

Category Questions: Windows Into This Pattern Language

How do we evoke and engage the wisdom and resourcefulness of the whole on behalf of the whole?

In this section you see the patterns sorted into seven “category questions” that serve as windows into the pattern language by addressing different aspects of wise democracy’s overall “prime directive” question above. Along with each pattern, we’ve briefly described how it relates to its category question. Many of these patterns could easily associate with several of these questions, but we have chosen associations we think are most significant. For a fairly good overview of this whole wise democracy pattern language, you can read through the entire text in this section. Alternatively, you can just explore patterns associated with questions that particularly interest you.



I Diversity

How can we include enough diverse people and perspectives?

Citizen-Stakeholder Integration — People involved as members of the community and/or as interested parties have special gifts to offer to deliberations and should be convened in ways that utilize those different gifts well.

Collective Distributed Intelligence — To the extent people can engage at their convenience during their normal lives, we can gain wide and more diverse participation and wisdom.

Complex Identity — The more we acknowledge the fullness of who people are, the more they will feel respected enough to show up and give their full gifts.

Diversity — Try to start with a good range of relevant diversity — and then honor new diversity that shows up.

Enough Time — If there isn’t enough time, you won’t be able to hear all the voices and there will be pressure to marginalize the strange or difficult ones (which may hold the greatest gifts, if there were time to hear them).

Equity — Marginalized people can sense when a situation is too full of privileged dynamics for them to show up fully and be heard, so they often won’t even come, or will have a struggle if they do.

Felt Agency — People are more willing — even eager — to participate when they think an activity will actually have some notable impact.

Microcosms and Populations — We can convene manageably sized groups that contain the diversity of the larger population we want to engage — and then we can connect them both.

Multi-Media Engagement — Different people respond to different kinds of media and forms of engagement, so the more diverse and integrated our modes of engagement, the greater quantity and diversity of engagement we can get.

Multiple Perspective View — Holding space for diverse people and perspectives involves being able to honor and even occupy all those differences simultaneously.

Out of Many, One — It can help to periodically point out that even in — and especially thanks to — all our diversity, we are fundamentally one group, one community, one people, one humanity, one planet...

Privacy Guarantees — Many people need privacy for safety before they will join an authentic or public conversation.

Safety First, Then Challenge — Make sure people know they are or will be safe, while then also giving them the challenges that make their involvement meaningful.

Sortition — Random selection (sortition) is a proven method for getting diversity, although some forms of diversity require special forms of sortition to engage them.

Spaces for Dialogue and Collaboration — To the extent adequate places and times are not provided or don’t work for people, they just won’t show up.

Universal Participation — The realization that everyone is already co-creating what’s happening helps us bring the right people into newly creative interactions and to avoid blaming some of them.

Whole System in the Conversation — In most cases you want to involve people with all the diverse pieces of the puzzle you are trying to address.



II Interaction

What kind of healthy interaction can help us generate wisdom and resourcefulness?

All Concerns Addressed — Any concerns we don’t seriously consider represent pieces of the picture we aren’t addressing, so the more concerns we address, the more thorough our problem-solving will be for all involved.

Circles and Cycles — Arranging group participants in a circle fosters peer relationships and shared focus. Cycles provide second chances and opportunities for review. Both of these can help generate collective wisdom and resourcefulness.

Civil Rights — Formalizing people’s rights to believe, speak and associate does not *guarantee* generative interactions, but if we don’t have those rights, we risk losing the capacity to create good things together.

Constraints on Concentrated Power — Domination shuts people up and mass manipulation distorts how they think and feel, neither of which enables “healthy interactions that generate wisdom and resourcefulness”!

Deliberation — If we’re going to think about something together, it really helps to do a thorough job of it.

Feeling Heard — When someone feels truly heard, their body-mind relaxes. They no longer have to push or back off. They can just be there and hear others, with profound implications for “healthy interaction”!

Generating Shared Orientation — We may or may not think we’re all on the same page, but it’s really useful to realize how profoundly we are kin, want the same things, and can come to see a bigger picture together.

Generative Interactions — Many group processes use dialogue, diversity, creativity, story, vision, art and even drama to call forth insights and capacities that the people involved never realized before.

Integrity and Authenticity — To the extent we all show up as who we really are and communicate what’s really going on, information, wisdom and energy can flow freely among us.

Metabolizing Polarization — There’s always incomplete truth on both sides — and more than two ways to look at any issue — so dissolve hard edges by mining and purifying the treasures available all over the map.

Nurturing Social Capital — *Bonding* social capital is how we are connected in our groups while *bridging* social capital is how well our different groups relate to each other — all of which help us interact creatively.

Power of Listening — It’s no use talking if no one’s listening — and it’s good to know the most productive and profound ways to listen.

Powerful Questions — These lead us to explore what matters — what most needs to be explored or what we’re most passionate about.

Proposals and Outcomes Emergent — Starting with a question or issue and using our exploratory powers to discover what we need to do can expand our thinking and creativity more than starting with a proposal.

Story — Important experiences, perspectives, and dreams flow most easily among us in the form of stories.

Transpartisan Inquiry — It is safer to talk with the enemy if we are assured we don’t have to give up our views and values, but just listen well and be civil and co-creative and see what happens.



III Big Picture

How else can we see a big enough, full enough picture?

Capacitance — If we are going to try to comprehend the whole picture, we’re going to run into a lot of things that don’t settle down or sit easily with each other. We’ll need to hold them all without jumping to premature conclusions.

Context Awareness — What’s all around, before, and after any situation are potent parts of the picture that we easily miss by focusing only on what’s up front and immediate.

Dancing Among Clarity, Inquiry, Mystery ... — This explores how our friendship with uncertainty can develop into a three-step dance of humble, productive learning.

Expanding Situational Curiosity — It helps to be aware that at any given time we don’t know everything relevant to the situation, so we can stay humble and keep expanding our explorations.

Expertise on Tap (Not on Top) — Experts have special knowledge vital to our success in furthering our values and aspirations — but that doesn’t mean *their* values and aspirations should have the final say.

Full Spectrum Information — If we want to see the big picture, we need to make an effort to gather diverse information from all facets of that picture.

Groundedness — Grasping the big essence of what’s happening involves being fully present and centered, keeping things real, and not getting distracted by things that aren’t actually true, important and vital.

Multi-Modal Intelligence — Head, heart, spirit, resonance, intuition — all these (and more) modes of comprehending what’s going on offer unique gifts to inform us and our efforts.

Systems Thinking — There are many ways we can understand and work with the many ways things are interconnected — and that’s a vital and oft-overlooked dimension of addressing any situation.

Taboo Awareness — If we can’t talk about it, it will hide from us and someday catch us unaware. So at least note the dynamics that keep us from looking and speaking and, where advisable, transcend them.

Tackling Cognitive Limitations — We have created a world that we didn’t evolve to understand, so we have blind spots galore and we’d be wise to take them into account and use appropriate methods to counter them.

Universal Intelligence — We can step into really big-picture perspectives that are available from nature, evolution, spirituality, and other realms that embrace all of life.

Wise Use of Uncertainty — Becoming too certain is a dangerous dead end, so we’d be wise to become friends with uncertainty to see what else it can teach us about the fullness of what we’re dealing with.



IV Realizing Potential

How else can we tap the wisdom and energies latent in life’s dynamics?

Bringing Understanding to Life — To collectively tap the gifts of life, we need clear, animated understandings and inquiries that can be readily shared and applied.

Commons and Commoning — Start with understanding, expanding and supporting that which we all share, so it can support us.

Consulting and Abiding by Willingness — If we respect and nurture people’s natural readiness to contribute, they will.

Fullness of Choice — The more informed and creative the act of choosing can be made, the more natural, motivating and appropriate the choices will be.

Grounding in Fundamental Needs — To the extent we together explore and meet the deep universal needs of each other and nature, we will be cared for in return.

Healthy Polarity Dynamics — Life is filled with seeming opposites that, on closer examination, depend on each other — and in that interdependence we can find vast wisdom and energy we would otherwise waste fighting.

Life-Enhancing Enoughness — Don’t require of life more than it has to give — and discover, liberate and enjoy the vast, profound varieties of abundance life readily provides.

Restorative Justice — Blame and punishment cement over the dynamic complexity of harmful acts, but these harmful acts can be raised into the

service of life by nurturing deeper truth and relationship among all parties.

Rich Feedback Dynamics — Healthy systems have ways to tell themselves what’s needed to sustain or evolve — dynamics we can learn from, join, or use.

Synergy Between Part and Whole — Anything alive has parts that work together to create something greater that supports them — and therein lie keys to coherent aliveness.

Using Diversity and Disturbance Creatively — Nature does this really well and to the extent we, too, can do it together consciously, we’ll gain access to all the wisdom and energies we need.



V Caring

How can we care in big enough ways?

Appreciative Thinking — Deep understanding and gratitude can not only inform our caring but also directly enhance whatever or whoever we appreciate.

Big Empathy — There are ways to expand our empathy through space and time and the complex, obscure linkages of systemic influence.

Caring into Quality — We can do well — with competence and love — whatever it is we are doing, and be proud of it as a service to life.

Cooperative Ownership as Stewardship — Resources and enterprises are not only for use and profit — especially by special interests — but are primarily for sharing and sustaining by and for us all.

Deep Time Perspective—In our work today we need to be aware of history, evolution, trends and future generations.

Fair Sharing of Costs and Benefits—Often caring starts with noticing and addressing who benefits and who suffers from the ways things are set up.

Nature First—There is probably nothing more fundamental than caring about and for the Earth and natural systems upon which we depend totally.

Possibility Thinking—Beyond any current complexities, constraints, or assumptions, we can always consider what is possible right now that could enhance life.

Sacredness—Our most potent caring grounds us in the intrinsic value of things beyond their obvious connections to our lives—including the value things have for others.

Visionary Attractors—We can be drawn into greater, better possibilities by clear examples and visions that grab our imaginations.

Whole Healing—Moving into greater wholeness—"healing"—ideally involves the lives, behaviors and conditions of individuals, groups, and whole societies and cultures.

Working With Feelings—We can engage with feelings in ways that tap the immense power of natural caring—in and for ourselves, each other and life.



VI Action

How can we get things done in wholesome ways?

Connecting Nodes of Life Energy—We can network different people's energies into potent collaborative webs of intention and action.

Consent—We can create space for initiatives by those directly engaged, with due regard to dissent that indicates something needs to be addressed.

Critical Thinking—Anything we can do to notice what is or isn't working—and why—can help us accomplish what's needed.

Exuberance—Vitality and enjoyment attract and empower engagement by everyone.

Glocal Subsidiarity—Ideally decisions are made close to where the action is, but also in light of needs and dynamics present at larger and smaller scales.

Healthy Competition/Cooperation Dynamics—Both modes have positive and negative manifestations, so let's avoid the downsides and synergize the upsides.

Holistic Leadership and Governance Dynamics—There are many ways to call forth and engage the vital energy of whole living systems to be productive while sustaining, healing, and evolving themselves.

Inclusive Stakeholder Governance—If the diverse players already involved in an issue domain all work together, what needs to be handled will be handled well.

Integral Political Will—When the whole system wants something done, it gets done—so we can help that happen.

Multi-Modal Power—There are so many sources of power available to us—influence and control, collaboration, mutual aid and stimulation, presence and witnessing... We just need to integrate and apply them wisely.

Optimizing Freedoms and Constraints—Pursuing goals can be viewed as games shaped by what players can and cannot do, with fair opportunity for all to effectively play the games that matter to them and the whole.

Partnership Culture—We can make collaboration cool, enjoyable, potent, skilled, desirable, expected, habitual...

Prudent Use of Power-Over—Sure, we sometimes have to manage and control things, but we can often use other approaches for even better results.

Range of Tolerance—The flexible range of our tolerance can guide our willingness to empower others to work towards shared goals and keep us from getting bogged down seeking elusive agreement and perfection

Realizing Essential Aspirations—People need and want things—different things and similar things—and such motivators can generate power to get things done together.

Self-Organization Fostered—So much of what groups and lives need to meet their challenges already exists in and among them, to flourish under conditions we can help realize.

Well-Utilized Life Energy—The more we can tap into and empower the needs, dreams and aptitudes people already have, the less outside energy and management we'll need to apply and the better our results will be.

Working the Field—Fields simultaneously influence everything in them, so working with field dynamics can make all the nonlinear difference in the world.



VII Sustainability

How can we sustain our wise activities over time?

Appropriate Technology—Technology can enhance or imperil our ability to keep going and flourishing, so discern and spread old and new approaches that support wholesome life, while restraining dangerous forms.

Collective Wise Oversight of Governance—Let's set things up so that many citizens and stakeholders can competently observe all forms and aspects of governance at all levels to help avoid disasters and enhance wisdom.

Creative Experimentation—Initiating, evaluating and sharing new possibilities that are grounded in new evidence can help us creatively meet unprecedented challenges and opportunities.

Full Cost Accounting—Making sure we cover all environmental, social, infrastructure and other costs now (instead of "externalizing" them onto others, nature or the future) helps us avoid tragedy when the bill finally comes due.

Iteration—Periodic activities that involve review of results so far and support subsequent adjustments enable adaptation and consequent thrival.

Prudent Progress—The next step off the edge of a cliff is not progress, so keep alert to our location, direction and momentum as we move ahead.

Quality of Life Indicators—The more usefully we track how good our lives actually are, the more likely we'll be able to make them better.

Regenerativity—Exploitation, degradation and denial are obviously not as sustainable as dynamics that heal, renew, evolve and build resilience.

Wholesome Life Learning—We can keep learning as we go, in ways that will help us become ever more able to take the wholeness of life into account.

Alphabetical list of all the patterns

- All Concerns Addressed
- Appreciative Thinking
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- Capacitance
- Caring into Quality
- Circles and Cycles
- Citizen-Stakeholder Integration
- Civil Rights
- Collective Distributed Intelligence
- Collective Wise Oversight of Governance
- Commons and Commoning
- Complex Identity
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- Deep Time Perspective
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- Enough Time
- Equity
- Expanding Situational Curiosity
- Expertise on Tap (Not on Top)
- Exuberance
- Fair Sharing of Costs and Benefits
- Feeling Heard
- Felt Agency
- Full Cost Accounting
- Full Spectrum Information
- Fullness of Choice
- Generating Shared Orientation
- Generative Interactions
- Glocal Subsidiarity
- Groundedness
- Grounding in Fundamental Needs
- Healthy Competition / Cooperation Dynamics
- Healthy Polarity Dynamics
- Holistic Leadership and Governance Dynamics
- Inclusive Stakeholder Governance
- Integral Political Will
- Integrity and Authenticity
- Iteration
- Life-Enhancing Enoughness
- Metabolizing Polarization
- Microcosms and Populations
- Multi-Media Engagement
- Multi-Modal Intelligence
- Multi-Modal Power
- Multiple Perspective View
- Nature First
- Nurturing Social Capital
- Optimizing Freedoms and Constraints
- Out of Many, One
- Partnership Culture
- Possibility Thinking
- Power of Listening
- Powerful Questions
- Privacy Guarantees
- Proposals and Outcomes Emergent
- Prudent Progress
- Prudent Use of Power Over
- Quality of Life Indicators
- Range of Tolerance
- Realizing Essential Aspirations
- Regenerativity
- Restorative Justice
- Rich Feedback Dynamics
- Sacredness
- Safety First, Then Challenge
- Self-Organization Fostered
- Sortition
- Spaces for Dialogue and Collaboration
- Story
- Synergy Between Part and Whole
- Systems Thinking
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