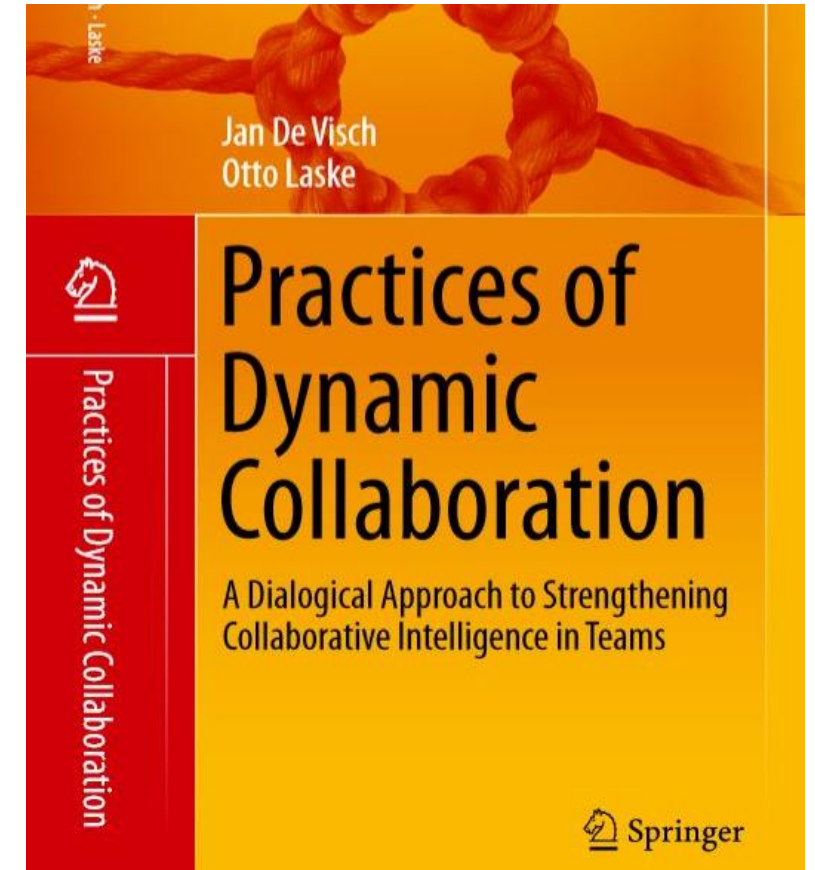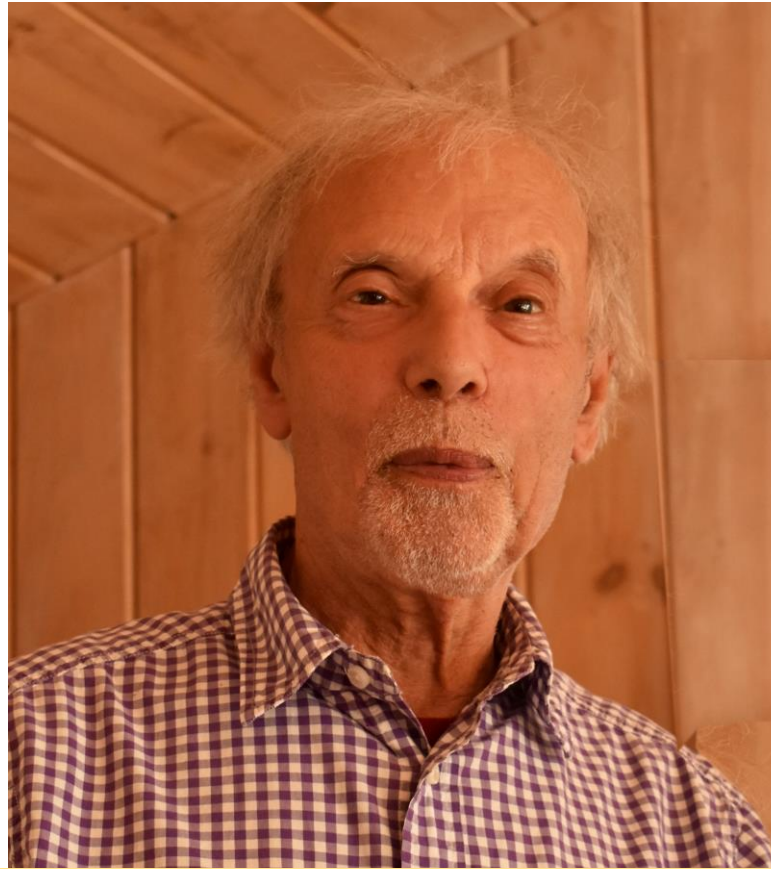
Telling (what to do)
Do the thinking for the other
Rules of inference and reasoning
Complicated thinking

Sessions follow on September 16th, October 14th, November 18th, and December 16th .
Subscribe through https://connecttransform.be
The topic on September 16th: *The 'Common Ground' Dialogue: Working with Upwardly and Downwardly Divided Teams*

Jan De Visch
jan@connecttransform.be
https://connecttransform.be

Otto Laske
otto@interdevelopmentals.org
https://interdevelopmentals.org