ART OF HOSTING

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

Welcome...
To the Art of Hosting

...a training and practice retreat for all who aspire aspire to lead by engaging in interactive ways with groups and teams.

Welcome leaders - those who want to help - trainers, academics, consultants, politicians, managers, social workers, entrepreneurs, social innovators, youth workers, community builders, hosts.

AoPL has been offered in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and North and South America.

We are a growing community of practitioners, supporting each other to further our ability as practitioners/hosts in co-creative learning and problem-solving.

About this Workbook
This workbook is your personal reference journal with the purpose of strengthening your learning by offering the key materials of this training as well as a place for you to take notes to help you remember, focus and deepen your understanding and practice.

It shares the basic assumptions and worldviews underpinning the Art of Participatory Leadership practice.

It includes several methodologies and practices that the community of practitioners has found simple and helpful. They are for you to use, improve, and share.

It provides you with resources - books, links, and information and where to go next – in your learning and/or reading.

Table of Contents
what you'll find inside...

What is the Art of Hosting?
AoH

The Art of Hosting is a response to a world that is becoming increasingly complex and fragmented, where true solutions and innovations lie not in one leader or one viewpoint, but in the bigger picture of our collective intelligence.

The Art of Hosting is a response at a time when institutions and democracies are failing to address the increasing chaos in our world. It is a testing ground for those seeking to find new, effective and healthy patterns for organizing, innovating and interacting, to create new forms that serve us better.

The Art of Hosting is a practice ground for all who aspire to bring out the best in others. It is based on the assumption and experience that human beings have an enormous untapped wealth and resilience.

The leadership approach called the Art of Hosting (AoH) activates the collective intelligence in a group to find new solutions to the increasing challenges of the world of work today.

Like other organizations and as leaders we need to be more flexible and creative in the context of accelerating changes, increased complexity, and challenging economic realities. The traditional command-and-control type of leadership alone is no longer appropriate. In the current climate, tapping into the potential held in the organization is crucial. Inviting everyone to participate with their diverse perspectives is the key to releasing this potential.

AoH practice is based on convening strategic dialogue and conversations as drivers for development and change. This form of leadership is already used with successful results in multiple sectors (government, NGOs, and private settings) particularly in the following areas:

- Strategic organizational development
- Facilitating large-scale conversations around strategic questions
- Stake holder involvement

'A' Definition

The AoH is...
An emerging group of methodologies for facilitating conversation in groups of all sizes, supported by principles that help maximize collective intelligence, integrate and utilize diversity and minimize/transform conflict. Processes facilitated in this way tend to result in collective clarity and wise action - sustainable, workable solutions to the most complex problems. The approach ensures that stake holders buy into the process (because they participate in the design and the process is by definition transparent) and make ongoing feedback, learning and course correction a natural and efficient part of life

And Art of Hosting is much more than this.

It is a Practice, like mediation, Tai Chi or mindfulness is a practice. We see it as a Four Fold Practice.

It is an Invitation to live and work in the space between chaos and order, the Chaordic Path.

It is a Fellowship, which is more than a community. It is a web of practitioners and not an organization.

What is Art of Hosting?
A Few Assumptions

New Solutions are Needed

The Art of Hosting is built on the assumption and experience that we need to find new solutions for the common good, whether in corporations, government, education, non-profits, social movements, communities, or families. These solutions are more comprehensive and more readily found and owned if they are co-created by the between us. The time is now.

New Solutions Grow Between Chaos and Order

If we want to innovate we have to be willing to let go of what we know and step into not knowing. In nature all innovation happens at the edge of chaos, or in the space between chaos and order (the chaordic path). It is in the chaordic space that new connections are created and new possibilities emerge. - The way to any major change or transformation will go through chaos into new order.

Conversation Matters

It is common sense to bring more people together in conversation. It is the way we have done it in generations past, gathering round fires and sitting in circles. It is the way we occasionally taste now, building core relationships that invite real collaboration.

> **"Instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all."**
> **Pericles**

Meaningful Conversation can Lead to Wise Action

Human beings that are involved and invited to work together take ownership and responsibility when ideas and solutions must be put into action. Conversations that surface a shared clarity on issues of importance foster ownership and responsibility when ideas and solutions must be put into action. – Actions that come out of collective clarity are both wise and sustainable.

Paradoxes at Work

In hosting strategic and meaningful conversations we operate in a world that is not black or white – but rather full spectrum. We need to be able to operate in and hold paradoxes such as:
• Action and Reflection
• Content and Process
• Leading and Following
• Hierarchy and Community
• Warrior and Midwife

Purpose of This Art of Hosting

- To learn and explore personal practices of authentic leadership, engagement, and reflection

- To learn and explore methodologies to engage yourself and others in making change in our communities - including world cafe, open space, circle, appreciative inquiry, and harvesting

- To connect with others to create and sustain practices that support meaningful conversations that create change

- To respond to a call from our community, which is already hosting meaningful conversations in all sectors so we can continue to build our depth and ability to make change in our communities

Participants in this Art of Hosting will…

Learn valuable approaches and tools for engaging stakeholders in meaningful conversations

Develop a shared understanding of each other's work and opportunities for future and strategic collaborations

Explore and gain clarity on how to address issues at the at the center of day-to-day decisions and practices in our community

Explore and identify new strategies and approaches for furthering their work in our community and/or systems

Multiple Levels of Focus

AoH invites us to operate at four interconnected levels at once. The learning at each of these levels informs and is present in the subsequent levels, so that a natural hierarchy results. These four levels operate as characteristics of a whole and not as a linear path, but rather as characteristics of work.

Individual
- To continue to connect to our passion and reason for choosing a different way of leading in our communities
- To strengthen individual courage to lead as hosts

Team
- To train on the competencies of collective reflection and wise action
- To practice co-creating, co-deciding and co-hosting in order to host strategic meetings, focus groups, and community conversations

Community/Organization/Etc.
- To experience working in unity with other leaders
- To experience new organizational forms and work of co-creating relationships that serve the deeper needs and patterns in our community and world

Global
- To understand the bigger context that we are always part of
- To benefit from knowledge and experience of a global or "trans-local" network of practitioners and learners in this field

We have three days together to deepen a practice of being present, focusing on questions that matter, listening to each other and to what we create together, harvesting, and choosing wise action. It is our opportunity to be in the practice of thoughtfully doing the work that needs to be done in our community.

Workshop Content
Overview

This retreat is designed to provide participants with an introduction of the approach described above. A good balance between in-depth teaching sessions on the key elements of the approach and practice sessions modeled by the facilitators first and then hosted by the participants themselves is key to the learning strategy of this workshop. Below is a structured overview of the items, which will be presented, taught, and experienced and practiced by the participants during the retreat.

Two Complimentary World Views How am I making sense of the world around me?	Organizations as Adaptive Systems	Organizations as Machines

Mental Models Patterns or metaphors that help us to understand and describe how we see the world	Working with Vision and Purpose	Divergence/Convergence
	Chaordic Path	Organizing Patterns
	U-Process	

Methodologies & Practices Those practices that manifest our worldview in how we work and act together and through which our world view can be experienced	Practicing Dialogue	4-Fold Practice
	Powerful Questions	Circle
	8 Little Helpers	World Cafe
	Open Space	Appreciative Inquiry
	Pro-Action Cafe	Mind Mapping
	Harvesting	Working Together to Create a 'Container'
	Consensus Decision Making	Communities of Practice

Developing and Implementing Strategies for Specific Contexts The Art of Hosting at work	Checklist for Design	Chaordic Stepping Stones
	6 Breaths of Design	Chaordic Design Process
	5th Organizing Paradigm	

On Leadership
Margaret Wheatley

In fact, in this day and age, when problems are increasingly complex,
and there simply are not simple answers,
and there is no simple cause and effect any longer,
I cannot imagine how stressful it is to be the leader
and to pretend that you have the answer.

So, what I see in life-affirming leaders is that they are willing to say to people "I do not know the answer, but together we will figure it out."

So, they are also leaders who rely on other people's intelligence.

And a life-affirming leader is one who knows how to rely on and use the intelligence that exists everywhere in the community, or the school or the organization.

And so these leaders act as hosts, as stewards of other people's creativity and other people's intelligence.

And when I say host, I mean a leader these days needs to be one who convenes people, who convenes diversity, who convenes all viewpoints in processes where our intelligence can come forth.

So these kinds of leaders do not give us the answers, but they help gather us together so that together we can discover the answers.

Two Complimentary World Views
Organizations as Machines and as Adaptive Systems

Living Systems
A Natural Approach to Organizing Life

For three hundred years, since Descartes and Newton, our thinking has predominantly been influenced by rationalism. We have been able to figure things out and "be in control". We tend to view our organizations and communities as we view machines – as consisting of clearly defined parts with clearly defined roles and a predictable output.

In a complex world, this mechanistic view may not always be adequate to meet the complex problems and challenges we face. What if communities and organizations could be viewed as living systems as well?

Living systems exist everywhere in nature – bacteria forming colonies or ants coming together to form a system that is capable of creating an anthill. – Some termite nests even have air conditioning so the temperature stays the same inside the hill!

There are two exciting phenomena in nature and living systems:
1) Nature has the capability to self-organize, i.e. it does not require someone specific to direct the organization instead of all who are involved participate in what is needed to achieve a purpose
2) Self-organisation can lead to emergence = the emergence of totally new properties and qualities = 1+1 = 11 or something totally new and surprising.

What if organizations really are living systems and there could be a simpler way of organizing that opens up the possibility for emergence – provided the right conditions are in place?

What would our organizations and communities look like then?

Some qualities of Living Systems:

• A living system only accepts its own solutions (we only support those things we are a part of creating)

• A living system only pays attention to that which is meaningful to it (here and now)

• In nature a living system participates in the development of its neighbour - an isolated system is doomed.

• Nature and all of nature, including ourselves is in constant change (without 'change management')

• Nature seeks diversity – new relations open up to new possibilities. It is not survival of the fittest – but everything that is fit – as many species as possible. Diversity increases our chances of survival.

• 'Tinkering' opens up to what is possible here and now – nature is not intent on finding perfect solutions, but those that are workable

• A living system cannot be steered or controlled – they can only be teased, nudged, titillated

• A system changes (identity) when its perception of itself changes

• All the answers do not exist 'out there' – sometimes we must experiment to find out what works

• Who we are together is always different and more than who we are alone - possibility of emergence. Our range of creative expression increases as we join others. New relationships create new capacities.

• Human beings are capable of self-organizing – given the right conditions

Self-organization shifts to a higher order

People are intelligent, creative, adaptive, self-organizing, and meaning-seeking. Organizations are living systems. They too are intelligent, creative, adaptive, self-organizing, meaning-seeking.

Meg Wheatley

AoH and Living Systems as a Complement to Traditional Leadership Models

Traditional Leadership	AoH and Living Systems Complement
Mechanistic	Organic
Management by control	Leadership by trust
Executing procedures	Innovating process
No single person has the right answer, but somebody has to decide	Together we can reach greater clarity - intelligence through diversity
Silos/hierarchical structures	Networks
Leading by instructions	Leading by hosting
Top-down orders - often without full information	Top-down orders informed by consultation
Working without a clear purpose and jumping to solutions	Collective clarity of purpose is the invisible leader
Motivation via carrot and stick	Motivation through engagement and ownership
Seeking answers	Seeking questions
Results-oriented	Purpose-oriented - the rest falls into place
Chairing, reporting	Hosting, harvesting, follow up

A Note on Worldviews ...

Our worldviews, made up of our values, beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, and ideas, impact everything from how we understand the nature of reality to how we respond to the environment around us. Each person's worldview influences their goals and desires, consciously and unconsciously shaping perceptions, motivations, and values.

The convergence of our individual characteristics and our unique history, including our life experiences, region, culture, religion, socioeconomic status, and family are expressed through our worldview. Our worldviews inform and affect our individual realities and the actions we take in the world. There is an infinite multiplicity of worldviews and more than one "right" way or perspective. Each of us has our own unique worldview.

We are each part of a complex, ever-changing, interconnected living universe. What we do influences the world around us, and the world around us influences us, even when we are not aware of exactly how. Greater understanding of the interdependence of all life leads to a more complete view of reality.

Mental Models
Working with Vision and Purpose

Vision: Where do we want to go? What is our ideal future?

Definition: The act or power of seeing
A vision statement is sometimes called a picture of your organization in the future but
it's so much more than that.   Your vision statement is your inspiration, the framework for all your strategic planning. A vision statement may apply to an entire company or to a single division of that company. Whether for all or part of an organization, the vision statement answers the question, "Where do we want to go?"

What you are doing when creating a vision statement is articulating your dreams and hopes for your organization or community. It reminds you of what you are trying to build.

The Purpose of Purpose: Why are we all here collectively?

Discovering purpose is to discover why something exists. Often we hurry to get into action, before we properly understand why we need to take action. Gaining clarity on purpose, and especially gaining collective clarity is setting the right course for taking action. A purpose, therefore, becomes a navigational tool like a compass as it helps us to discover the direction of travel for our efforts so they can be of service. Purpose can also been described as 'the glue' that brings people's contribution and why it is worth working on this together. In fact, purpose becomes an invisible leader as it both connects different actions taken and supports everyone to know why their contribution is valuable.

Deb Helber talks about the importance of purpse

A Statement of Purpose defines, with absolute clarity and deep conviction, the purpose of the community. An effective statement of purpose will be a clear, commonly understood statement of that which identifies and binds the community together as worthy of pursuit. When properly done it can usually be expressed in a single sentence. Participants will say about the purpose, "If we could achieve that, my life would have meaning."
**Dee Hock**

Purpose to be a useful navigational tool in seeking the way forward contains three elements:

Higher Intent – why action is needed for the greater good in service of life, e.g. "We are not forming coalitions of states, we are uniting men" - Jean Monnet

Statement of Purpose – what effort is needed here and what is being pursued so that direction of action can be set, (does not define the destination, instead it invites and inspires others to participate with clarity

Intention – The will to be in pursuit of grounding the higher intent through the actions we take regardless of the challenges that might arise

When these three elements are aligned and collectively understood – the greater good of why we need to take action, the clarity of what we are pursuing in order to ground the higher intent and the will to do this regardless of the conditions – then purpose becomes a powerful attractor that allows people to put their individual efforts to work together on making a difference for all.
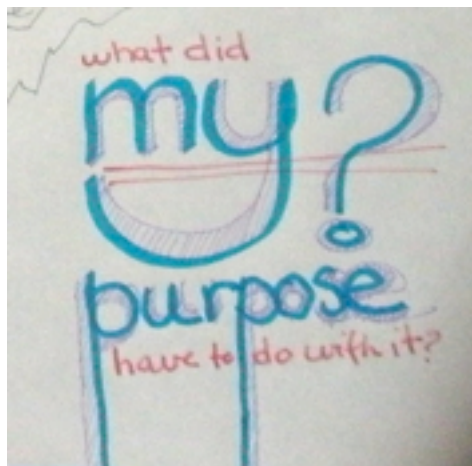
In an organization or a community, many purposes co-exist, and often not enough effort is given to interconnect these purposes so that it can often feel that different and conflicting purposes are at play.

It is therefore important to remember that different purposes are at play, for example:
- purpose of the stakeholders that the organization serves
- purpose of the whole community / organization
- purpose of the core group
- purpose of each member of the core team

In the light of this, the following questions may inspire your collective inquiry into your shared purpose:
- What is our collective purpose?
- What is the purpose of our function, team, project?
- How does my purpose and the purpose we are all here to accomplish align?
- What is the purpose that is at the heart of this work and that will align us all to
- accomplish it?

Putting effort, therefore in gaining clarity and specifically collective clarity on purpose is a key strategic action that if overlooked, usually ends up confusion and even conflict instead of achieving outcomes that make a difference. Seeking purpose is not something to be done once, either. As action is taken and more is discovered as a result, coming back to check in with purpose – are we still on course or do we have a new one arising is a wise thing to do.
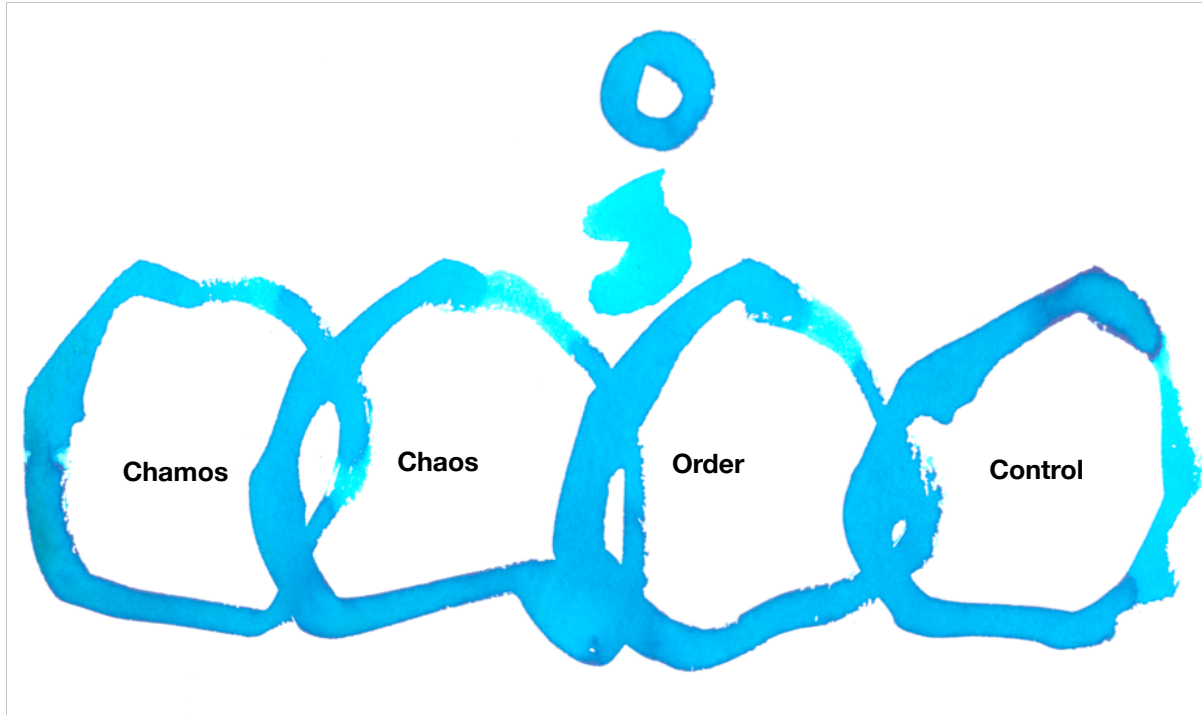
Collective clarity of purpose is the invisible leader.

Mary Parker Follett

Mental Models
The Chaordic Path

Emergence
(new consciousness, new awareness, and new solutions)

Chamos   Chaos   Order   Control

There is a path to take between Chaos and Order that leads us to the new, collective learning, real time innovation. Instead of relying on controlling every detail in our organizations or communities from the top down, many leaders today see the need to access the collective intelligence and collective wisdom of everyone, which can be, at times, a "messy" process until we reach new insight and clarity.

We are beginning to understand and treat organizations and communities more like living systems than static machines. After all, the chaordic path is the story of our natural world – form arises out of non-linear, complex, diverse systems. "At the edge of chaos" is where life innovates – where things are not hard wired, but are flexible enough for new connections and solutions to occur. New levels of order become possible out of chaos.

This "chaordic confidence" – the capacity we need to stay in the dance of order and chaos – supports a generative emergence that allows the new, collective intelligence and

wise action to occur. In this space of emergence, we leave our collective encounters with that which not one of us individually brought into the room. This requires us to stay in a transformative shift, though we may want to veer toward either chaos or order.

And in fact, we will move between chaos and order – this is the generative dance, an oscillation often seen in the natural world. A balance between two seeming polarities, which are instead compliments of each other.
As we move between chaos and order, individually and collectively, we move through confusion and conflict toward clarity. We are all called to walk this path without judgement – some will feel more comfortable with chaos, others with order. Both are needed as, together, we walk the edge that is between these two toward something wholly new.

On the far side of chaos is chamos – or destructive chaos. On the far side of order is stifling control. When we move toward either of these extremes, the result is apathy or

How much order do we need? How much chaos would be helpful here?

or rebellion. The very opposite of chaordic confidence, where the new cannot be born.

There is a path toward common ground, co-creation, and wise and strategic action. There is a "sweet spot" of emergence with tangible results. If we are looking for innovative, new solutions we will find them in a place between chaos and order – the chaordic path.

Chaos/Order is the Place for Leadership
The practice of leadership resides in the place between chaos and order. When facing new challenges that cannot be met with the same way we are currently working, we need to learn new ways of operating. It is during these times of uncertainty and increased complexity, where results cannot be predicted that leaders need to invite others to share diverse knowledge to discover new purpose and strategies and decide the way forward.

Order/Control is a Place for Management
The practice of management lies between order and

control where activities need to be maintained and executed routinely so that a particular standard results. It is the place where "more of the same" is required. Therefore, when predictability is called for and where procedures and standards are clearly defined and need to be adhered to.

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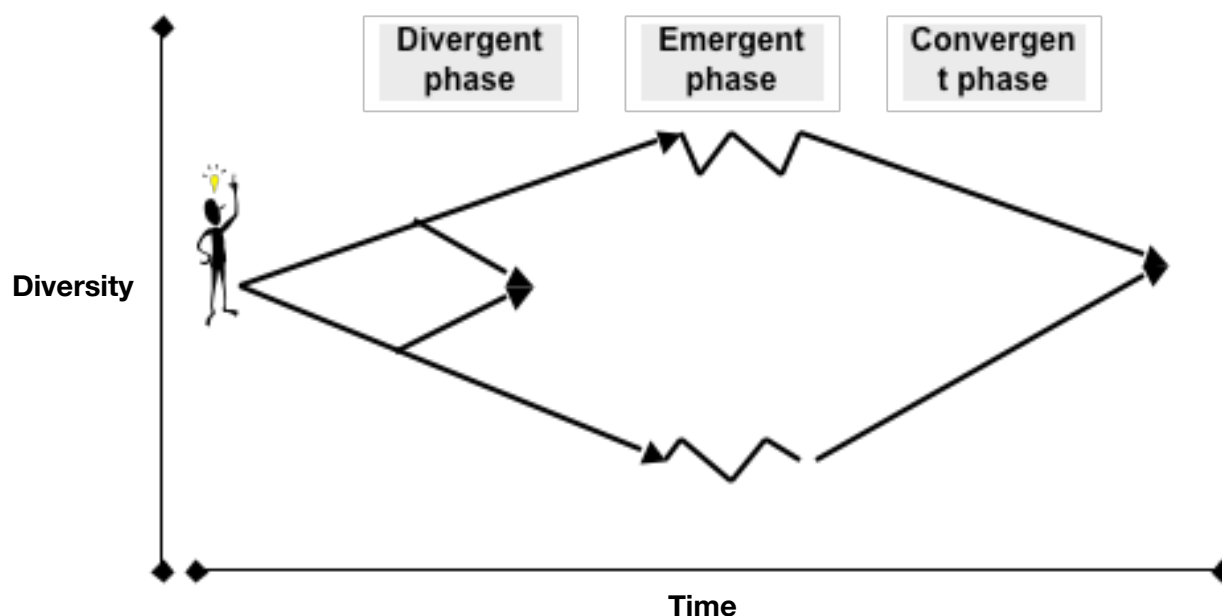
The **convergent phase** is goal-oriented and focused, linear, structured and usually subject to time constraints. It is focused on getting results and may require quick decisions.

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

Reflections on Divergence and Convergence:

Mental Models
Organizing Patterns

Over the millennia, human beings have developed many different ways of organizing together. One of the questions that the Art of Hosting community is continually asking itself is "What are the organizational concepts that we can develop together that are actually good for us, and are good for this time?"

Four organizational paradigms:

Circle
The mother of all our organizational forms – humans started sitting in circle as soon as they invented fires to sit around. We told stories, held elder councils and solved problems in this way. This form is very useful for reflection, storytelling, being together. Purpose is in the centre – it is shared.

Triangle (hierarchy)
Then we stopped our nomadic wandering and settled in one place, we developed agriculture. Some people had more or better land than others, and we began to develop hierarchies where one person or group of people had power and every body else did not. And now we had belongings that we needed to protect. The triangular form of hierarchy is very useful for action, for getting things done. The boss says "this is what needs to happen", and the others say "yes, sir!" and do it. Purpose is at the top.

Square (bureaucracy)
The more we got settled, the more we had to sustain. Our systems got very complicated, our population exploded, and the bureaucracy developed. It really is a development of the hierarchy, and becomes very complex, with lots of structures and processes involved. Bureaucracy is fantastic for stability and maintaining the status quo, and for managing complex situations. It typically moves slowly. Purpose in the bureaucracy is also at the top.

Networks
A more recent organizational form, networks are collections of individuals, circles or triangles – nodes that are connected together. We rarely find networked collections of bureaucracies, but networks can and often do spring up inside them. Networks are great for relationship and innovation, and for getting things done fast. The connection is guided by individual purpose. The different nodes are connected together because their respective purposes need each other. Once the need is no longer there, the network connection will most often lapse.

Circle/Council - Nomadic Age
Hierarchy - Agricultural Age
Networks - Information Age
Bureaucracy - Industrial Age
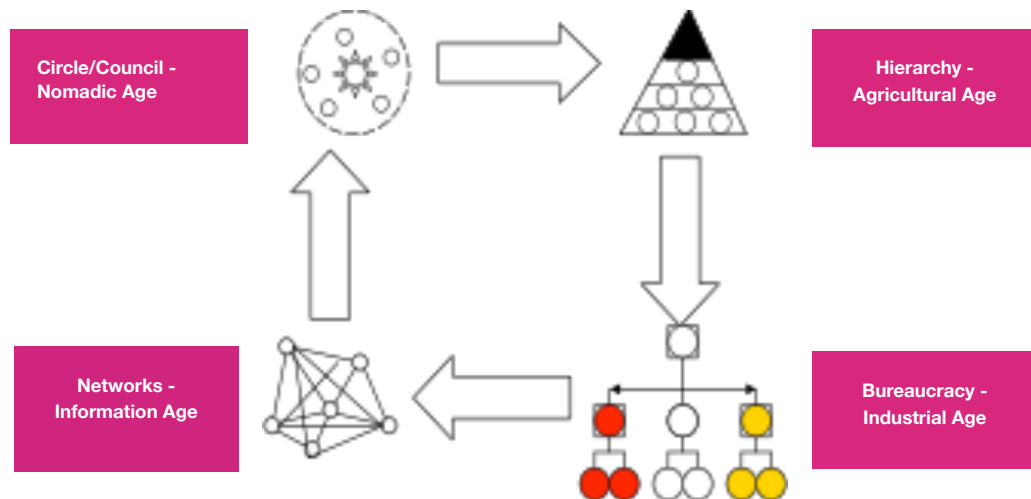
When a new organizational form emerges, the older ones do not disappear. Each form has both advantages and shortcomings – each is good for different things.

When we want to start an organisation ourselves or organize something in our lives, which one of these organizational forms do we choose? What we have seen in the Art of Hosting community is that we need to build structures that can use any of these forms at the right time. As need arises, how are we able to respond with the most useful organizational form?

When something needs to get done, then triangle is great. When we need to stop and reflect, circle is useful. When we need stability, it is good to have a bureaucracy. When we need to innovate, networks work best. So what is the next level of organizational form that can hold all of these? The Art of Hosting community is observing the emergence of a new pattern…

Successful organizing is based on the recognition that people get organized because they, too, have a vision.
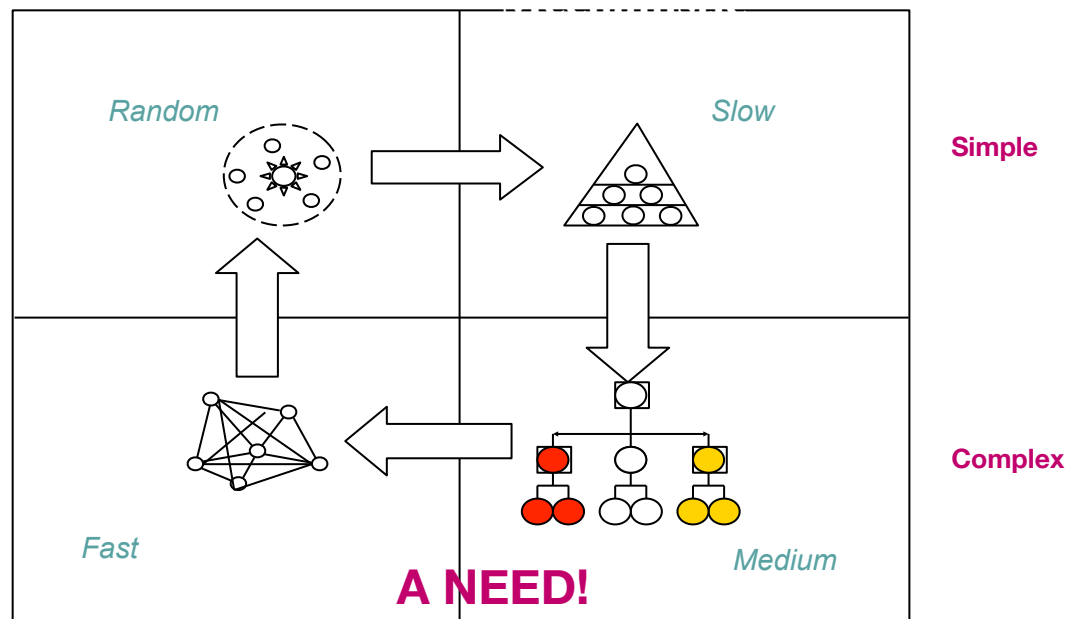
Paul Wellstone

Chart, Jessica Lipner and Jeffrey Stamps

Pace of Change

Organic Models   **Mechanistic models**

Random   *Slow*   **Simple**

Fast   *Medium*   **Complex**

A NEED!

Mental Models
The Fifth Paradigm

The fifth organizational pattern is a combination fo the circle or council for collective clarity, the triangle or project team (hierarchy) for action and the square or bureaucracy for accountability, structure, and stabilty and the network for rapid sharing f information, inspiration and linking all the parts together.

At the center, always, is our purpose. Typically, a core team will gather in a circle around a purpose, which will be based on meeting a need that is felt in our life contexts. As we gather around the core purpose, we begin to form relationships with others in the circle that, as we map the connections, start to show up as a network. But while these relationships can help us all with our individual work, they do not necessarily allow us to manifests our shared purpose in the world, which will typically involve making things happen. The first step might be to develop actions to sustain the core team. So individual members take responsibility for different aspects – like organizing meetings or raising funds - other members step up in a support role and this leads to the formation of triangles. The triangles will be dictated by the central purpose. Hierarchy forms in response to central purpose – not somebody's ego!

Once the core team is sustainable, the next step is typically to open up the conversation to the wider community that feels the need that informs the purpose at the centre of our circle. A triangle from the core team might then get together to call a larger-scale assembly, which might become a circle of supporters for the larger project. The inner circle is reaching out to the next level, which will in turn reach out to a wider community, creating concentric circles rippling out into our society, each circle connected to the others by triangles animating action informed by the core purpose.

The pattern of core purpose, circles, triangles and networks repeats again and again. Another typical finding is that as the core team goes out into the community and the conversation expands, the core purpose is informed by a broader perspective and is adjusted accordingly, to accommodate the next level of scale and action.

It is important to understand that what we are describing here is not a deliberately designed model, but the description of a pattern that has emerged naturally and spontaneously throughout the global hosting community as we have collectively developed our work of hosting in ever-larger and more complex adaptive systems.

Then perhaps we would discover that 'organisational miracles' are always happening, and have always been happening.
Mario Tronti

Our Organizing Pattern

Shared Purpose/ Resonance
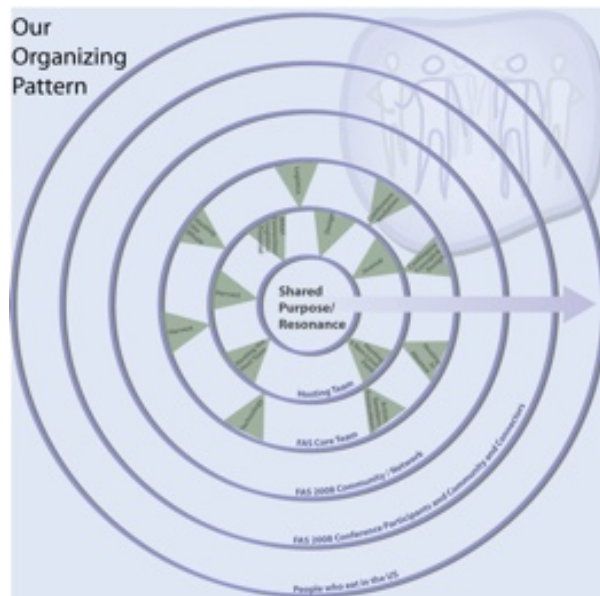
The 5th Paradigm at work:
The Food And Society 2008 Conference organized by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation in the USA

MENTAL MODELS
Theory U

Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future

SUSPENDING
seeing our seeing

REDIRECTING
seeing from the whole

Sensing
transforming
perception

Presencing
transforming
self and will

Realizing
transforming
action

embodying the new
INSTITUTIONALIZING

enacting living microcosms
PROTOTYPING

envisioning what seeks to emerge
CRYSTALLIZING

LETTING GO ———— **LETTING COME**
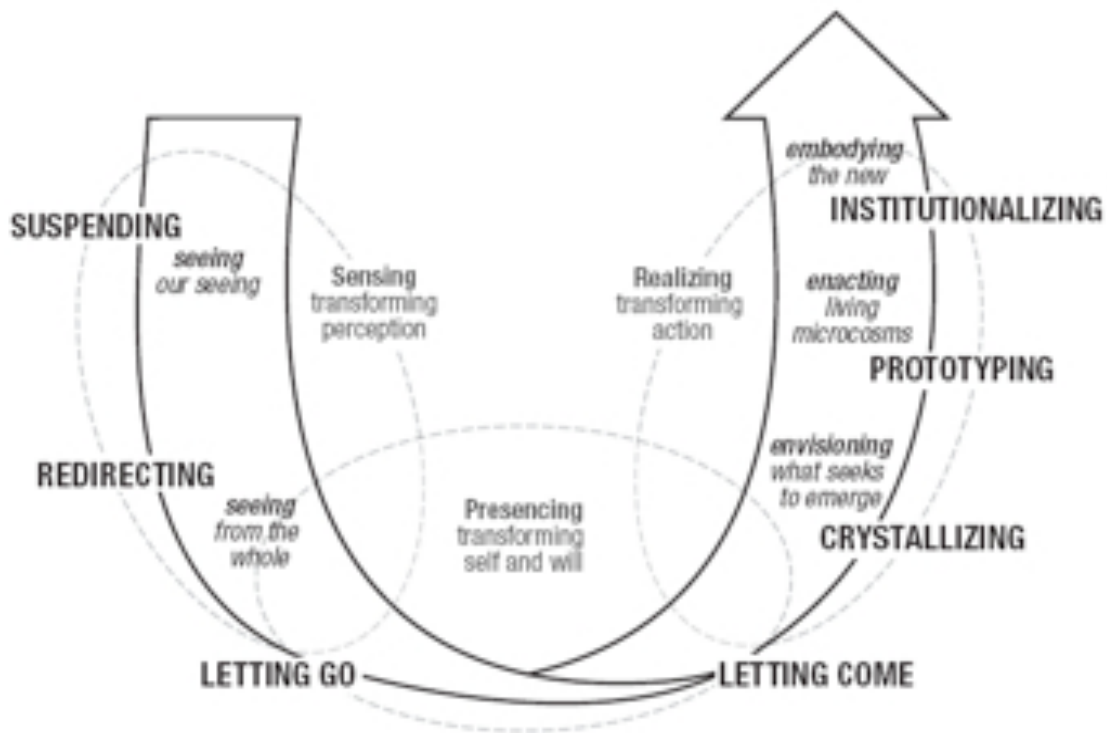
Seven Capacities of the U Movement

The entire U movement arises from seven core capacities and the activities they enable. Each capacity is a gateway to the next activity – the capacity for suspending enables seeing our seeing, and the capacity for protyping enables enacting living microcosms – but only as all seven capacities are developed is the the movement through the entire process possible.

society for **SoL**
organizational learning

© Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, Betty Sue Flowers. *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future.* Cambridge, Mass.: SoL, Society for Organizational Learning, 2004. Page 225.
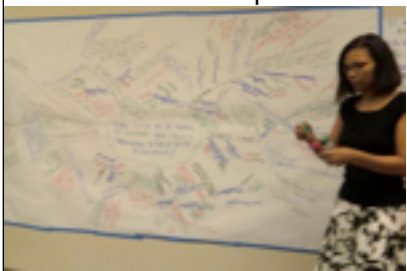
"Presencing" is bringing into presence, and into the present, your highest potential and the future that is seeking to emerge. Your highest future possibility is related to your own highest intention…it's being an instrument of life itself, to accomplish, in a sense, what life wishes for me to accomplish.

We are longing for profound renewal and change in our collective structures and institutions. We have been waiting, consciously or not, all our lives. And now, it seems, a window is beginning to open.

Otto Scharmer

Methodologies and Practices
An Overview

Method	Uses
Circle	Adaptable to a variety of groups, issues, and timeframes. Circle can be the process used for the duration of a gathering, particularly if the group is relatively small and time for deep reflection is a primary aim. Circle can also be used as a means for "checking in" and "checking out" or a way of making decisions together, particularly decisions based on consensus.
Appreciative Inquiry	Useful when a different perspective is needed, or when we wish to begin a new process from a fresh, positive vantage point. It can help move a group that is stuck in "what is" toward "what could be". Appreciative Inquiry can be used with individuals, partners, small groups, or large organisations.
World Café	Process used to foster interaction and dialogue with both large and small groups. Particularly effective in surfacing the collective wisdom of large groups of diverse people. Very flexible and adapts to many different purposes – information sharing, relationship building, deep reflection exploration and action planning.
Open Space	Useful in many contexts, including strategic direction-setting, envisioning the future, conflict resolution, morale building, consultation with stakeholders, community planning, collaboration and deep learning about issues and perspectives.
Collective Mind Map	Quick and simple way to create a shared overview of issues and opportunities relevant to a particular subject or challenge. Always has a clear focus that can be captured in a "burning" question, Can be done either on a large sheet of paper or screen, electronically with a mind-map program projected on a screen. When all themes and issues have been recorded on the mind-map, the group can decide on the priorities by voting on the map. This gives a clear indication on which themes or issues have the highest leverage for further action.

When Practicing Dialogue
Helpful Hints

The following practices can radically shift the quality of any conversation, whether with one person, or in a small circle or with hundreds of people. As a muscle, they need to be practiced regularly to become natural in any context. Practice them and invite others to practice them with you!

Focus on what matters
We have no time to lose for what doesn't.

Suspend judgments, assumptions, certainties
No one knows it all and it is not about knowing who is right or wrong. It is about exploring together and surfacing what we do not know or see yet.

Speak one at a time
Invite to speak with intention.

Listen to each other carefully
Invite to listen with attention

Listen together for insights and deeper questions
Do not remain at the surface of what you already know. Engage fully with others into bringing what we do not know yet to the surface.

Link and connect ideas
This is how you can learn, surface what do not know yet, and innovate.

Slow down
We are so often caught in a hectic flow of actions. Slowing down helps to foster more reflection.

Be aware of your impact on the group
Do not monopolise the speaking time. Make sure everybody can be heard.

Focus on what is in the middle
rather than what is in your mind.

Accept that divergent opinions are okay
We do not need to reach a consensus on what we are discussing. Innovation comes from putting different perspectives together.

Contribute with your mind and heart
Bring your full self into the room. Allow yourself to be both a professional and a human being.

Play, doodle, draw
Use a large sheet in the middle of your group as a space to capture the results of your collective reflection.

Have fun!
What if enjoying ourselves was the key to improving our learning and performance?

(The above "hints" adapted from world cafe etiquette, circle practice, and theory u.)

> # Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.
>
> **Margaret Mead**

Powerful Questions Focus Attention, Intention, and Energy
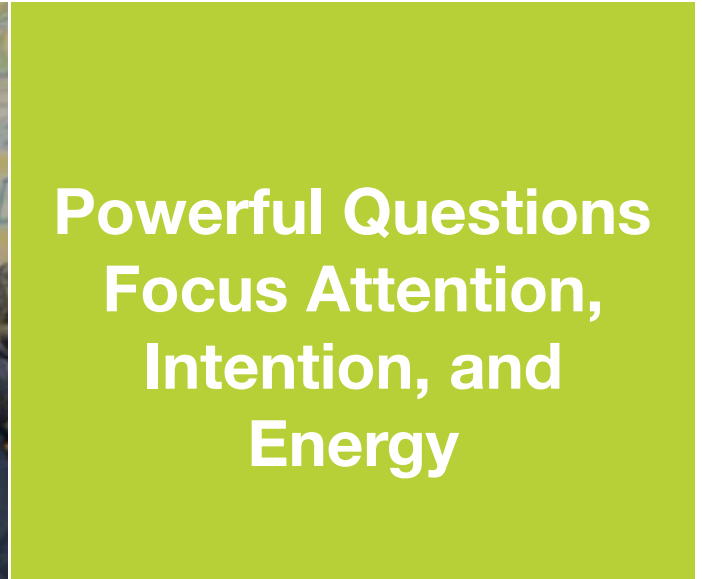
Powerful Questions
inquiring about things that matter

While answers tend to bring us to closure, questions open up to exploration.

Asking the right question

Asking the right question is the most effective way of opening up a conversation and keeping it engaging. A high-quality question focuses on what is meaningful for the participants, triggers our curiosity and invites us to explore further.

When inviting people into a conversation that matters, it is helpful to have an overall question, one that itself embodies the purpose of the meeting. This is the key question or the "calling question" for the conversation or meeting. The calling question is best formulated together with key stakeholders.

The conversation may include other questions than the

calling question. The questions you choose or that people discover during conversation are critical to its success. A hosted conversation could explore one question or a series of related questions.

Some guidelines for choosing questions:
- A well-crafted question attracts energy and focuses attention on what matters. Experienced hosts recommend asking open-ended questions, not ones that have a simple yes/no answer.
- Good questions invite inquiry and curiosity. They do not need to promote action or problem solving immediately.
- You'll know a good question when it continues to surface good ideas and possibilities.
- Check possible questions with key people who will take part in a conversation. Does it hold their attention and energy?

A powerful question…

- Is simple and clear

- Is thought provoking

- Generates energy

- Focuses inquiry

- Challenges assumptions

- Opens new possibilities

- Evokes more questions

Reflections on powerful questions:

If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on it, I would use the first 55 minutes to formulate the right question because as soon as I have identified the right question I can solve the problem in less than five minutes.

Albert Einstein

The Four- Fold Practice
practicing AoH

- **Be Present** - (Pre-Sensing)

- **Practice Conversations** (Participation)

- **Hosting Conversations** (Contribute)

- **Community of Practitioners** (Co-Create)

Being truly present, engaging skilfully in conversations, being a good host of conversations and engaging with others in co-creation, are all practices or skills that are easily understood but it takes a continuous practice to hone these skills.

The Four-Fold Practice

Becoming a Community that LEARNS

Becoming a Community of LEARNERS

Community of Practitioners
Co-create

Hosting Conversations
Contribute

To be Present
Pre-sensing

Practice Conversation
Participating

Becoming a LEARNER

1. **Being Present (Pre-sensing) –**

...host yourself first - be willing to endure chaos - keep the "space" or possibilities open - stay in the fire of the present...
Being present means showing up, undistracted, prepared, clear about the need and what your personal contribution can be. It allows you to check in with yourself and develop the personal practice of curiosity about the outcomes of any gathering. Presence means making space to devote a dedicated time to working with others. If you are distracted, called out or otherwise located in many different places, you cannot be present in one. For meetings to have deep results, every person in the room should be fully present.

Being present also means being aware of one's environment, other people and what impacts you and how you impact others.

Collectively, it is good practice to become present together as a meeting begins, be it through a welcome, a good framing, through "checking-in" to the subject matter or task at hand by hearing everyone's voice in the matter or as simple as taking a moment of silence.   Invite a collective slowing down so that all participants in a meeting can be present together.

2. **Participate and practice conversations**

...be willing to listen fully, respectfully, without judgment and thinking you already know the answer – practice conversation mindfully...

Conversation is an art, it is not just talk. It demands that we listen carefully to one another and that we offer what we can in the service of the whole. Curiosity and judgment cannot live together in the same space. If we are

judging what we are hearing, we cannot be curious about the outcome, and if we have called a meeting because we are uncertain of the way forward, being open is a key skill and capacity. Only by practicing skilful conversation can we find our best practice together.

If we practice conversation mindfully we might slow down meetings so that wisdom and clarity can work quickly. When we talk mindlessly, we neither hear each other nor do we allow space for clarity to arise. The art of conversation is the art of slowing down to speed up.

3. Hosting conversations

...be courageous, inviting and willing to initiate conversations that matter - find and host powerful questions with the stakeholders – and then make sure you harvest the insights, the patterns, learnings and wise actions...

Hosting conversations is both more and less than facilitating. It is an act of leadership and means taking responsibility for creating and holding the "container" in which a group of people can do their best work together.

You can create this container using the seven helpers (p. xx) as starting points, and although you can also do this in the moment, the better prepared you are the better.

The bare minimum to do is to discern the need, get clear on the purpose of the meeting, prepare a good, powerful question to initiate the conversation and know how you will harvest and what will be done with that harvest, to ensure that results are sustainable and the effort was worth it.

Hosting conversations takes courage and it takes a bit of certainty and faith in people. We sometimes give short shrift to conversational spaces because of the fear we experience in stepping up to host. It is, however, a gift to host a group and it is a gift to be hosted well.

4. Co-creating with others – becoming a community of practice
...be willing to co create and co-host with others, blending your knowing, experience and practices with theirs, working partnership…

The fourth practice is about showing up in a conversation without being a spectator, and contributing to the collective effort to sustain results. The best conversations arise when we listen for what is in the middle, what is arising out of the center of our collaboration. It is not about the balancing of individual agendas, it is about finding out what is new. And when that is discovered work unfolds beautifully when everyone is clear about what they can contribute to the work.

In a truly co-creative process it becomes irrelevant who said or contributed what – the gift is in the synergy and inspiration when we each build on each others knowledge and the whole becomes much bigger than the sum of the parts.

This is how results become sustainable over time – they fall into the network of relationships that arise from a good conversation, from friends working together.

The collaborative field can produce unexpected and surprising results.

From a learner to a community that learns.
As we learn to be truly present and engage in conversations that really matter – we become learners. As learners many doors are open to us. As we begin to host conversations and connect with other hosts – we become a community of learners or practitioners. As a community we own a much bigger capacity than as individual learners. As a community of individual practitioners or learners – truly becomes "a community that learns", that is where we really enter the collective intelligence. – We multiply our capacity and enter the field of emergence.

Circle
practicing an ancient form

The Circle, or council, is an ancient form of meeting that has gathered human beings into respectful conversations for thousands of years. In some areas of the world this tradition remains intact, but in some societies it has been nearly forgotten. PeerSpirit circling is a modern methodology that calls on this tradition and helps people gather in conversations that fulfil their potential for dialogue, replenishment, and wisdom-based change.

www.peerspirit.com

One of the beautiful things about circle is its adaptability to a variety of groups, issues, and timeframes. Circle can be the process used for the duration of a gathering, particularly if the group is relatively small and time for deep reflection is a primary aim. Circle can also be used as a means for "checking in" and "checking out" or a way of making decisions together, particularly decisions based on consensus. Be creative with circle!

Principles of Circle:
- **Rotate leadership** among all circle members.
- **Responsibility is shared** for the quality of the experience.
- **Reliance on Wholeness,** rather than on any personal agenda.

Practices of Circle:
- **Speak with Intention:** Noting what has relevance to the conversation in the moment
- **Listen with Attention:** Respectful of the learning process of all members of the group
- **Tend to the Well-being of the Group:** Remaining aware of the impact of our contributions

Setting Circle Agreements:
The use of agreements allows all members to have a free and profound exchange, to respect a diversity of views, and to share responsibility for the well-being and direction of the group. Agreements often used include:
1. Listen without judgment (slow down and listen)
2. Whatever is said in circle stays in circle
3. Offer what you can and ask for what you need
4. Silence is also part of the conversation
5. We agree to employ a group guardian to watch our need, timing, and energy.

General Flow of the Circle
~ Intention
~ Welcome/Start-point
~ Center and Check-In/Greeting
~ Agreements
~ Three Principles and Three Practices
~ Guardian of the Process
~ Check-Out and Farewell

Intention shapes the circle and determines who will come, how long the circle will meet, and what kinds of outcomes are to be expected. The caller of the circle spends time articulating intention and invitation.

Welcome/Start Point. Once people have gathered, the circle host (or a participant) will typically open the circle with a gesture to indicate that the circle will start. Poems, silence, song, or gesture may be used.

The center of a circle usually holds objects that represent the intention of the circle.

Check-in usually starts with a volunteer and proceeds around the circle. If an individual is not ready to speak, the turn is passed and another opportunity is offered after others have spoken.

To aid self-governance and bring the circle back to intention, having a circle member volunteer to be the role of guardian is helpful. This group member watches and safeguards the group's energy and observes the groups process.

Closing the circle by checking out provides a formal end to the meeting, a chance for members to reflect on what has transpired.

(The above was adapted from a handout which was generously provided by Peer Spirit to the Art of Hosting)

What is Circle Good For?

One of the beautiful things about circle is its adaptability to a variety of groups, issues, and timeframes. Circle can be the process used for the duration of a gathering, particularly if the group is relatively small and time for deep reflection is a primary aim. Circle can also be used as a methodology of "checking in" and "checking out" or a way of making decisions together. Be creative with circle and be ready for the deep wisdom it can unearth!

Materials Needed:

- Chairs/cushions arranged into a circle – folks should be able to view each other without impediments (i.e. tables or desks)
- Object for the Center – this can be flowers, a bowl, basket, or even a poster stating the intention or purpose of the gathering
- Talking piece
- Chime, bell, or other gentle noisemaker
- Materials for harvesting conversation

In helping others, we shall help ourselves, for whatever good we give out completes the circle and comes back to us.

Flora Edwards

Talking pieces and a circle center (left)

Chairs set up for a large circle to start the day (right)

Appreciative Inquiry
working with what's possible

Appreciative Inquiry is a strategy for intentional change that identifies the best of 'what is' to pursue dreams and possibilities of 'what could be'; a cooperative search for strengths, passions and life-giving forces that are found within every system that hold potential for inspired, positive change. (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987)

http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/

Assumptions

- In every community something works
- What we focus on becomes our reality
- Reality is created in the moment – there is more than one reality
- The act of asking questions influences the community in some way
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past
- If we carry forward parts of the past, they should be what is best
- It is important to value differences
- The language we use creates our reality

Problem Solving	Appreciative Inquiry
"Felt Need" Identification of the Problem	Appreciating and valuing the best of "what is"
Analysis of causes	Envisioning "what might be"
Analysis of possible solutions	Dialoguing "What should be" Innovating "What will be"
Basic Assumption: An organization is a problem to be solved.	Basic Assumption: An organization is a mystery to be embraced.

General Flow of an Appreciative Inquiry process:

Appreciative inquiry can be done as a longer structured process going through phases of

DISCOVER: identifying organisational processes that work well.
DREAM: envisioning processes that would work well in the future.
DESIGN: Planning and prioritising those processes.
DELIVER: implementing the proposed design.

The basic idea is to build organizations around what works, rather than trying to fix what doesn't.

Discover
What gives life?
(the best of what is)
Appreciating

Dream
What might be?
(What is the world calling for?)
Envisioning Results

Deliver
How to empower, learn, and adjust/improvise?
Sustaining

Affirmative Topic Choice

Design
What should be - the ideal?
Co-constructing
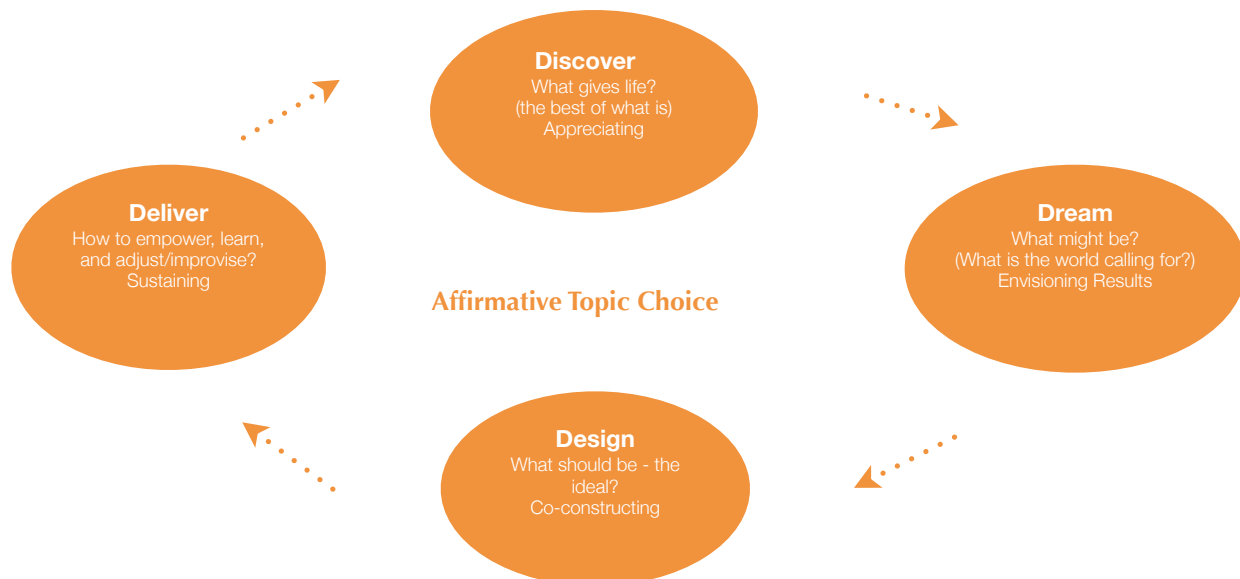
At the center is a positive topic choice – how we ask even the first question contains the seeds of change we are looking to enact.

Appreciative Inquiry can also be used as a way of opening a meeting or conversation by identifying what already works. What do you value most about your self/work/organization?

What is Appreciative Inquiry Good For?
Appreciative Inquiry is useful when a different perspective is needed, or when we wish to begin a new process with a fresh, positive vantage point. It can help move a group that is stuck in "what is" toward "what could be". Appreciative Inquiry can be used with individuals, partners, small groups, or large organizations.

Materials Needed:
Varies depending on processes used.

We grow in the direction of the questions we ask.

The World Cafe
dialogue for large and small groups

The World Café is a method for creating a living network of collaborative dialogue around questions that matter in real life situations. It is a provocative metaphor...as we create our lives, our organizations, and our communities, we are, in effect, moving among 'table conversations' at the World Café. (From The World Café Resource Guide)

www.theworldcafe.com

What is World Café Good For?
A World Café is a great way of fostering interaction and dialogue with both large and small groups. It is particularly effective in surfacing the collective wisdom of large groups of diverse people. The café format is very flexible and adapts to many different purposes – information sharing, relationship building, deep reflection exploration and action planning.

When planning a café, make sure to leave ample time for both moving through the rounds of questions (likely to take longer than you think!) and some type of whole-group harvest.

Operating principles of World Cafe:
- Create hospitable space
- Explore questions that matter
- Encourage each person's contribution
- Connect diverse people and ideas
- Listen together for patterns, insights and deeper questions
- Make collective knowledge visible

Assumptions of World Cafe:
- The knowledge and wisdom we need is present and accessible.
- Collective insight evolves from honoring unique contributions; connecting ideas; listening into the middle; noticing deeper themes and questions.
- The intelligence emerges as the system connects to itself in diverse and creative ways.

General Flow of a World Café:
➡ Seat 4-5 people at café-style tables or in conversation clusters.
➡ Set up progressive rounds of conversation, usually of 20-30 minutes each – have some good questions!
➡ Ask one person to stay at the table as a "host" and invite the other table members to move to other tables as ambassadors of ideas and insights
➡ Ask the table host to share key insights, questions, and ideas briefly to new table members, and then let folks move through the rounds of questions.
➡ After you've moved through the rounds, allow some time for a whole-group harvest of the conversations.

Materials Needed:
- Small tables (36-42"), preferably round
- Chairs for participants and presenters
- Tablecloths
- Flip chart paper or paper placemats for covering the tables
- Markers
- Flip chart or large butcher paper for harvesting collective knowledge or insights
- Posters/Table Tents of Café Etiquette
- Materials for harvest

(The above info adapted from Café to Go at
www.theworldcafe.com)

Open Space Technology
participants call the conversation

An Open Space Technology Marketplace, Deer Creek Art of Hosting 2009.

The goal of an Open Space Technology meeting is to create time and space for people to engage deeply and creatively around issues of concern to them. The agenda is set by people with the power and desire to see it through, and typically, Open Space meetings result in transformative experiences for the individuals and groups involved. It is a simple and powerful way to catalyze effective working conversations and truly inviting organizations – to thrive in times of swirling change.

www.openspaceworld.org

What is Open Space Good For?
Open Space Technology is useful in almost any context, including strategic direction setting, envisioning the future, conflict resolution, morale building, consultation with stakeholders, community planning, collaboration and deep learning about issues and perspectives.

Open Space Technology is an excellent meeting format for any situation in which there is:
- A real issue of concern
- Diversity of players
- Complexity of elements
- Presence of passion (including conflict)
- A need for a quick decision

Open space can be used in groups of 10 to 1,000 – and probably larger. It's important to give enough time and space for several sessions to occur. The outcomes can be dramatic when a group is uses its passion and responsibility – and is given the time – to make something happen.

Principles of Open Space:
- Whoever comes are the right people
- Whenever it starts is the right time
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
- When its over its over

The four principles and the law work to create a powerful event motivated by the passion and bounded by the responsibility of the participants.

General Flow of an Open Space Meeting:
The group convenes in a circle and is welcomed by the sponsor.
The facilitator provides an overview of the process and explains how it works. The facilitator invites people with issues of concern to come into the circle, write the issue on a piece of paper and announce it to the group.
These people are "conveners." The convener places their paper on the wall and chooses a time and a place to meet. This process continues until there are no more agenda items.
The group then breaks up and heads to the agenda wall, by now covered with a variety of sessions. Participants take note of the time and place for sessions they want to be involved in.

Dialogue sessions convene for the balance of the meeting. Recorders determined by each group capture the important points and post the reports on the news wall. All of these reports will be harvested in some way and returned to the larger group.
Following a closing or a break, the group might move into convergence, a process that takes the issues that have been discussed and attaches action plans to them to "get them out of the room."
The group then finishes the meeting with a closing circle where people are invited to share comments, insights, and commitments arising from the process.

Materials Needed:
- Circle of chairs for participants
- Letters or numbers around the room to indicate meeting locations
- A blank wall that will become the agenda
- A news wall for recording and posting the results of the dialogue sessions
- Breakout spaces for meetings
- Paper on which to write session topics/questions
- Markers/Pencils/Pens
- Posters of the Principles, Law of Two Feet, and Roles (optional)
- Materials for harvest

Marketplace

The Law of Two Feet

The Four Principles

Whoever comes is the right people.

Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.

Whenever it starts is the right time.

When it is over it is over.

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The Law of Mobility

If you find yourself in a situation where you are not contributing or learning, move somewhere were you can.

Passion and Responsibility

Collective Mind Map
Making visible our thinking

"A mind map is a diagram used to represent words, ideas, tasks or other items linked to and arranged radially around a central key word or idea. It is used to generate, visualize, structure and classify ideas, and as an aid in study, organization, problem solving, decision making, and writing." (Wikipedia)

A collective mind-map

A collective mind-map is a quick and simple way to create a shared overview of issues and opportunities relevant to a particular subject or challenge. The mind-map always has a clear focus that can be captured in a "burning" question, i.e. What are the main issues or opportunities you as a team are facing now?

The mind-map can be done either on a large sheet of paper or screen, electronically with a mind-map program projected on a screen.

Ground-rules for making a collective mind-map:

- All ideas are valuable! We do not evaluate or discard ideas at this point.
- Whoever presents an idea or issue decides where it goes on the mind-map, and whether it is a major theme or a sub-issue.
- It's OK to have contradicting themes or issues.
- Whenever possible, give concrete examples.

Making the mind-map

The mind-map process is lead by a host. All participants have access to post-it notes. When anyone has an idea or issue they want to suggest for the mind-map, they write their name on the post-it and hold it up. Runners will collect the post-its and give them to the facilitator, who will then call out the names in the order received. Once a person's name is called, they can present their idea or issue.
If the group is large there will be a need for radio-microphones. These will be provided by the runners when it is the participant's turn to speak.

The actual map is drawn up by two scribes. The central question is at the center of the mind-map. The major themes – and different issues under each theme, are recorded on the mind-map radiating out from the central question.

Voting

When all themes and issues have been recorded on the mind-map, the group can decide on the priorities by voting. Everyone gets a number of votes i.e. sticky dots that they can place on the themes or issues they see as most important.

The voting procedure gives a clear indication on which themes or issues have the highest leverage for further action.

(The above process is adapted and inspired by "Future Search" – a social technology developed by Marvin Weisbord & Sandra Janoff)

Example of a mind map created by participants exploring "who" was active in food systems work in the U.S. – participants then voted on where to focus their efforts

The real voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new landscapes, but in seeing with new eyes.

Marcel Proust

Pro Action Cafe
combining world cafe and open space

The Pro Action Cafe is a space for creative and action oriented conversation where participants are invited to bring their call - project - ideas - questions or whatever they feel called by and need help to manifest in the world.

The concept of Pro Action Cafe is a blend of "world cafe" and "open space" technologies. It was first conceived by Rainer von Leoprechting and Ria Baeck in Brussels, Belgium.

What is Pro Action Cafe Good For?
As a conversational process, the Pro Action Cafe is a collective, innovative methodology for hosting conversations about calls, questions, and projects that

matter to the people that attend. These conversations link and build on each other as people move between cafe tables, cross-pollinate ideas and offer each other new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, organization, or community.

As a process, the Pro Action Cafe can evoke and make visible the collective intelligence of any group, thus increasing people's capacity for effective action in pursuit of good work. Pro Action Cafe can be used with a network of people and/or as a methodology for a specific, group, organization, or community to engage in creative and inspirational conversation leading to wiser and more collectively informed action.

General Flow of a Pro Action Cafe

A quick check in circle to connect to purpose of the session and with each other. If check-in has already taken place as part of a longer process go straight to building the agenda.

You need 2 1/2 to 3 hours for a good Pro Action Cafe. Invite participants to step forward with their call and in that way ask the community for the help you need to move your project into action. People with a call/project stand up, speak it and write it on the agenda that corresponds to a numbered cafe table.

Count the amount of participants, divide by four - this gives you the amount of callers with projects/sessions that can be worked. (ie. with 40 participants, you can have 10 callers maximum) The principle is first come, first served. If you have less callers, add chairs to cafe tables but no more than 5 at a table. During this process each contributing participant (those who do not step forward) get to support up to three different calls/projects.

When the agenda has been created, invite the callers to go to their numbered cafe tables. There will be three rounds of conversation in cafe style of 20-30 minutes - each guided by a few generic questions to help deepen and focus the conversations.

Round 1
What is the quest behind the call/question/project? - to deepen the purpose of the call

Round 2
What is missing? - when the quest has been deepened, explore what could make the project more complete and possible

Round 3
What am I learning about myself? What am I learning about my project? What next steps will I take? What help do I still need? - to help bring it all together for the caller and their project

Round 3 is in 2 steps:
1. First 20-25 minutes for the callers to reflect by themselves on the 4 questions above and harvest their key insights.
2. Round proceeds as the previous rounds - in conversation with participants. The new participants visit the table to listen to the harvest of the caller, their learning, their steps, help needed - and then offer any insight and any further support they can offer.

Between each round, crate breaks for the participants to have a drink, relax together, and get ready to support another caller in their quest/project.

Last step is to meet in circle and invite the callers from each table to share answers to these two questions:
1. What am I grateful for?
2. What are my next steps?

If there is time, the whole group can shortly reflect on: What applications do we see for practicing proaction cafe in our contexts?

End the Pro Action Cafe with a collective gesture to appreciate the work done and the gifts offered and received.

Materials and Set Up
- Ideally create a large circle in one part of the room and enough cafe tables with four chairs in another part. (If the size of the room does not allow this, then participants will move the tales and chairs themselves as soon as the agenda is created.)
- Dress the tables with flipchart paper, colored pens, and markers as basic cafe set up.
- Prepare the matrix for the agenda setting of the session with the right amount of sessions according to the number of participants divided by four.
- Have fun and do good work together.

http://sites.google.com/a/pro-action.eu/pro-action-cafe/how-to-become-a-host/hosting-kit

The Art of Harvesting
making meaning of our conversations

What if we were planning not a meeting but a harvest? In taking such an approach, we must become clear about why we are initiating any process. The Art of Hosting and the Art of Harvesting dance together as two halves of the same thing.

Harvesting is more than just taking notes. To get a sense of the complexity of this art, let's begin by picturing a field in which someone has planted wheat. How can that field of wheat be harvested?

We first imagine the harvest from that field as a farmer using equipment to cut down the wheat, thresh it, and separate the seeds from the stalks. The farmer might store the grain, further refine it, sell it quickly or wait for the price to increase.

Now imagine a geologist, a biologist and a painter harvesting from the same field. The geologist picks through the rocks and soil gathering data about the land itself. The biologist might collect insects and worms, bits of plants and organic matter. The painter sees the patterns in the landscape and chooses a palette and a perspective for work of art.

They all harvest differently from the field. The results of their work go to different places and are put to different uses. But they all have a few things in common; they have a purpose for being in the field and a set of questions about that purpose, they have a pre-determined place to use the results of the harvest, and they have specific tools to use in doing their work.
Despite the field being the same, the tools and results are specific to the need, purpose and inquiry.
There are eight stages of harvesting, elucidated in the companion book to this one. Briefly they are:

Stage 1: Sensing the need
Sensing the need may at first be intuitive or very basic – like sensing hunger, but once the sensed need becomes conscious one can act on it.

We sense that we are hungry and from there we plant a garden, knowing that the work of planting and harvesting lies before us but that the end result meets the need for sustenance.

The need is not complicated; it is real and clear and it speaks deeply and inspires invitation and action. Everything begins from this need, and the way we hold it and invite others into it informs the harvest that we take at the end of the day

Stage 2: Preparing the field
In some cases the caller creates the readiness of the field by creating awareness around the need. Others with a similar need will recognize the call.

In preparing the field – sending out the call, giving the context, inviting etc.– we set the tone of the whole process – the seriousness and quality will determine the quality of what we reap. The work of readying a field for planting can take a whole year during which we condition the soil, clear the rocks and prepare things. What we are doing here is actually harvesting a field so that the seeds can be planted.

I**n other words: start thinking about the harvest from the very beginning – not as an afterthought.**

Stage 3: Planning the Harvest
Planning the harvest starts with and accompanies the design process. A clear purpose and some success criteria for the process of the harvest itself will add clarity and direction.

What would be useful and add value - and in which form would it serve best?

Translated into a simple check-list, it becomes:
- What intent are you holding?
- Who is going to benefit?
- How can you add most value to the work at hand – how will the harvest serve best?
- What form or what media will be most effective?
- Who should host or do the harvesting?
- What is the right timing?

Stage 4: Planting the seeds
The questions around which we structure the hosting become the seeds for harvesting. All gardeners and farmers know that planting seeds depends on the time and the conditions. You can't just plant whenever you want to. You plant once the conditions are right to maximize the yield.

In hosting practice, this means being sensitive to timing when asking questions.

In sowing the seeds that will drive the inquiry – *identifying and asking the strategic and meaningful questions* – you determine the output. So in planning the harvest, ask yourself, "What it is that this process needs to yield? What information, ideas, output or outcome will benefit us here and now, and what might take us to the next level of inquiry?"

a sample harvest

The process itself is an on-going one. With each part of the process, you harvest something. Some of it you need to use right away, to help lead you into the next process. Some of the harvest you will need later.

So part of planning the harvest is also knowing for *whom, when and how* you need to use it. Another part of the planning is asking yourself in which format the harvest will serve you best.

Stage 5: Tending the crop
Protect the integrity of the crop. Nurture the crop as it grows, weed it and thin it to keep the strong plants growing and get rid of all that will not nourish or serve. This involves a combination of feeding the field and letting it grow. But it also involves just sitting in the field. Holding space for what is emerging and enjoying it.

During the process, enjoy seeing your work unfold in all its complexity. The more you can welcome the growth you are witnessing, the higher the quality of the harvest. Now you are in the pulse of noticing both the quality of the field and the quality of the crops.

This is where we engage in conversation and exploration – where the richness of the harvest is born. The richer the conversation or exchange, the richer the harvest!

Stage 6: Picking the fruits
Picking the fruits corresponds to recording or creating a collective memory. The simplest way to harvest is to record what is being said and done, the output of the conversations, etc. This creates a **record** or **collective memory**.

Recording can be done in words.
- your notes, which will be *subjective*
- or transcripts of output from conversations recorded on tapes, etc., which will be *objective*.

Recording can also be done with pictures / photographs / video / film.

pictures evoke and recall feelings, atmospheres, situations.
or you can video the conversation - record both verbally and visually

It is helpful to give some thought in the planning phase to how you want to harvest. What kind of records, templates etc. will help you gather the relevant information or knowledge?

Stage 7: Preparing and processing the fruits
Creating a memory is the first step. As we pick the fruits or seeds for processing, some will be used right away, some will be used for further processing and some will be used as seed for the next season.

The second step is **making collective sense and meaning**. This is where we add value and make the data useful. There are many ways of doing this. The general idea is to take loads of bits of information and transform them into "holons" – wholes that are also parts of greater wholes.

a harvest team hard at work

Things that can help in this process:.
- Harvest in a systemic way. Ask collectively: What did you notice? What gave sense and meaning to you? Notice the patterns - they indicate what is emerging
- Use metaphors, mental models and stories to make complex issues simple
- Use drawings and graphics to make complex issues manageable and visible

Stage 8: Planning the next harvest - feeding forward
Most harvesting is done to bring closure to a process or bring us to the next level of understanding. More importantly, it helps us to know collectively, to see the same picture and share the same understanding together.

A few comments
The above reflections mainly concern collective harvesting.

Individual reflection and harvest will raise the level of the collective harvest. During learning processes, individual harvesting can be done intentionally, by using a journal as a learning tool.

Web-based tools open up a whole world of possibilities that are not dealt with here.

Harvesting the "soft" is much more subtle and subjective than dealing with the "cognitive" or more objective, tangible parts. A qualitative inquiry into what we have noticed, what has shifted or changed in our relationships, in the culture or atmosphere may give us some information about the softer part of the harvest.

For the most effective harvest, these eight steps should be planned beforehand, as part of designing the whole process.

The Seven Little Helpers
essentials of conversation

There are seven "helpers" that help us design a good conversation. At the bare minimum, if you use these tools, conversations will grow deeper and work will occur at a more meaningful level. These seven helpers bring form to fear and uncertainty and help us stay in the chaos of not knowing the answers. They help us to move through uncomfortable places together, like conflict, uncertainty, fear and the groan zone and to arrive at wise action.

1. Be Present
Inviting presence is a core practice of hosting, but it is also a key practice for laying the ground work for a good meeting. There are many ways of bringing a group to presence, including:
Start with an intention or prayer
Start with a moment of silence
Check in with a personal question related to the theme of the meeting
Pass a talking piece and provide space for each voice to be heard

Start well. Start slowly. Check everyone in.

2. Have a good question
A good question is aligned with the need and purpose of the meeting and invites us to go to another level. Good questions are put into the centre of a circle and the group speaks through them. Having a powerful question at the center keeps the focus on the work and helps a groups stay away from unhelpful behaviours like personal attacks, politics and closed minds.

A good question has the following characteristics:
- Is simple and clear
- Is thought provoking
- Generates energy
- Focuses inquiry
- Challenges assumptions
- Opens new possibilities
- Evokes more questions

It is wise to design these questions beforehand and make them essential pieces of the invitation for others to join you. As you dive into these questions, harvest the new questions that are arising. They represent the path you need to take.

1. Be Present

2. Work together with mates

3. Have a good - 'wicked' -

4. Invite intentional listening and speaking

5. Harvest something useful

6. Make a wise collective decision

7. Act wisely & follow up
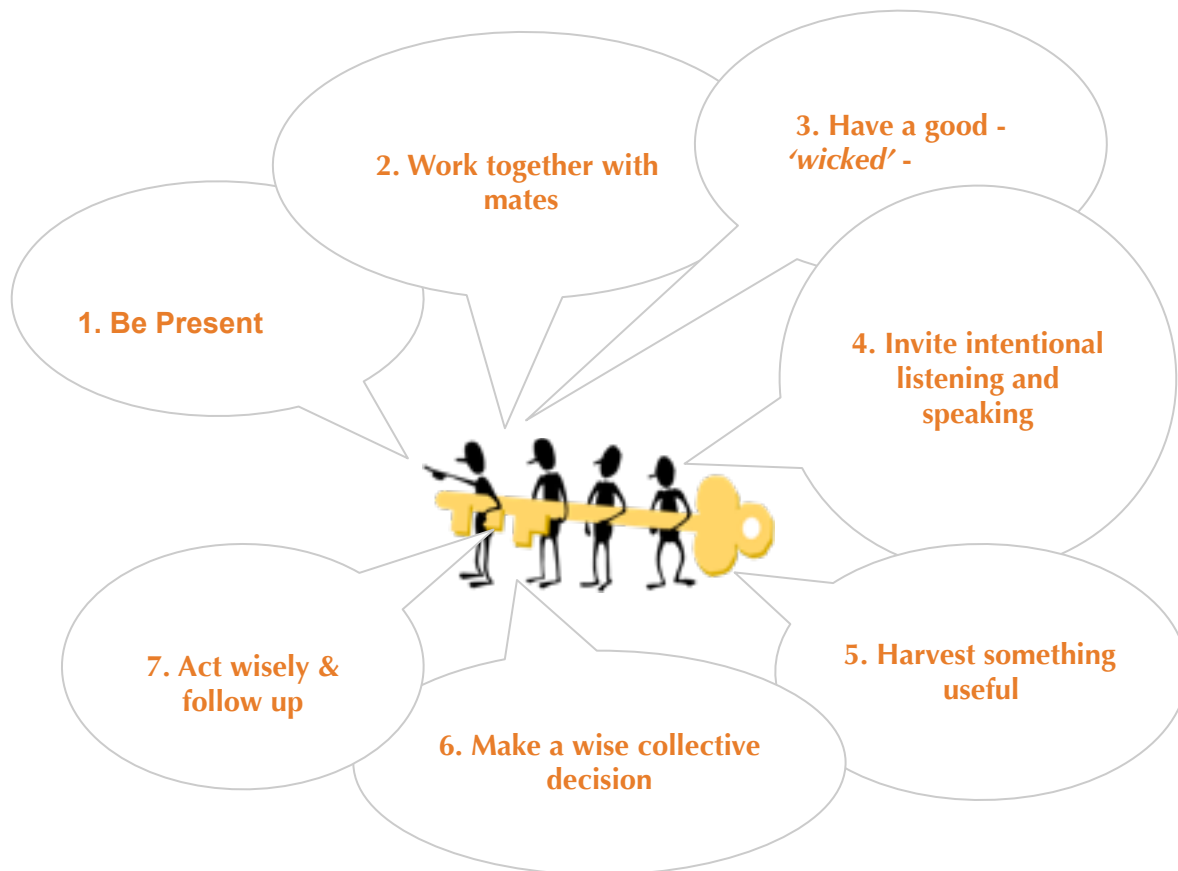
3. Use a talking piece

In it's simplest form a talking piece is simply an object that passes from hand to hand. When one is holding the piece, one is invited to speak, and everyone else is invited to listen. Using a talking piece has the powerful effect of ensuring that every voice is heard and it sharpens both speech and listening. It slows down a conversation so that when things are moving too fast, or people begin speaking over one another and the listening stops, a talking piece restores calm and smoothness. Conducting the opening round of a conversation with a talking piece sets the tone for the meeting and helps people to remember the power of this simple tool.

Of course a talking piece is really a minimal form of structure. Every meeting should have some form of structure that helps to work with the chaos and order that is needed to co-discover new ideas. There are many forms and processes to choose from but it is important to align them with the nature of living systems if innovation and wisdom is to arise from chaos and uncertainty.

At more sophisticated levels, when you need to do more work, you can use more formal processes that work with these kinds of contexts. Each of these processes has a sweet spot, its own best use, which you can think about as you plan meetings. Blend as necessary.

4. Harvest

Never meet unless you plan to harvest your learnings. The basic rule of thumb here is to remember that you are not planning a meeting, you are instead planning a harvest. Know what is needed and plan the process accordingly. Harvests don't always have to be visible; sometimes you plan to meet just to create learning. But support that personal learning with good questions and practice personal harvesting.

To harvest well, be aware of four things:
- Create an artifact. Harvesting is about making knowledge visible. Make a mind map, draw pictures, take notes, but whatever you do create a record of your conversation.
- Have a feedback loop. Artifacts are useless if they sit on the shelf. Know how you will use your harvest before you begin your meeting. Is it going into the system? Will it create questions for a future meeting? Is it to be shared with people as news and learning? Figure it out and make plans to share the harvest.
- Be aware of both intentional and emergent harvest. Harvest answers to the specific questions you are asking, but also make sure you are paying attention to the cool stuff that is emerging in good conversations. There is real value in what's coming up that none could anticipate. Harvest it.
- The more a harvest is co-created, the more it is co-owned. Don't just appoint a secretary, note taker or a scribe. Invite people to co-create the harvest.

Place paper in the middle of the table so that everyone can reach it. Hand out post it notes so people can capture ideas and add them to the whole. Use your creative spirit to find ways to have the group host their own harvest.

5. Make a wise decision

If your meeting needs to come to a decision, make it a wise one. Wise decisions emerge from conversation, not voting. The simplest way to arrive at a wise decision is to use the three thumbs consensus process. It works like this:

First, clarify a proposal. A proposal is a suggestion for how something might be done. Have it worded and written and placed in the centre of the circle. Poll the group asking each person to offer their thumb in three positions. UP means "I'm good with it." SIDEWAYS means "I need more clarity before I give the thumbs up" DOWN means "this proposal violates my integrity...I mean seriously."

As each person indicates their level of support for the proposal, note the down and sideways thumbs. Go to the down thumbs first and ask: "what would it take for you to be able to support this proposal." Collectively help the participant word another proposal, or a change to the current one. If the process is truly a consensus building one, people are allowed to vote thumbs down only if they are willing to participate in making a proposal that works. Hijacking a group gets rewarded with a vote. Majority rules.

Once you have dealt with the down thumbs, do the same with the sideways thumbs. Sideways doesn't mean "no" but rather "I need clarity." Answer the questions or clarify the concerns.

If you have had a good conversation leading to the proposal, you should not be surprised by any down thumbs. If you are, reflect on that experience and think about what you could have done differently.

(For more, refer to The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making by Sam Kaner.)

6. Act.

Once you have decided what to do, act. There isn't much more to say about that except that wise action is action that doesn't not over-extend or under-extend the resources of a group. Action arises from the personal choice to responsibility for what you love. Commit to the work and do it.

7. Stay together

Relationships create sustainability. If you stay together as friends, mates or family, you become accountable to one another and you can face challenges better. When you feel your relationship to your closest mates slipping, call it out and host a conversation about it. Trust is a group's most precious resource. Use it well.

Working Together Using AoH
hosting and designing as a team

Working Together to Create a 'Container'

How are we going to behave together in pursuit of our purpose?

When we enter an inquiry where we do not have ready or easy answers and we cannot see the obvious solution – we also enter "chaos" together. In walking the chaordic path together it is wise to start by creating the conditions that can help contain that chaos. - We call this creating a "container". One fundamental way to create a container is to agree on how we want to work or "travel" together in pursuit of our goal. – In other words we define some agreements or principles of co-operation.

Principles - when defined with clarity, conviction and common understanding - guide our pursuit of purpose. Developing them requires engaging the whole person, not just the intellect. Principles bind a community together and serve as a touchstone to remind us of how we have agreed to act and decide together around our purpose.

Scientists have discovered that the small, brave act of cooperating with another person, of choosing trust over cynicism, generosity over selfishness, makes the brain light up with quiet joy.

Natalie Angier, Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times reporter, describing a study of the effects of behavior on brain chemistry

Exploring principles of cooperation using an exercise with ropes

Circle

- **Purpose is at the centre,** the invisible leader

- **Hosting Team:** hosting the whole; holds the field; holds the clarity of purpose & clarity of harvesting; meeting in a circle and demonstrating circle in action

Triangles

- **Day Hosting:** Two from the Hosting Team act as Day Hosts, holding the clarity of purpose/theme for the day; framing the opening & closing of the day; keeping track of time & agenda. Day Hosts are empowered to make executive decisions about the timing and fit of activities for the day, calling in the rest of the team when absolutely needed.

- **Hosting sessions:** The Hosting Team hosts sessions to model the methodologies

- **Participants host sessions:** The Hosting Team becomes client and coach, supporting participants to step in & step up

- **Hosting the Meta Harvest Team:** The Meta Harvest Team harvests on the meta level, reinforcing what we are learning day by day

- **Teaching:** The Hosting Team brings appropriate teaching and background during the training, looking at patterns relevant to the group and introducing methodologies

- **Participating:** Members of the Hosting Team become participants at various times during the training

- **Space & Beauty team:** Cares for the physical space so that it positively impacts the inner space and learning of the participants

- **Logistics & Admin team:** Supports the training by taking care of all the venue logistics and the pre- and post administration of the event
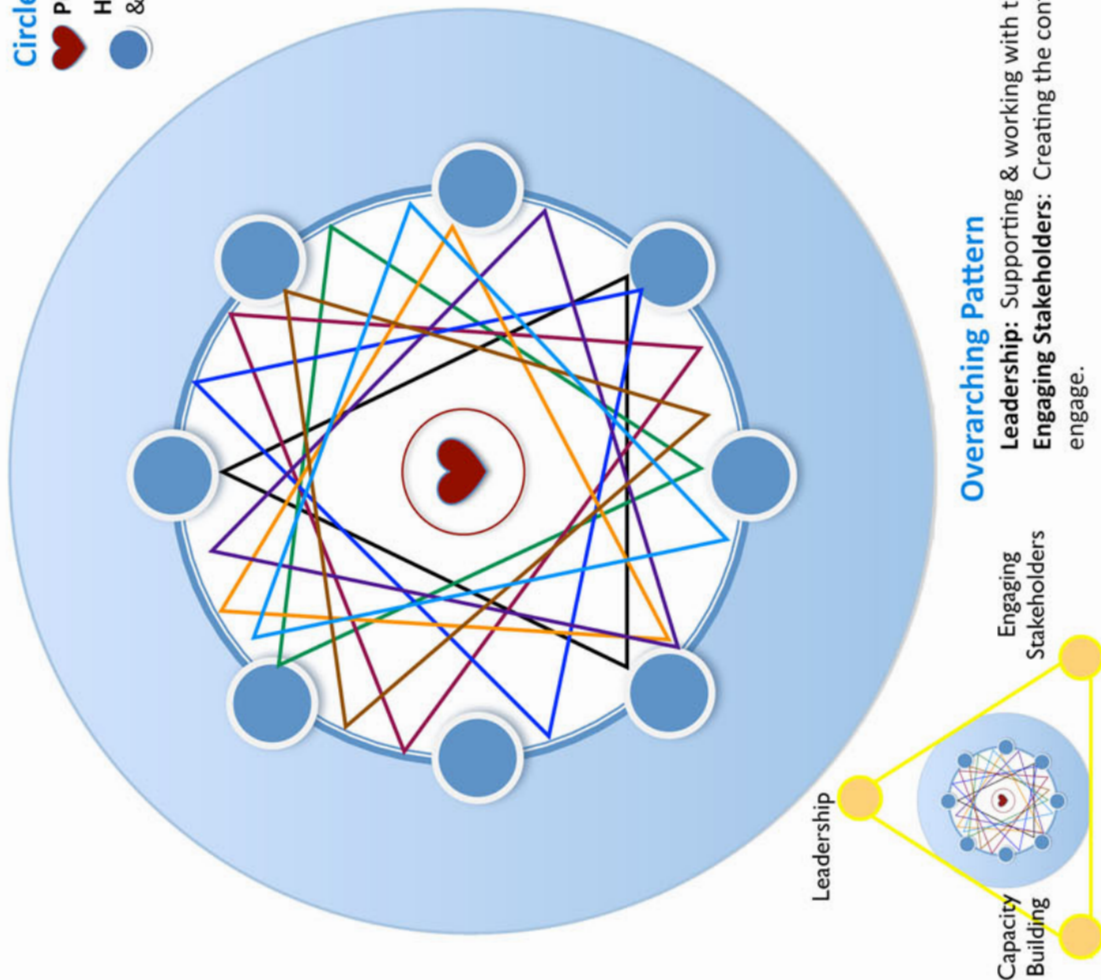
Overarching Pattern

Leadership: Supporting & working with the mandate from the system, encouraging clarity of direction and purpose. **Engaging Stakeholders:** Creating the container for wise & effective engagement. **Capacity Building:** Building the skills to engage.

Leadership

Engaging Stakeholders

Capacity Building

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A Core Hosting Team Holds a Field
hosting and designing as a team (cont.)

Hosting really is a co-creative effort. The diagram below sets out the different roles that make up a Core Hosting Team. Some of the functions can merge e.g. stage-managing and logistics depending on the size and complexity of the process.

The **people holding the strategic perspective** are usually members of the calling service. They are deeply involved in the content and they help the hosting team to understand what

The **caller** is the client of the process, the one who has identified the need and who holds the highest stake in

The Process host introduces the processes, their purpose and explains how people can participate . They hold space once conversations have started. They also host gathering new

For the self–organising process to bear fruits and not be chaotic, the **boundary conditions,** i.e. the non negotiable must be clearly fixed for the participants

Harvesters capture the key insights of what the group is engaging with different tools: notes,

Powerful questions are carefully designed as prompts to engage the group to explore and surface what they

The **Space Host** looks after both the physical aspects, e.g. room layout, materials, equipment, etc., as well as the more subtle non physical aspects of a group, e.g. energy, etc.

In a very large process, it is helpful to also have a **logistics person** who supports the team with the additional physical conditions needed for the process to run

Strategic perspectiv

Process Host

Caller

Participant

Caller

Pur pose

?

?

?

Harvester

Logistics person

Space Host

Who Makes Up a Core Hosting Team

An ideal hosting team consists of:
- The caller who has sensed the need to convene this process
- Members of his/her team who have an in-depth understanding of the content
- Internal consultants who understand the culture of the organization and how change can be led and   accompanied successfully in this context
- External consultants who bring their experience and practices from outside and help the team to take some distance from the context in which they are absorbed in order to gain some fresh perspectives.

The size of this team will vary depending on the scale of the process.

A Core Hosting Team is About Learning Together

In such a team, everybody is learning. Being clear about what you can contribute and what you can expect to learn will help the team to work consciously together in service of the people invited and the purpose. It is highly recommended to have seasoned people in the team who can help less experienced practitioners to deepen their understanding of this way of working through practicing. Sometimes, these seasoned practitioners will even not be visible to the participants. They act then as coaches of the team.

Detailed Roles in a Core Hosting Team

Caller

The caller is the client of the process. They have sensed the need for it and have invited the hosting team to help them initiate a process where others are invited in order to produce outcomes from sharing their knowledge together. The caller is part of the process and:
- Co-drafts and send the invitation
- Welcomes people
- Frames the context and the purpose
- Listens to what is coming out of the conversations
- Helps the hosting team to adapt the process if necessary
- Commits to follow-up on the outcomes

Strategic Perspective Holders

The people who hold the strategic perspective include the caller and other people who have a key stake in the outcomes of the event. These people specifically:
- Liaise with speakers to help them see where their interventions fit
- Liaise with guests to help them catch up when they arrive and make sense of the outcomes of the seminar
- Listen intentionally for horizontal questions
- Capture the key aspects learned by the group
- Liaise with the hosts to keep the event on tracks

Process Hosts

Before an event Process Hosts offer their skills of designing so that an architecture for the process can be created. This is created taking into account the context and purpose of the process, as well as the desired outcomes. During an event, the focus of the process hosts is on facilitating the processes that make up the overall architecture. This includes framing in each method, explaining how people will participate, offering stillness whilst people are in conversations, i.e. holding space, and supporting the gathering of insights as a result of the conversations. In terms of an, the process host is the most visible part of the team, but they cannot do their role without the support of the other members of the team

Speakers

At different points during an event, e.g. welcome, framing a process or closing, a speaker offers in perspective. The purpose for doing this is to inspire and catalyse the subsequent conversations that the participants will engage in. Perspective can be offering in the key challenge that needs to be faced or the most important questions that if engaged in would make a difference. It can also be offering in a new way of looking at issues. This role of speaker is different to more traditional speakers in that they do not take the stance of an expert with the preferred approach or option. Instead they offer their knowledge and perspective to invite in more diversity of views and collective intelligence.

Harvesters

During the design phase of a process, thinking ahead to what we wish to collect as a result of the conversation, i.e. the harvest is very important and shapes what the Harvesters will be gathering and looking out for during an event. Specifically, during an event their role includes
- Being of service to the strategic group and speakers at anytime
- Collecting the results of the conversations depending on the level required, e.g. detailed notes of what was spoken, worksheets participants have filled in, graphic recording, meta level, etc.
- Collecting all pieces of harvesting throughout the event, e.g. worksheet, flipcharts, etc.
- Recording real time visually, e.g. mind maps, photographing, videoing, creating a visual landscape
- Producing the artefacts of what the process produced, e.g. landscape, newsletter/live minutes, full record, strategic report, etc.

Space and Beauty Hosts

The purpose of space hosting is to contribute to creating the optimal learning conditions by tending the physical and non-physical (energetic / subtle) levels. It consists of multiple levels which depending on the context, includes:

Physical Hosting
- Location of venue– proximity to access to nature, transport links, etc.
- Venue – standard and style of facility, e.g., main group room, break out rooms, accommodation, catering, etc.
- Main Group Room – Spacious, light, adaptable, wall space for harvesting
- Setting the optimal learning space when in location e.g., comfort and access for participants, learning space for optimal flow, which includes ample space for harvesting, location of food/drinks, amenities, e.g., restrooms, cloakrooms, etc

Energetic Hosting, sometimes known as holding space
- Connecting to the authentic higher purpose that serves the common good
- Working intentionally with the more subtle levels of emotional, subliminal (unconscious) and thought-based aspects of human interaction that can distract or negatively disturb the creation of a generative learning field
- Noticing the 'unspoken', the shadow, and if in service, giving voice to them, either by asking a question, naming the energy or emotion in the field, or ground it intentionally

Logistics and Admin Team

When hosting a very large event, then it is applicable to have a logistics person or even team as tending to the practical details becomes even more important when working with large number. Specifically, this role includes:
- Liaise with people in charge of the venue on any issue
- Ensure proper set-up of the space
- Handle laptops & USB sticks whenever used
- Handle requests coming from all other teams
- Test all equipment: microphones, PC, projector...

FOLLOW-UP / STRATEGIC CONTINUITY

After an event, it is good practice to gather as an entire Core Hosting Team and to harvest out both the key content insights that will move the work forward as well as the key process insights that will help to shape the next process steps. This allows the wisest next steps in service of the development of individuals, the organisation and the common good to be identified.
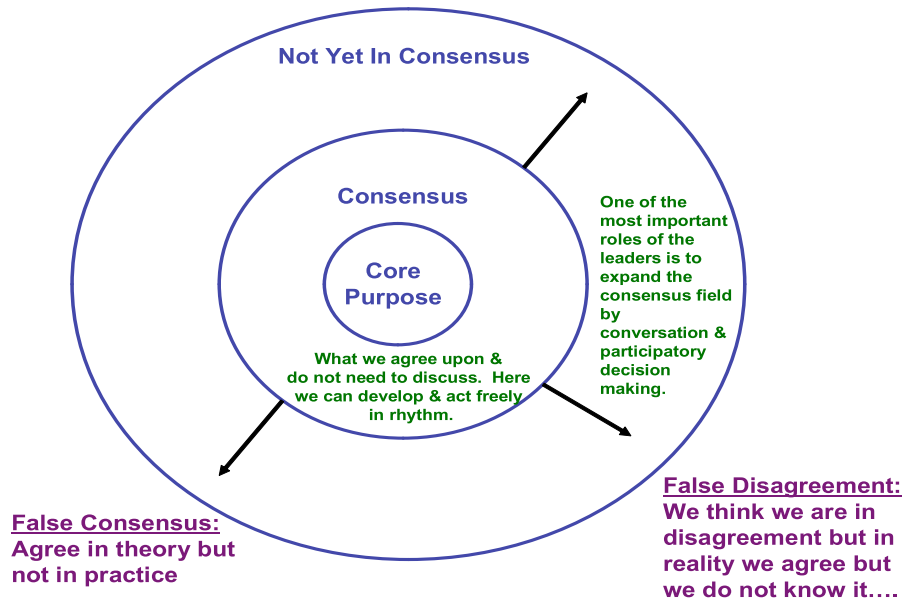
Consensus Decision Making
deciding wise action together

Consensus:
❖ We see the same – collective clarity
❖ Not manipulated agreement

Not Yet In Consensus

Consensus

Core Purpose

What we agree upon & do not need to discuss. Here we can develop & act freely in rhythm.

One of the most important roles of the leaders is to expand the consensus field by conversation & participatory decision making.

False Disagreement:
We think we are in disagreement but in reality we agree but we do not know it….

False Consensus:
Agree in theory but not in practice

Consensus can be a very powerful model of participatory decision making when it is considered to be a "win-win" process and held as integral to the purpose of the group. Although it is sometimes abandoned as being overly complex and time consuming, consensus decision making, in itself, opens the process to careful consideration, listening, and negotiation.   In this context, decisions must be fully understood and agreed to by all members of the group, and the group holds the process of making a decision which is in the best interests of everyone.

Consensus should not be seen as giving power to a small group to veto a decision. Opposing a suggestion or decision also means being willing to take responsibility for moving the process forward.

In working with participatory processes the important thing is to agree on the decision-making process ahead of time.

Serve, serve well, serve others above yourself and be happy to serve... you are the change that you dream, as I am the change that I dream, and collectively we are the change that this world needs to be.

Efren Penaflorida

Consensus usually ensures that everyone is on board and ready to act once the decision has been taken.
Other agreements can be to settle for 75% consensus, or have a democratic decision-making process, or simply collect input and let a chosen group make the decision - whatever serves the purpose best.

What Happens When Your Don't Agree on a Decision Making Process?

Sometimes a group will move forward on their path and begin making decisions before agreeing on how such decisions will be made. This may work – or appear to work – at the outset of a process, but some difficulties can occur.

The meeting just goes one and on...

Members act alone on their own & speak from their own perspective -soon the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.

Someone always gets their way

A badly prepared issue is delegated to a poor underling who later is conveniently blamed for not having taken it further in a good way

What happens when we don't agree on a decision making process?

After a meeting with no collective decision process a few people meet behind closed doors and make the REAL decisions

Just before you are closing the conversation and make the decision somebody comes up with something completely new that becomes the decision

Those that shout the loudest get their way

Reflections on Decision Making:

Communities of Practice
an introduction

(This is a brief and shortened version of an introduction to communities of practice by Etienne Wenger)

This brief and general introduction examines what communities of practice are and why researchers and practitioners in so many different contexts find them useful as an approach to knowing and learning.

What are communities of practice? Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope.

In a nutshell: Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

Note that this definition allows for, but does not assume, intentionality: learning can be the reason the community comes together or an incidental outcome of member's interactions. Not everything called a community is a community of practice. A neighbourhood for instance, is often called a community, but is usually not a community of practice. Three characteristics are crucial:

1. The domain:
A community of practice is not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people. (You could belong to the same network as someone and never know it.) The domain is not necessarily something recognised as "expertise" outside the community. A youth gang may have developed all sorts of ways of dealing with their domain: surviving on the street and maintaining some kind of identity they can live with. They value their collective competence and learn from each other, even though few people outside the group may value or even recognise their expertise.

2. The community:
In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. A website in itself is not a community of practice. Having the same job or the same title does not make for a community of practice unless members interact and learn together. The claims processors in a large insurance company or students in American high schools may have much in common, yet unless they interact and learn together, they do not form a community of practice. But members of a community of practice do not necessarily work together on a daily basis. The Impressionists, for instance, used to meet in cafes and studios to discuss the style of painting they were inventing together. These interactions were essential to making them a community of practice even though they often painted alone.

3. The practice:
A community of practice is not merely a community of interested people who like certain kinds of movies, for instance. Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems —in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction. A good conversation with a stranger on an airplane may give you all sorts of interesting insights, but it does not in itself make for a community of practice. The development of a shared practice may be more or less self-conscious. The "windshield wipers" engineers at an auto manufacturer make a concerted effort to collect and document the tricks and lessons they have learned into a knowledge base. By contrast, nurses who meet regularly for lunch in a hospital cafeteria may not realise that their lunch discussions are one of their main sources of knowledge about how to care for patients. Still, in the course of all these conversations, they have developed a set of stories and cases that have become a shared repertoire for their practice.

It is the combination of these three elements that constitutes a community of practice. And it is by developing these three elements in parallel that one cultivates such a community.

Communities of practice are not called that in all organizations. They are known under various names, such as learning networks, thematic groups, or tech clubs.

While they all have the three elements of a domain, a community, and a practice, they come in a variety of forms. Some are quite small; some are very large, often with a core group and many peripheral members. Some are local and some cover the globe. Some meet mainly face-to-face, some mostly online. Some are within an organization and some include members from various organizations. Some are formally recognized, often supported with a budget; and some are completely informal and even invisible.

Communities of practice have been around for as long as human beings have learned together. At home, at work, at school, in our hobbies, we all belong to communities of practice, a number of them usually. In some we are core members. In many we are merely peripheral. And we travel through numerous communities over the course of our lives.

In fact, communities of practice are everywhere. They are a familiar experience; so familiar perhaps that it often escapes our attention. Yet when it is given a name and brought into focus, it becomes a perspective that can help us understand our world better. In particular, it allows us to see past more obvious formal structures such as organisations, classrooms, or nations, and perceive the structures defined by engagement in practice and the informal learning that comes with it.

Where is the concept being applied?

The concept of community of practice has found a number of practical applications in business, organisational design, government, education, professional associations, development projects, and civic life.

Organizations. People have adopted the concept most readily in business because of the recognition that knowledge is a critical asset that needs to be managed strategically. Initial efforts at managing knowledge

had focused on information systems with disappointing results. Communities of practice provided a new approach, which focused on people and on the social structures that enable them to learn with and from each other. Today, there is hardly any organisation of a reasonable size that does not have some form communities-of-practice initiative. A number of characteristics explain this rush of interest in communities of practice as a vehicle for developing strategic capabilities in organizations:

Communities of practice enable practitioners to take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need, recognising that, given the proper structure, they are in the best position to do this. Communities among practitioners create a direct link between learning and performance, because the same people participate in communities of practice and in teams and business units.

Practitioners can address the tacit and dynamic aspects of knowledge creation and sharing, as well as the more explicit aspects. Communities are not limited by formal structures: they create connections among people across organizational and geographic boundaries.

From this perspective, the knowledge of an organization lives in a

constellation of communities of practice each taking care of a specific aspect of the competence that the organisation needs. However, the very characteristics that make communities of practice a good fit for stewarding knowledge—autonomy, practitioner-orientation, informality, crossing boundaries—are also characteristics that make them a challenge for traditional hierarchical organisations. How this challenge is going to affect these organisations remains to be seen.

The web. New technologies such as the Internet have extended the reach of our interactions beyond the geographical limitations of traditional communities, but the increase in flow of information does not obviate the need for community. In fact, it expands the possibilities for community and calls for new kinds of communities based on shared practice.

The concept of community of practice is influencing theory and practice in many domains. It has now become the foundation of a perspective on knowing and learning that informs efforts to create learning systems in various sectors and at various levels of scale, from local communities, to single organizations, partnerships, cities, regions, and the entire world.

(Further Resources on Communities of Practice are listed in the Resources Section.)

A community of practice gathering in Columbus, Ohio.

Deeper Process Design
introduction

The following pages will give a short introduction to how you can combine and apply some of the core methodologies in exercising leadership in a strategic organizational context.

The following qualities or conditions support a successful implementation.

•Leadership and the approach described in this workbook are particularly useful when **working with complexity** (complex problems and situations), but where there are no clear, unambiguous, fixed solutions, but where the context is constantly changing and you have to work flexibly with what is **emerging**.

•To create a successful intervention **you have to plan a process not an event**. This means that there is a preparatory phase or process, the actual engagement process (one event or a series of events), and a follow-up process, each with some steps that need to be clarified before proceeding to the next phase or "breath". (see 6 breaths of design)

•Planning and designing an **emergent process or strateg**y (rather than a prescriptive one) means operating in the **"chaordic space."** (see see the chaordic path)

•Designing a process in this context means creating a framework or light structure (process design) within which one can operate and produce results in an environment of self-organizing order rather than control.

•The Chaordic Stepping Stones and the Chaordic Design Process offer a
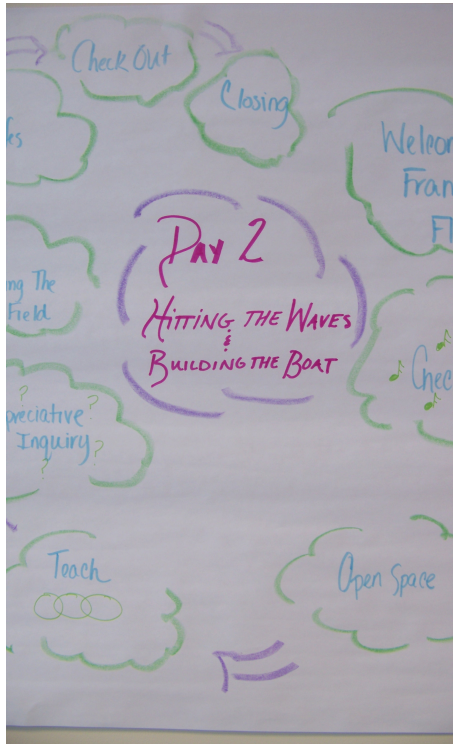
"**Lorem Ipsum Dolor Set Ahmet In Condinmentum. Nullam Wisi Acru Suscpit Consectetuer viviamus Lorem Ipsum Dolor Set Ahmet. Lorem Ipsum Dolor Set Ahmet In Wisi.**"

Leo Praesen

step-by-step approach to structuring and creating progress in this space.

•A good knowledge of the methods and means available will allow you to choose the **right means for the right situations.**

•A good process design is **responding to the need in the moment**, allowing yourself to be well prepared but flexible and able to respond to what is actually happening.

•**Fully combining and integrating content with process, each in support of the other is crucial for creating good results.** A good content combined with a poor process or a good process without some real content - both fall short of the mark.

•To be able to operate well in this environment one needs to embrace both the ability to work in a highly structured way as well as in a chaordic way. The 5th paradigm shows a way of organizing that combines both. (see the 5th paradigm)

Developing and Implementing Conversations in Specific Contexts
Checklist for the design of processes

Before the process – meeting

Preparation (Purpose: to create focus for, and prepare for the meeting/process).

- Getting the participants' 'meaningfulnesses' on the table
- Need check
- Burning questions
- Clarify purpose-goals-and methods
- Send out an invitation with a clear purpose
- Preparation of logistics and material etc.
- Preparation of yourself as host (over prepared and under structured)
- Make the room/space yours

The Process - the meeting

1. Opening of the meeting/process

(Purpose to create a "safe space", acceptance, meaning and overview.)

- Context: "The bigger picture… the many aspects, conditions and relations, that surround a certain situation or case, and that contribute to defining the meaning to give to the situation."
- Purpose – short and long term
- Possibly a framing – set boundaries – and what are givens
- Check in – physically, mentally, and emotionally – so everyone's voice is heard, and everyone is present.
- Expectations – and hopes for outcomes
- Share meeting design/structure … or
- Create a shared agenda

2. The meeting/process

Choice of content (what) and process/method (how) in relation to purpose, target group and the desired outcome.

3. Closing the meeting/process

(Purpose: summary/wrap up, conclusion, closing) -

- Review of results, decisions
- Conclusions
- Agreements
- Check-out (personal)

After the meeting/process

- Follow up (Purpose: review, learning, anchoring)
- Review of experiences and results
- Evaluation
- Learning
- Anchoring of the meeting/process
- Full stop… or beginning

'Learning Ecology'

Documentation of content and process (Purpose: to maintain and anchor common/shared knowledge, insights, agreements etc. – to feed knowledge back into the system, so it is not lost, and so it is possible to further build upon the knowledge that is already present. This is to create a shared memory.

Other possible ingredients

Disturbance

It is important that there is a good amount of disturbance. The disturbance can be so small that it doesn't move anything, or really challenge, and it can be too much, so that it is rejected as too overwhelming (inspired by Maturana).

The ability to handle chaos – the courage to stand in chaos.

To dare let go of control.

Variation – in rhythm – content – methods – process etc..

Experience-based – "Tell me and I will forget – show me and I will remember – involve me and I will learn."

From head to feet – personally meaningful – mentally – emotionally and action-wise

Purpose

It is important to let the purpose shape the meeting.

A key is to determine whether the meeting already has a determined content – does it need to have a formal structure (i.e. the group wants to agree upon or make a decision around a predetermined issue/content), or – is the purpose of the meeting to explore, inquire, develop ideas or in other ways make space for co-creation and development – in other words, let a new content emerge – have an open structure.

Different purposes:
- Show up
- Learning processes
- Idea development/innovation
- Dialogue
- Experience sharing
- To find consensus
- To build team
- Information meetings
- Planning meetings
- Distribution of tasks
- Decision making meetings
- Problem solving meeting
- Need clarification meetings
- Etc

Types of meetings	Formal structure	Open structure
Creative	(Directed/'controlled') design and planning meetings	Idea-generation meetings, brainstorming, development meetings
Learning	Education, Information meetings	Interactive processes, Dialogue meetings, Experience sharing, etc.
Decision making Common ground	Decision making meetings	Council, etc.

Copied from InterChange's on-line resources: http:www.interchange.dk/resources/checklistfordesign/

The 6 Breaths of Process Architecture

Over the years many hosts saw their work with different (larger scale) initiatives as a follow-up of different 'breaths', different phases of divergence and convergence. They became know as the Six Breaths. As we learn, in reflection on the work that we do, it is most likely that this pattern will gain more clarity in the months and years to come…

First breath: THE CALL
- Name the issue: calling the core question -- birth of the callers. We have noticed that there is always a 'caller', a person who deeply holds a question, a problem, a challenge. Sometimes there are several callers. The callers are the ones who invite the host(s) to help them.
- Wise action: Focus the chaos of holding the collective uncertainty and fear -- step into the centre of the disturbance
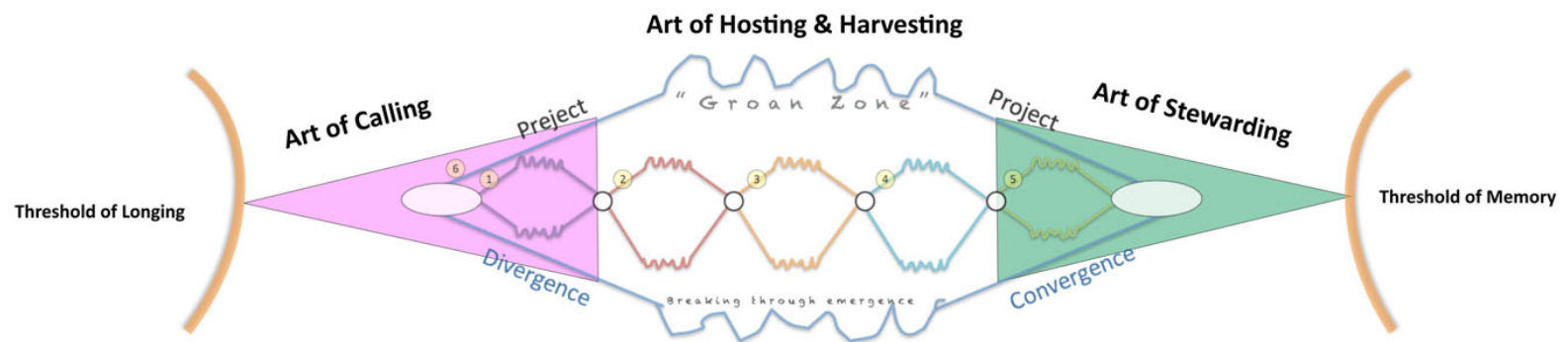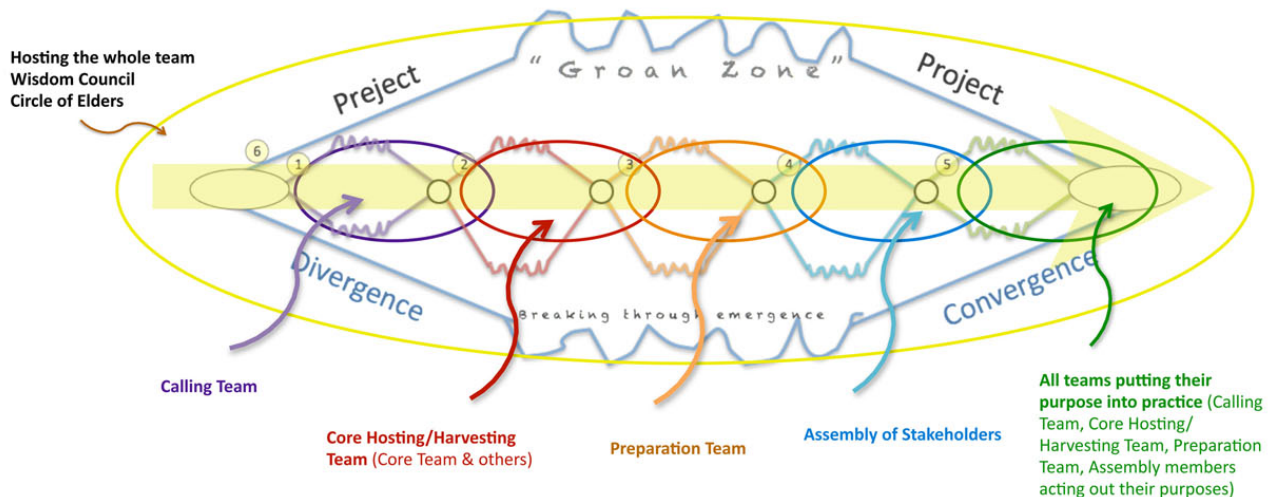- Don't move too fast
- Question: What is really at stake here? What if some of us worked together to surface the real question and need that matters to the community?

When the caller has committed to call the process, we go to the next phase.

Second breath: CLARIFY
- Creating the ground: The callers and hosts work to create collective clarity of purpose and the first articulation of principles
- Wise action: engagement
- Don't make assumptions
- Question: How to get from need to purpose? What is our purpose? How to see and feed the group value?

This phase is over once the core of clarity has emerged.

Third breath: INVITE
- Giving form and structure: design and invitation process
- Wise action: keep checknig to be sure your design and invitation serve the purpose
- Don't make your design too complex (match it to the purpose)
- Question: Who are the stakeholders? How do we invite people to participate in a

way that moves them to show up? How do we let go of our expectations that certain people need to be there?
The meeting has been designed, a larger group of stakeholders has been invited, a good meeting space has been found: it's time to meet!

Fourth breath: MEET ...
- Meeting: Conversation
- Wise action: our role is to host the group, the purpose, the questions
- Don't go alone
- Question: How can I best serve as the instrument/container to allow collective wisdom to emerge?

…and make meaning together. When the meeting is done, the group of stakeholders find collective meaning and start to co-create. This is where the harvest is important -- to capture key messages and insights and make sense of them.

Fifth breath: ACT
- Practice: Perform the wise actions decided on during the conversation. Follow up, continue learning and leading from the field
- Wise action: always come back to purpose
- Don't lose sight of the purpose of it won't be embodied
- Question: How do we sustain the sefl-organisation?

Here the seed of community is born, and the results are a connectedness between the stakeholders and wiser actions. From here the next calling question arises…

Sixth breath: **HOLDING THE WHOLE**: holding the story of the unfolding progress, tending to the core team and the heartbeat of the sacred purpose underneath all the activities

People and Teams within the Process Architecture

Hosting the whole team
Wisdom Council
Circle of Elders

Preject   "Groan Zone"   Project

Divergence

Breaking through emergence

Convergence

Calling Team

Core Hosting/Harvesting Team (Core Team & others)

Preparation Team

Assembly of Stakeholders

All teams putting their purpose into practice (Calling Team, Core Hosting/Harvesting Team, Preparation Team, Assembly members acting out their purposes)

Art of Hosting & Harvesting

Art of Calling

Preject   "Groan Zone"   Project

Art of Stewarding

Threshold of Longing

Divergence

Breaking through emergence

Convergence

Threshold of Memory

Threshold of Longing: Following the sense of longing to a spark of insight, which, over time and sensing in becomes clarity about a deep calling. Crossing the threshold initiates the birth of the call.

Threshold of Memory: The work becomes a legacy passed on to others. It is time to let go and allow the influence to ripple out and do what it will. When we and our acts are forgotten, the threshold of memory has been crossed.

The Chaordic Stepping Stones
walking the chaordic path

The Chaordic Stepping Stones

There are clear strategic steps we can take when walking the Chaordic path. These steps are a way of bringing just enough structure or order into the chaos to keep us moving forward on the chaordic path. These steps allow us to progress gradually giving our project or organisation more form as we progress.

The first step is identifying the real need, followed by formulating a clear purpose, then defining the principles that help guide us towards our goal (as attributes or characteristics describing where we want to be or how we want to get there), gradually proceeding to defining a concept, then giving it more structure and moving into practice. These steps can be used both as a planning tool and to help understand what you are discovering about an organization, community or initiative.

However, these stones don't have a consistent starting point. For example, you might find yourself (or those you are working with) beginning with a concept, lacking clarity of need or purpose, then returning to clarify those before you proceed. Another way to think of these is as facets, sides to a gem. Each piece illuminates the gem.

The Chaordic process is in continual motion, each step integrating and including the previous steps. It is not a linear process - it is an iterative process - supported by an ongoing documentation or harvest and feed back loop. Once you have defined the principles you check back if they support the purpose etc. The process allows us to be able to remain in reflection and practice.

The Chaordic Design Process
dee hock

The chaordic design process has six dimensions, beginning with purpose and ending with practice. Each of the six dimensions can be thought of as a lens through which participants examine the circumstances giving rise to the need for a new organization or to re-conceive an existing one. Developing a self-organizing, self-governing organization worthy of the trust of all participants usually requires intensive effort. To maximize their chances of success, most groups have taken a year or more on the process. During that time, a representative group of individuals (sometimes called a drafting team) from all parts of the engaged organization or community meet regularly and work through the chaordic design process.

The steps involved in conceiving and creating a more chaordic organization are:

Develop a Statement of Purpose

The first step is to define, with absolute clarity and deep conviction, the purpose of the community. An effective statement of purpose will be a clear, commonly understood statement of that which identifies and binds the community together as worthy of pursuit. When properly done, it can usually be expressed in a single sentence. Participants will say about the purpose, "If we could achieve that, my life would have meaning."

Define a Set of Principles

Once the purpose has been clearly stated, the next step is to define, with the same clarity, conviction and common understanding, the principles by which those involved will be guided in pursuit of that purpose. Principles typically have high ethical and moral content, and developing them requires engaging the whole person, not just the intellect. The best will be descriptive, not prescriptive, and each principle will illuminate the others. Taken as a whole, together with the purpose, the principles constitute the body of belief that will bind the community together and against which all decisions and acts will be judged.

Identify All Participants

With clarity about purpose and principles, the next step is to identify all relevant and affected parties - the participants whose needs, interests and perspectives must be considered in conceiving (or re-conceiving) the organization. As drafting team members pursue their work, their perceptions of who constitutes a stakeholder will typically expand. They now have an opportunity to ensure that all concerned individuals and groups are considered when a new organizational concept is sought.

Create a New Organizational Concept

When all relevant and affected parties have been identified, drafting team members creatively search for and develop a general concept for the organization. In the light of purpose and principles, they seek innovative organizational structures that can be trusted to be just, equitable and effective with respect to all participants, in relation to all practices in which they may engage. They often discover that no existing form of organization can do so and that something new must be conceived.

Write a Constitution

Once the organizational concept is clear, the details of organizational structure and functioning are expressed in the form of a written constitution and by-laws. These documents will incorporate, with precision, the substance of the previous steps. They will embody purpose, principles and concept, specify rights, obligations and relationships of all participants, and establish the organization as a legal entity under appropriate jurisdiction.

Foster Innovative Practices

With clarity of shared purpose and principles, the right participants, an effective concept and a clear constitution, practices will naturally evolve in highly focused and effective ways. They will harmoniously blend cooperation and competition within a transcendent organization trusted by all. Purpose is then realized far beyond original expectations, in a self-organizing, self-governing system capable of constant learning and evolution.

Drawing the Pieces into a Whole

The process is iterative. Each step sheds new light on all of the preceding steps and highlights where modifications or refinements need to be made. In effect, the process continually folds back on itself, more fully clarifying the previous steps even as each new dimension is explored. Over time, the elements become deeply integrated. None is truly finished until all are finished.

Two risks are frequently encountered - moving onto the next stage too quickly and allowing the striving for perfection to bog down the process. The first risk is common when working on purpose and principles, where agreement on "platitudes" can often be reached even when underlying differences persist. In these situations, finding an easy answer that pleases everyone is not enough; digging deeper to find richer and more meaningful understanding and agreement is essential. This can be taken to an extreme, of course, which leads to the second risk. Perfection is not required and will never be attained. Getting a very good answer that is "good enough" to move on to the next step is the goal. Keep in mind that what is done at each stage will be subsequently refined.

The Chaordic Design Process
continued

The most difficult parts of the process are releasing preconceived notions about the nature and structure of organizations and understanding their origins in our own minds. We often catalyze this process by asking the question: "If anything imaginable were possible, if there were no constraints whatever, what would be the nature of an ideal institution to accomplish our purpose?"

There is no absolutely right or wrong way to undertake and proceed through the chaordic design process, but we typically observe the following pattern in our work with organizations:

One or two sessions exploring the core chaordic concepts with a leadership or initiating group. We urge groups and organizations to take time to assess the relevance and "fit" of chaordic concepts and processes for their circumstances. Having key participants consider and endorse a major change initiative is essential if the effort is to have a serious chance of success.

One or two sessions determining participants, developing resources and devising a strategy for working through the chaordic design process. One or more months of work are typically required to organize the resources and support that an organizational development effort will need. This includes the development of several dedicated teams with responsibility for project management and staffing, outreach and communications, and organizational concept and design.

A series of in-depth meetings, each several days in length, to work through each of the six elements. Some elements, such as principles and organizational concept, often take more than a single meeting. It is not uncommon for this series of meeting to take at least a year, sometimes two, especially when dealing with large, complex organizations or industries.

Ongoing analytic and educational support for process participants. Issues invariably arise that require more detailed research or attention by a special team. Research on industry-specific matters, or mapping potential participants and their current relationships to each other, are examples. Legal analysis is often required.

Chartering and implementation. Our aim is to create a dynamic, evolving organization. Yet implementation of the new concept can take several month. In the case of existing organizations seeking to transform themselves, a careful strategy for the transition from one structure to another must be created. When a new organization is being formed, it may take some months for individuals and other institutions to elect to join and participate.

(Dee Hock, Birth of the Chaordic Age, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco.)

Resources
books, articles, websites

Many resources are available – books, articles, websites, blogs, communities.

As starting points or hubs for more extensive lists of resources, we suggest:

www.artofhosting.org   (co-created by many art of hosting stewards)

www.evolutionarynexus.org An online conversation and knowledge space, with a separate Art of Hosting section.

http://www.evolutionarynexus.org/community/art_hosting or http://www.vimeo.com/groups/hosting Provides videos about several AoH topics

Here are a few gems with which to start or perhaps, like old friends, return to:

Baldwin, Christina
Calling the Circle – The First and Future Culture
Storycatcher – Making sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story
www.peerspirit.com

Brown, Juanita with David Isaacs & the World Café Community
The World Café – Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter
www.theworldcafe.com

Corrigan, Chris
The Tao of Holding Space
Open Space Technology – A User's Non-Guide (with Michael Herman)
www.chriscorrigan.com

Cooperrider, David and Srivastva (2000)
Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Toward a Positive Theory of Change
www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu
www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/whatisai.pdf

Owen, Harrison
Open Space Technology – A Users Guide
Expanding our now - The Story of Open Space Technology
The Spirit of Leadership - Liberating the Leader in Each of Us
www.openspaceworld.org

Holman, Peggy (Editor), Tom Devane (Editor)
The Change Handbook (Second Edition Available this Fall)

Isaacs, William.
Dialogue and the art of thinking together.

Kahane, Adam
Solving Tough Problems
Power and Love

Kaner, Sam et. al.
The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making

Resources
books, articles, websites - continued

Scharmer, Otto
Presencing
Theory U

Senge, Peter
The Fifth Discipline
The Fifth Discipline Field Book (with Ross, Smith, Roberts, and Kleiner)
The Art and Practise of The Learning Organization
The Dance of Change   (with Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts)

Wenger, Etienne (Communities of Practice)
Cultivating Communities of Practice: a Guide to Managing Knowledge. (with Richard McDermott and William Snyder)
Communities of Practice: the Organisational Frontier. Harvard Business Review. January-February 2000, pp. 139-145.
(with William Snyder)
Knowledge Management is a Donut: Shaping your Knowledge Strategy with Communities of Practice. Ivey Business Journal, January 2004.
Supporting Communities of Practice: a Survey of Community-Oriented Technologies. www.ewenger.com/tech, 2001.
Communities of practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
Learning for a Small Planet: a Research Agenda.www.ewenger.com/research, 2004.

Wheatley, Margaret J.
Leadership and the New Science:
Turning to One Another
Finding Our Now
A Simpler Way (with Myron Kellner-Rogers)
Perseverance

Whitney, Dianna and Trosten-Bloom, A.
The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: a Practical Guide to Positive Change.

Resources - Articles
Basics of Hosting: Hosting in a Hurry (V.1.5)

written by Chris Corrigan, Steward, Canada-Vancouver Island

Putting the Art of Hosting into practice
A quick reference for convening conversations that matter.

All conversations are opportunities for us to connect a little deeper with one another. In the Art of Hosting practice we often talk of the four fold way and the seven little helpers: the simplest tools for convening any conversation.

By far most of the conversations we host in our lives at work or in the community are conversations with small groups. These simple processes are offered as a quick reference for bringing depth and life to those conversations.

The Four Fold Way of Hosting
We have learned that quality conversations leading to close teamwork and wise action arise when there are four conditions present:

1. Be Present
2. Participate and practice conversations
3. Host
4. Co-create

We call these four conditions the Four Fold Way of Hosting, because you can practice these any time. They form the basis for all good hosting.

Be Present
...host yourself first - be willing to sit in the chaos - keep the space open - sit in the fire of the present...

Being present means showing up, undistracted, prepared, clear about the need and what your personal contribution can be. It allows you to check in with yourself and develop the personal practice of curiosity about the outcomes of any gathering. Presence means making space to devote a dedicated time to working with others. If you are distracted, called out or otherwise located in many different places, you cannot be present in one. For meetings to have deep results, every person in the room should be fully present.

Questions to help you become present

What am I curious about?

Where am I feeling anxiety coming into this meeting and how can I let that go?

What clarity do I need? What clarity do I have?

Collectively, it is good practice to become present together as a meeting begins. This might be as simple as taking a moment of silence to rest into the present. If an Elder is present, a prayer does this very nicely. Invite a collective slowing down so that all participants in a meeting can be present together.

Participate and practice conversation
...be willing to listen fully, respectfully, without judgment and thinking you already know all the answer – practice conversation mindfully...

Conversation is an art, it is not just talk. It demands that we listen carefully to one another and that we offer what we can in the service of the whole. Curiosity and judgment cannot live together in the same space. If we are judging what we are hearing, we cannot be curious about the outcome, and if we have called a meeting because we are uncertain of the way forward, being open is a key skill and capacity. Only by practicing skilful conversation can we find our best practice together.

> **Practicing conversation**
>
> Listen and help others to listen
>
> Use silence
>
> Contribute to the harvest
>
> Put good questions in the centre
>
> Connect ideas

If we practice conversation mindfully we might slow down meetings so that wisdom and clarity can work quickly. When we talk mindlessly, we don't allow space for the clarity to arise. The art of conversation is the art of slowing down to speed up.

Host conversations
...be courageous, inviting and willing to initiate conversations that matter - find and host powerful questions with the stakeholders – and then make sure you harvest the answers, the patterns, insights learnings and wise actions...

Hosting conversations is both more and less than facilitating. It means taking responsibility for creating and holding the container in which a group of people can do their best work together. You can create this container using the seven helpers as starting points, and although you can also do this in the moment, the more preparation you have the better.
The bare minimum to do is to discern the need, prepare a question and know what you will do with the harvest. If there is no need to meet, don't meet. If there is a need get clear on the need and prepare a process that will meet that need by asking a powerful question. And always know how you will harvest and what will be done with that harvest, to ensure that results are sustainable and the effort was worth it.

> **Hosting basics**
>
> Determine the need and the purpose
>
> Create a powerful question
>
> Host an appropriate process
>
> Encourage contributions
>
> Harvest

Hosting conversations takes courage and it takes a bit of certainty and faith in your people. We sometimes give short shrift to conversational spaces because of the fear we experience in stepping up to host. It is, however, a gift to host a group and it is a gift to be hosted well.   Work in meetings becomes that much better.

Co-create
...be willing to co create and co-host with others, blending your knowing, experience and practices with theirs, working partnership..

The fourth practice is about showing up in a conversation without being a spectator, and contributing to the collective effort to sustain results. The best conversations arise when we listen for what is in the middle, what is arising out of the centre of our collaboration. It is not about the balancing of individual agendas, it is about finding out what is new. And when that is discovered work unfolds beautifully when everyone is clear about what they can contribute to the work. This is how results become sustainable over time – they fall into the network of relationships that arise from a good conversation, from friends working together.

> **Co-creation**
>
> Speak truth
>
> Speak for what is in the middle
>
> Offer what you can
>
> Ask for what you need
>
> Commit to what you can
>
> Let go

So contribute what you know to the mix so that patterns may become clear and the collaborative field can produce unexpected and surprising results.

The Seven Helpers

Over the years, we have identified seven little tools that are the source of good conversational design. At the bare minimum, if you use these tools, conversations will grow deeper and work will occur at a more meaningful level. These seven helpers bring form to fear and uncertainty and help us stay in the chaos of not knowing the answers. They help us to move through uncomfortable places together, like conflict, uncertainty, fear and the groan zone and to arrive at wise action.

- Be present
- Have a good question
- Use a talking piece
- Harvest
- Make a wise decision
- Act
- Stay together

1. Be Present

Inviting presence is a core practice of hosting, but it is also a key practice for laying the ground work for a good meeting. There are many ways of bringing a group to presence, including:

- Start with a prayer
- Start with a moment of silence
- Check in with a personal question related to the theme of the meeting
- Pass a talking piece and provide space for each voice to be heard
- Start well. Start slowly. Check everyone in.

2. Have a good question

A good question is aligned with the need and purpose of the meeting and invites us to go to another level. Good questions are put into the centre of a circle and the group speaks through them. Having a powerful question at the centre keeps the focus on the work and helps a groups stay away from unhelpful behaviours like personal attacks, politics and closed minds.

A good question has the following characteristics:

- Is simple and clear
- Is thought provoking
- Generates energy
- Focuses inquiry
- Challenges assumptions
- Opens new possibilities
- Evokes more questions

It is wise to design these questions beforehand and make them essential pieces of the invitation for others to join you. As you dive into these questions, harvest the new questions that are arising. They represent the path you need to take.

3. Use a talking piece

In it's simplest form a talking piece is simply and object that passes from hand to hand. When one is holding the piece, one is invited to speak and everyone is invited to listen. Using a talking piece has the powerful effect of ensuring that every voice is heard and it sharpens both speech and listening. It slows down a conversation so that when things are moving too fast, or people begin speaking over one another and the listening stops, a talking piece restores calm and smoothness. Conducting the opening round of a conversation with a talking piece sets the tone for the meeting and helps people to remember the power of this simple tool.

Of course a talking piece is really a minimal form of structure. Every meeting should have some form of structure that helps to work with the chaos and order that is needed to co-discover new ideas. There are many forms and processes to choose from but it is important to align them with the nature of living systems if innovation and wisdom is to arise from chaos and uncertainty.

At more sophisticated levels, when you need to do more work, you can use more formal processes that work with these kinds of context. Each of these processes has a sweet spot, its own best use, which you can think about as you plan meetings. Blend as necessary.

Process	Requirements	Best uses
Appreciative Inquiry	At least 20 minutes per person for interviews, with follow up time to process together. Can be done anywhere.	Discovering what we have going for us and figuring out how to use those assets in other places.
Circle	A talking piece and a space free of tables that can hold the group in a circle.	For reflecting on a question together, when no one person knows the answer. The basis for all good conversations.
Open Space Technology	A room that can hold the whole group in a circle, a blank wall, at least an hour per session. You have to let go of outcomes for this to realize its full power.	For organizing work and getting people to take responsibility for what they love. Fastest way to get people working on what matters.
World Cafe	Tables or work spaces, enough to hold three to four at each, with paper and markers in the middle. You need 15 to 20 minutes per round of conversation and at least two rounds to get the full power. People need to change tables each round so ideas can travel.	For figuring out what the whole knows. World Cafe surfaces the knowledge that is in the whole, even knowledge that any given individual doesn't know is shared.

4. Harvest

Never meet unless you plan to harvest your learnings. The basic rule of thumb here is to remember that you are not planning a meeting, you are instead planning a harvest. Know what is needed and plan the process accordingly. Harvests don't always have to be visible; sometimes you plan to meet just to create learning. But support that personal learning with good questions and practice personal harvesting.

To harvest well, be aware of four things:

Create an artifact. Harvesting is about making knowledge visible. Make a mind map, draw pictures, take notes, but whatever you do create a record of your conversation.

Have a feedback loop. Artefacts are useless if they sit on the shelf. Know how you will use your harvest before you begin your meeting. Is it going into the system? Will it create questions for a future meeting? Is it to be shared with people as news and learning? Figure it out and make plans to share the harvest.

Be aware of both intentional and emergent harvest. Harvest answers to the specific questions you are asking, but also make sure you are paying attention to the cool stuff that is emerging in good conversations. There is real value in what's coming up that none could anticipate. Harvest it.

The more a harvest is co-created, the more it is co-owned. Don't just appoint a secretary, note taker or a scribe. Invite people to co-create the harvest. Place paper in the middle of the table so that everyone can reach it. Hand out post it notes so people can capture ideas and add them to the whole. Use your creative spirit to find ways to have the group host their own harvest.

For more information and inspiration, consult The Art of Harvesting booklet available from Monica Nissen or Chris Corrigan.

5. Make a wise decision

If your meeting needs to come to a decision, make it a wise one. Wise decisions emerge from conversation, not voting. The simplest way to arrive at a wise decision is to use the three thumbs consensus process. It works like this:

First, clarify a proposal. A proposal is a suggestion for how something might be done. Have it worded and written and placed in the centre of the circle. Poll the group asking each person to offer their thumb in three positions. UP means "I'm good with it." SIDEWAYS means "I need more clarity before I give the thumbs up" DOWN means "this proposal violates my integrity...I mean seriously."

As each person indicates their level of support for the proposal, note the down and sideways thumbs. Go to the down thumbs first and ask: "what would it take for you to be able to support this proposal." Collectively help the participant word another proposal, or a change to the current one. If the process is truly a consensus building one, people are allowed to vote thumbs down only if they are willing to participate in making a proposal that works. Hijacking a group gets rewarded with a vote. Majority rules.

Once you have dealt with the down thumbs, do the same with the sideways thumbs. Sideways doesn't mean "no" but rather "I need clarity." Answer the questions or clarify the concerns.

If you have had a good conversation leading to the proposal, you should not be surprised by any down thumbs. If you are, reflect on that experience and think about what you could have done differently.

For more, refer to The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making.

6. Act.
Once you have decided what to do, act. There isn't much more to say about that except that wise action is action that doesn't not over-extend or under-extend the resources of a group. Action arises from the personal choice to responsibility for what you love. Commit to the work and do it.

7. Stay together
Relationships create sustainability. If you stay together as friends, mates or family, you become accountable to one another and you can face challenges better. When you feel your relationship to your closest mates slipping, call it out and host a conversation about it. Trust is a group's most precious resource. Use it well.

Acknowledgements and contact information.

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Please share this document and contact me at chris@chriscorrigan if you need to. My website at www.chriscorrigan.com has links to or copies of most of the resources discussed here.

Notes and Reflections