

# Divergence and Convergence

In entering into an inquiry or multi stakeholder conversation we operate with three different phases in the process – divergent, emergent and convergent. Each of these phases is different, and it is important for a host to know where we are in the process – and what is needed in each phase.

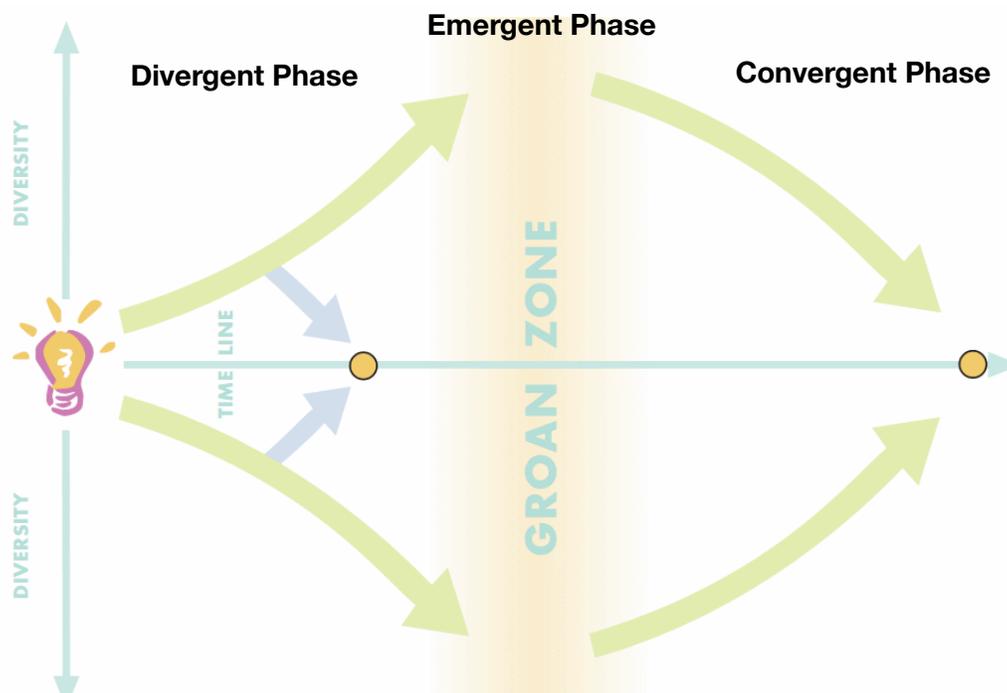
The “breath’ of divergence and convergence, of breathing in and breathing out is at the heart of our process design. Every process goes to a few or more of these ‘breathing’ phases.

In the **divergent phase**, there is as yet no clear goal. This is a “goal-seeking” phase where a clear shared purpose gives the collective direction. Another driver in this phase is asking the right questions.

If you close the divergent phase too soon, the level of newness or innovation will be less. Ideally a group will stay in inquiry in the divergent phase until a new shared and agreed solution or goal is seen by everyone.

Divergent thinking typically generates alternatives, has free-for-all open discussion, gathers diverse points of view and unpacks the problem.

The divergent phase is non-linear and needs “chaos time”. It is process-oriented and needs prolonged decision time.



The **convergent phase** is goal-oriented and focused, linear, structured and usually subject to time constraints. It is focused on getting results and may require quick decisions.

Convergent thinking means evaluating alternatives, summarising key points, sorting ideas into categories and arriving at general conclusions.

The **emergent phase**, between the divergent and convergent, is fondly known as the ‘**groan zone**’ – It is the phase where different ideas and needs are integrated. It may require us to stretch our own understanding to hold and include other points of view. We call it the groan zone because it may feel messy - an uncomfortable stretch - but it is also the phase where the new solution emerges.

Divergent Thinking	Convergent Thinking
Generating alternatives	Evaluating alternatives
Free-for-all open discussion	Summarizing key points
Gathering diverse points of view	Sorting ideas into categories
Unpacking the logic of a problem	Arriving at general conclusions

*It is one of the secrets of  
the world. We all have the  
key to one another's locks.  
But until we start to talk,  
we don't know it.*

**Michael Silverblatt**