

Collective Leadership and Circles: Not Invented Here

Mark Mattaini

Jane Addams College of Social Work

University of Illinois at Chicago

Casey Holtschneider

Department of Social Work

Northeastern Illinois University

Author Note

Mark Mattaini holds an *emeritus* appointment at Jane Addams College of Social Work, University of Illinois at Chicago and is an affiliate of Behaviorists for Social Responsibility; Casey Holtschneider is on faculty in the Department of Social Work, Northeastern Illinois University, and serves as Executive Director of The Lyte Collective in Chicago, Illinois.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Mark Mattaini, P.O. Box 1045, Pagate, NM, 87040.

Email: [mattaini@uic.edu](mailto:mattaini@uic.edu)

### Abstract

The need for systems/cultural level change addressing intractable and escalating social and environmental challenges is well established. One of the attractions of behavior analysis for many has been the potential to have an impact on such challenges (certainly since Skinner, 1948; 1953). Issues like police-community relations, violence—from neighborhood to global levels, economic inequality, and climate change have been only minimally addressed within behavior analysis, despite the oft repeated mantra that they are all at root behavioral. Disciplines determine the scope of their interests; behavior analysis and behavioral systems analysis have long claimed at least potential expertise in changing not only individual behavior, but also the collective and interlocking functioning of larger institutions and systems. In this paper we note that standard organizational behavior management (OBM) practices primarily emphasizing centralized leadership are unlikely to be adequate for such work. We therefore argue that collective leadership, a strategy that has not been emphasized in OBM, will be required to operationalize behavioral systems interventions in situations where centralized leadership is impossible or dangerous, and suggest circle processes as one behaviorally specifiable approach to constructing collective leadership, an approach that behavioral systems analysts are well-positioned to test and refine.

### Collective Leadership and Circle Processes: Not Invented Here

The need for systems/cultural level change addressing intractable and escalating social and environmental challenges is well established (Biglan, 2015; Mattaini & Aspholm, 2015). One of the attractions of behavior analysis for many has been the potential to have an impact on such challenges (certainly since Skinner, 1948; 1953). Issues like police-community relations, violence—from neighborhood to global levels, economic inequality, and climate change have been only minimally addressed within behavior analysis, despite the oft repeated mantra that they are all at root behavioral. Policy and advocacy work occurs constantly in and among governmental, corporate and nongovernmental organizations, but little collective attention has yet been paid to that work within mainstream organizational behavior management (OBM), with the noticeable exception of efforts related to behavior analyst certification and licensure, and services for persons with disabilities served by behavior analysts. What attention has been paid over the past three decades (see, for example, Biglan, 1995, 2015; Greene, Winett, Van Houten, Geller, & Iwata, 1987; Mattaini, 2013; Mattaini & Thyer, 1996) often calls for advocacy, policy change, and strategic planning based in a science of cultural and organizational practices that remains seriously underdeveloped in areas of major social and environmental concern.

Decision making and leadership in the OBM literature usually are discussed in terms of management decisions in situations where data to guide decisions is available, and the primary work to be done involves ensuring that appropriate patterns of interlocking behavioral contingencies are in place to produce desired aggregate products meeting the requirements of receiving systems (Glenn et al., 2016). Relevant interlocking contingencies are often known, or can be estimated with a high probability of accuracy. There is a place for teamwork in such

management, but the primary purpose of teams is typically held to be to “dramatically [increase] the opportunities for receiving positive reinforcement” (Daniels, 2000, p.137). Daniels, for example, recommends a *demand-pull* model, in which “specific behaviors expected from team members, team leaders, and managers must be clearly spelled out” (p. 139) with a goal of increasing mutual reinforcement for desired behaviors, behaviors largely identified by senior management. Komaki’s Operant Model of Supervision similarly relies on increasing effective monitoring of desirable behaviors, arranging positive consequences, while minimizing antecedent only strategies (Komaki 1998).

Models of this kind—demonstrably effective in conventional settings—often have limited applicability in settings in which centralized leadership is not realistic, and the interlocking contingencies required to produce desired outcomes and optimal rules to guide them remain largely unknown. Given this situation, some in behavior analysis have suggested that our limited disciplinary resources be directed to smaller projects (including modest laboratory analogues) in which our current knowledge is deeper, avoiding wicked problems like those mentioned in the first paragraph until much more basic science on which to build is in place. That is a defensible position, but not the one taken by the authors, who believe behavioral systems analysis in its current state is likely to have unique contributions to make in addressing contemporary social and global realities, the press of which requires immediate attention now. At a minimum, we believe we know enough to propose systems level experiments, and to direct our well-established evaluation methods to those.

A key obstacle to a mainstream OBM emphasis, however, is that addressing community and larger societal issues usually requires some form of collective leadership. (A search indicates that the phrase “collective leadership” has not appeared in the Journal of Organizational

Behavior Management.) Leadership is clearly necessary, but centralized leadership is not realistically possible in certain systems level issues that involve multiple, often largely autonomous, cultural entities and powerful actors (Fawcett, Mathews, & Fletcher, 1990; Mattaini, 2013). Furthermore, because only limited knowledge is often available regarding realistic and sustainable solutions and the networks of interlocking contingencies required to achieve them, intervention is likely to require arrangements that encourage disciplined innovation and creativity. Histories of conflict and conflicting values among organizations, communities and leaders are common, and powerful competing interests often at play in efforts to address our most difficult challenges (Biglan, 2015). The authors believe that some form of collective leadership is necessary under such circumstances (Ganz, 2009; Sharp, 2005). We will also suggest that circle processes, which originated in collective cultures, appear to be highly consistent with core behavior analytic and behavioral systems science principles, and may offer a realistic and testable technology supporting collective leadership. Finally, we will argue that behavioral systems science has unique potential to contribute to the evaluation and refinement of such processes.

### **Collective Leadership**

The concept of collective leadership is not unknown within behavior analysis. The fictional planner/manager model in *Walden Two* (Skinner, 1948) is probably the best known example, although Skinner offered limited detail regarding decision-making processes other than that they were firmly grounded in data and respect for individual preferences and differences. Stephen Fawcett's partnerships with communities around local issues emphasized collaborative and locally compatible partnerships for decision-making (Fawcett, 1991; Fawcett, Mathews, & Fletcher, 1980). Increasing community participation has also been explored behavior analytically

(Mattaini, 1993a), as has improving processes within a community board (Briscoe, Hoffman, & Bailey, 1975). The compendium *Behavior Analysis in the Community* (Greene, Winett, Van Houten, Geller, & Iwata, 1987) includes other valuable and related content. Nonetheless, most of the community and larger systems work that has been done within behavior analysis has focused on relatively discrete behaviors, with little emphasis on collective leadership or shaping complex systems of interlocking behavioral contingencies over time. There are, however, other literatures on which behavior analysts can draw that are largely consistent with a scientific perspective and offer some insight into operationalizing collective leadership.

Marshall Ganz, currently a lecturer in public policy at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, previously director of organizing for the United Farm Workers (UFW), and an organizing and leadership advisor to the first Obama presidential campaign, published a book length study of leadership and organization in the UFW (2009). In this study he contrasted the UFW with the less successful campaigns of the Teamsters and AFL-CIO, contextualized with other similar campaigns and related research. Ganz's focus was on "strategic capacity" within leadership teams; he identified two clusters of factors key to strategic capacity: *biographical sources*, and *organizational sources*. Biographical dimensions included diversity of life experiences, diversity of social networks, and diversity of tactical repertoires, all of which proved valuable in taking on new challenges where solutions were not yet known, and distinguished between the UFW and the AFL-CIO. (Although not discussed further here, it appears certain that diverse and transdisciplinary experiences and repertoires will be essential in dealing with wicked problems like those identified above.) Particularly germane for our purposes here, however, are Ganz's organizational sources, including *processes of deliberation and decision making*, *resources*, and *accountability structures*. The circle processes explored below

provide operationalized approaches to deliberation and decision-making, identifying and soliciting resources, as well as accountability in ways that are consistent with Ganz' findings as well as with behavior analytic principles—although clearly more research is needed, as discussed later, and behavior analysts are uniquely prepared to complete much of that research.

While early research indicated that traditional brainstorming, avoiding critical analysis, as developed by Alex Osborn commonly produced solutions to problems inferior to those developed by individuals (Lehrer, 2012), there is considerable evidence within science that teams, collective problem-solving, and collective leadership often yield improved solutions to complex or wicked problems (Lee, Brownstein, Mills, & Kohane, 2010; Nemeth & Ormiston, 2007; Wuchty, Jones, & Ussi, 2007). Elements like the ability within the group to disagree and process that disagreement, physical proximity, and diversity within the group are among the characteristics that that research has identified as important. Genuine innovators have in nearly all cases been “part of a movement, a school, a band of followers and disciples and mentors and rivals and friends who saw each other all the time and had long arguments over coffee” (Gladwell, 2002, ¶4).

Examples of structuring such arrangements include establishing architectural arrangements like Building 20 at MIT and Steve Jobs structuring of Pixar headquarters to enforce interaction across disciplines and perspectives (Lehrer, 2012). In both cases these arrangements led to clarification of positions, but also in many cases provided powerful motivative conditions for achieving common solutions (Lehrer). Geographic collocation is particularly valuable, due to the intensity of face-to-face contingencies present (Lee, Brownstein, Mills, & Kohane, 2010). For persons and cultural entities concerned with major social and global issues, structuring such intense, constructional (in Goldiamond's [1974/2002] terms), and

creative arrangements can be a difficult challenge. Those concerned are commonly geographically dispersed, and often further divided by conflicting interests, complex political dynamics, and severe time limitations. Nonetheless, while those personally involved may not recognize this, in areas like climate change, economic inequality, and urban violence, long-term interests among many actors, organizations, and other cultural entities merge to a great extent. For example, police, neighborhoods, governmental actors, and inner city young people all would benefit from reduced urban violence, but behavioral and cultural histories and short-term contextual realities often obscure these common interests. Two ultimately compatible but immediately contesting approaches hold the most promise in these situations: collective nonviolent resistance (Aspholm & Mattaini, in press), and the construction of trans-cultural collective leadership. At least preliminary evidence suggests that variations of *circle processes* may be one valuable technology supporting nurturance of such leadership. In the material that follows, we first present basic concepts and references related to circle processes as described in the literature, including a brief summary of current evidence for their utility. We then examine possible convergences between circle processes as commonly described and core behavior analytic and behavioral systems concepts, leading to suggestions for further exploration and research supporting collective action on critical social and environmental issues.

### **Circle Processes**

Circle processes are traditional to many aboriginal and First Nations cultures around the world. While most commonly associated with restorative justice practices that foster healing as an alternative to punishment, the power of the circle method has been observed and documented in numerous other settings ranging from the court to the

classroom to the boardroom.<sup>1</sup> Circles are a method of dialogue rooted in the values of interconnectedness, equality and respect—principles that are often absent in contemporary decision-making among persons of different cultures and power differentials. Circles bring together affected stakeholders through an organized behavioral process that can dramatically increase the probability that divergent perspectives can be understood, evaluated and incorporated into collective planning and problem-solving. The circle process is at once highly structured and potentially creative; as discussed later, a core set of cultural practices and interlocking contingencies protects this potential.

Before discussing details of circle processes, it is important to clarify that indigenous circle processes (including for decision-making, accountability, and healing) often were and are grounded in traditional spirituality and interlocking practices shaped and sustained within unique physical and interpersonal contextual realities. While there are times that such factors are appropriately included in contemporary projects (e.g., coming of age programs for African-American youth), in most cases including practices like “smudging” in mainstream groups would be little more than disrespectful cultural appropriation, and likely to be unnecessarily off-putting to many in mainstream society. The presentation here suggests that our cultures have much to learn from others, but that this learning needs to be applied in ways that can be integrated into the values and contextual realities of contemporary societies and cultures.

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<sup>1</sup> For accessible introductions, see Rupert Ross, *Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2006); Carolyn Boyes-Watson, *Peacemaking Circles and Urban Youth: Bringing Justice Home* (St. Paul, MN: Living Justice Press, 2008); Ball, Caldwell, and Pranis, *Doing Democracy with Circles*.

The process of participating in a circle requires those present to shed often destructive conventional meeting norms by which some are able to monopolize the conversation (often risking silencing and alienating those most impacted by, and often with the most information about, the decisions being made). In the circle, opportunities for speaking rotate around the group and interruptions are excluded; thus responses must be held until a person's turn next comes around. This potentiates and to a great extent enforces listening rather than speaking over, and considering responses rather than immediately reacting, thus allowing understanding and planning to evolve collectively and working toward achieving some level of consensus. Circles allow participants to practice (and reinforce) the skills required to create cultural entities that allow space for dialogue and understanding—communities built on the rule that “our fates are intertwined: what happens to one affects what happens to others” (Ball, Caldwell, & Pranis, 2010, 35). It is important to note that circles can be demanding and usually do not yield easy solutions; the issues involved typically are complex and often stressful. Recent work as discussed later, however, demonstrates that circle processes often provide opportunities and reinforcers for staying with issues until some level of resolution can be achieved, even if the final outcome is not precisely what any participant expected. As the data discussed below suggest, such resolutions, although they may take time, are more likely to be honored than those that are quickly leveraged by actors (persons or groups) with narrow (often self-) interests, as resistance by the excluded can be minimized—also a finding from long-standing Quaker practices.

Several types of circle processes can be specifically structured to foster collective leadership (see Ball, Caldwell, & Pranis, 2010, for details). *Learning and understanding circles* are conducted to share knowledge, develop more sophisticated and holistic understandings of an issue, and process information shared to move forward in the face of challenges. These processes

can facilitate a more complete comprehension of a topic as sharing of information and values facilitates disclosure from multiple sources represented in the circle. *Conflict resolution circles* bring together individuals who initially see themselves as on opposing sides of an issue to clarify disagreements, explore options, and ultimately search for consensus on moving forward in a way that respects and is acceptable to all parties. The simple practices of sharing thoughts, feelings and experiences with those you initially disagree with can facilitate understandings required for a positive resolution (insert ref). *Community-building circles* create bonds and sustain relationships among persons and groups who share common lives or circumstances with the goal of constructing and sustaining a healthy common life.

*Accountability circles* have been applied in a range of settings including schools, workplaces and communities, providing a structure for understanding, processing and repairing harms that may have occurred among parties. Accountability circles also have particular value for ensuring that plans made among voluntary and activist groups working in areas of social responsibility are sustained by those involved (including in one form by Behaviorists for Social Responsibility). Such circles have also been widely used in juvenile and criminal justice settings, and in matrix and team projects within business and nonprofit settings in which they can offer opportunities to maximize targeted reinforcement practices.

*Decision-making circles* provide a useful strategy in a variety of settings in which groups are making decisions under conditions in which no single actor or representative has adequate knowledge to make optimal decisions. In these circles, established roles can be loosened so that, for example, legislators and constituents share knowledge and power, supervisors and employees have opportunities to hear each other and harness the information each brings to the work being

done, or police and community members can establish plans that are acceptable to each. (For descriptions of other types of circles, refer to Ball, Caldwell, and Pranis [2010].)

While circles have been utilized for diverse purposes, their basic structure is consistent across forms. Among essential practices for all participants in circles are (a) negotiating to establish common values; (b) listening attentively and quietly to other participants until one's own turn comes around (typically by circulation of a "talking piece," although variations fitting the setting are common); (c) sharing one's own perspective and responding to others' concisely, honestly, and respectfully; (d) verbally reflecting on one's own and the collective's performance; (e) providing reinforcement to others for their contributions; and (f) committing to continuing participation until the group reaches common understandings. Figure 1 depicts some key practices that structure effective circle processes; if the incidence of any of these is too low, the circle is unlikely to produce optimum outcomes.

<INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE>

Experiences over the past two decades suggest that certain structural arrangements support positive circle outcomes (Pranis, Wedge, & Stuart, 2003; Boyes-Watson, 2008; Riestenberg, 2012; Ball, Caldwell, & Pranis, 2010). In most circles, all participants are seated facing one another and only the individual holding the talking piece may speak, then when done, passes the talking piece to the person seated directly next to them. Although it is possible to use only some elements of circle processes but not others, for example passing a talking piece while using auditorium seating or at a conference table, doing so while facing each other without a barrier in between is generally reported to increase the intensity of participation. Typically circles have formal opening and closing

rituals (moments of silence, statements of concern or commitment, even music) designed to focus attention on the present gathering; introductions; and searches for common values and guidelines to guide the circle. Circle processes are guided by one or two circle keepers who ensure that the values and practices of the circle are maintained. This is not a typical leader or facilitator role (although in some settings the labels “facilitator” or “guide” may be more appropriate than “circle keeper”); there is a delicate balance here, as in some settings words like “talking piece” or “keeper” may be uncomfortable, but the message that “what we are doing here is something really different” can also be emphasized with new language. Nonetheless, language appropriate to the setting can and should be chosen. Regardless of title, circle keepers are equal participants in decisions and sharing, but with the added responsibility of holding the process intact. They are not usually outsiders with no investment in the actions or decisions to be taken, rather they are members of the collective that has come together who have learned the skills of keeping the circle. This role, in fact, is often best rotated.

The core process of the circle centers on a series of questions posed to participants designed to bring perspectives, alternatives, and resolution to the issue at hand. Under most circumstances, circle participants (including circle keepers) speak in a clockwise order, responding to questions initially raised by the circle keeper, although other members may also raise questions (or anything else consistent with collectively developed guidelines) in their turns. Each member of the Circle is invited to share how the topic being discussed directly impacts their situation as relevant, along with their perspective and experiences on the issue at hand. Effective circles are enacted to ensure that all voices can be heard, although participants can choose to pass if they do not feel they have something

to contribute, or are not comfortable doing so. The goal is usually for solutions acceptable to all participants; some decisions made are therefore necessarily interim or experimental, with full recognition that more may need to be done at a different time or place.

In their primer on the use of circles in public planning, Ball et al. (2010) outline four stages of the circle process. The first is *determination of the circle process as suitable* for the task at hand. Are participants willing? Are well-prepared keepers and adequate space and time available? Are the intentions of those who have organized the circle prepared to listen to the perspectives, no matter how different, of all those participating? The more genuinely the intentions of participants are communicated, regardless of their differences, the more likely that the circle will achieve meaningful outcomes. These questions should be considered in advance to minimize aversive conditions for participants that could interfere with achieving a successful outcome. The second stage Ball et al. (2010) refer to is that of *preparation*. This includes identifying, inviting and preparing each participant, gathering as much information about the situation as possible, planning opening and closing rituals and solidifying the logistics for the circle such as time, place and refreshments.

The third stage is the *convening of the circle* itself. Circle keepers welcome all participants and lead an opening ritual to help all present transition into a mindful space focused on the issue at hand. The first question rounds should typically include identifying the values (note the connections to ACT [Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2011] here) that the group would like to hold throughout the circle, and clarifying guidelines that will help the group uphold these values. The circle then turns to rounds of introductions, and an invitation for each to share their experiences and perspectives on the topic being discussed. If participants stray from the guidelines during the circle the keeper pauses the process and revisits the guidelines, engaging

the group in examining whether there is a need for any changes. The work of the circle continues until closure on the issue is reached; a closing round or ritual that honors the process and celebrates connections and progress completes the meeting. Note that elements of circle processes can be incorporated into other meetings in which the whole process would be cumbersome or initially uncomfortable (Boyes-Watson, 2008), although the full process has considerable value. (In fact, such elements are likely to be facilitative in any collective leadership arrangement.) The steps taken during the circle are intended to minimize aversive conditions and reinforce participation by creating an environment where each participant experiences responses indicating that their voice is heard and respected, while being open to appropriate challenges by others. The final stage discussed by Ball, Caldwell, and Pranis (2010) is ensuring that there is appropriate *follow-up* following the circle (or often *sequence* of circles). This may include providing a summary of what was discussed to all participants, keeping them updated as to how plans are moving forward, eliciting feedback on the process itself, and planning for follow-up circles where indicated.

Like any other complex repertoire, the skills of guiding and keeping circles require training and shaping as appropriate for various contexts and conditions. A good deal can be learned from literature and video materials, but there is considerable advantage to *in situ* training experiences, which are available in many large urban areas, most often from organizations significantly associated with juvenile justice, but often with a much broader mission of dissemination of circle processes.

### **Consistency with Behavioral Systems Science**

Although this may be evident to some readers already, circle processes incorporate a number of practices and principles that are consistent with behavior analytic and behavioral

systems analysis, and that are likely to account for the successes that have been reported. We briefly note these here.

### **Practices Encouraging Empathy**

Recent work by Biglan and others on mindfulness and empathy indicates that high levels of empathy and the resulting forbearance lead to improved social and working relationships, reduced stress, and policies reducing conflict and coercion (Biglan, 2015). Well-implemented circle processes encourage empathic exchanges by structuring supporting motivative antecedents and reinforcers. Initial mutual introductions, sharing of values and experiences that bring people to the work of the circle often surface similarities and emotions supporting empathy, while the processes of only one speaking at a time and passing the opportunity around the circle increase the probability that commonalities will be heard. As discussions proceed, additional such opportunities commonly arise. Circle keepers also are positioned to model both such sharing and reinforcing it when it occurs.

### **Practices Encouraging Acceptance and Commitment**

Acceptance and commitment therapy and training have become mainstream behavior analytic strategies for both clinical and developmental purposes (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2011; Biglan, 2015). Carefully paced circle processes increase opportunities to hear and gradually accept the realities of the situations under discussion and of reactions to and positions on issues raised. The strong emphasis on core values both in the beginning and throughout circle work continually brings participants back to those values, thus offering multiple opportunities to commit oneself to collectively valued action, even when that may be uncomfortable. Enhanced empathy is also likely to increase the probability of collective commitment. Keepers have

opportunities to shift discussions in these directions, and to bring them back when necessary, throughout the process.

### **Practices Maximizing Opportunities Reinforcing Cooperation and Innovation**

Overall rates of reinforcing and aversive exchanges have long been known to affect the quality of group functioning (Rose 1977; Mattaini, 1993b). Discussion rounds within circles offer many opportunities to recognize or agree with contributions of others. Circle keepers, but in fact all members, also have many opportunities to provide motivative antecedents for and to reinforce acts of mutual encouragement, including by modeling and directing questions toward recognizing or increasing current rates of positive exchange. Questions initiated by keepers but also by group members can also be specifically directed toward new ideas, innovations, or how to move beyond current limitations arising in the discussion.

### **Practices Minimizing Aversives While Encouraging Differences**

Circles have particular strengths in guiding group processes away from aversive exchanges while concurrently evoking and reinforcing discussions of differences in values, approaches, and desired outcomes. Initial collectively developed guidelines begin to shape these repertoires; the keeper is also empowered to shift discussion back to those guidelines at any point—not so much to “enforce” them, as to structure a discussion among all members (always one at a time around the circle) as to whether the group is satisfied that the guidelines are being followed at the present moment, and whether changes in guidelines should be explored prior to returning to the process. Compliance can and should also periodically be reinforced by keepers. Collectively developed guidelines almost always include listening with respect for others’ positions, managing disagreements in honest ways, opportunities for each to speak “their truth,” and willingness to hear new ideas. Combined with practices on the part of facilitating evocation

of and reinforcement for innovation, a structure consistent with the research reported earlier on effective work groups is likely to emerge. The process of passing a talking piece (literally or figuratively) typically evokes full participation while encouraging deep exploration of multiple understandings and patterns of systemic transactional patterns that can guide decision-making.

### **Common and Interlocking Practices Structuring Collective Leadership**

All of the above practices support the emergence of patterns of collective leadership by bringing the right people together, shaping mutual engagement, providing voice to all participants, evoking deep exploration of the patterns of interlocking system transactions involved in current issues and challenges, and developing and following up on plans to respond to those realities (patterns that behavior analysts have long recognized as challenges for some groups (e.g., Briscoe, Hoffman, & Bailey, 1975). Those who have had successful circle experiences often find that elements of those processes can be integrated into other group efforts (e.g., by eliciting comments from those who are silent—including those one expects to disagree with the directions a discussion is currently taking). Familiarity with circles within a collective shapes practices that with encouragement can be sustained outside the circle proper, and those practices can be integrated into daily and long-term interlocking practices within the specific collective, but potentially in its interlocking transactions with other behavioral systems as well.

It is important to note here that circle processes are not always rapid; particularly in situations of conflict, even developing common guidelines may take significant time (Pranis, Wedge, & Stuart, 2003; Boyes-Watson 2008). If there is a real need for collective leadership as discussed in the early part of this paper, however, the investment may often be worth the time required. There is a long-standing recognition (going back at least to early Quaker processes, (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 2002) that decisions made in cases where there is substantial

disagreement among important actors often face real challenges in implementation. The greater the agreement on the decision, the less such resistance appears likely. These assertions, while they have substantial support in some settings, remain anecdotal as general principles. As discussed toward the end of the next section, behavioral systems analysts are particularly well positioned to contribute to the knowledge base regarding the power and generalizability of circle processes across settings, and more broadly the dynamics of effective collective leadership.

### **Support for the Utility of Circle Processes in Organizations and Communities**

Data supporting the utility of circle processes in some areas are well developed, while support in others is currently largely anecdotal. Adequate evaluation relying on standard social science methods is in many cases difficult; this is an area in which behavior analytic science could be particularly helpful, given our expertise in interrupted time series and related methods. The strongest support for the use of circle processes is currently found in the restorative justice literature utilized within the criminal justice system. In their meta-analysis of restorative justice practices, most utilizing some form of circle processes, Latimer, Dowden and Muise (2005) synthesized existing literature meeting criteria for rigor in a meta-analysis from 1980 to 2005. Twenty-two studies of 35 unique restorative justice programs were analyzed; the researchers found evidence that restorative programs were significantly more effective than standard justice processes across the four outcomes of victim and offender satisfaction, restitution compliance, and recidivism. With the exception of mixed findings of the impact of restorative justice approaches on re-offending (Weatherburn & Macadam, 2013), studies completed since the meta-analysis of Latimer and colleagues continue to report promising results for the use of Circles as part of an alternative approach to traditional criminal prosecution and sentencing (Bergseth & Bouffard, 2012; de Beus & Rodriguez, 2007; Lambson, 2015; Leonard & Kenny, 2011; Sherman

& Strang, 2007). Many of the studies included are limited, however, by a self-selection bias in that participants must agree to participate in the restorative process (Latimer et al., 2005); at the same time, the alternative is typically criminal prosecution, so agreement rates tend to be very high.

There is preliminary descriptive support for the use of circles in multiple other settings for equally varied purposes through numerous case studies. Circles have been used to improve integrated healthcare and thereby overall health outcomes by bringing together patients, their multiple providers and support systems to work through stressful decisions and circumstances; encourage transparency and understand options for care; process the frustration and fatigue those with chronic illness face; share insights and information with the patient; and heal social relationships that go beyond the physical conditions with which they are struggling (Jordan, 2014; Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2014). Circles have also successfully been used in bringing together community organizations, law enforcement and youth involved in gangs in the prevention of violence (Boyes-Watson, 2008); increasing academic achievement and safety and reducing delinquency in schools (Hopkins, 2002; Porter, 2007); intervening in domestic violence with both victims and offenders (Zakheim & Faye, 2011). In all of these cases, evaluation relying on pooling many cases and even randomized experiments is possible, often with increasingly rigorous designs as results accumulate.

Perhaps of most interest here, circle processes have demonstrated utility for planning for property development in townships of farmers, residents, developers and landowners with competing interests and concerns (Ball et al., 2010), and making operational decisions in boards of directors meetings for corporations and nonprofit organizations (Baldwin, Linnea, & Wheatley, 2010).

In most cases, organizational contexts and change efforts in one setting are substantially different than in other settings, even within organizations with somewhat similar mandates and challenges. At best, a small number of similar cases may be available for study. Rigorous evaluation has therefore proven difficult up to now. Such situations are, however, ideal settings and occasions for the use of time-series designs within organizations and across small numbers of cases. The rigorous testing of circle processes in most organizational settings therefore awaits exactly the methods in which behavior analysts are highly skilled (Biglan, Ary, & Wagenaar, 2000).

Behavioral systems science has much to learn, and likely some things to teach, in the development of effective processes supporting productive collective leadership. Disciplines determine the scope of their interests; behavior analysis and behavioral systems analysis have long claimed at least potential expertise in changing not only individual behavior, but also the collective and interlocking functioning of larger institutions and systems. Given the historic challenges currently faced by human collectives and societies, it is time to test the hypothesis that we have something substantial to offer in these areas. Collective leadership will be required to operationalize behavioral systems interventions in situations where centralized leadership is impossible or dangerous. Circle processes are one behaviorally specifiable approach to constructing collective leadership that behavioral systems analysts are well-positioned to test.

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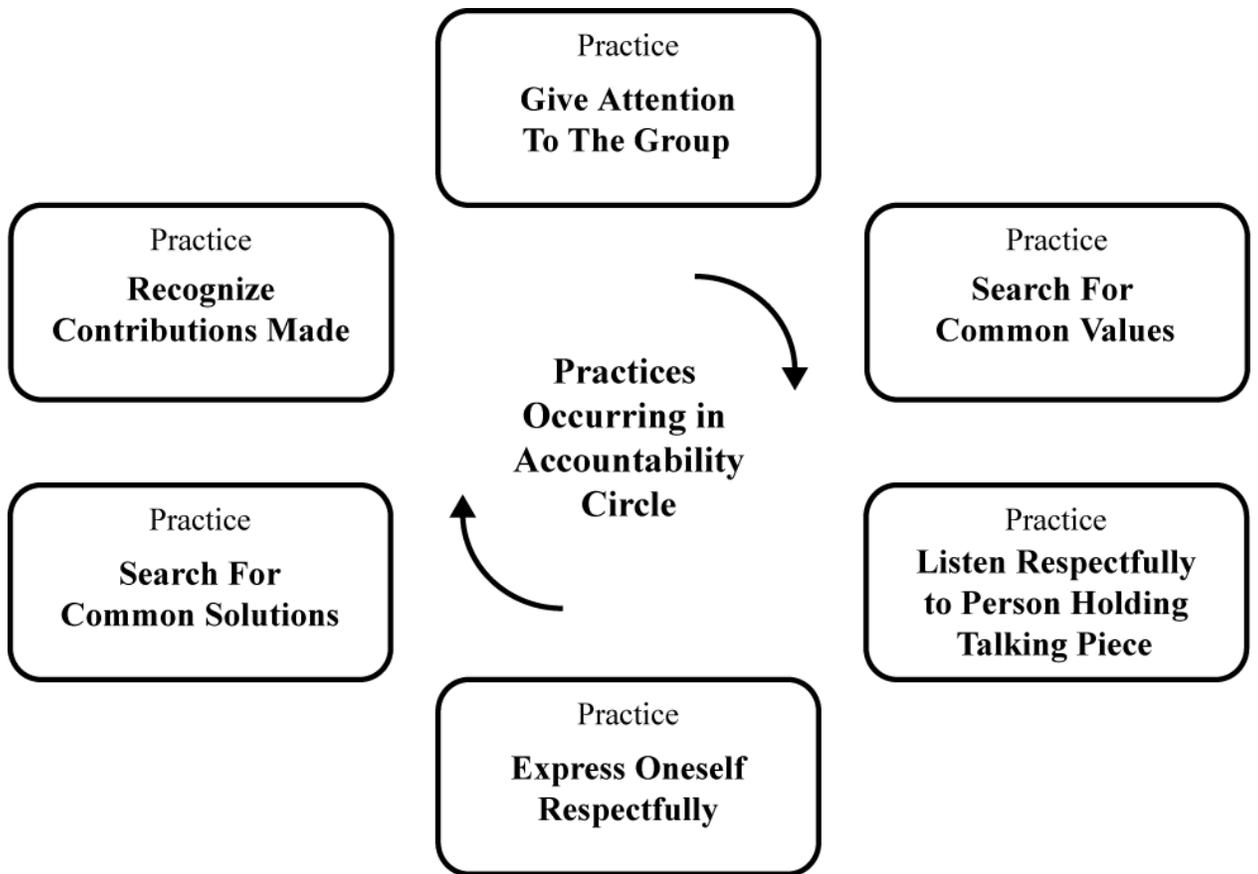


Figure 1. Common practices to be shaped and sustained in accountability and other circle processes.