

The Psychology of the Path Progression in the Harmony Problem Solving Labyrinth

In the Harmony Problem Solving Labyrinth pattern, participants enter the paths simultaneously, as equals. One does not enter before the other, which might suggest an imbalance of power or importance.

In the opposite entrance version, the participants enter facing each other. There is no choice of right or left paths, so there is no hidden symbolism of right and wrong.

The action spaces are strategically located at the midway point of each path. Standing at that location, participants turn to face each other and speak across the neutral center, that place where common ground is identified. This occurs every time an action step is taken, keeping the awareness of common ground always central.

Step One – State the Problem. As the participants progress through the pathway to the first action station, they initially enter the middle path, the middle point, a balanced place in the pattern to begin the process by stating the problem.

As participants move from the first action step to the second, they turn outward, away from each other. This offers an inward focus, focusing not on the other person, but what they have heard and are processing internally.

Step Two – State Your Feelings. The second action space is on a path that finds the participants further part from each other than the first, but still facing one another directly across the neutral center. Here, as they each describe how they are feeling about the problem, they must listen a bit harder as the distance of separation has increased.

In moving from the second action space toward the third, the participants again turn outward and focus inward to process what they have heard and prepare for the third action. They are also moving along the longest pathway, offering maximum time to prepare for the next, important action step.

Step Three – State the Other Person’s Feelings. On the third action space, participants are the furthest apart. This makes it difficult to mumble or speak softly. The participants must use a strong voice to describe in their own words what they heard in action step two – how the other person is feeling.

As the participants move to action space four they are now turning inward, toward one another. Here the walking pattern changes from outward directional turns to inward. Their focus meets across the neutral center as they turn and briefly walk directly toward each other before stepping onto the path that holds the fourth action.

On the side-by-side version of the labyrinth pattern, the participants meet and briefly walk side-by-side before stepping onto the path that holds the fourth action. A physical coming together that symbolizes movement from individual voices to shared dialog.

Step Four – Brainstorm Ideas. The fourth action path is much closer to the center than the previous three and is, therefore, more conducive to conversation without straining to hear, without requiring loud, strong voices to be heard. Action four is collaborative. Here participants brainstorm ideas. The

location of this space suggests they are getting closer to the goal, moving closer to a solution, coming together.

Step Five – Choose the Best. Once all ideas are offered in action step four, the participants move to action space five. By doing so, they follow the path as it turns again toward the center, toward each other. This action space is the closest to the neutral center. It is on the rim of the center. It is also the closest the participants have physically been during this process. This location suggests a movement to collaboration and consensus. It requires the least amount of voice projection and offers the greatest amount of intimacy of all the action spaces to this point. While the neutral center still separates the participants, this closeness allows an ease and flow of conversation about the various possibilities offered in action step four, weighing the pros and cons, and mutually deciding on the best solution.

As participants are ready to move into the center, the steps to reach the center are fewer. The entrance to the center is near and easily observed, suggesting a lack of difficulty to get there. Once again the participants turn inward, toward one another as the path leads into the center.

On the side-by-side version of the labyrinth pattern, the participant enter the center by meeting first and walking alongside on another into the shared center space.

On the opposite entrance version of the labyrinth pattern, the participants turn to face each other and walk toward one another as they enter the center – the final steps inward, coming together.

The center point is intentionally open, without barriers, without choices. The participants are free to be side-by-side as equals with nothing separating them. They choose how to seal the agreement, handshake or hugs or writing the agreement with chalk on the ground or on a piece of paper.

The paths out from the center is a time for integration. Participants can choose to walk out the same path they used to come in, to walk out the other person's path, to walk together or separately.

Other ideas –

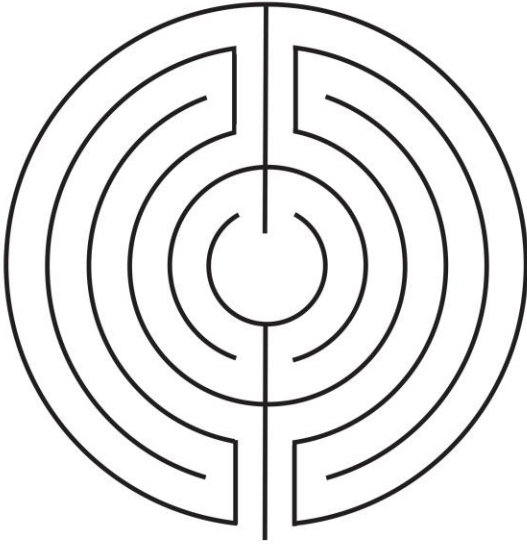
Participants may be asked to carry a heart or a heart shaped paper or stone might be placed in the middle – to remind and encourage speaking and listening from the heart.

The participants might carry a stone that represents the problem, and be willing to set that stone down at a point when they are ready to let it go of this burden– or designate the placement of the stones at the center after the agreement is reached.

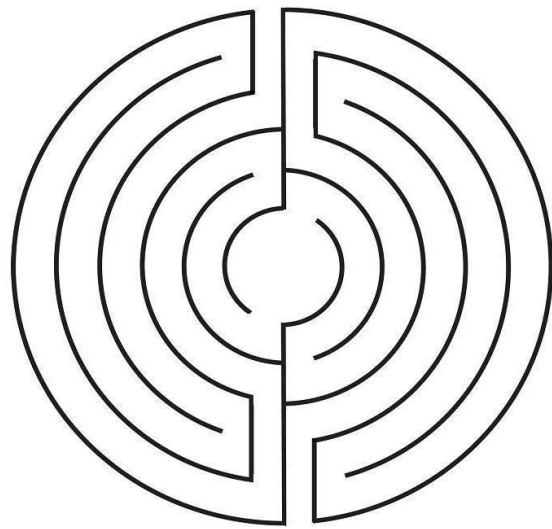
As they do the exit paths, participant may be invited to dance or move in a way that represents how they are feeling about the agreed solution.

Participants may choose to engage in a playful process of mirroring each other's movements as they walk out on opposite paths. Silliness might be encouraged. This can have the effect of releasing any built-up tension and encourage joy and laughter and sharing.

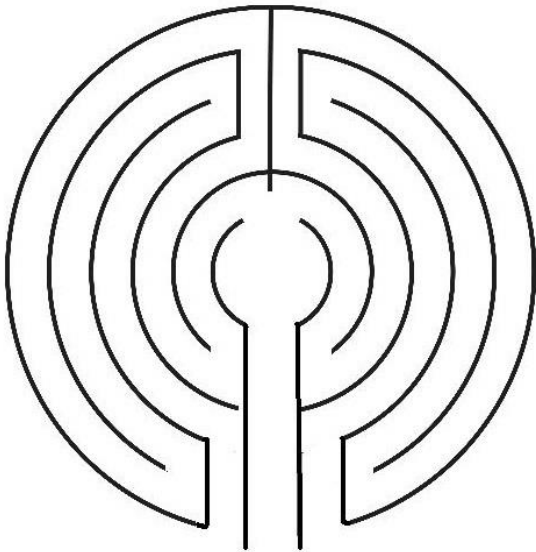
HARMONY DESIGN VARIATIONS



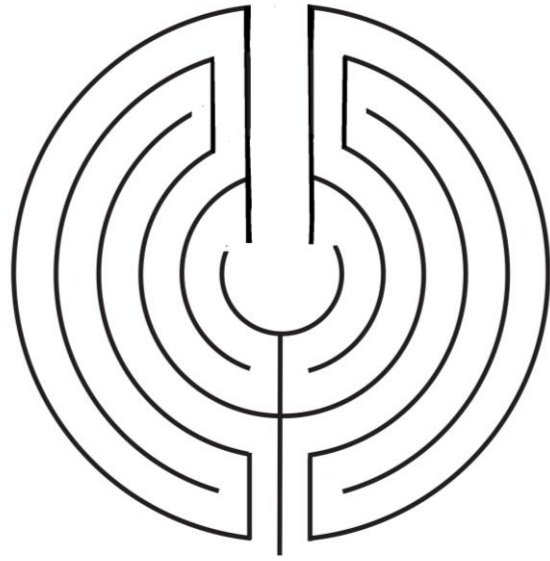
Original side-by-side entrance



Opposite entrance



Side-by-side entrance with shared exit



Side-by-side entrance with opposite shared exit