Working with Systems Inspired Change by Frank Uit de Weerd

Leveraging the collective wisdom and attuning to what is naturally emerging

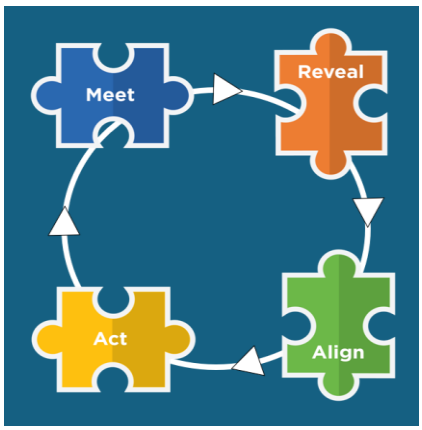
In today's era of rapid change and increasing complexity, a new approach to working with change is essential—one that taps into the collective wisdom and attunes to what is naturally emerging, rather than relying on the traditional top-down, programmatic model. We call this approach **systems inspired change**. It is rooted in the belief that we are part of an interconnected, intelligent field that holds the answers we seek, provided we learn how to access it as part of a dynamic and evolving process.

The prevailing approach to change remains top-down, driven by leaders who assert they have the answers rather than drawing on the collective insight of all involved. This "systems blindness" disregards valuable information, leading to suboptimal solutions, unintended consequences, resistance, disengagement, and unproductive conflict. Approaches that once worked in predictable and stable environments are no longer adequate in today's complex and uncertain landscape.

In the sections that follow, we share four resources to help you navigate change in a more systems inspired way. We hope they will serve you and your organization on your journey!

Resource #1: The Phases of Systemic Evolution - A model that helps you track the systemic evolution in a group, team, or organization

In their book *Creating Intelligent Teams* (2014), Anne Rød and Marita Fridjhon introduced the iterative phases of systemic evolution. They propose that human relationship systems evolve through four interconnected but distinct phases: **Meet, Reveal, Align, and Act (MRAA)**. This model offers a powerful framework to identify the current phase of a particular system and determine the next steps. It emphasizes that change is an organic, step-by-step process in which systems evolve at their own unique pace.



Meet is about connecting to where the relationship system is, rather than where you think they are or should be. A check-in provides a powerful starting point for meeting, offering a space to gauge where everyone stands. Simple questions like "How is everyone doing?" or "What needs to be said before we move on?" help create a fuller picture of the group's state and helps people to become present. Too often, individuals dive straight into their own agendas, neglecting to attune to what is alive within the team.

Reveal is about creating awareness of what is going on in a relationship system. It is about taking a reflective view on what is or has been happening. This can be as part of a

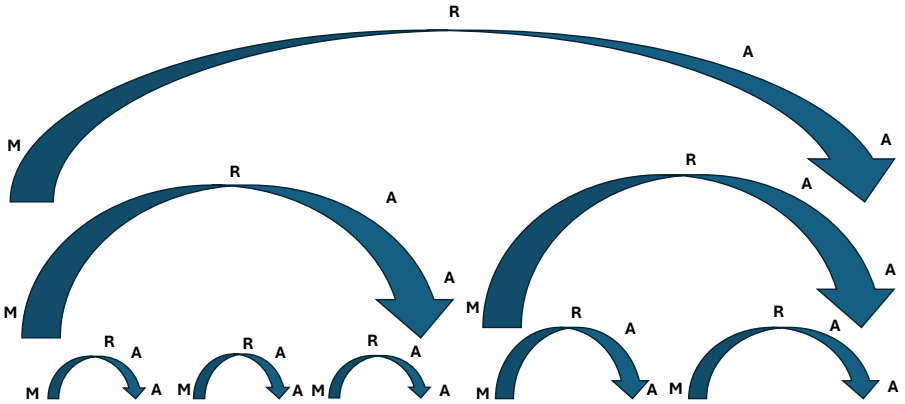
quarterly performance review (e.g. what are we learning as a team from this data?). It can also be in real-time moments, e.g. “I notice there is silence, what is going on?” The key of effective revealing is neutrality - avoiding interpretations, judgements or imposing own views. The intent is to initiate further exploration to give birth to new awareness and insights.

Align is about co-creating a way forward based on shared understanding. In relationship systems, alignment is often found in small steps rather than in big leaps, as it takes time to get everyone on board. While this process may feel slow, it ultimately leads to more sustainable outcomes. As the saying goes*, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”* In organizational settings, there is often a leader or committee that take the final decision. This is a practical and effective way to move forward, provided all views have been listened to and considered.

Act is about putting a plan in action and taking steps forward. Actions must be sufficiently specific and concrete to ensure the team moves in the desired direction. Without the foundational work of meet/reveal/align, actions risk being misaligned or lacking true ownership. If actions are aligned, they lead to meaningful and lasting progress.

The elegance of the MRAA model lies in its universal applicability. It can be observed in larger arcs, such as an annual team review, medium arcs like quarterly evaluations or a 1-day workshop, smaller arcs like dealing with a specific agenda point in a meeting, and even mini arcs that surface within the dynamics of a single moment.

MRAA IS EVERYWHERE EVERY TIME



By adopting this lens, you gain a deeper capacity to facilitate the natural flow of what is trying to emerge, enabling you to tap into the inherent wisdom of the relationship system and to accelerate systemic evolution.

Reflective questions:

1. In what phase do you (or your team) spend most time (M, R, A or A)?
2. What phase is marginalized?
3. What would it bring if more time was spent here?

Resource #2 : Applying the Phases of Systemic Evolution in Meetings – Starting in a Powerful Way

Leaders and managers spend, on average, nearly 50% of their time in meetings. Yet many admit that a significant number of those meetings feel unproductive — despite time being one of the scarcest resources in organizations today. This raises two important questions: Are all these meetings truly necessary? And, if they are, how can we make them more effective?

The MRAA framework offers a helpful lens for running effective meetings. One of the most common patterns we observe is that teams skip the Meet phase altogether. Leaders often move immediately into content, tasks, or decision-making. While this may appear efficient, the opposite is often true: investing more time upfront in the Meet phase creates stronger connection, clarity, and alignment — ultimately making meetings more productive and impactful.

To support this process, we developed the acronym **PI-CATR**, a simple yet powerful structure for "meeting the system where it is" and creating the conditions for meaningful collaboration.

PI — **P**ersonal **I**ntention

Before the meeting begins, take a moment for personal reflection:
- How do you want to show up?
- How do you want to be during this meeting? *(the Being)*
- What do you want to contribute, accomplish, or learn? *(the Doing)*

Clarifying intention helps participants become more conscious, present, and responsible for the quality of the interaction.

C — **C**heck-In

Begin with a check-in — brief or extended, depending on the context.
The purpose is to help everyone arrive fully into the meeting. Without presence, there is no strong container for meaningful conversation.

Possible questions include:
- What needs to be said for you to be fully present?
- How are you arriving today?
- What is currently occupying your attention?

At times, people may need space to land, release tension, complete an urgent matter, or voice something important before they can genuinely engage.

A — **A**genda

A clear agenda creates shared understanding around objectives, priorities, and desired outcomes.

Important considerations:
- Prepare and share the agenda in advance.

- Use pre-work where appropriate.
- Ensure the right people are present.
- Avoid overloading the meeting.
- Separate operational topics from strategic conversations.

The agenda should provide enough structure to create focus, while remaining flexible enough to adapt to emerging needs.

T — **T**eam Alliance

Create an explicit team alliance around how you want to work together.
- What atmosphere do we want to create together?
- How do we want to engage when tensions or disagreements arise?
- What ways of working will support productive collaboration?

Even a short conversation about these questions can significantly improve psychological safety and collective effectiveness. The alliance should become a living document that evolves with the team and gradually shapes its culture.

R — **R**oles

Clarify the roles needed to support the meeting process.
These can include practical or rotating roles such as:
- Chairperson
- Facilitator
- Timekeeper
- Note taker
- Meeting coach

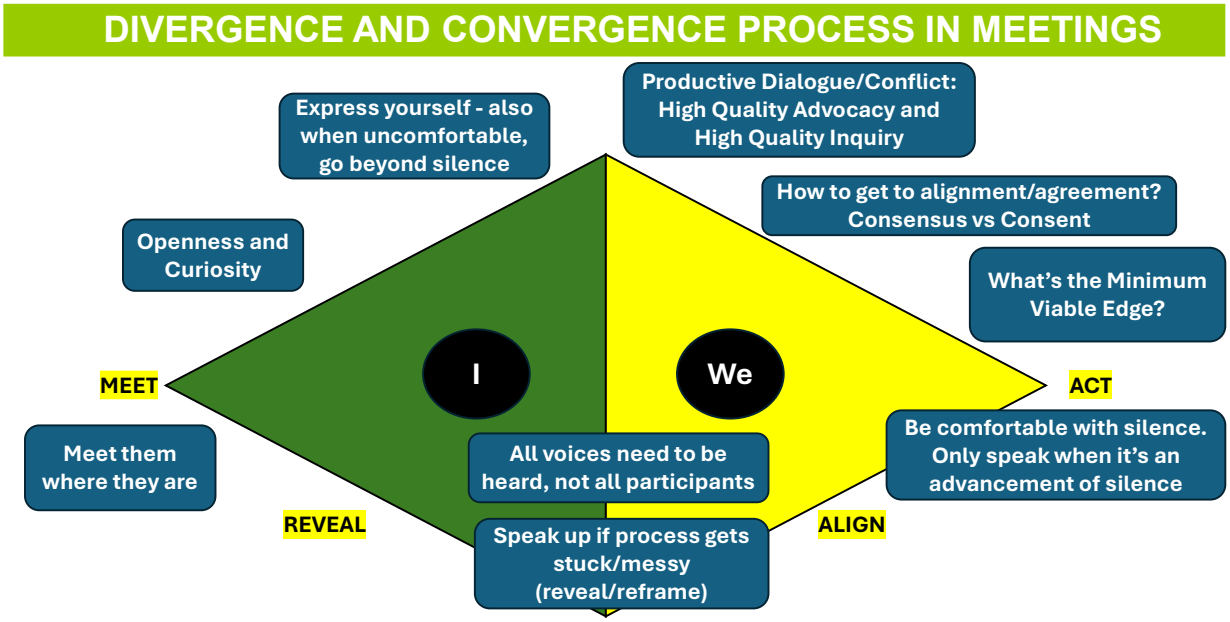
It can also be valuable to assign “inner roles” that strengthen group dynamics, such as:
- Devil’s advocate (for teams that avoid conflict)
- Action guardian (for teams that struggle to make decisions or follow through)

For leaders, it is equally important to consciously address the power dynamic within the team. Explicitly designing how decisions will be made and how leadership authority will be exercised can greatly increase trust, ownership, and participation.

This simple PI-CATR structure helps create a powerful container for meetings and significantly enhances their effectiveness. Please note that the MRAA sequence is already embedded within the Meet phase itself: participants first Meet, then Reveal what is present, Align around shared intentions and ways of working, and finally become ready to Act.

Resource #3 : Applying the Phases of Systemic Evolution in Meetings - Navigating Divergence and Convergence

A practical application of Meet, Reveal, Align and Act (MRAA) is navigating divergence and convergence processes in meetings.



Meet is the starting point, as outlined in the previous section. This is about getting everyone present in the meeting, aligning on the session's objective and establishing a shared way of working. For instance, if the goal is to launch a product or service into a new region or country, this phase ensures everyone is on the same page about this objective. This is also the place to clarify how decisions are made.

Reveal occurs in the **divergence phase**. It is about hearing everyone's ideas and exploring them to get all information on the table. This is the land of "I": by voicing your deepest truth, you contribute most to the collective. It is crucial that everyone feels safe enough to express their ideas and ask (the "stupid") questions. Often, the most powerful ideas appear when it requires courage/guts to speak up.

Align happens in the **convergence phase**. Here all ideas are being considered and weighed on their pros and cons. It is the place of productive dialogue and conflict, sorting out what is the best way forward for the team or organization. This is the land of "We," where individual perspectives give way to collective decision-making. The key question is: what it trying/wanting to happen in the system? Clarity on decision-making processes is essential—whether by the leader, a committee, voting, consensus (everyone agrees), or consent (no one disagrees, everyone can live with it). In our experience it often works best to adopt a step by step approach, going for the "minimal viable edge", to ensure that everyone is on board.

Act is the outcome of the convergence phase, where decisions translate into concrete next steps, setting the stage for the next MRAA cycle.

It is acknowledged that this process is in practice not so linear, there will be many mini-MRAA arcs present. Still we hope this overview provides you with a useful frame to make your meetings more conscious and effective.

Resource #4: Free Systems Inspired Leadership Competency Assessment

Effective leadership is crucial for working with Systems Inspired Change. If you are interested in evaluating your leadership skills based on Systems Inspired Leadership competencies, take this free assessment.

This assessment is featured in the book Systems Inspired Leadership, an international bestseller by Frank Uit de Weerd and Marita Fridjhon.

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Frank Uit de Weerd is an organizational psychologist and executive coach who partners with leaders, teams, and organizations to realize high-impact results in a fast-paced world. He specializes in fostering agile, systems inspired organizations where individuals feel permission to bring their full selves to work. As the lead author of the international bestseller Systems Inspired Leadership, Frank has been instrumental in developing a proven and innovative approach that helps organizations harness collective wisdom and cultivate collaborative leadership at all levels. Based in the Netherlands, Frank is married with two children and has spent a significant part of his life living and working abroad.

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