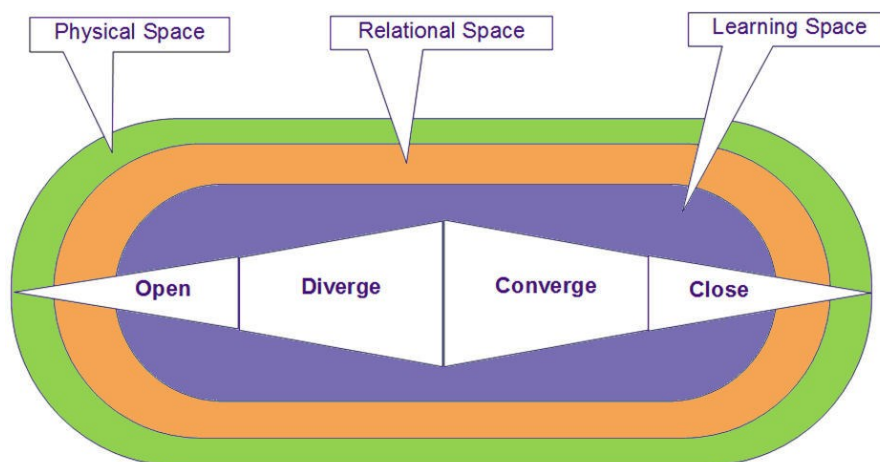


# The Learning Circle Model: 3 Spaces & 4 Phases



A key model<sup>1</sup> which integrates the essential elements of a learning circle has been developed. This model is called 3 Spaces & 4 Phases and provides a guide for setting up and facilitating a series of learning circles.



## 3 Spaces:

It is important to be attentive to 3 different spaces when you organize a series of learning circles:

| The Physical Space  |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Convenient to where participants work (e.g. a break room)</li> <li>o Comfortable seating in a circle</li> <li>o Confidential: No cross traffic</li> <li>o Minimal interruptions: Silent cell phones</li> <li>o A virtual meeting space would be structured differently</li> </ul>  |
| The Relational Space  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Determined by participants who have a shared practice. It must be perceived as:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationally “safe”</li> <li>• Collaborative</li> <li>• Collegial</li> <li>• Generative</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |
| The Learning Space  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Disciplined inquiry</li> <li>o Tacit knowledge (thoughts, feelings, beliefs) is disclosed</li> <li>o Explicit knowledge (information from a variety of sources) is included</li> <li>o Participants attempt to make sense of what has been discussed</li> <li>o Individual &amp; collective mindlines are remodeled</li> </ul> |

<sup>1</sup>This model is based on a conceptual framework which Hess et al (2015, p. 71) developed as a “phased, collaborative process [employing] practice talk” which they define as “naturally occurring, collegial conversations among members of clinical teams.”

# The Learning Circle Model: 3 Spaces & 4 Phases



## 4 Phases:

To ensure that conversations at the learning circles remain productive and effective, it is important they are well structured. The following is a facilitation guide which can be drawn upon to structure your learning circles. There are 4 phases to the conversation: Opening, Divergent, Convergent and Closing. A new facilitator may find that they need multiple sessions to accomplish the 4 phases. Each phase contains key content and one overview question. To help you make the model work for you, there are also some suggested prompts listed for each phase.

| Opening Phase             |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Description:</b>       | The first step of divergent thinking is to be open. This means temporarily suspending judgment and deliberately opening yourself up to new thoughts and ideas.   |
| <b>Overview Question:</b> | How do we do this now?   |
| <b>Key Content:</b>       | Begin with a prepared practice story that relates to a current practice issue.   |
| <b>Prompts:</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o “Let’s talk about how it went with...”</li> <li>o “I would like to do a check-in on...”</li> <li>o “Can you please let us know how things went for you?”</li> </ul>   |
| Divergent phase           |  |
| <b>Description:</b>       | Divergence allows you to look for options and new ideas. People in the group are looking at things from different perspectives.  |
| <b>Overview Question:</b> | How could we do this better?   |
| <b>Key Content:</b>       | Have the group reflect on the initial story in a way that will permit others to disclose their thoughts and feelings. The initial story may lead to other, similar practice stories.   |
| <b>Prompts:</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o “What suggestions do you have for helping with this experience?”</li> <li>o “Has anyone else seen a similar challenge in practice?”</li> <li>o “What are other people’s experiences of this?”</li> </ul>  |
| Convergent phase          |  |
| <b>Description:</b>       | In this phase you are seeking a conclusion, an answer, and closure on the topic in question.   |
| <b>Overview Question:</b> | How should we do this better?  |
| <b>Key Content:</b>       | Interject applicable information from external sources such as guidelines, journal articles, consultants or conferences. If there are unanswered questions that require more information, someone volunteers to investigate and report back at the next session.   |
| <b>Prompts:</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o “How are we going to fix...?”</li> <li>o “Looking at what we’ve come up with, let’s choose between these options...”</li> <li>o “What information is helpful for us on this topic?”</li> <li>o “Does anyone have a suggestion for where we can find this information?”</li> </ul> |

# The Learning Circle Model: 3 Spaces & 4 Phases



## 4 Phases continued:

| Closing phase             |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>Description:</b>       | To close the session, the group summarizes the discussion and plans for changes which will be made in practice integrating what has been learned.  |
| <b>Overview Question:</b> | How will we do this better?  |
| <b>Key Content:</b>       | Participants summarize and make sense of what has been discussed. In light of the conversation, the group specifies what practice changes will be made outside of the learning circle. Someone volunteers to prepare a practice story to report during the opening phase of the next session.  |
| <b>Prompts:</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o “So what are we going to do with this now?”</li> <li>o “Who will take this on?”</li> <li>o “How should we move forward with this?”</li> <li>o “What can we do to share what we’ve learned?”</li> <li>o “Would you be willing to try this out and let us know how it goes next time?”</li> </ul> |

### Reference:

Hess, D.W., Reed, V.A., Turco, M.G., Parboosingh, J.T. & Bernstein, H.H. (2015). Enhancing engagement in practice improvement: a conceptual framework. *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*. 35(1): 71-79.