THE CIRCLES
INITIATIVE

The Circles Initiative

Collective Intelligence for Collective Challenges

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Our Mission

The complexity of today's problems has outpaced that which solitary efforts can handle. This is why, at the Circles Initiative, we believe that the future hinges on **collective intelligence**.

Without effective coordination, critical problems fester unsolved, and trust in the capability of 'experts' and public institutions erodes. Consequently, today's challenges demand powerful forums where those with lived, firsthand knowledge of problems can recognise their interconnectedness and collaborate across conventional boundaries, instead of retreating further into isolation and narrow specialisation.

We gather the knowledge and insight too often left fragmented across institutions and routines to transform latent potential into living, active solutions. While the great academies and universities of the past pioneered knowledge creation in their time, our current age requires new convening formats. The Circles Initiative builds these essential forums where meaningful connections between diverse perspectives are translated into solutions to our shared challenges.
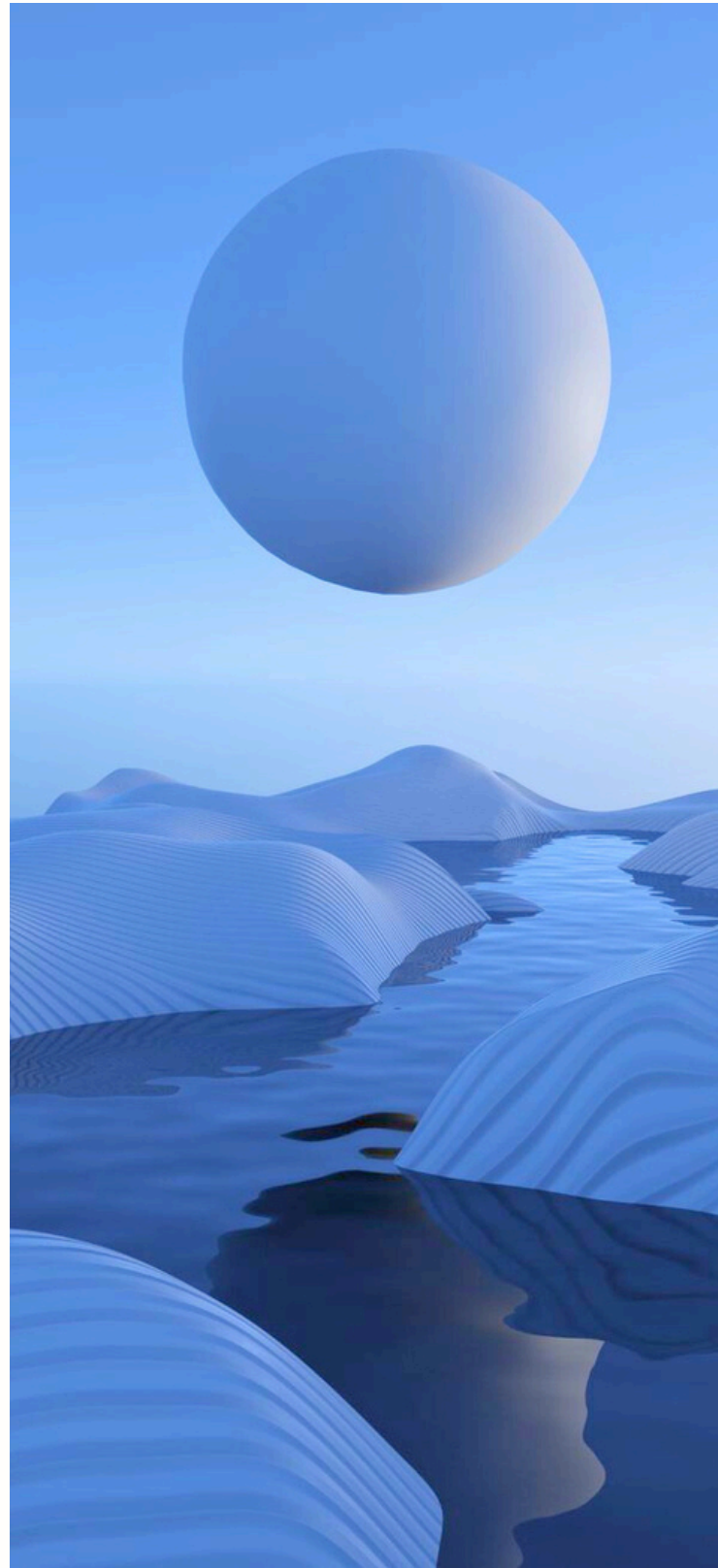
The Challenge

Our world grapples with complexity at an unprecedented scale. From climate change to healthcare access, from rapid technological shifts to deepening social inequities, today's greatest challenges are systems-level—far beyond the reach of any one group or institution acting alone. These problems require multiple perspectives, disciplines, and approaches coming together.

Yet complexity is only one part of the challenge. The tempo of change outstrips structures built for slower times. Traditional collaborative frameworks, academic research, and bureaucratic institutions struggle to match the accelerating evolution of these challenges. By the time coordination is achieved, the landscape has already shifted.

And with innovation racing ahead, the best research has moved out of public institutions into private hands. While this shift brings efficiency, it also means that systems-level problems are frequently neglected. Institutions chase personal incentives and objectives, leaving broader societal issues without a natural home.

The Human-Capital Paradox

Across the UK and Europe, we urgently need ways to mobilize and tap into the tacit knowledge scattered across organizations—experts and practitioners who know the complexities of today's challenges because they live them firsthand. Contrary to its conventional framing, the problem isn't a shortage of human capital. We already have world-class institutions like Oxford and Cambridge, groundbreaking AI companies such as DeepMind, cutting-edge research facilities, the City of London's financial expertise, thriving tech hubs, and exceptional transport links connecting these centers of excellence.

The bottleneck is collective intelligence. Every day, millions of brilliant minds pass each other in London, Cambridge, Berlin, and Paris. Notwithstanding, unless someone crafts the structure necessary to draw them together, they just remain ships in the night. Our challenge is to transform these chance encounters into meaningful collaboration. The real opportunity lies here: convening diverse expertise around the right problems, turning potential into momentum, and giving collaboration a shared purpose and a clear path forward. And there is tremendous hope in this distinction; creating the missing infrastructure is far easier than creating smart human beings!

This is the gap the Circles Initiative fills—building the forum for collective intelligence, before complexity outpaces our ability to respond.

A Proven Model: Historical Precedents

Throughout history, we see remarkable examples of what becomes possible when the right people are convened around key problems. When diverse experts across sectors collaborate on shared challenges, innovative solutions emerge that no single institution could develop alone.

Time and again, history demonstrates that unlocking collective intelligence yields tangible results. The Green Revolution that saved millions from starvation did not arise from a single laboratory or government program, but from forums like CGIAR (Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research) that brought agricultural scientists together with economists, policymakers, and farmers. By bridging the gap between theoretical research and practical application, they reshaped global food security.

The EPOD (part of Harvard's Kennedy School) convenes researchers and policymakers to design and test policy solutions. They outlined and developed vaccination programs in India, increasing child vaccination by 22%.

The CGIAR global partnership involves farmers, NGOs, the public and private sector, to collaborate on research to alleviate food security. They pioneered the 'Green Revolution', preventing famine in South Asia in the 1970s.

We see similar patterns across domains and eras. When semiconductor technology needed coordinated advancement across an entire industry, the IRDS (International Roadmap for Devices and Systems) provided the collaborative framework that maintained the extraordinary pace of computing innovation. When complex policy challenges required both academic rigor and practical application, EPOD's (Evidence for Policy Design) model of connecting researchers directly with policymakers generated evidence-based solutions that actually worked in the real world.

What these precedents share is their ability to break down traditional barriers between institutions, disciplines, and sectors. They created environments organized not around abstract academic fields, but around concrete problems. They emphasized implementation over theory, and embraced continuous learning as solutions evolved.

The IRDS, developed by the IEEE, was an interdisciplinary group that built a set of predictions about developments in electronic devices and systems. They were crucial in chip scaling, and standardising chip architectures.

The Circles Initiative builds on this proven historical pattern while adapting it for the complexity and pace of today's world. History shows that when we create the right forums for collective intelligence, bringing together people who might otherwise remain in their separate spheres, extraordinary outcomes move from the realm of possibility to the realm of expectation..

Our Solution: The Circles Methodology

We've designed a practical, lean method that allows people to convene seamlessly around urgent challenges. Our approach emphasizes sharp problem definition, strategic participant curation, and a structured yet flexible model of collaboration.

Defining the Problem

Every Circle begins with a clear, action-driven problem statement framed as a "What..." question. This ensures the focus remains practical rather than theoretical. For instance, we ask: "What must we do to make renewable energy financially viable at scale?" rather than "The theoretical implications of renewable energy economics."

Problems are defined through two pathways:

- Pre-Circle Consultation: Working directly with relevant institutions and stakeholders to articulate the challenge, identify its key dimensions, establish boundaries, and map available resources.

- Chair-Led Definition: Collaborating with a Circle Chair, a reputable in-field expert, who guides problem formulation, helps curate appropriate participants, defines scope, and outlines success criteria.

Our team of researchers and analysts rigorously assess each problem to ensure relevance, urgency, and demand for cross-sector collaboration.

Bringing Together the Right People

Each Circle consists of twelve hand-selected participants, drawn from four key sectors, every participant must have skin in the game and real-world experience with the challenge at hand. Our curation team works nationally, leveraging institutional partnerships and deep research to recruit the most relevant voices.

Public Sector: Policy makers, regulators, and government representatives

Innovation Sector: Researchers, scientists, and entrepreneurs working at the cutting edge

Frontliners: Those with ground-level experience implementing solutions

Private Sector: Business leaders and industry experts

The Three Cs Framework

Once assembled, we move participants through our structured Three Cs Framework:

Contextualisation
Participants share firsthand experiences of the problem from their sector's perspective, establishing a shared set of assumptions grounded in reality. This ensures everyone understands the true nature of the challenge from multiple angles.

Conceptualisation
The group identifies the systemic constraints preventing the problem from being solved. With all components of the system represented in the room, participants uncover barriers that might remain invisible to any single sector working alone.

Codification
The Circle establishes specific actions to address identified constraints and assigns them to participants. This creates a practical roadmap with clear ownership and accountability.

By the end of the process, we have more than ideas—we have a concrete plan for action, with tasks distributed among participants who have both the expertise and institutional backing to implement solutions.
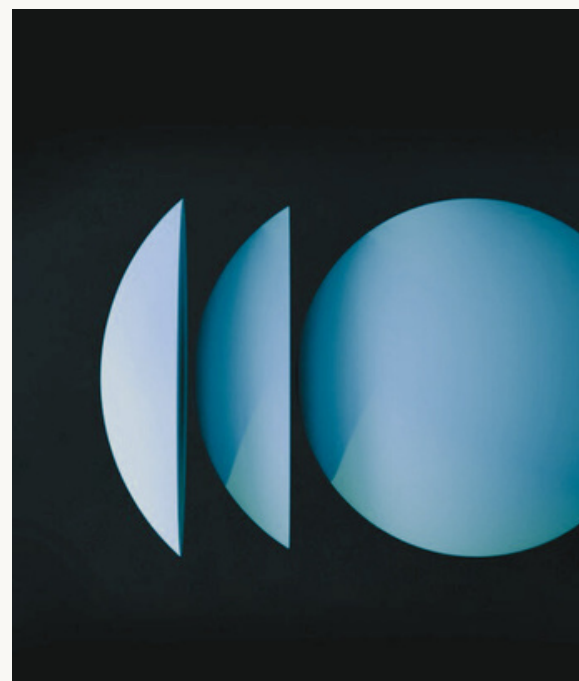
Our Technology

We have partnered with Dialoto AI, a conversational mapping software platform, to integrate cutting-edge technology that makes the Circle process as seamless, equitable, and productive as possible.

Conversation Mapping in Real Time

Dialoto's AI dynamically visualises discussions as they unfold, creating a visible, structured map of thought in real time. As participants engage, the AI projects the evolving conversation onto shared screens, allowing everyone to track the logical flow of ideas as they emerge. This reinforces focus, and surfaces new insights, ensuring that contributions stay anchored to the specific problem being addressed.

The AI also actively monitors participation levels, helping ensure balanced contributions across all sectors represented. We demonstrate collective intelligence taking shape, live in the moment!

AI as the 13th Participant

In every Circle, Dialoto's AI operates as an invisible but indispensable "13th participant," quietly levelling the playing field and enhancing the collaborative process. It answers factual questions on demand, providing evidence, references and context, ensuring that all participants share the same access to critical baseline information. By eliminating knowledge gaps, it streamlines the informational landscape across sectors and expertise areas, enabling every voice to engage from a common foundation.

It creates a space where everyone, regardless of background, feels prepared, confident, and equipped to contribute meaningfully to the Circle's work.
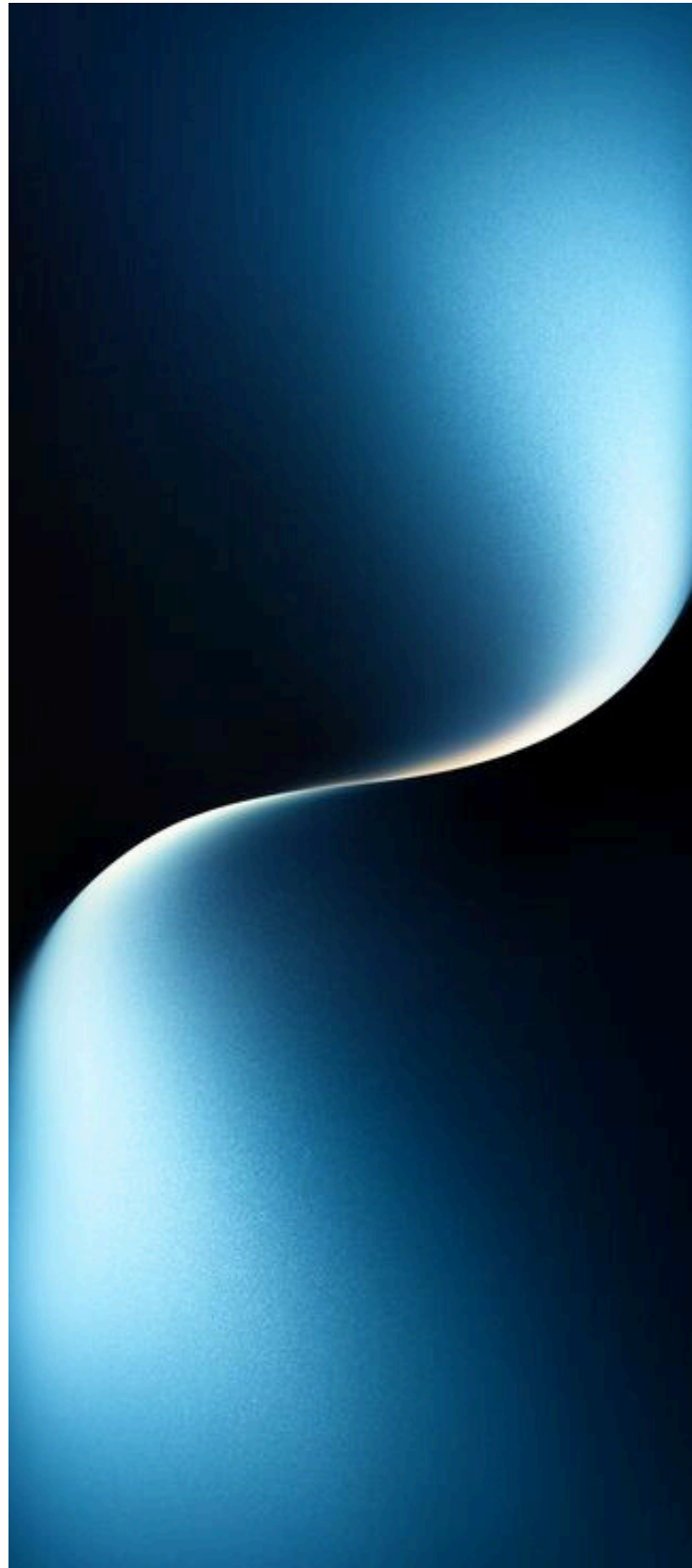
Thoughtfully Designed Environment

At the Circles Initiative, we have deliberately crafted the physical space and technical setup to support and amplify our collaborative methodology.

At the core of the setup is an advanced system of dual-function audio devices, which serve as both microphones and speakers. Each device is omnidirectional, ensuring clear, fluid conversation among all participants.

Seating arrangements are equally strategic: three tables of four participants, each from one of the four sectors involved in the discussion. Thus, each table is curated to include cross-sector representation, intentionally mixing perspectives from innovation, public policy, private enterprise, and frontline practice.

This careful distribution ensures that diversity of thought is not left to chance, but embedded into the design of every discussion. positioned to foster intimacy without sacrificing connection to the broader group.

The spatial layout itself is flexible, engineered to enable both focused small group collaboration and fluid transition to full Circle-wide discussions. Every aspect of our technology, spatial design, and hardware serves a single goal: to create an environment where collective intelligence can flourish naturally, meaningfully, and efficiently.

From Roadmap to Reality: Post-Circle Implementation

More than just a discussion forum, the Circles Initiative functions as a vehicle for tangible action and real-world implementation. Our partnership with Telos House gives us access to a strategic network, committed to action the roadmaps we develop. As such, we've designed our post-Circle process to make the translation from insight to concrete outcomes as easy as possible.

The "Full Circle" Report

Our comprehensive report documents the entire Circle process and outcomes:
- Complete visualization of the dialectical map showing how the conversation evolved
- Analysis of cross-sector perspectives and their contribution to the solution space
- Clear breakdown of actionable solutions with assigned responsibilities
- Timeline for implementation with specific milestones
- Resource requirements and institutional commitments

Network Mobilization

We activate the extensive Telos House network to support implementation:
- Connect Circle participants with additional resources and expertise
- Broker new partnerships needed for specific actionables
- Identify funding pathways for initiatives requiring financial support
- Facilitate institutional backing for policy recommendations

## Oversight from "Advisory Circles"

For each circle, we will form a dedicated Advisory Circle—a steering committee of distinguished individuals from the wider Telos Network—providing:

- Strategic guidance on implementation
- Assistance in overcoming institutional barriers
- Connections to additional stakeholders when needed
- Independent assessment of progress and impact
- Recommendations for course corrections when necessary

Community Accountability

We maintain momentum through various accountability mechanisms:
- Fortnightly or monthly progress updates shared with the entire Telos House community
- Regular check-ins with Circle participants regarding their assigned actions
- Public tracking of implementation milestones
- Celebration of successes and transparent discussion of challenges
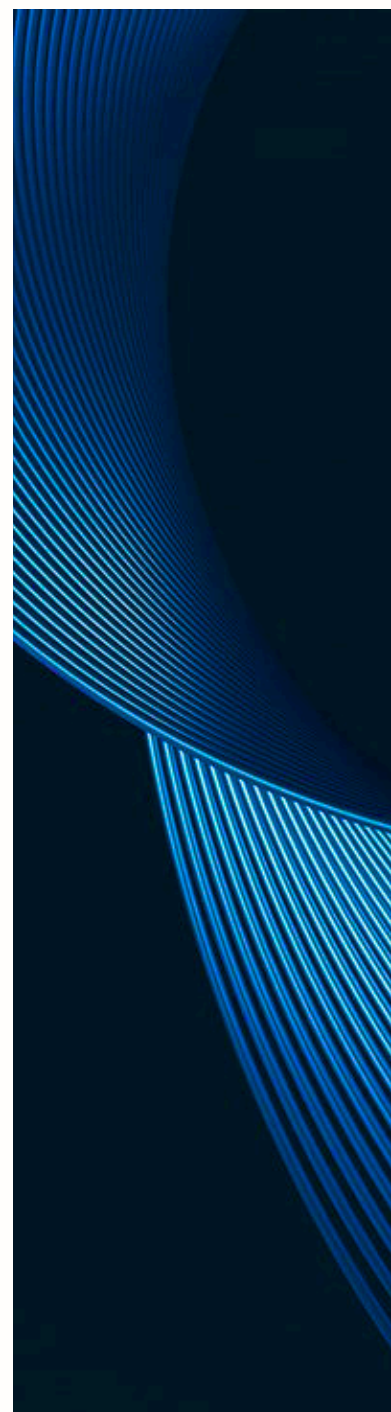
Closing Statement

We believe that addressing our most complex challenges requires not just brilliant individuals, but the right forums to bring them together in ways that unlock their collective intelligence. This journey is not one we can undertake alone. Creating meaningful change at a systems level requires a community of committed individuals and institutions willing to collaborate across traditional boundaries. Every participant, supporter, and partner becomes an essential part of this collective endeavor.
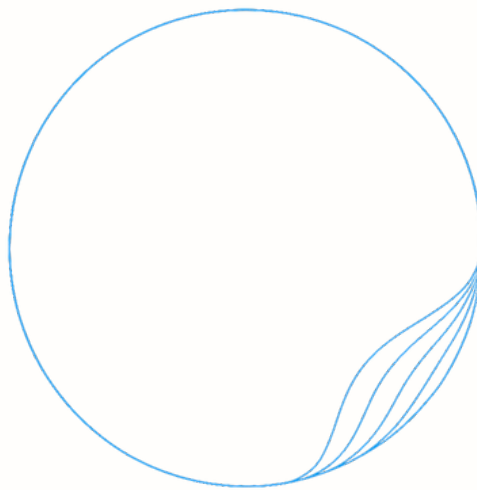
We're grateful to everyone who shares our belief that by bringing together the right minds around the right problems, we can solve challenges that otherwise remain intractable. Your interest and engagement help make this vision possible. If you'd like to learn more about our work or explore how the Circles methodology might address a challenge relevant to your organization or sector, we welcome your outreach.

Together, we can harness our collective intelligence to create the solutions our future demands.

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