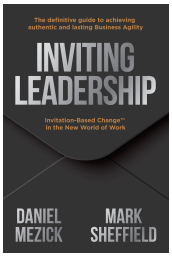

INVITING LEADERSHIP is your tutorial and reference guide for implementing Invitation-Based Change™ in the new world of work. This book shows you how to leverage genuine invitation to engage the workforce and generate the positive business outcomes that emerge from self-managed teams.

INVITING LEADERSHIP shows you how to do more with less.

Appendix B – Authority Circle™

When and Why to Use the Authority Circle

Authority Circle is a meeting format. It is a severe variation (a mutation) of the plain-vanilla Fishbowl format. Use it when you are aiming at the following goals and objectives:

- You want to create "common knowledge" across the entire group about key items the group is working on
- You want to allow the wider group to listen in on authority conversing with itself, about issues of importance
- You want to create a very real sense of convergence around a set of issues, in advance of launching the group into either
  - a deeper-convergence activity around taking action, or
  - a divergence activity such as Open Space
- A common belief held by many executives is that releasing any amount of decision-making authority opens the door to disorder and a loss of control. But the reality is that good boundary design, good boundary implementation, and good boundary management can create an environment where the transfer of very small amounts of decision-making authority can create very large increases in the desired results: more self-management, more employee engagement, more innovation, and higher performance.

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- You want to focus the leadership authority figures on how to leverage the power of authority and authority distribution dynamics, to discover "persons of interest" and emergent leaders in the wider group; people who are led to "speak *to* authority" or even "speak *as* authority" on the most important issues

How to Use the Authority Circle

Roles

Original set of inner circle authority figures
Current inner circle member
Current outer circle member
Facilitator

Events

Authority Circle start
Inner circle member vacate
New inner circle member arrival (occupies an empty seat)
Inner circle discussion
Topic change

Required Elements

- Time: 30 to 90 minutes without a break; up to 180 minutes with 1 or 2 breaks
- Topics: A set of issues that are very hot for the group, a minimum of 3, maximum of 10
- Microphones for larger groups

Steps

1. How Space is Arranged and Materials Needed
    - Arrange an inner circle and an outer circle of chairs. The inner circle contains a small ring of chairs; the outer circle is larger

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and encircles and contains the inner circle completely.

- The outer circle has one or more rows of chairs, with enough seats for all of the other less-authorized participants.
- Inner circle contains at least 2 microphones for larger groups.

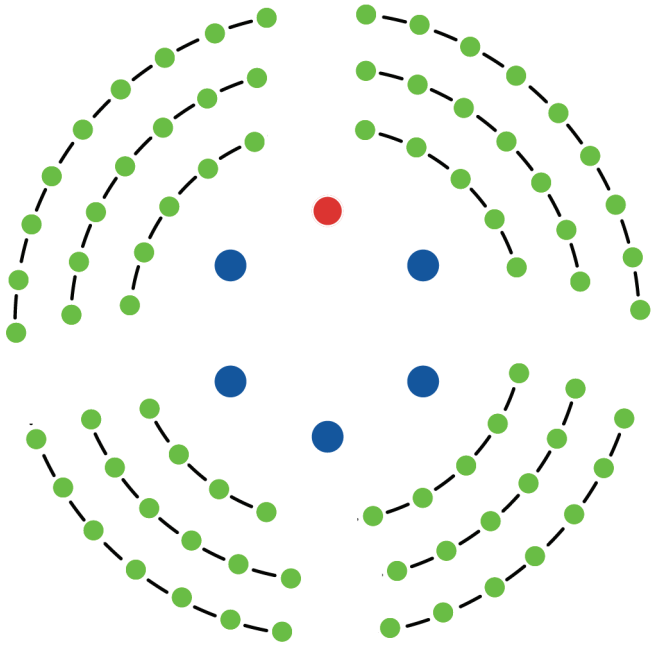

Figure B-1: Authority Circle Setup

2. Structuring the Invitation
   - Populate the inner circle with the people occupying the highest-authority roles in the group. Ask them to discuss a set of hot topics, listed on the wall, one by one with each in a strict time box of at least 10 minutes each. Invite them to converse with each other as if the audience was not

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there. Ask them to avoid presenting to the audience.
    - Invite the people outside the Authority Circle to listen and observe, and optionally participate directly by occupying the blank "hot seat" if and when if becomes available (see below).
3. How Participation is Distributed
    - Everyone in the inner circle may speak.
    - Everyone in the outer circle may listen, and if the "hot seat" is open, they may step in and take it.
4. How Groups are Configured
    - One inner circle group of 3 to 7 participants, with one blank chair in that circle.
    - One outer circle with everyone else seated.
    - Rules apply for the original N members of the inner circle:
        - All original inner circle members stay inside the inner circle at all times.
        - When someone from the outer circle takes the hot seat:
            - Conversation stops.
            - That person gets the microphone, has the floor, and may speak a comment, question, or concern.
        - This is a facilitated event. For each topic queued up to be addressed by the inner circle, it goes like this:
            - Phase 1:
                - Identify the next issue to discuss.
                - Clear the "hot seat" (open it up so there is one seat open in the inner circle).
                - Brief discussion of the topic by the authority figures inside the

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inner circle; everyone in the outer circle listens.

- Phase 2: Outer circle members are authorized to take the hot seat. What that happens:
  - Discussion stops.
  - New inner-circle member gets a microphone.
  - New inner circle member speaks a question, comment, or concern.

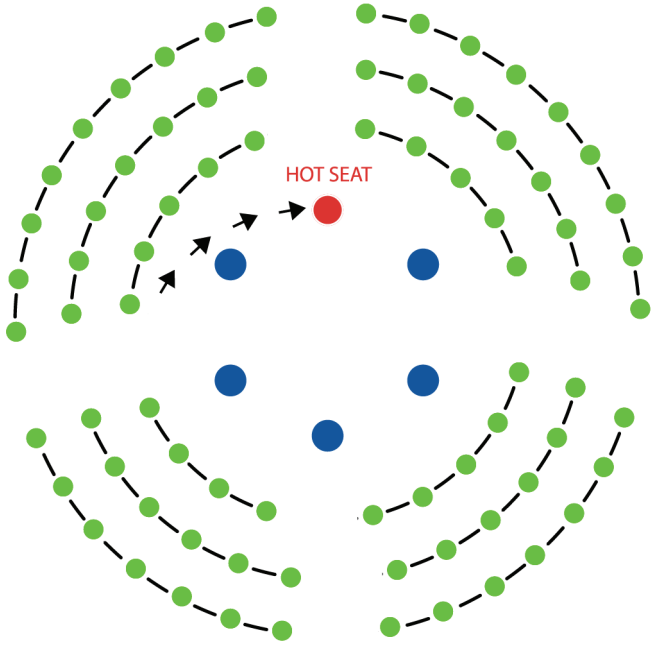

Figure B.2: Outer Circle Member Takes a Seat

Sequence of Steps and Time Allocation

- Time: 30 to 90 minutes without a break; up to 180 minutes with 1 or 2 breaks

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- For each topic addressed by the inner circle, it goes like this:
  - Phase 1: Brief discussion inside the circle; everyone in all rows of the outer circle listens.
  - Phase 2: Outer circle members may come forward and occupy the hot seat. When this occurs, then:
    - Discussion stops.
    - New inner-circle member gets a microphone.
    - New inner circle member speaks a question, comment, or concern.

Tips and Traps

- When a new person takes the hot seat by moving from the outer circle to the inner circle, they may change the subject. For this reason, it is important to work in the Phase 1 / Phase 2 format. This allows the leaders to say what *they* want to say in Phase 1 and then allows for the randomness and subject changes that may ensue in Phase 2.
- For Authority Circle to work, the event must be competently and firmly facilitated.
  - The timebox for each discussion item must be kept.
  - The rules for 'the originals' must be maintained in a strict way. In this default setup, original inner-circle members must remain seated inside the inner circle.

Riffs and Variations

- Variation 1: An Original Inner Circle Member Vacates
  - You can open up more than one seat in the inner circle by allowing some of the original

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inner circle members to vacate. For example, one of the original members may get up and join the outer circle. The rule is that at least "N" of the original authority figures must remain in the inner circle at all times, so the center contains a high concentration of authority and authorization. Example: The original group is seven and six must be present inside the inner circle at all times (N=6). There are now six originals remaining. None of them may vacate the inner circle until the authority figure who left the inner circle returns to the inner circle. This rule allows the opening up of a maximum of two seats in the inner circle: the original vacant "hot seat" and the seat opened up by one of the original authority figures.

- It is a good idea to tag each of the original inner circle members with a special nametag that identifies them as one of the originals. This makes it easier to facilitate the inner circle as original members move in and out.
- Be careful when opening up multiple seats. Only do it when you want more openness. There is a high potential for disorder when you do this. Multiple open seats can be hard to manage as a facilitator, and may introduce substantial randomness to the conversation. When using Authority Circle with multiple open seats, the current topic and conversation can tend to stop and start as new participants enter the inner circle. This can be "bumpy" at times. Subjects change more frequently. To reduce randomness and make facilitation easier, a single hot seat

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(single empty seat initially) is recommended for the first time you try Authority Circle.

- Variation 2: Phase 1 Contains all Subjects:
  - No open chairs for most of the event; instead have the top leadership in the inner circle converse and articulate their positions on the issues one by one. Then, later, have a Phase 2 where a single chair can open up.
- Variation 3: Concentric Ring Seating:
  - For large groups over 50 or so, use multiple concentric rings for the outer circle. Create at least four aisles so participants can quickly move to or from the center.
- Variation 4: Authority Layers:
  - For a very large group, populate the first row of the outer circle with direct reports of the original inner-circle members. And for each topic, run it in three phases:
    - Inner circle discussion.
    - Inner circle discussion, with an option for those in the first row of the outer circle to take any empty inner-circle seat.
    - Inner circle discussion, with an option for anyone to take any empty inner-circle seat.

Examples

- You are assisting with establishing a change in a rather hierarchical organization. Use Authority Circle with the top 40 or 50 company leaders, to teach them how to measure out small units of authority to gain several large units of employee engagement
- You are designing a large company retreat or corporate planning event. Use Authority Circle after the CEO keynotes and before launching

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the group into a problem-solving activity, for example before the use of Open Space

- You are designing a large company retreat or company planning event. Use Authority Circle after an Open Space to build common knowledge of how the group of key authority figures responds to the content of the event and the Proceedings.
- The group is facing a set of problems that only the whole group knows how to solve. Create a three-hour event with a beginning, middle, and end. Use Authority Circle in the middle segment of the event to build common knowledge about the issue. Discover (as a group) what the authority figures think about it, in service to making a mid-course correction or adjustment as a whole group, based on what "authority has to say" about the hottest issues.

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