

**graph-ic** | 'grafik |  
 adjective  
 1 relating to visual art, especially involving drawing, engraving, or lettering: his mature graphic work.  
 • Computing relating to or denoting a visual image: graphic information such as charts and diagrams.  
 2 giving a vivid picture with explicit detail: he gave a graphic description of the torture.  
 3 of or in the form of a graph

# Notes on Graphic Listening as a reflective practice



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 Cohort C • 13 Jan 22  
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This Graphic Reflection was created after a conversation among change makers from several organizations engaged with a Learning Institute on Person-Centered Planning & Organizational change. These notes illustrate Graphic Listening as a reflective practices by describing the construction of this graphic. This form of graphic record will be most legible to people who participated in the conversation

*There is no greater power than  
a community discovering what it  
cares about.*



**Meg Wheatley**

<https://margaretwheatley.com>

One way to support a group to discover what it cares about is to make a trial effort to capture their collective wisdom & offer a graphic account of the ideas, images, & feelings\* that emerge in conversations about purpose & a desirable future.

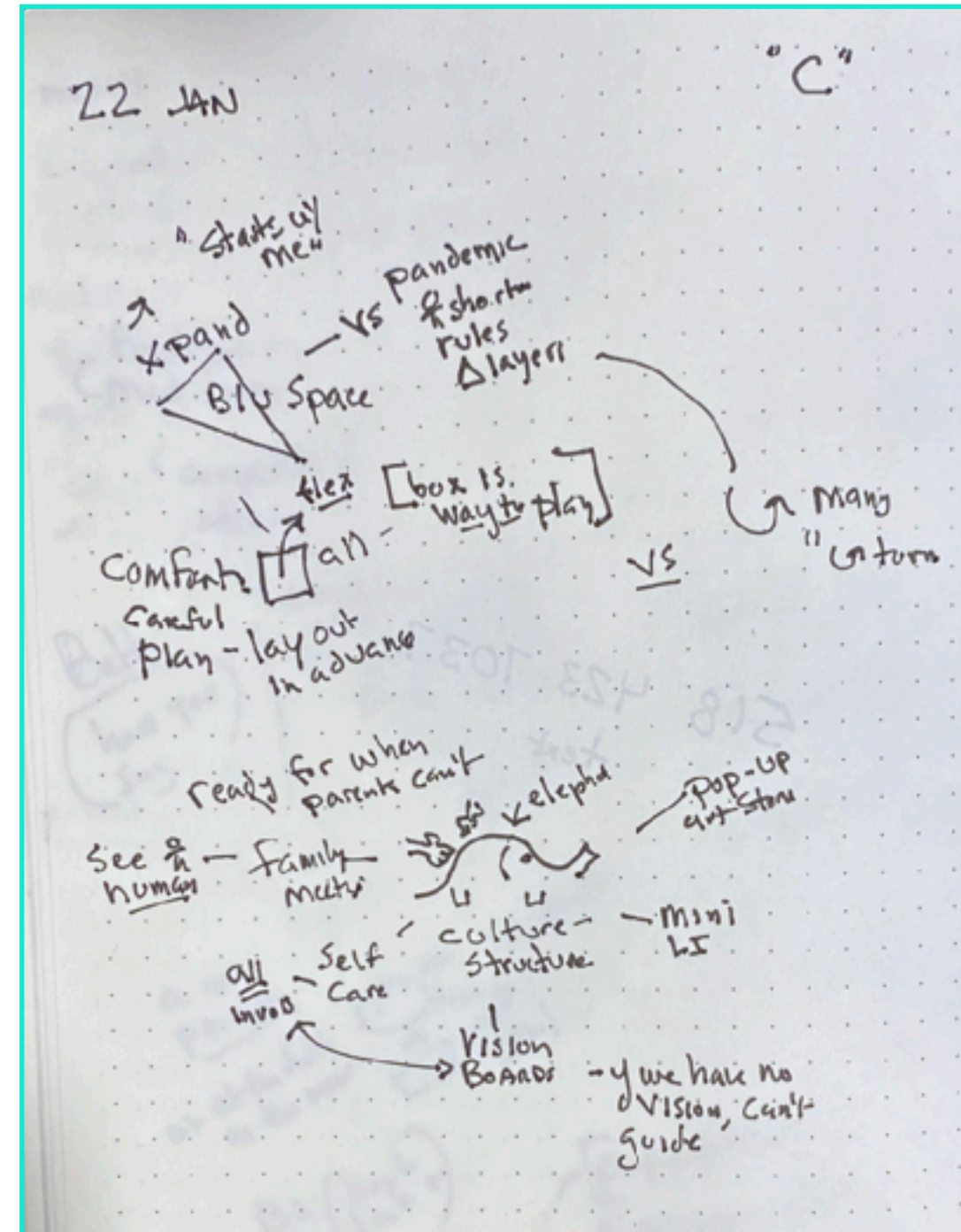
\*Color, accents, shapes, emoji expressions reflect feelings.



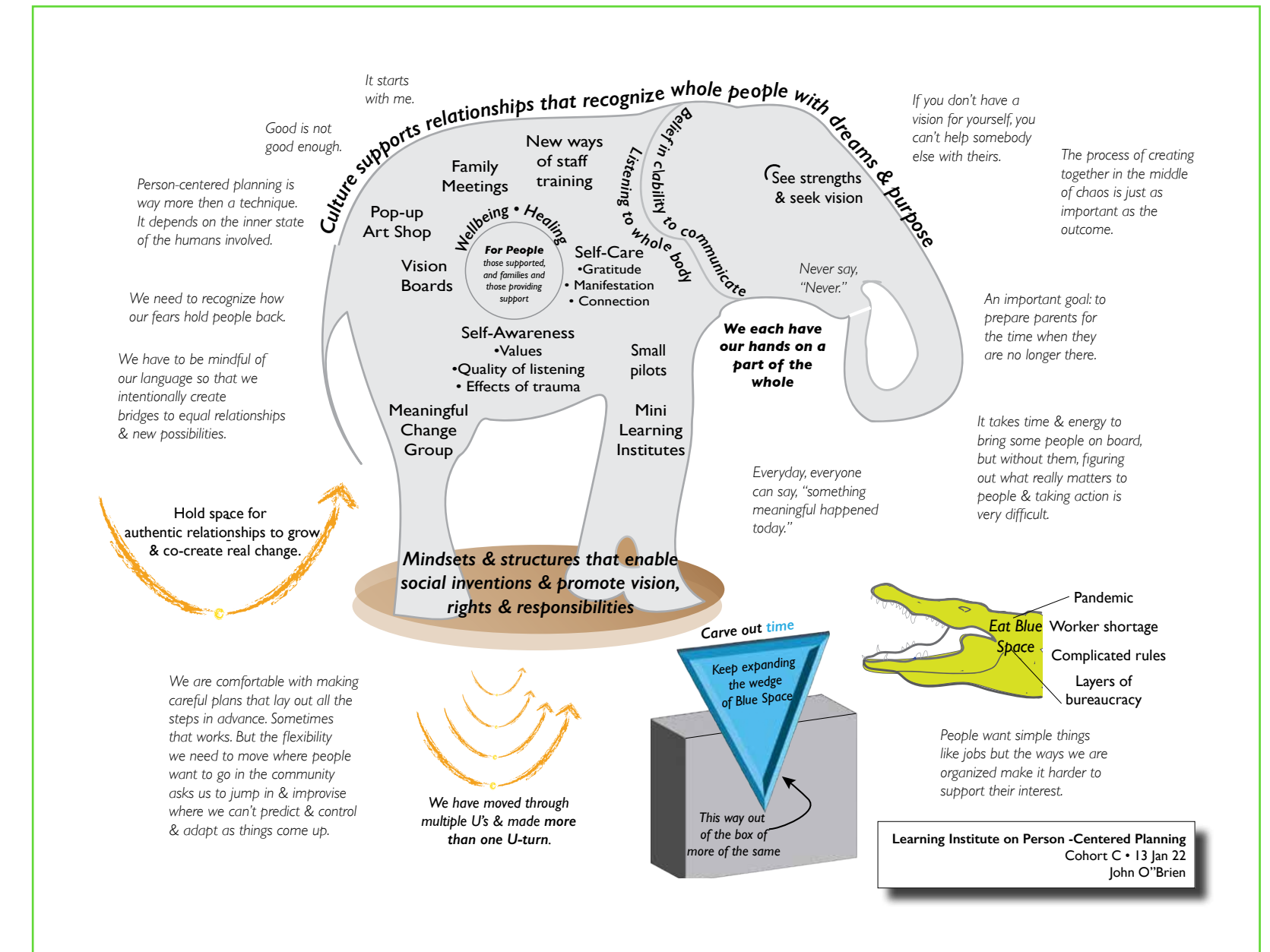


## Real time –now

Group graphic recording captures the conversation as it emerges using markers on big sheets of paper. It lets the group see what it is saying. Occasional summaries check accuracy & encourage pattern finding.



Individual graphic listening captures resonant words & images as they emerge in conversation. Anyone can make this kind of notes any time. This is the foundation in memory for action that arises from the conversation or for going further to reflective practice.



## Reflective practice –later

After an important conversation a few listeners, or an individual listener, identify, expand, amplify & arrange images & patterns of ideas that have resonance for them & return them to the group to inform further conversation.

This version was made with Adobe Illustrator & Adobe InDesign in order to include more quotes than I could hand letter on a page. Hand-drawn graphics are equally or more effective.



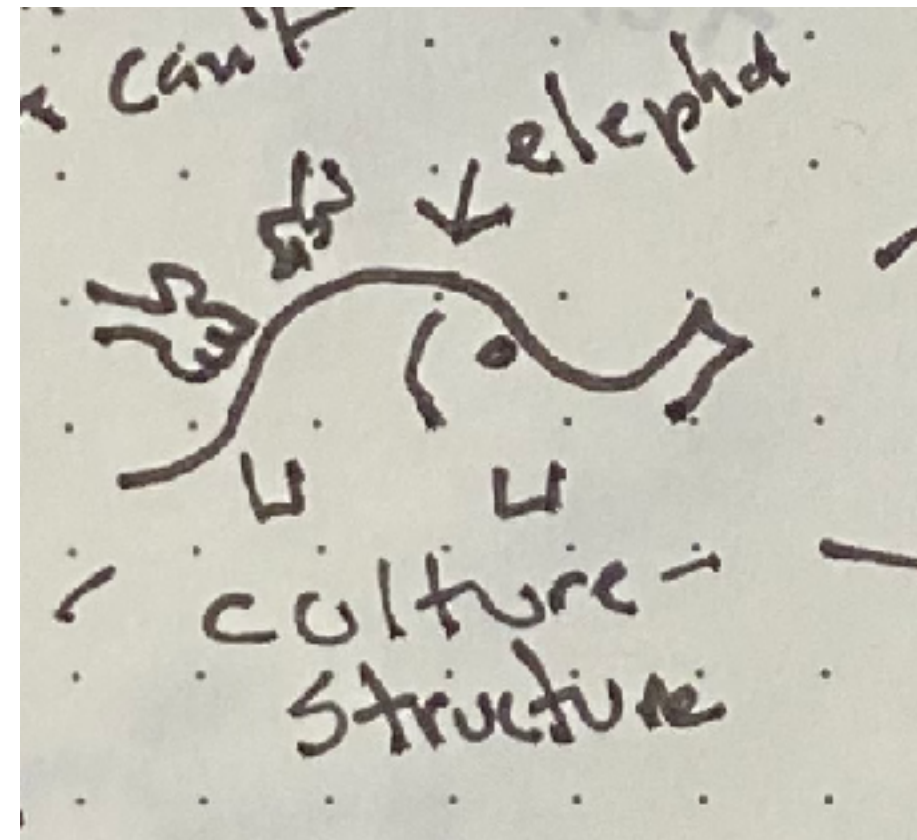
Level of Listening	Experience	Result
<b>Listening 1</b> <i>downloading</i>	Just what I expected.	No change or small changes in understanding. Mostly a repeat of the same ideas.
<i>Open Mind expresses curiosity and quiets the Voice of Judgment</i>		
<b>Listening 2</b> <i>debating</i>	I became aware of some new facts and ideas that challenged my assumptions and shifted the way I make sense of the situation.	Taking account of new realities; better informed. More aware of assumptions, new ideas and alternative ways to understand current reality.
<i>Open Heart activates compassion and overcomes the Voice of Cynicism</i>		
<b>LISTENING 3</b> <i>dialogue</i>	I have seen the situation, and my place in it, through the eyes of someone whose experience is different from mine. I have a new sense of how another person experiences the situation and how they feel it. My own feelings resonate with those of someone different from me.	Awareness of real differences in experience and evaluation of the situation; new perspective; better understanding of aspects of the situation that have been hidden or avoided.
<i>Open Will draws on courage and calms the Voice of Fear</i>		
<b>LISTENING 4</b> <i>collective creativity</i>	I am not the same person now than I was when I entered this conversation. Together we generated understanding and possibilities that did not exist when the conversation started.	A growing sense of the highest possibility in the situation and of the contribution I can make.
<p>The table is based on a video on levels of listening presented by Otto Scharmer in the edX course, <i>U.Lab: Transforming Business, Society &amp; Self</i>, 21 January 2015.</p>		

The quality of any conversation depends on the **level of listening** that participants bring to it. A conversation that spends some time at Level 3 or Level 4, where new perspectives & insights emerge from the flow will repay the time it takes to generate a reflective graphic memory.

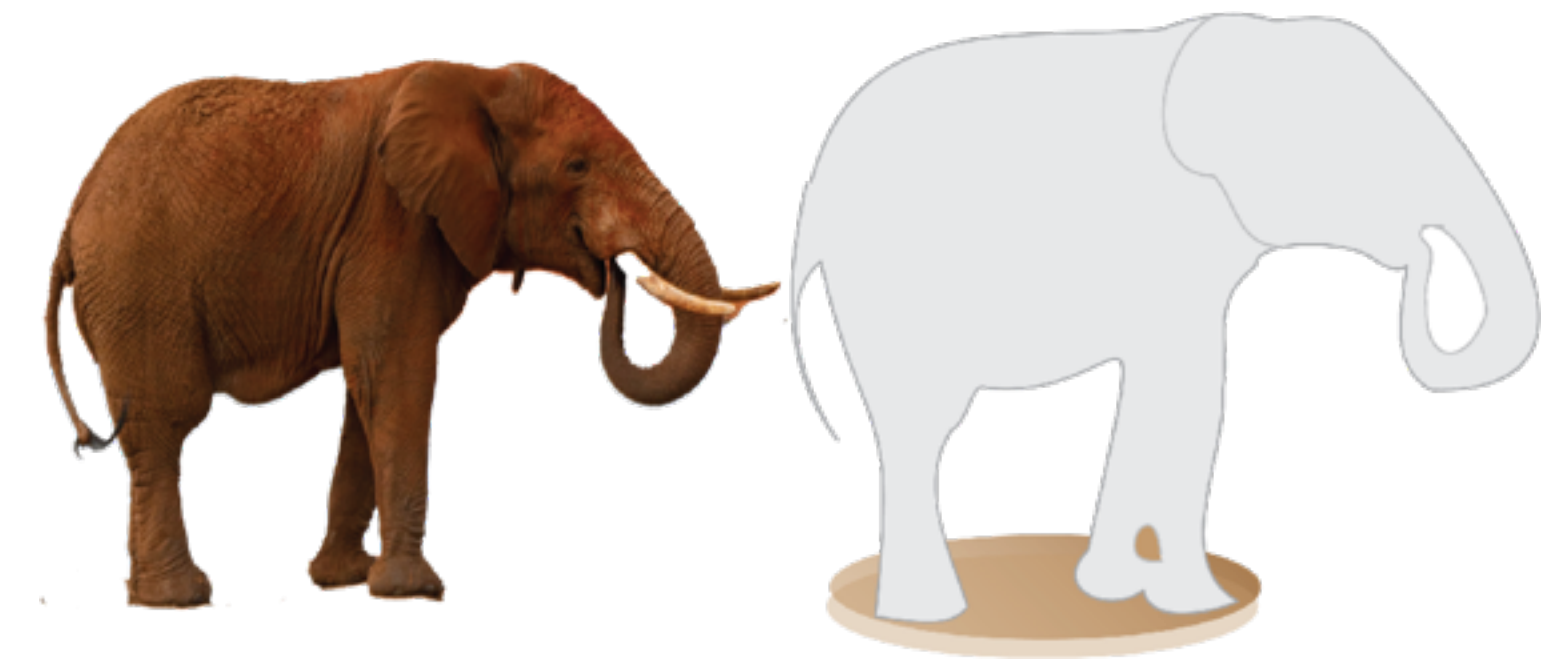
Noticing & suspending the **Voice of Judgment**, the **Voice of Cynicism**, and the **Voice of Fear** by practicing **Curiosity, Compassion, & Courage** supports discovery of what the group cares about.

Their **Voice of Judgment** shuts some people down before they even start recording resonant images by declaring, ***I can't draw***

This misses the purpose of graphic listening. The purpose is to become aware of, reflect on, & communicate the metaphors, images, patterns, & words that express what a group cares about enough to act.



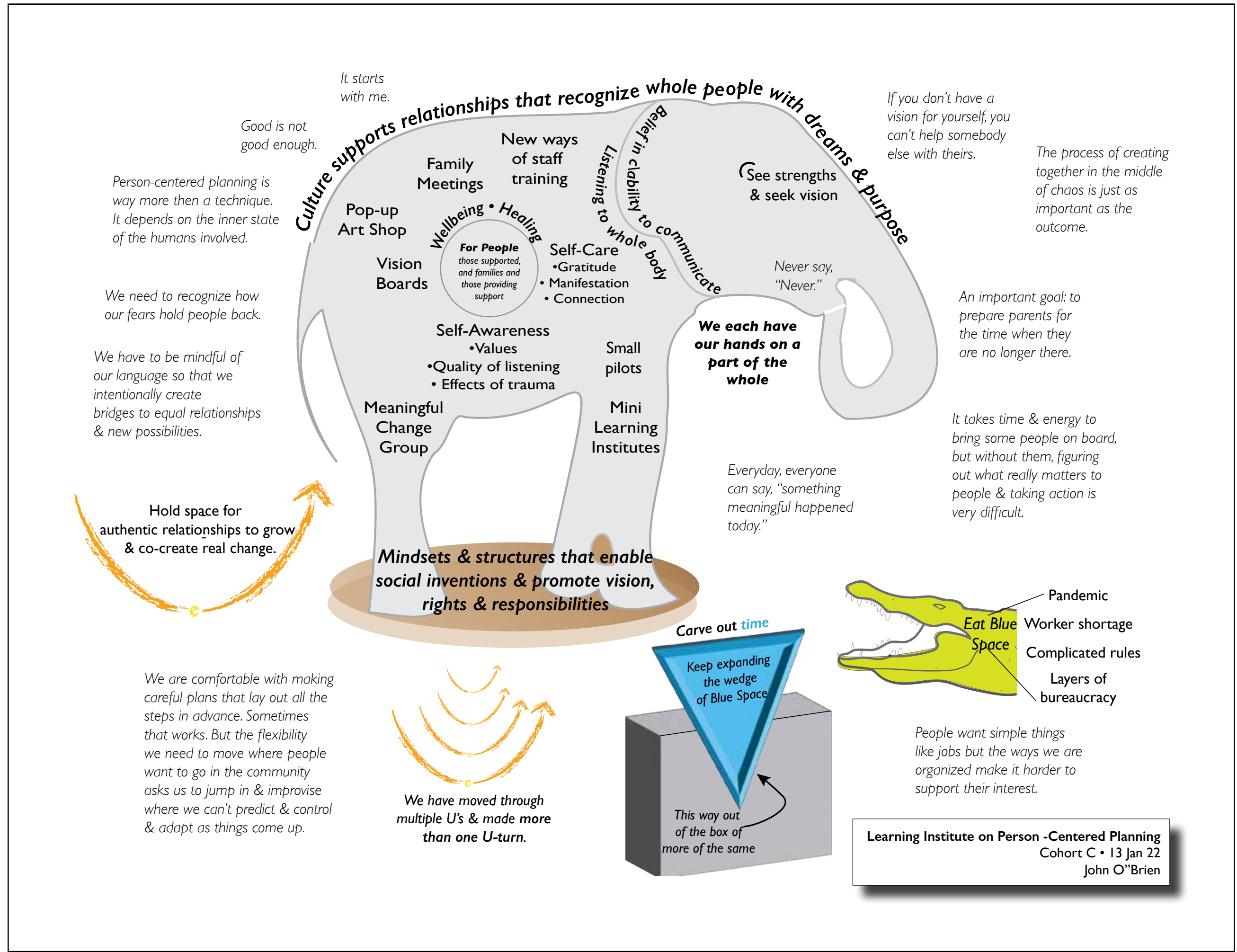
As this image from my notes shows, graphic listening has little to do with ability to draw. Indeed I have labeled the squiggle "elepha" so I will remember.



Because I enjoy taking time to reflect while my hands are occupied with a drawing application, I created a better approximation of an elephant by finding a picture I liked & tracing it. This is by no means necessary.



Everything in the record, was said in the conversation. As much as my notes allow, the key words & phrasings were those spoken during the conversation rather than paraphrases of substitute words. The rest reflects my choices to bring out the patterns that resonate for me.



The the reflection is one interpretation of the conversation. There is no pretense that it is neutral, objective, or complete. Another participant would see different patterns & express them differently.

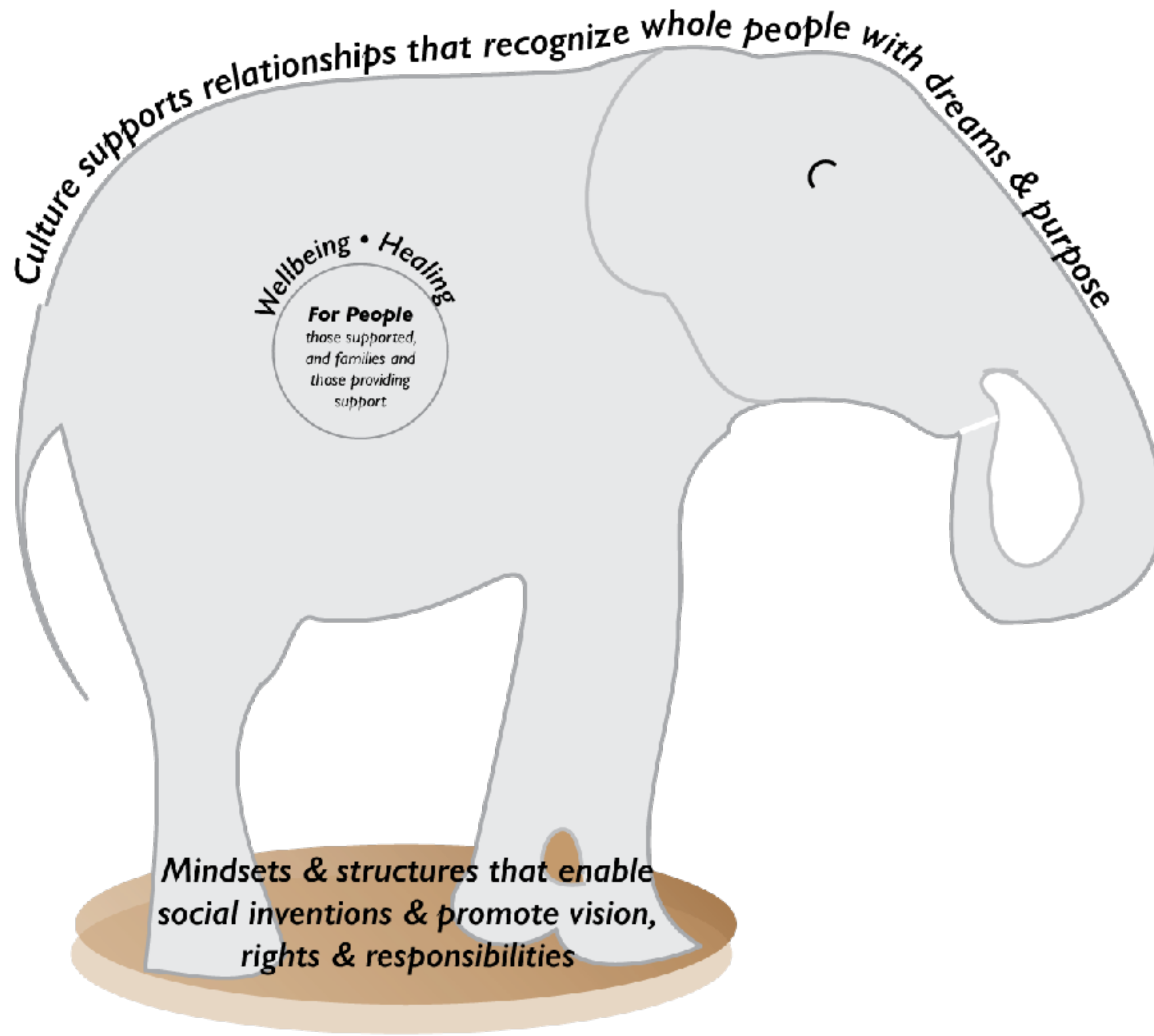
Notes serve as a memory & a collection of images & words. Some patterns are already in view or nearly so. Others will show up while making the graphic.

Choices in revealing patterns...

- ...What is included.\*
- ...The shape the images take as they make the transition from words.
- ...How the elements are positioned on the page & in relationship to each other: *what goes together.\*\**
- ...The size and dimensions of the images, the weight & size of the type.

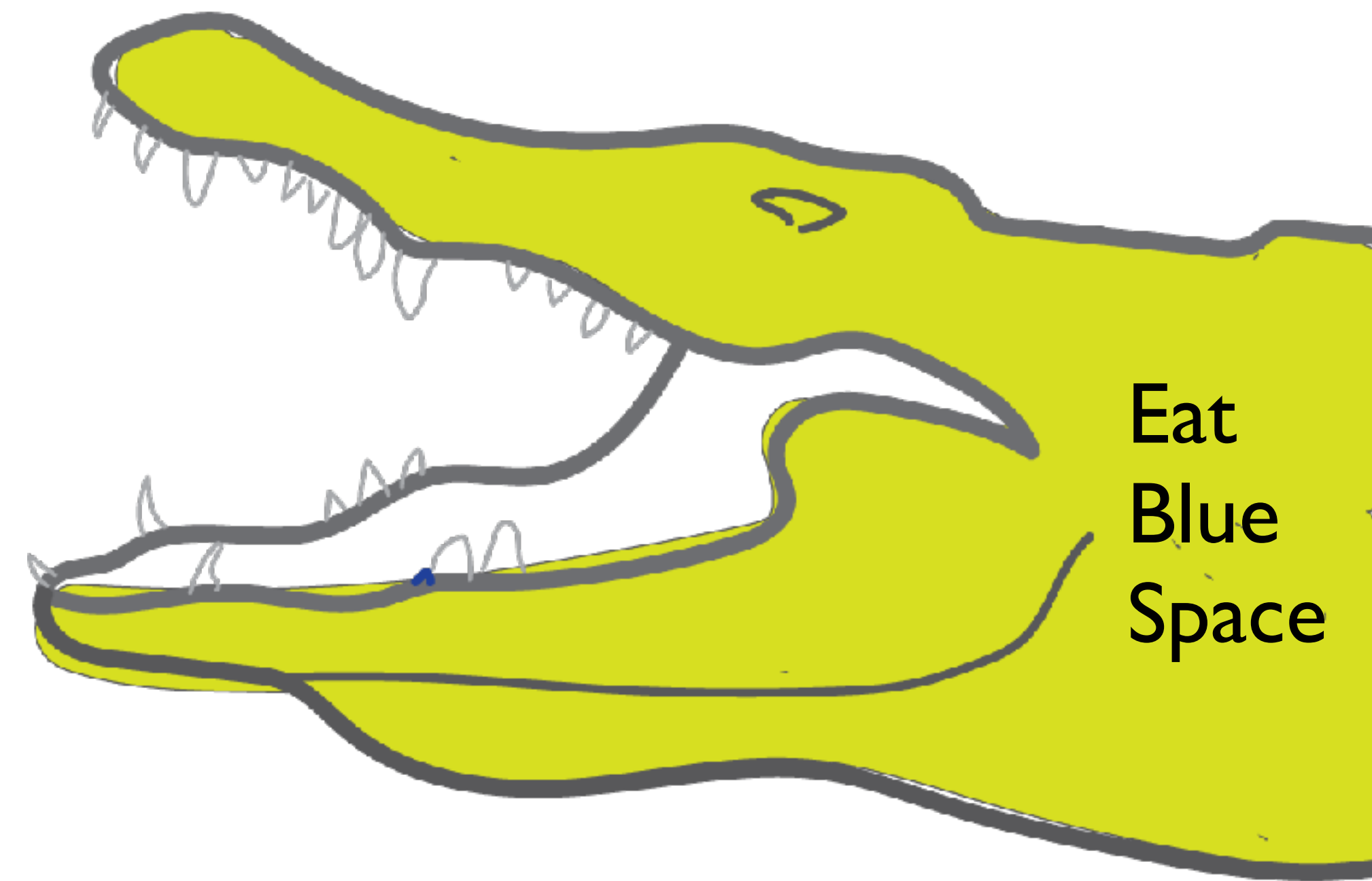
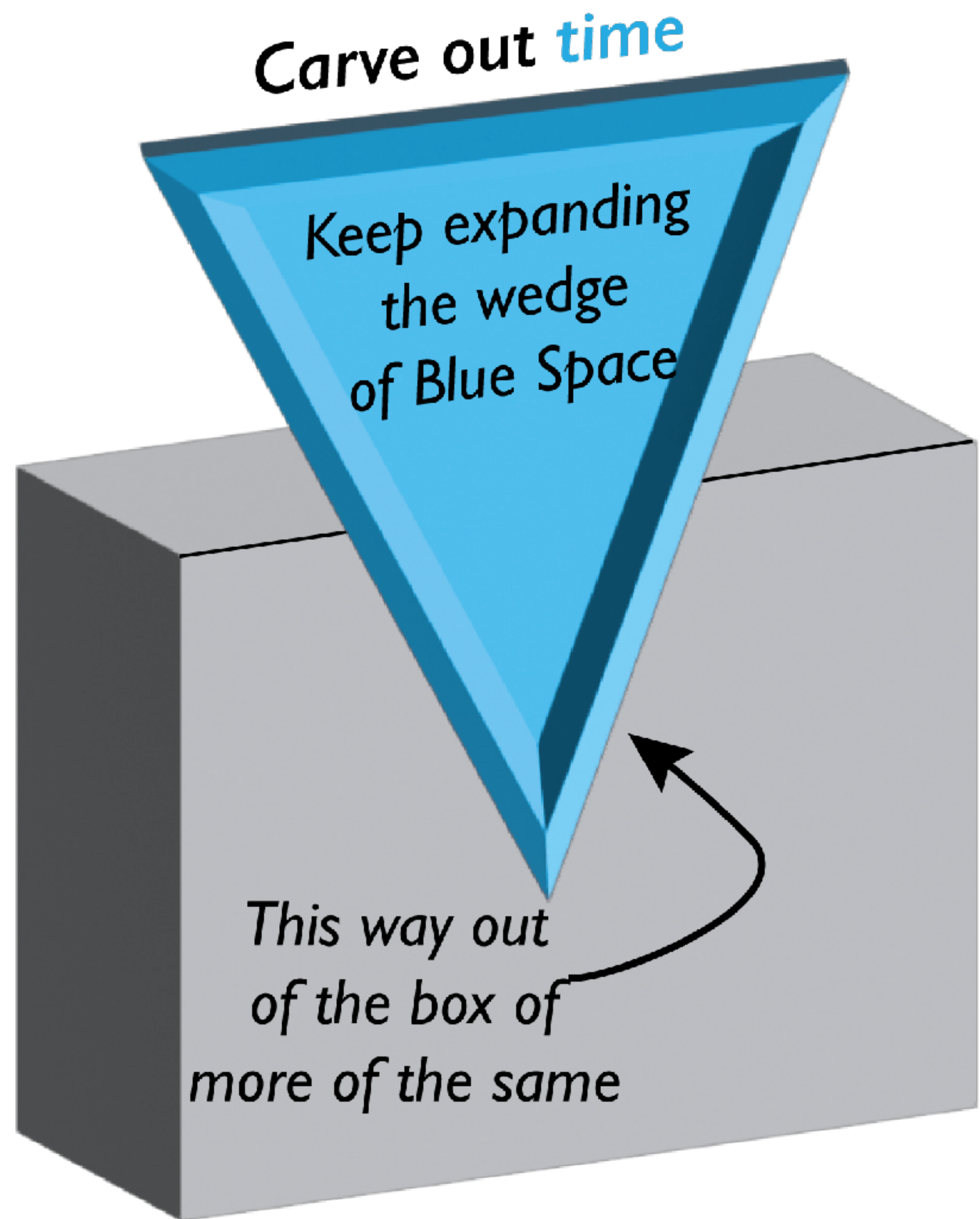
\* In addition to the elephant (which echoes the parable of the Sightless Sages each sensing the whole by the part they are touching) the image of puzzle pieces came up in conversation to express the different, complementary initiatives people are implementing. I chose the elephant because the field seems more alive & open ended than the image of a puzzle where the task is to imitate the finished picture on the box.

\* An advantage of using a software application is the ease of moving things and adjusting sizes of images & type. One can move things around until they feel right.



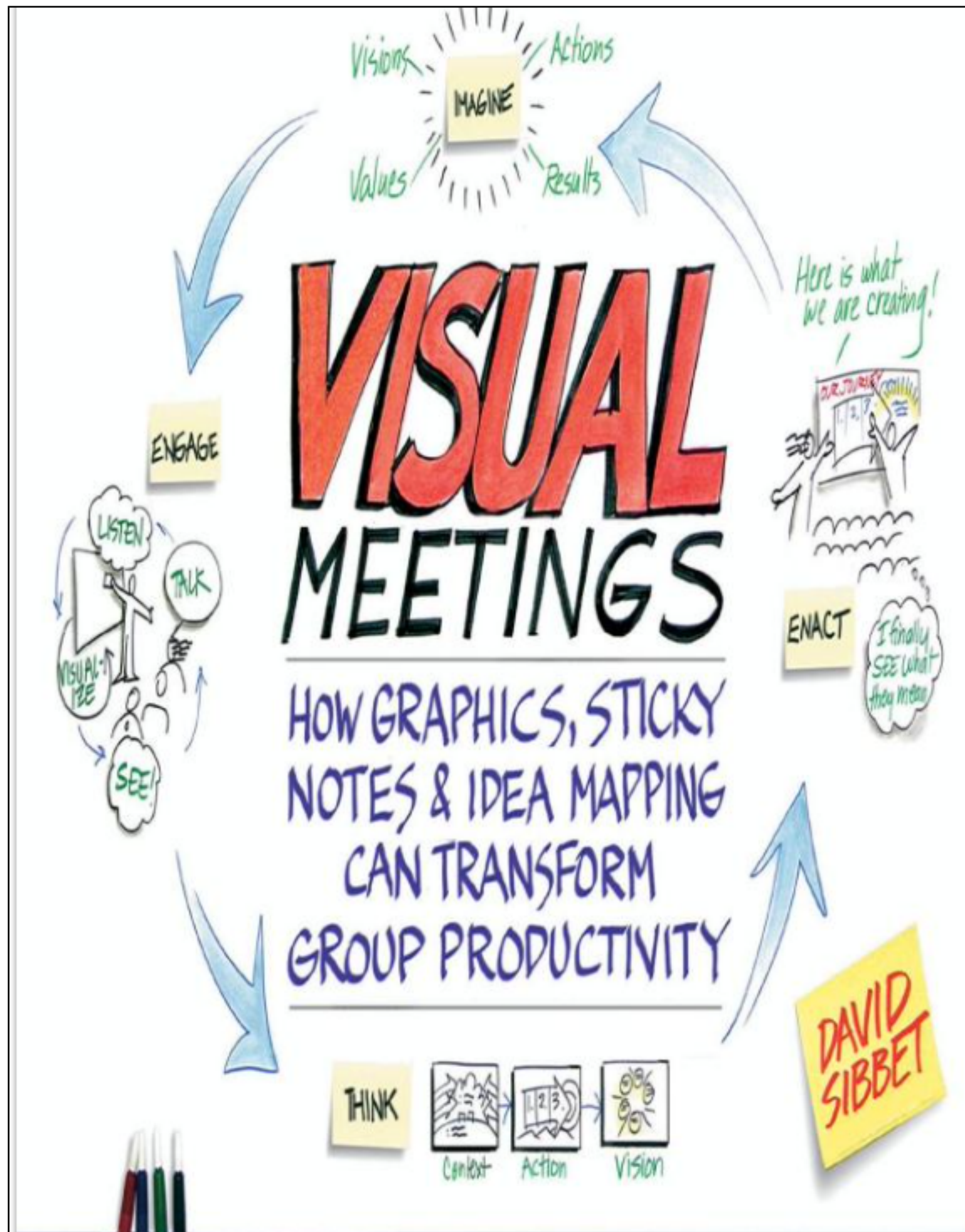
The biggest, boldest type on the biggest, most central figure asserts the depth of the change we seek. Culture must develop if we are to recognize whole people with purpose. Each of the change efforts. The capacity to transform rests on our ability to develop mindsets and change structures to enable social invention. The change is in relationships among people who are finding better lives together: people supported, staff, family members. Everybody has the responsibility of healing & developing wellbeing.





This image makes a pattern that links several contributions. It suggests that unless we make time to invest in deeper listening & dialogue around the deeper moral purposes of our work ([Blue Space](#) as it is known from previous conversations) we will have no way out of reproducing more of the same. Creating this kind of space for authentic relationships to grow drives a wedge into existing structures & practices, including comfortable ideas about planning as command & control. The effort to expand [Blue Space](#) attracts aggressive opposition & calls for forceful resistance..





*You must give birth to your images.  
Fear not the strangeness you feel.  
The future must enter you...  
Long before it happens.*

*—Reiner Maria Rilke*

