



# Co-creation

Wisdom from wherever

## Meeting at Cross Purposes

The biggest reason I have chosen to work with groups, communities and organizations is simple: it's too painful to do otherwise.

It's painful to be in meetings that spin and spin and gain no traction. It's painful to see people shut down. It's painful to hear people repeat themselves over and over, and watch the surrounding disaffection. It's painful to feel a meeting grasp at a poor conclusion like a much-needed life preserver.

We all have our techniques, interventions and theories about how to make our collaborations go better – and I'd welcome you sharing your favourite one with other readers (just send me an email at bob@robertwziegler.com). Here's my number-one, non-obvious meeting principle:

*Have a clear purpose to a meeting that segregates divergent and convergent thinking.* Any significant decision will involve two phases. The first, which I call the divergent phase, may involve scanning the horizon for possibilities, unearthing background data, re-examining underlying assumptions, or brainstorming. The second, or convergent phase, would involve distilling down the mass of data, opinion, values, aspirations and influencing factors down to a manageable set of actionable

## Emerald

The formulas that generate fractals are remarkably simple. It is just the process of repeating the formula over and over that generates complex and elegant structures.



commitments.

Problems arise when some people in the meeting are diverging and others converging. For example, one person may suggest hiring an administrator to manage client relations (a convergent move), to which another person will “respond:” “Have we measured how useful the client database is? Do we actually use it?” Person number two feels like this is a logical next step to the question of whether to hire an administrator while Person number one may feel Person two had just changed the subject, and that the original proposal was not heard at all.

## The Convergent Meeting

The purpose of the meeting is often expressed as a convergent goal, for example: “Decide on the best approach to handle dwindling enrolment.” If there is such a convergent goal, everyone should be clear whether all the background discussion has happened already (“it’s decision time!”) or whether the first part of the meeting will be dedicated to that divergent exploration of options and concerns.

So there are two types of convergent meetings, one that is dedicated solely to decision-making and one that reserves time at the beginning for exploration, brainstorming and discovery. In the first case, where the exploration has occurred in a previous meeting, the chair or facilitator must signal convergence, e.g. “Okay we heard from everyone about their concerns about this project last time, you’ve all received Kay’s summary of the options, and now we need to zero in on a

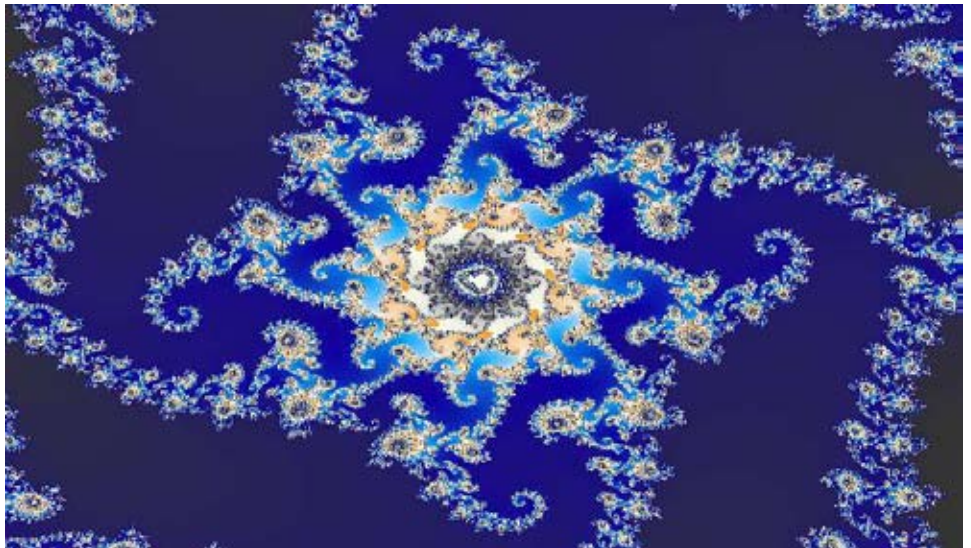


### Fern

I really had to examine this to assure myself it was computer generated.

## Emerald II

Complexity in fractals doesn't arise from lots of components like bricks in a building. Rather, the complexity comes from ploughing information back into the formula. So the proper verb – instead of “building” – is likely to be “refining” or “deepening.”



decision.”

If the meeting needs to explore first, then the chair or facilitator should make that explicit: “Before we get to specific suggestions about how to solve this problem, let’s explore the issues. What observations have we made that informs this decision? What are the most important issues to consider before we make this decision? Are there any assumptions that people would like to challenge?” Then, when the background seems to be fleshed out, “So aside from the options we’ve already heard, are there any others we should throw into the mix?”

After all that diverging, then the group is primed and ready to get to the work of converging. “Okay we’ve got our options and our critical concerns. Would anyone like to put forward a recommendation that addresses those concerns?”

If you give appropriate emphasis to the divergent discussion, the convergence on a decision gets much easier. Also, you can address the implementation details more fully.

## The Divergent Meeting

Sometimes getting to an actionable next step is unrealistic. If so, make it very clear that this meeting is exploratory. Brainstorming techniques are helpful, as are various kinds of graphic notetaking – capturing the free flow of ideas in a way that is visible to everyone.

When ideas become visible, the significance of sequence (what came first and what came next) is diminished, and there is a greater spirit of

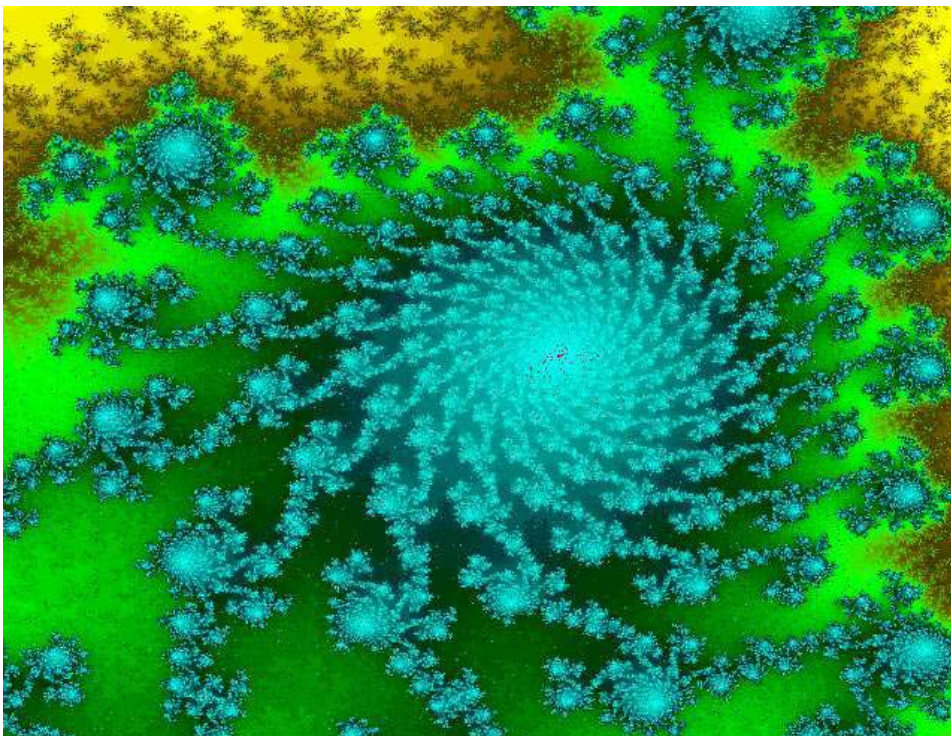
exploration and co-creation, rather than positional jockeying.

You will want to follow the divergent meeting with a convergent one, and it is critical that people have a record of their divergent work handy. You can re-post the original flipcharts, distribute a summary document, or have a summary on the wall – or all of the above.

## Putting this into practice

I wish I could say that every meeting I attend is so neat and tidy. In reality, we often don't have clear purposes, and we don't know whether we are converging or diverging. This is working at cross purposes. Any meeting participant can contribute to focusing the group's attention on the right question. Or more often, on the right set of questions. In other words, clarity of purpose is not simply the work of a chair or facilitator, it is everyone's work.

Let me know what you have found most useful in your collaborative work – it would be great to share your ideas with other Co-creation readers! (bob@robertwziegler.com)



## Galaxy

Changing a mathematical fractal is a simple matter of changing the underlying formula. Changing a human system is likewise a matter of changing the underlying mental models – or assumptions about reality.