

Group Harvesting of AoH Practice Stories

Storytelling is one of the most powerful knowledge management tools of the Art of Hosting community. Contained in our stories is both the experience and learning that will grow our capacities to use the Art of Hosting practice in ever more complex spaces. As the depth and scale of our work increases, our practice stories offer us guideposts for innovation, process development and how to create robust containers for conversations that really matter.

During August and September 2010 we began to experiment in Art of Hosting trainings with combining storytelling and harvesting to build our capacity in both these mediums; we were *hosting the harvest*. Group harvesting enables us to track many arcs of a single story simultaneously, meaning we can practice targeted listening and group learning, while offering a gift to the story holders, as well as the group as a whole in the form of collective meaning making. Group harvesting is an ideal way to surface the many insights, innovations and a-ha's that exist beneath the surface of our stories and to take learning around our practice to a deeper level.

How does group harvesting of practice stories work?

First, you need a good story about a change process that was run using Art of Hosting principles and practice – ideally one that has enough complexity, scale and duration to make it interesting. In our Art of Hosting community, we have the stories of the European Commission, healthcare projects in Columbus, Ohio and Nova Scotia, the UK FinanceLab and Annecto in Melbourne, Australia as some key examples of this type of story, but any systemic story will do.



Group harvest in action

It is best to have those directly connected to the story on hand to tell it, and it can be more interesting to hear from more than one person involved in the story. More voices add depth and richness, as well as a variety of points of view.

The story does not need to be an often-told one, or polished in any form. In fact, this process can be used to help polish a story and give the storytellers input on how to focus and refine the story to be told to different audiences.

We've found that group harvesting takes time – at least 90 minutes is the minimum time needed. If you are working with a group of harvesters during a training, or with people who haven't done this type of process before, then keeping the storytelling to around 30 minutes is advisable, otherwise it is easy for listeners to become overloaded. If you are working with a practice team or your purpose is to create maximum learning around

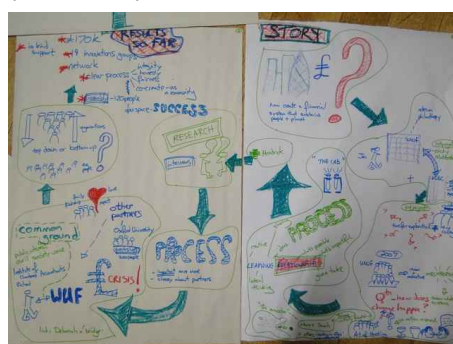
a story, then you may want to work on the interplay between story, harvest and learning for a half day, a day or even longer.

Preparing for group harvesting:

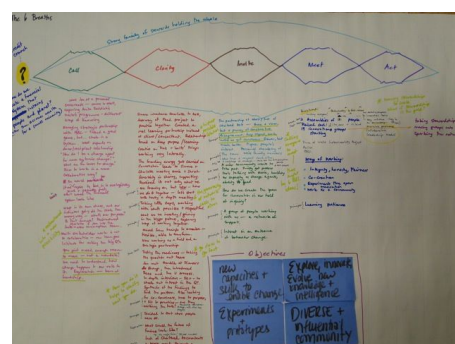
First check with your storytellers and make them an invitation. Stories respond to invitation and when a heartfelt invitation is present, often a story will come out in a whole new way and offer new learning to those telling it. A group harvest is a gift to those telling *and* those harvesting, and should be offered as such.

Next, decide on the arcs you would like to harvest. Ideally this could be agreed with the storyholders and the listeners, depending on where they want to focus their learning. As in any Art of Hosting process, you are planning for the harvest. Take as much time as you need to discuss exactly what you want to get out of this process and what will happen to the harvest afterwards. You'll need at least one person harvesting each arch you've chosen and more than one can harvest the same arch simultaneously. Here are some to choose from:

- **Narrative Arc***: The thread of the story – people, events, stages. You might also harvest facts, emotions and values that are part of the story, etc.
- **Process Arc***: What interventions, processes, applications, discoveries happened?
- **Pivotal Points***: When did breakthroughs occur, what did we learn?
- **Application**: What can we learn from this story for application in our own or other systems?
- **Taking Change to Scale**: What can we learn from this story about taking change to scale?
- **Questions**: What questions arise from this story that we could ask of any system?
- **Synchronicity & Magic**: What happened during this story that pointed to synchronicity and the magic in the middle?
- **Specific theme**: Harvest the story using a specific theme, like collaborative leadership, the art of participation, etc, and see what it tells you
- **Art of Hosting pattern arc**: *The 6 Breaths*: Where did each breath occur during the story? *The 5th organisational paradigm*: Where did new forms of governance and working occur? *Core team/calling team*: What did we learn about holding the centre of this work? There may be others as well.
- **Principles**: What principles of working can be gleaned from this story? What did we learn about participatory practices? What principles of complex living systems were reflected in this work?
- **The StoryField***: How did the field of the system's story change? Can you name the story or metaphor the system started with and what it moved to?



Narrative Arc



The 6 Breaths

If you have other talents in your group around graphic facilitation/visuals, poetry, music, mindmapping, art, etc. you may also want to invite a harvest in this form. Each of these will add a greater richness, diversity and enjoyment to the harvest.

Welcome people to the session. Make the invitation publically to the storytellers. Explain the arcs and ask for volunteers.

PIVOTAL POINTS / BREAKTHROUGH HS

THE BIG DIFFERENCE WAS IN THE PRACTICE AND BELIEFS

THE DYNAMICS LAB

START

THINKING THE SITUATION COULD BE BETTER

REAL?

HUMAN CRUNCH

PSYCHOLOGICAL CRUNCH

HOW TO BE MORE PASSIONATE, THAT MEANS PEOPLE & PLACES

AND LOT OF NERDS AND THOUGHT AND SOME A VISION AND RESPECT

WORKING IN A C.P. SITUATION

DEEP PRACTICE FORMATION

ART OF FINDING & CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

A LOT OF WORKED IN ON A DESIGNS IN THE LAB

A RESEARCH

NEW TECHNOLOGY

BE ABLE TO MOTIVATE & FIND TO CREATIVE CHANGE

FREEDOM TO EXPLORE!

NEW OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE SOMETHING

SHIFT IN ORGANIZATION "WIN-F"

HOW TO GET A DIFFERENT ANALYSIS OTHERS LOOK LIKE?

HOW TO GET A DIFFERENT ANALYSIS OTHERS LOOK LIKE?

WHAT QUESTIONS ARISE FOR YOU?

- How did the idea come to be?
 - How did the main question emerge?
 - How did it evolve over the course of time?
- What is it that you can share with another person that could shift ^{the way they} ^{think} ^{about} ^{the world} (in the community)?
- What do you experience going through the process of setting up the lab?
- Where do I take courage to take?
- How can we create more spaces for meaningful conversations in our lives?
- How do we make a practice of creating mutually beneficial relationships in our lives?
- How do we find out what universe needs?
 - What sorts of things do we need to become a better person?
 - What sorts of things do we need to contribute to the world?
 - What sorts of things do we need to become a better person?
- How do we practice the authenticity of original ideas our time?
- How do you realize that insights were sharing this story?
 - What were your realizations?
 - Insights were sharing this story?

Group harvest: Give the storytellers materials to do their harvest of the harvest. Ask each of the harvesters to report in on what they found. Take at least as long for this as for the storytelling. Each of the harvests will have more depth than can be told during a first round. It might be helpful to have more than one round of harvest, or for the rest of the group to question each harvester to draw out additional insights.

Response from the group: *What were the gifts to you from this group harvest? What are you taking away from this session?*

Ideally create a large circle with tellers as part of the circle. You may need some small tables for those harvesting onto flipchart, or they may be fine harvesting onto the floor. You'll need plenty of coloured pens and other art supplies may also be helpful.

You may want to have recording equipment on hand if you'd like to video the story and the results. It's also helpful to photograph graphic harvest.

What else can be done with a group harvest?

For the StoryHolders

Group harvesting is an ideal input both for taking stock of the learning so far in a project and for polishing a story so that it can be told to another audience. Having external ears listen to your story can help to surface things you haven't seen or haven't taken notice of during the time you were living in the experience. Often an experience is so complex and moves forward with such speed that it is almost impossible to see how it all fits together from the inside.

We suggest using a group harvest to take stock at regular intervals during a project's life. Being well witnessed can be both a blessing and a relief to people who've done the hard yards holding the space for something to happen. Good witnessing enables insights about the key pivotal points in a story to surface, as well as helping other emotions to be heard and released. Deep listening can help a story to identify its protagonists' strengths and gifts, as well as the supports and barriers they faced in contributing those gifts. It can also support a story to rise above the personal to reveal insights about the local context it happened in and even the wider systemic context.

Just as external eyes can help us see something we know well in a new light, external listeners can help story participants to see their own experiences in a new light, often revealing what has not been seen from inside the story. Even such a simple thing as naming what has not been named before adds immensely to the learning.

If you have harvesters who are expert in body-based knowing or intuition systems, such as constellation work, these can also add a rich understanding to the harvest. Those who are story or narrative practitioners can add a reflection using mythology, metaphor and other story forms.

Specific feedback can also help a team to know what to focus on in polishing their story. Often there are so many details held by the team, that a listener can be overwhelmed. Harvesting can help to bring what's important into sharp relief, supporting a story to become more focused and more potent.



Graphic harvesting

For the Listeners and Harvesters

If storytelling is a skill that is both inherent to humans and one that can be polished with practice, then so is listening. Listening is the companion skill to storytelling, indeed the story arises in the space between the teller and the listener. In essence, a story *needs* a listener to become what it can be. We don't often get the opportunity to listen well, especially with a specific purpose, and to provide a necessary feedback loop to those within a committed project. Group story harvesting can provide such a practice and feedback loop, strengthening the community around a project shared in this way.

Harvesting is also a skill that needs practice, and it is important to experience the wide variety of ways a story or an experience can be harvested, each bringing its own richness, much as another facet brings sparkle to a gemstone. Purposeful harvesting is both a good experience and an excellent way to practice. Story listeners and harvesters may want to debrief afterwards on their experience, surfacing their challenges and learning as a way for the group to become more skilful in the future.

Beyond – for the AoH community and wider

Harvests of projects that have gone to scale, as well as those that have faced many challenges, are a valuable contribution to the wider AoH community and beyond, helping us to increase the learning within our network. Sharing practice stories is one of the quickest ways for the principles and practices of AoH to be understood and integrated. Please share your group story harvests on the AoH Ning site.



Music harvest

Contributed by Mary Alice Arthur, Monica Nissén & Ria Baeck, October 2010

*Draw your chair up close to
the edge of the precipice and
I'll tell you a story.*

***F. Scott Fitzgerald --
Notebooks***