

“Leaders don't create followers, they create more leaders.” (Tom Peters)

As we enrolled for the AoH-Training in Berlin we were asked to write down some of our most burning questions that we would like to work on during the training. This is what I formulated: “Circle work, participatory methods, hosting, ways of accessing collective wisdom are incredibly valuable, but they do not make the need for leadership superfluous. How do we act as “enlightened”, serving leaders that include participatory methods and train others to become leaders in their own way?” In this reflection piece I recapitulate some of my observations and insights. I formulate them in such a way that readers who have not been involved in the training or who do not even know about AoH can – hopefully- also make sense of it.

Before setting out I would like to describe what I understand leadership to be: Leadership is necessary in order for a group of people to move from a need or an aspiration towards the ability to really attain or create what they aspire for. It implies the willingness to motivate and influence others in such a way that a certain goal can be reached. Situations that call for leadership are usually marked by the need for learning: learning the things we are not yet good at or have never tried out before. Mentoring or teaching and learning are closely related to leading.

Art of Hosting and Harvesting (AoH) favors collaborative or shared leadership. It is among other things about experiencing community and teams in such a way that leadership and insights are offered from everywhere in the circle. Leadership is not limited to one person, but is rather situational and temporary. From a conceptual perspective everyone is hosting the event, while at the same time being a participant. The idea behind this approach is that everyone brings questions, experiences and knowledge into the space. When they are being accessed, a common field of exploring & learning as well as co-creation can emerge. This implies that everyone should be part of the field of inquiry in two ways: on the one hand exploring one's own questions and learning edges, on the other hand supporting others in their inquiries. A community of leaders can appear, when it is understood that there is not one person or one team that knows all the answers to all questions. Consensus is strived for when it comes to decision-making. This form of collaborative or transformational leadership is appealing to people with a so-called pluralistic mindset. For it is based on humanistic values like the importance of interpersonal relationship and awareness, sensitivity, personal growth and self-expression, tolerance, diversity, interdependence, equality and an idealistic attitude of wanting to serve and change the world.

On the factual level there is a situational system of responsibilities in place. The set-up of the Training in terms of who is responsible for what seemed to me at first quite complicated and bumptious: a calling team, a hosting team, hosts of the day,... Within this larger team of people who had prepared the event, there was a certain hierarchy in terms of responsibility and expertise, but Ria and Mary Alice, the two elders or one could say main leaders (called hosts in this context) usually stepped back enough for the others of the calling team to feel comfortable about making an introduction, offering a teaching session or leading the check-in or anything else that was part of the flow. This was right from the beginning a practical example of collaborative or shared leadership.

The leading question for the AoH-Training in Berlin was “How do we want to learn and lead in changing cities?” Many young talented and committed people under age 40 showed up. Apart from sharing perspectives on this question, the flow of the Training gave an additional possible answer by empowering people to step forward and facilitate parts of the programme and while doing so learn more about their capacities and limits as a leader.

During the first day we were sent out at noon in groups of three with the task of doing an appreciative inquiry on the streets of Berlin (<http://aohberlin2011.posterous.com/day-01-sensing-the-city>). My team visited the Occupy Berlin tent settlement near the main station. In the

conversation with a 60-year old woman two things that have to do with my question stood out. She was really happy experiencing a loving community there and she mentioned the good work that was being done by a core team in terms of hosting and taking care of the flux of visitors and people staying for a while. Her appreciation of the Occupy Berlin settlement highlighted the need for leadership in this self-organizing protest movement.



On the night of the first day every one of the participants of the AoH-Training was offered the chance to take on a role for a part of the program of the coming days. The set-up was a bit artificial: one person of the hosting team (Ria or Mary Alice) was the client who gave a certain task to a group of people that was volunteering for one aspect. Those interested in trying out some of the methodology would be told for instance: Tomorrow I want a Pro-Action-Café that should help people reflect on how they want to apply what they have learned. Although the so-called client set the stage, there was a coach as well who followed up with the group and answered questions. The group met and started looking into what was needed and who would take care of what. Then at the planned time the participants facilitated this part of the event. Ideally client and coach gave them some feedback afterwards.

The roles and tasks to choose from were quite diverse. Some tried out the methodologies. One group was responsible for space & beauty. After having been informed on what they might focus on, they were the ones that could interrupt at anytime when they noticed for instance that the energy was not directed towards a common goal. By asking everyone to connect to the middle of the circle they might bring attention to this. They concentrated on the energy, the capacity to listen, as well as the physical conditions. They also had to remain aware of timing and transitions. The so-called harvesting team was asked to find ways of capturing what was being learned. This way of handing on responsibilities definitely created opportunities for developing leadership skills. People were

encouraged to engage and participate in a more active & intense way. While on the one hand being empowered to do so, they also got support.



This approach worked out. It showed an arrangement how leaders can include participatory methods and train others to become leaders in their own way. Here are a few of the things that I observed that contributed to the success of this approach:

1. Attitude of the Hosts

The members of the hosting and of the calling team were really part of the circle. During check-in they would check in like anyone else. There was a great deal of authenticity in making visible their own challenges and learning edges, for instance due to logistics. It helped to recognize the shared values like the importance of interpersonal relationship, personal growth, tolerance and equality.

There was a clear feeling that the experienced hosts (especially Ria) also had their own questions that they were pursuing. Some of it got published: Ria looked into a theme that she put in for the open space café about the tension between being rooted and being flexible. At another point she decided to have a constellation to have a closer look at what effect the location Evangelische Schule/Berlin was having on the AoH-Training. Each time it was obvious that she had a real interest in these topics and that she was open to learn more (see also <http://aohberlin2011.posterous.com/day-1-our-check-in>).

The hosts and callers defined themselves as members of a learning community. They described how this larger group of people that they feel part of was closely following up and supporting this event and that they are curious to hear more about it and profit from the harvesting being done. Although

this caused some confusion and even suspicion, it widened people's perspective and gave them the feeling of being part of a movement that is involved in making this world a better place.

Client and coach were interested in others really exercising and trying out things. They gave clear guidelines, nevertheless clearly stepped back, while giving permission to feel free to be flexible and change things if the need was felt. It wasn't about them. They were serving those with less experience by empowering them and giving tasks that might confront them with their edge of learning but that were at the same time do-able.

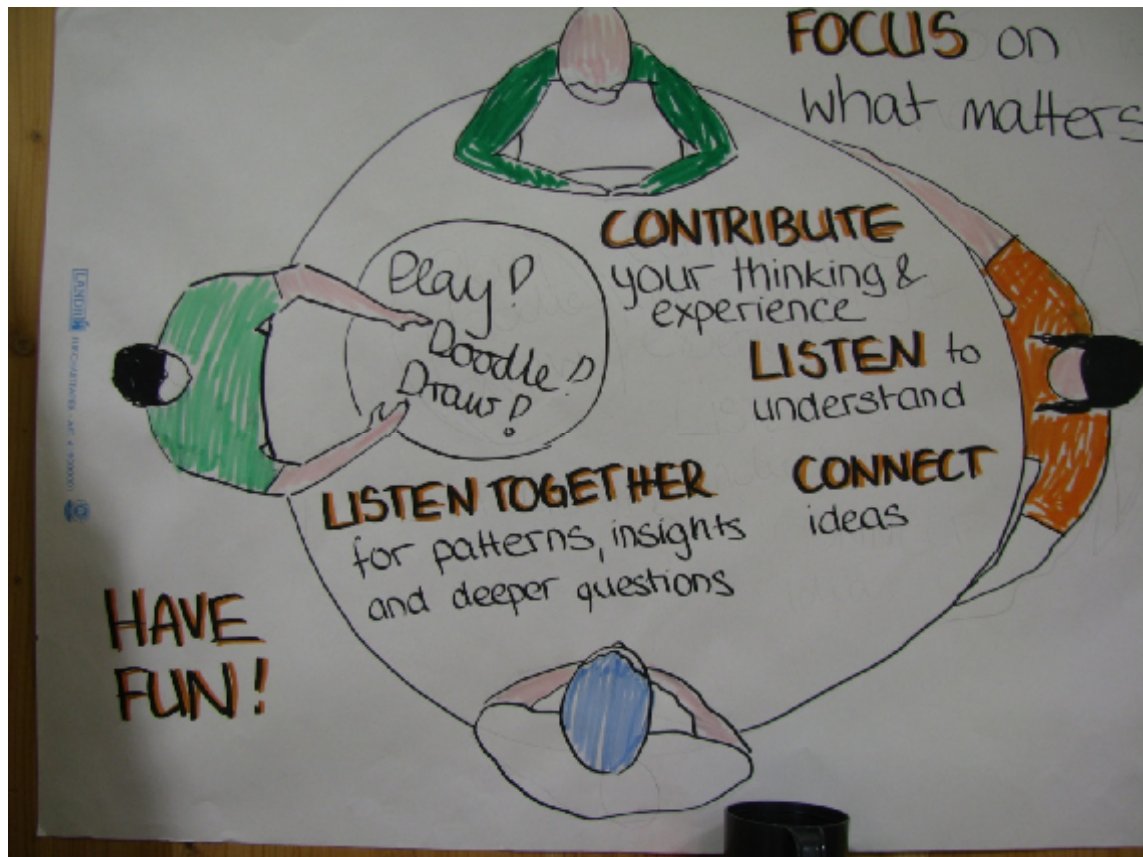
Most of the time when tasks had been given to others, there was no intervention by the hosts. It is obviously helpful to have this as a basic rule of thumb: intervention no, feedback yes. I don't know how much feedback was actually given in any detail afterwards. In terms of really training people to become good leaders, it seems important to me that people hear about their strengths and weaknesses and that things that they might not have noticed themselves due to lack of experience are pointed out in the group or on a one-on-one-basis.

The basic attitude of the hosts and the calling team was one that I would call "open source": Knowledge and expertise were gladly shared. The bottom line seemed to be the intention to teach and model a humanistic attitude and the willingness to hand on tools that can be used in the service of humanity.

2. Participants

On behalf of the participants there had to be a willingness and curiosity to learn and test one's own faculties. It does not take wonder that the question arose a few times if and how it is possible to use AoH in a "forced context". It shows the sensitivity that the approach implies a certain openness and interest in those participating.

Not everyone signed up for a task within the program flow. Those who did seemed to have been realistic concerning their own faculties. Everything went smooth. In some situations there were some interesting interactions where people of a team backed up one another. Mutual respect, appreciation and trust, as well as a certain degree of lightness and play seemed to be at the base of this. Those had definitely been modeled by the hosting and calling team.



3. Organizational structure

When people start counseling one another in circles or pro-action cafés and by doing so align themselves with the field they are inquiring into, it can easily happen that this creates tensions within the organization they work in. No matter whether they are in a leading position or not, they might have a hard time, as the structures of the organization usually do not allow him or her making good use of their own knowledge and or that of others. Moreover the set-up is usually demanding from a leader to not be vulnerable and authentic. There is the assumption that the leader should know best. With Brian Robertson I would claim that “achieving true whole-system transformation requires broadening from just developing conscious leaders to developing the concrete organizational structures and systems themselves to allow a conscious organization, not just conscious people within a conventional organization.” (Brian Robertson - June 28, 2011- see: <http://www.wakinguptheworkplace.com/2011/06/28/the-conscious-organisation/>)

As far as this aspect is concerned it was of interest to me to see how the set-up during the training was such that the intricate interplay between hosting and calling team and participants modeled shared leadership and that the stress was on participatory methodologies, giving people a taste of what is possible. A three-day-training is a mini-organization

4. Field intelligence

The concept that anyone can access field intelligence when coming from a point of stillness was introduced in the organizational development realm by the work of Otto Scharmer, Peter Senge and others. The ability to silence the analytical mind, find inner stillness, fine-tune our intuition and come to deep knowing is called the “blind spot of leadership” by Otto Scharmer. Methodologies like world café, open space and others can be used in order to access the field intelligence, but they can also

remain stuck on a more analytical level, where personalities exchange opinions, experiences and strategies. Future leaders need to hear about and experience this inner stillness as the source of wisdom. It helps them to develop and trust their own intuitive faculties and makes it clear that they need to create conditions and settings in which this becomes possible for others as well.

I am assuming that most of the participants in Berlin got a taste of this, but I am not sure that those who have not heard about this before have become aware of the importance of anchoring oneself in this stillness.

5. Expertise

Another aspect that seems worth mentioning and looking at is that which one could call expertise. Everyone may be able to contribute in a process of collecting ideas and perspectives. But nevertheless as Tom Gram says “expertise is that which separates the novice from the expert”. In psychology literature there is something called the 10,000 hour rule. This means that in many disciplines expertise is only developed through practice. At this point it is again important to look at the development of each individual and how they deal with their own limits. As there was some conflict and criticism concerning the filming of the event, it became obvious that a group can deal as a group with conflict, but that it does need a certain degree of wisdom and expertise in the leaders in order to be able to deal with such a situation. People who are involved in the Arab Spring or the Occupy Movement have to deal with conflict, diverse opinions and even aggression from outside. Looking at these protest movements all over the world and the efforts to create alternatives to the present ways of doing things, I suspect that it is an important question how to create a balance between accessing field intelligence on the one hand and using expertise on the other hand.

In any case practice and feedback are necessary in order to move from knowledge to performance and become able for instance to facilitate group processes. Quite a number of the participants had taken part in an AoH-Training before, so they were given the chance of an apprenticeship. Even the hosting team described themselves as part of a community of practice and encouraged everyone to become part of this. Within the context of the training some people felt the need to hear more about the professional background and expertise of other participants, so the suggestion was made to write down a few data on a small card and have them all visible for everyone. To me it showed the need to not just rely on synchronicity and deep sensing but also have a chance to hear about that which has already been experienced or researched more thoroughly.

Conclusion

The collaborative leadership approach worked well as most people in the room were in resonance with a humanistic/pluralistic mindset. The longing was kindled to have more of this sort of co-operation and communication in other settings, especially in one's own workplace. At the same time observations were made by several people that that might not be realistic.

In order to find out which leadership style is suited in which situation it is necessary to reflect on both the leader's and the followers' psychological development. It is necessary to recognize the limits of this approach when the pre-dominant worldview and value system of a group is e.g. more traditional or focused on achievements or when the set-up of an organization is not fit to profit from such an approach.

The Training in Berlin gave me a chance to experience and witness in an exemplary and inspiring way how in a pluralistic context “leaders can create more leaders”. Thanks to all of us!

