

Learning to Co-Create the Solutions We Seek:
The Art of Hosting a Nonprofit Organization

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Abstract

The Art of Hosting is an emergent leadership model that compliments rapidly changing business needs and environments. This paper presents grounded theory on Art of Hosting components, including the Four Fold Invitation, Hobbit Tools, Five Diamonds of Participation, and Harvesting. An in-depth case study describes the use of Hosting architecture as the design for a nonprofit organization. While the Art of Hosting is effective for involving the community in discussions to co-create solutions to difficult problems, the practice does not easily facilitate a transition from discussion to action. As a framework for operating a nonprofit organization, further research is necessary to identify ways in which the Hosting practice may strengthen such a transition. As a personal leadership practice, the Art of Hosting may contribute to the organization's ability to connect within itself and its community.

Introduction

In Franklin County, Ohio, the health care system was sick. Patients and providers alike were dissatisfied and frustrated with the system's operation and level of care provided (Generon, 2005). The County's rate of health care spending had been projected to double from its current rate of \$7 billion to \$14 billion by 2014, an increase not due to significant population growth but significant health care needs within that population (Columbus Dispatch, 2007). In 2005, a local leader invited his community into communication about how Franklin County could create affordable and sustainable health care for itself. Through an emerging leadership practice called the Art of Hosting, these community members created a unique nonprofit organization where dialogue and inquiry were promoted, the community created a collective vision of what health care can be, and the organization became connected to its community. Their case story gives insight to the most basic questions in nonprofit management: What does it take for a nonprofit organization to truly meet the needs of its community? How can we create a nonprofit organization that calls forth our best contribution, inspires continuous learning, and creates valued results?

The Art of Hosting is an emerging core leadership practice and skill set for creating and holding space in which systemic change may occur. Hosting does not refer to traditional facilitation or leading (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). Instead, it engages specific principles, methods, and tools of practice to create the conditions within which participants can access their collective wisdom through meaningful conversation and inquiry. It invites the practitioner to:

- (a) Be present to the process by hosting oneself

- (b) Participate by listening without judgment and speaking truthfully
- (c) Host conversations on powerful questions
- (d) Create working partnerships that blend knowledge, experience and practice
- (e) Utilize interactive processes and tools to support the emergence of group learning, creativity, and shared commitment to action. (Art of Hosting, n.d.; Berkana Institute, n.d.)

The case study research in this paper is offered as an initial contribution to the subject's grounded theory. At the time of this writing, no formal research has been published on the Art of Hosting. This paper offers a basic context and framework for understanding the Hosting practice, and applies this framework against the evolution of the case study organization. The purpose of this paper is to explore the value of designing a nonprofit organization within the framework of the Art of Hosting by using qualitative and quantitative methods. Thus the research question that served as the basis of this inquiry was:

What are the effects of the Art of Hosting on the formation and evolution of a nonprofit organization?

This study looks at the Art of Hosting as a choice of operating pattern for a nonprofit organization, and considers whether this practice contributes to a nonprofit organization's ability to achieve its mission. It will do this by providing an in-depth case study of the only identified nonprofit organization in the United States created within the framework of a Hosting practice.

The author of this paper is a student in the Regis University Masters of Nonprofit Management program, for which this Professional Project will partially fulfill their requirements for graduation. Throughout the paper, this student will refer to herself as "this project researcher."

Problem Statement/Background

Background

Currently, no formal research exists addressing the evolution of the Art of Hosting or its roots. This study is the first contribution towards a formal body of research for the Art of Hosting. A review of available documents on the Art of Hosting suggests to this project researcher that components of the Hosting practice surfaced in various learning organization writings, such as those of Peter Senge, Margaret Wheatley, Juanita Brown, David Isaacs, and others. Toke Moller and Monica Nissen were the early experimenters of participative methods that came to be known as the Art of Hosting—those who recognized the broad, emerging pattern—but formal documentation is lacking to identify when this began. Juanita Brown (2005) described the Art of Hosting in her book on the World Café, but she writes about the hosting process specifically within the context of Café and not for the broader purpose it has evolved to.

A timeline of Hosting gatherings—multi-day trainings and events in residential settings—presented on the Art of Hosting website (<http://www.artofhosting.org>) shows that the first Hosting gathering took place in Santa Cruz, California, in 1999, with one training a year following in Slovenia through 2001 as part of an Open Space Village forum. The number of events slowly grew to three to four per year in Europe and Canada during 2002 and 2003. The time between 2004 and 2006 saw a marked increase in training opportunities, with up to fifteen trainings offered in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Canada, and the United States during 2006. The Berkana Institute, the Shambhala Institute, Pioneers for Change, and other organizations appear to be the primary promoters of these training opportunities (Art of Hosting, n.d.; Berkana,

n.d.). The seed for this case study, in fact, was germinated at an Art of Hosting training offered by the Shambhala Institute in 2007.

Current Situation

Nonprofit organizations find themselves facing ever-increasing standards of performance (Salamon, in Herman, 2005; Herman & Heimovics, in Herman, 2005). These organizations are constantly asked to do more with less, forced to compete amongst each other for the same resources and customers, even as expectations for nonprofit performance are on the rise (Pascale, Millemann, & Gioja, 1997; Salamon, in Herman, 2005; Herman & Heimovics, in Herman, 2005)

Various solutions have been implemented over the years for improving nonprofit performance in the face of these increasing demands. Many solutions have focused on organizational effectiveness in the form of outcomes management practices: the United Way approach, the logic model, the balanced scorecard, best practice benchmarking, charity rating services, and others have been implemented by various nonprofits over the years (Murray, in Herman, 2005). Even for-profit alternatives such as Total Quality Management and Six Sigma have been implemented within nonprofits with the goal of improving nonprofit performance (Cox, 1999; Volunteer, 2005).

Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja (1997) observed that many companies try to make fundamental changes to the ways they operate by “introducing improvements (or at least improvement programs) into every function and process” (page 127). The obstacles facing organizational change, however, are deeper than any process improvement an organization may

chose to implement. Pascale, et al. (1997) assert that most organizational change efforts fail miserably:

[P]artly because large organizations have such a remarkable capacity to resist change of *all* kinds, and partly because the kind of change being sought is so much more radical and uncomfortable than anything required by a shift in strategy or process or corporate structure. . . it means a permanent rekindling of individual creativity and responsibility, a lasting transformation of the company's internal and external relationships, an honest-to-God change in human behavior on the job. (Emphasis original, page 128)

Research conducted by McHargue (2003) to measure dimensions of learning within nonprofit organizations demonstrated that “all the learning dimensions--promoting inquiry and dialogue, empowerment toward a collective vision, and connecting to the environment--were absent from the final model for NPOs” (page 202). Learning plays a pivotal role in organizational improvement, so learning deficits become a significant barrier to improving nonprofit performance.

Assumptions Affecting Nonprofit Performance

One assumption that this project researcher has culled from various reading is that nonprofit performance should be improved through the performance of its programs. The methods of program improvement themselves imply that improving a nonprofit organization's performance can be as easy as tuning up a car's engine: apply this process and achieve these results. This reveals an underlying assumption that an organization is an external, mechanistic structure, from which we are separate and can adjust to improve performance (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994; Wheatley, 2005, 2006). Under this assumption, people play roles within the organization but they are not the organization. Additionally, because the organization is a structure that can be manipulated and adjusted, changes to such an organization should be

simple to implement and lasting in their effect: Management trains staff in a process, staff will adhere to the process, and it will lead to improvement. Yet this chain of action seldom occurs in practice.

Inherent in Western culture is the assumption that an organization, nonprofit or otherwise, is expected to have all the answers and provide solutions to problems (Vogt, Brown, & Isaacs, 2003). A common view of the nonprofit organization's purpose is to focus on what is not working in society and how to fix it (Vogt, et al, 2003). Moreover, the organization is expected to come up with these answers by itself (Pascale, et al, 1997). By assuming the role of service provider, the organization assumes the role of expert. The answers that come from within an organization are expected to come from the top down (Vogt, et al, 2003). "We ask what's wrong here and who's to blame, instead of what's possible here and who cares?" (Vogt, et al., p. 11).

At the same time, an assumption gathering strength within the organizational learning community is that an organization is a living system, and that the system's strength lies within its ability to access the wisdom within its interdependence and relationships (Senge, et al., 1994; Wheatley, 2005, 2006; Vogt, et al, 2003; Art of Hosting, n.d.). Wheatley (2005, 2006) views organizational development from a science perspective, and often speaks of the need to design organizations based on today's quantum science models instead of older, Newtonian, mechanistic sciences. From this perspective, the organization is a dynamic but invisible infrastructure that makes interaction possible, much like social networking web sites which have value to their communities only because they build community.

Problem Limitations

If a nonprofit organization's ability to learn and adapt is viewed as the problem, then several limitations emerge. The inability to identify what's truly causing the problem in the first place is a significant limitation. As Weick and Sutcliffe (2001) say, "The whole point of a learning organization is that it needs to get a better handle on the fact that it doesn't know what it doesn't know" (Bryson, in Herman, p. 192). At the same time, organizations experience an inability to clearly articulate the answer to their problems in terms of organizational learning or change (Pascale, et al., 1997). Within the Art of Hosting community of practice, the times in which a practitioner or group get 'stuck' in a question or process are invitations to be curious and to learn (personal e-mail, instead of folding under the appearance of a problem (personal e-mail, December 10, 2007).

The Gap Between What Is and What Could Be

In these turbulent times, all organizations—for profit and nonprofit alike—must engage people's best thinking about complex issues without easy answers in order to create the futures they seek (Vogt, et al., 2003).

Padaki (2002) suggests that nonprofit organizations follow a social-systemic model for building a nonprofit as a learning organization, in which a decentralized and facilitative management structure is rooted in democratic and humanistic management values while relying upon interactive and synergistic management systems. At the same time, Padaki acknowledges that without substantial paradigm shifts within the organization, this model may result in

“worsening dysfunctional states in the organization” (p. 326). A fine line is tread between while attempting to improve an organization.

Nonprofit organizations must develop the capacity to learn and adapt to their changing environments (McHargue, 2003). However, as McHargue (2003) revealed through her research, some nonprofit organizations experience significant learning deficits. McHargue (2003) postulated several reasons for these deficits, including difficulty establishing a supportive environment for change, limited resources and time, a rapidly changing volunteer workforce, and the need to distinguish one’s self from ones competition by segregating from the community to develop a competitive edge.

Nonprofit organizations should be able to achieve organizational learning to continuously improve their ability to identify and meet the needs of their community (McHargue, 2003). McHargue’s research demonstrates a gap in nonprofit organizations’ ability to achieve organizational learning. The Art of Hosting may hold the potential to bridge that gap.

Importance of this Study

This study is the first contribution towards a formal body of research on the Art of Hosting, and contributes to the establishment of its grounded theory. By presenting the Art of Hosting framework to the nonprofit community, nonprofit organizations may identify tangible practices that enhance their organizations’ abilities to learn, improve, and connect with their community. Nonprofit leaders may also learn new ways to build good relations among key stakeholders that can help hold space for the launch of organizations grounded in purpose and need.

Review of the Literature

Because no formal or academic literature currently exists on the subject of the Art of Hosting, this literature review shall explore the developments within organizational learning and culture that helped prepare the ground for the Art of Hosting to emerge.

Bureaucratic Organizations

In the 1940's, Weber introduced an idealized description of distinctive characteristics of bureaucratic organizations, including: organization tasks are distributed to specific staff as official duties, a hierarchical authority structure, formal rules and regulations that govern the decision making process, impersonal orientation and social distancing, and employment based on merit and qualifications (Gerth & Wright Mills, 1946; 1946; Blau & Scott, 2003).

As Blau and Scott (2003) observe, nearly every modern administrative organization is organized as a bureaucratic structure. This observation also applies to nonprofit organizations. Over 90 percent of today's nonprofit organizations were created since the 1950's, and the concept of nonprofit organizations comprising a 'sector' dates back only to the 1970's (Hall, in Herman, 2003).

Since the 1970's, nonprofit organizations have become much more complex organizations, increasing and diversifying program offerings and playing a more prominent role in meeting society's needs (McHargue, 2003). The complexity and unpredictability of the world in which nonprofit, charitable organizations operate is great and seemingly continually increasing. Such change and unpredictability make the challenge of integrating mission, resource acquisition, and strategy even greater and require that chief executives effectively engage in leadership across the boundaries (Herman & Heimovics, in Herman, 2003).

The nonprofit administrator sees the world from the perspective of her own organization, which is strongly influenced by the organization's structure (Van Til, in Herman, 2003). In other words, the perceived options for an organization to respond to the needs of society are shaped and defined in part by the structure of the organization. As Van Til (in Herman, 2005) writes:

If nonprofit administrators are truly to be effective, they need to recognize that their organization is linked in myriad ways to the world outside it. Theirs, like any other organization, exists in a complex net of relations with other organizations and institutions, each of which affects each other in some way. (p. 40)

Social Organization Systems

In the 1950's Parsons introduced the concept of organizations as social systems which focused on solving four basic problems: adaptation to the environment, goal achievement, integration of its members into a single entity, and latency of the organization's motivation and cultural patterns (Parsons, 1953; Parsons, 1960; Blau & Scott, 2003). While serving specific functions, formal organizations "are part of the goal attainment subsystem of the larger society" (Blau & Scott, 2003, ch. 2). From this perspective, formal organizations may be viewed as a main method of society for "mobilizing power in the interest of achieving collective objectives," even while existing as social systems in their own right (Blau & Scott, 2003, ch. 2). This construct of organizations as social systems, however, remains applied to a bureaucratic structure.

Post Bureaucratic Systems

The study of organizational structure observed a movement away from traditional bureaucratic forms to the emergence of 'post bureaucratic' systems (Heckscher, 1994; Symon, 2000). Advances in computer technology contributed to a new way of thinking about structuring and organizing work: the network organization (Heckscher, 1994; Symon, 2000). Symon (2000) describes the shift towards post bureaucratic systems as motivated by globalization, service and

information economies, and the desire of organizations to survive in an ever-changing environment. Post bureaucratic organizations are flatter and leaner, more flexible and adaptive, able to learn from their environments and implement changes more effectively (Heckscher, 1994; Symon, 2000).

Network organizations have more permeable boundaries between organization levels, facilitating communication to exploit the organization's knowledge and experience to its best advantage (Symon, 2000). Work is completed in flexible, often-temporary teams, and individual employees are empowered to be innovative knowledge workers communicating throughout the organization to achieve its goals (Symon, 2000). As Baker (1992) writes:

A network organization can flexibly construct a unique set of internal and external linkages for each unique project. Unlike a bureaucracy, which is a fixed set of relationships for processing all problems, the network organization holds itself to each problem. Moreover, it adapts itself not by top-management fiat but by the interactions of problems, people and resources; within the broad confines of corporate strategy, organizational members autonomously work out relationships . . . In short, it is a social network that is *integrated* across formal boundaries. Interpersonal ties of any type are formed without respect to formal groups or categories. (emphasis original, page 308).

Once organizations began to shift to post bureaucratic, network systems, they found that the tools for organizational change also had to shift (Bunker & Alban, 1996). The new systems needed rapid and large-scale change systems to keep up in the emerging business world, and large group intervention processes such as Open Space began to surface in the business world as means to solve complex problems and co-create an organization's desired vision for the future (Bunker & Alban, 1996).

Learning Organizations and Organizational Learning

. . . the various predictions about globalism, knowledge-based organizations, the information age, the biotech age, the loosening of organizational boundaries, and so on have one theme in common—we basically do not know what the world of tomorrow will really be like, except that it will be *different*, more *complex*, more *fast-paced*, and more

culturally diverse . . . This means that organizations and their leaders will have to become perpetual learners (Emphasis Original, Schein, 2003, p. 393).

There is no one definitive model of a learning organization (Guest, 1999). Since their introduction in the 1970's, organizational learning and learning organizations have been the topics of much published literature. Argyris and Schon (1978) established the field of organizational learning, opening the door for research into the myriad aspects of this field as well as attempts to cultivate learning organizations based on these various methods arising from the research, including but not limited to:

- (a) Double-loop learning (Argyris and Schon, 1978)
- (b) Interconnected/multi-level learning (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Kim, 1993; Bontis, et al., 2002)
- (c) Systems theory (Flood, 1999; Senge, 1994, Wheatley, 2005, 2006)

Guest (1999) delineates general differences between traditional and learning organizations:

Table 1

Some General Differences between Traditional and Learning Organizations

| <i>Traditional Organization</i> | <i>Learning Organization</i> |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Functional departments | Process teams |
| Hierarchical structures | Flat structures |
| Discrete tasks | Multidimensional work |
| People following instructions | People doing what is right |
| People waiting to be given work | People using initiative |
| Management supervisors | Leadership coaches |
| Training courses | Continuous development |
| Activity-based compensation | Results-based compensation |
| Vertical advancement | Horizontal broadening |
| Policy-driven systems | Customer-driven systems |

There is a difference between a learning organization and organizational learning. Yang, Watkins and Marsick (2004) describe the learning organization as one that displays continuous learning and adaptive characteristics, or is working to instill them within the organization. On the other hand, organizational learning describes collective learning experiences used to acquire knowledge and develop skills. Chermack, et al., (2006) observe:

The learning organization is much more than an organization that instills and promotes learning at the organizational level. More importantly, that organizational learning can be thought of as aggregate learning, or the sum of multiple individual learning experiences. . . [while] a learning organization is an organization thought to be capable of continuous learning and adaptation. (pp. 68-9)

The capacity for continuous learning and adaptation is part of an organization's culture. Schein (2003) offered the following characteristics necessary for a learning culture to evolve within an organization:

- (a) Proactive problem solving and learning in relationship to the organization's environment
- (b) Commitment to learning how to learn
- (c) Positive assumptions about human nature
- (d) A belief that ones environment is manageable to some degree
- (e) Commitment to inquiry and pragmatism
- (f) Future orientation
- (g) Commitment to free, full, and relevant communication

Schein elaborates that these characteristics would require members of an organization to be involved in learning and generating solutions. Feedback must be gathered, digested, and assimilated into the organization's operating pattern to generate new possibilities for future responses. The organization's leaders must become more dependent upon and trusting of the

other members of the organization, facilitating and encouraging their involvement. A certain level of control over the organization's environment must be desired and obtained. Collaboration for accessing wisdom and truth will be necessary, as neither wisdom nor truth reside in any one resource or method. Rather than operating from the past or present, organizations must learn to operate from the emerging future. Finally, communication and information must be viewed as central to the well-being of the organization, and must therefore be cultivated and encouraged amongst all levels of the organization.

Factors that Produce Sustainable Learning

Watkins and Marsick (1997; 2003) identified seven key constructs that shape the ability of an organization to learn:

Table 2

Definitions of Constructs for the Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire

| <i>Dimension</i> | <i>Definition</i> |
|--|---|
| Create continuous learning opportunities | Learning is designed into work so that people can learn on the job; opportunities are provided for ongoing education and growth |
| Promote dialogue and inquiry | People gain productive reasoning skills to express their views and the capacity to listen and inquire into the views of others; the culture is changed to support questioning, feedback, and experimentation |
| Encourage collaboration and team learning | Work is designed to use groups to access different modes of thinking; groups are expected to learn together and work together; collaboration is valued by the culture and rewarded |
| Create systems to capture and share learning | Both high- and low-technology systems to share learning are created and integrated with work; access is provided; systems are maintained |
| Empower people toward a collective vision | People are involved in setting, owning and implementing a joint vision; responsibility is distributed close to decision making so that people are motivated to learn toward what they are held accountable to do. |
| Connect the organization to its environment | People are helped to see the effect of their work on the entire enterprise; people scan the environment and use information to adjust work practices; the organization is linked to its communities. |
| Provide strategic leadership for learning | Leaders model, champion, and support learning; leadership uses learning strategically for business results |

Each of these constructs is considered a characteristic of the learning organization (Argyris and Schon, 1996; Senge, 1990; Watkins and Marsick, 1996; 1997; 2003).

McHargue's (2003) research demonstrated that of the seven learning dimensions identified by Watson and Marsick, three were absent for nonprofit organizations. These

dimensions are presented below, with common characteristics identified by McHargue (2003) that may affect nonprofit organizations' abilities to become learning organizations:

Table 3

Common Characteristics Missing From Nonprofit Learning Organizations

| <i>Missing Dimension</i> | <i>Common Characteristics</i> |
|---|---|
| Promote dialogue and inquiry | Investment in services and programs to participants rather than in the organization or its employees Disconnect between funding and outcomes, creating the potential to blur requirements and standards for accountability, performance, and mission |
| Empower people toward a collective vision | Lower salary scales than for-profit organizations Dependence upon a volunteer workforce that may vary in number, duration, training and performance |
| Connect the organization to its environment | Inter-sector rivalry for resources, members, and clients Dominance of a scarcity mindset, where nonprofit organizations worry about funding while focusing the majority of time on service provision Difficulty in measuring performance, as the success of nonprofit organizations is typically measured by mission-related criteria as opposed to easier-to-measure fiscal outcomes |

Challenges to Organizational Learning

Padaki (2002) notes that the high failure rate seen in the implementation of other change efforts such as total quality management may predicate similar figures for the implementation of learning organization change efforts, especially when failing to acknowledge the paradigm shifts involved in such changes. Guest (1999) maintained that the listing of characteristics in itself can

stifle the process of learning. Pascale, et al. (1997) go to the heart of the challenge, when they write:

Most of what's been written about transformational change is either too conceptual and therefore too impractical, too inspirational and therefore too vague, or too company specific and therefore too hard to apply to one's own situation. We have been inept at transforming troubled organizations – or even at maintaining the vitality of healthy ones – because we have never before identified the factors that produce sustainable revitalization. (p. 128)

Conclusion

While there is no academic literature to date on the Art of Hosting, this review offers information on the components of organizational form and learning that contribute to the emergence of the Art. As an emerging leadership practice, no quantitative support exists as to its effectiveness or contributions to learning organizations. This identifies a need to generate a deeper understanding of the construct, its history, and application. The following section will introduce concepts involved with the Art of Hosting practice as it is currently understood within the community of practice.

The Art of Hosting

The Art of Hosting is a learning community dedicated to helping people and groups working with both heart and intention realize bold shifts in thinking, being and doing by asking questions. The hosting movement invites conversations among diverse people which produce breakthroughs in understanding—of people and systems, problems and opportunities. Another aspect of hosting relates to the practice of harvesting—connecting the fruits of one event or interaction to some future work- through harvesting the essence of conversations, making that visible, and paying it forward. The hosting community uses the tools of appreciative inquiry, open space and world café as well as the art of storyteaching. (Personal e-mail, December 11, 2007)

Powerful questions and conversations create fundamental shifts in the way we perceive challenges, engage with others, and move into action (Berkana, 2007). The case study organization used the Art of Hosting as a pattern and practice for guiding systemic change by asking questions that matter. This section does not codify the entire Art of Hosting practice, but clarifies the Art of Hosting evolution and framework so that it may provide a larger context for the case study organization.

Purpose

Simply stated, the purpose of the art of hosting is to serve a need (Bowen Island, 2006). Or, as one of the early namers of this process described it, the purpose of the Art of Hosting is to “amplify our brains and our hearts, or to engage our collective intelligence and wisdom to find the emergent and sustainable solutions to complex challenges (Nissen, n.d.). As Nissen (n.d.) notes, the needs addressed through hosting are not simple: they go to the core of our selves and our communities. An Art of Hosting training journal (Bowen Island, 2006) offers the following insight:

What is it we would like to become? - what might we create such that our lives and the lives of the communities we serve would be better? [The purpose of the art of hosting] is about noticing what is emerging and being brave enough to name it. (p. 8)

The Art of Hosting seeks to create organizational learning, development, and change through meaningful conversations that support commitment and ownership and release the power of collective intelligence (Berkana, n.d.).

Core Assumptions

The Art of Hosting is rooted in several core assumptions. Some of these assumptions shape the world view of the practitioner, while others shape the actual practice. As one practitioner writes, “[The Art of Hosting] is a collection of methods/pattern, a community of practice, a way of being” (personal e-mail, December 10, 2007). The core assumptions spring from this view. Because Hosting is an emerging practice, these core assumptions are also emerging. The below list offers select assumptions which contribute to shaping the Hosting practice (Berkana, n.d; Art of Hosting, n.d; Nissen, n.d; Wooded Glen, 2007).

Table 4

Overview of the Art of Hosting's World View and Basic Assumptions

| <i>World View</i> | <i>Basic Assumptions</i> |
|--|---|
| Organizations have more to do with living organic systems than machines | Core relationships invite real collaboration |
| Learning is a core competence in the network society | Leadership must be practiced within ourselves, our teams, our communities, and sometimes all three at the same time |
| The world is too complex to be led by individuals | When human beings are invited to work together on what truly matters to them, they will take ownership and responsibility for moving their issues and ideas into wiser actions that lasts |
| Learning, change and transformation involve a degree of chaos | We must co-create the solutions we seek |
| Sustainable solutions emerge through conversation and collaboration | We must find new solutions for the common good, regardless of the level or size of organization in which we participate |
| Conversation and dialogue opens collective intelligence, wisdom and action | The challenges of these times call for collective intelligence |
| Diversity adds value | It is common sense to bring stakeholders together in conversation when you seek new solutions for the common good |
| New insights and understanding are at the heart of reflective living and wise acting | The time is now |

Levels of Hosting

Ultimately, Hosting is a personal practice which occurs on three levels: hosting the individual self, hosting one's team, and hosting one's community. The Art of Hosting offers a clear architecture, which often focuses on the three levels described below. These three levels are interconnected, where learning at one level shapes informing the learning that occurs at subsequent levels (Art of Hosting, Wooded Glen, 2007).

Table 5

Levels and Foci of the Art of Hosting Practice

| <i>Level of Practice</i> | <i>Focus of Practice</i> |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Individual | To continue to connect to ones passion for taking this journey |
| Team | To strengthen individual courage to lead as hosts |
| | To train on the competencies of collective reflection and wise action |
| Community | To practice co-creating, co-deciding and co-hosting in order to host strategic meetings, focus groups, community conversations, 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 world |

Pattern

The pattern within the Art of Hosting invites new ways of living and working (http://www.berkana.org/pdf/artofhosting_shire.pdf). It offers a nontraditional pattern for working with organizations to engender systemic change (Art of Hosting, n.d.). A fractal pattern, the hosting practice scales from the individual to the community level, and the results of one process seed the next process iteration. This fractal pattern is illustrated in the following Figure:



Figure 1. Harvest of the fractal nature of Hosting, including Hobbit Tools (T. Woolf, personal communication, December 10, 2007)

Hosting's self-organizing nature makes it an emergent pattern. When fostering individual or community involvement, hosting relies on the circle and other non-linear processes to deepen the connection to the wisdom of the whole. Hosting emphasizes the collective for bringing intelligence and wisdom to play on a question. Participation by the individual and the collective in the hosting practice leads to ownership of the individual and collective of the results they achieve.

The Art of Hosting training journals (Wooded Glen, 2007; Bowen Island, 2006) outline key descriptors of the pattern of hosting as follows:

- (a) To go from fragmentation to connection
- (b) To ground our actions in that which is meaningful
- (c) To access and draw wisdom from all our collective intelligences
- (d) To be able to lead from the ‘field’
- (e) To shift our patterns of organizing and interacting
- (f) To connect and align our inner and outer worlds, remembering what we hold and having the courage to act wisely
- (g) To learn, practice and apply skills and methodologies; plus create the necessary conditions and timing
- (h) To host a level of consciousness where people can be together in an authentic way

The Chaordic path. A host must be skillful in walking a fine line between the chaos of such non-linear, emergent patterns and the desire for control that stifles the creativity that can emerge from chaos. Dee Hock named the space between chaos and order, the space illustrated in Figure 2, the Chaordic field (Waldrop, 2006). This field between chaos and order is the space from within which hosting may occur.

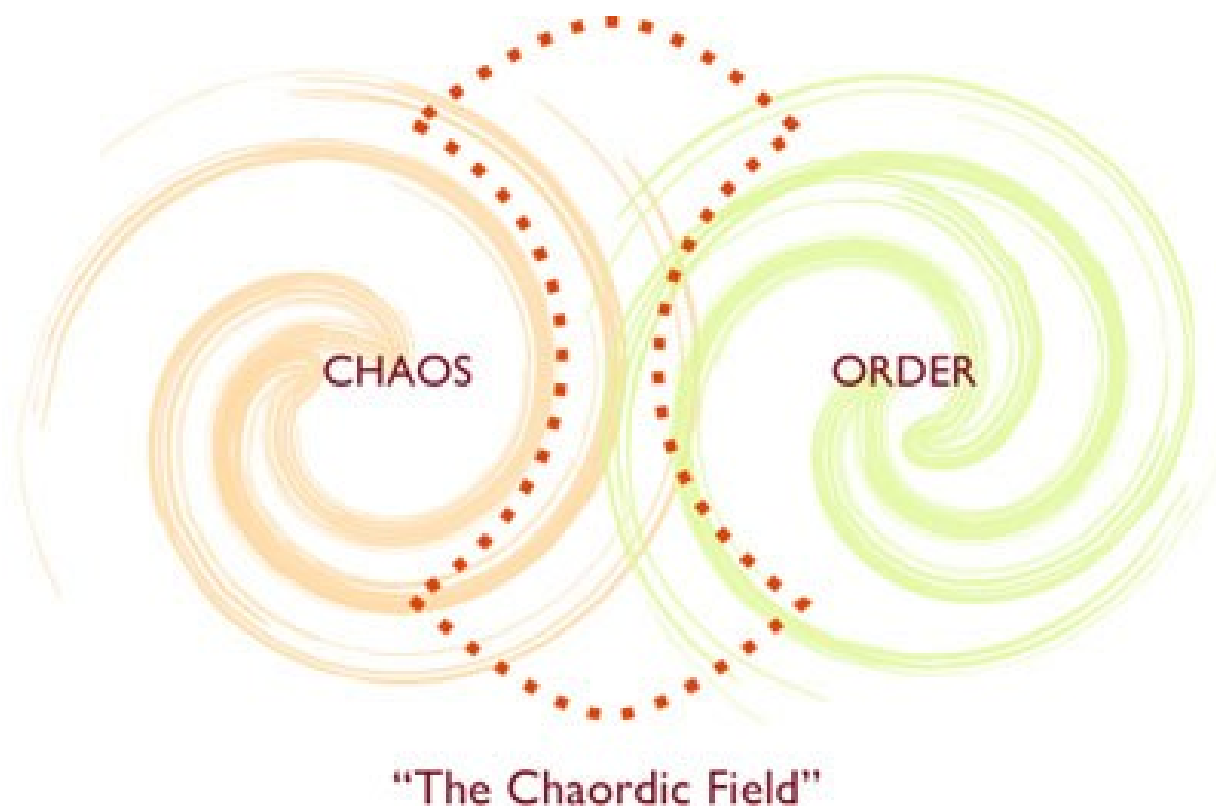


Figure 2. The Chaordic Field (Art of Hosting, n.d.)

In a practice that is driven by self-organized communal exploration of deep questions without easy answers, it is possible to become lost in the chaos that may arise. It is possible that participants may choose to impose order on the process, perhaps even to control the process or dictate its outcome. From the perspective of hosting, too much chaos or order stifle creativity and the ability for a group to access its collective wisdom and intelligence (Art of Hosting web site). By applying elements of skillful questions, or asking powerful questions that matter, the host introduces an element of chaos into an ordered existence. To keep the question process from becoming too chaotic, and participants from feeling too frustrated and powerless from not having answers, the host introduces skillful forms to shape and contain the discussion (Wooded Glen, 2007). By walking this Chaordic path between too much order or chaos, hosts support conditions for the group to work through fear and confusion in ways that encourage the emergence of new thinking and innovation.

Chaordic stepping stones. In walking the Chaordic path, hosts seek to root their steps in real needs and sustainable action for their communities (Wooded Glen, 2007). The Chaordic stepping stones were identified as part of the case study organization's evolutionary process (Ryan-Hart, 2007) and have been adopted by the hosting community as a means for understanding what is being discovered about an organization or process (Wooded Glen, 2007). These stepping stones occur in no particular order, and include: structure, practice, need, purpose, principles, people, concept, and beliefs that limit. A graphic representation of the Chaordic stepping stones is offered in Figure 3.

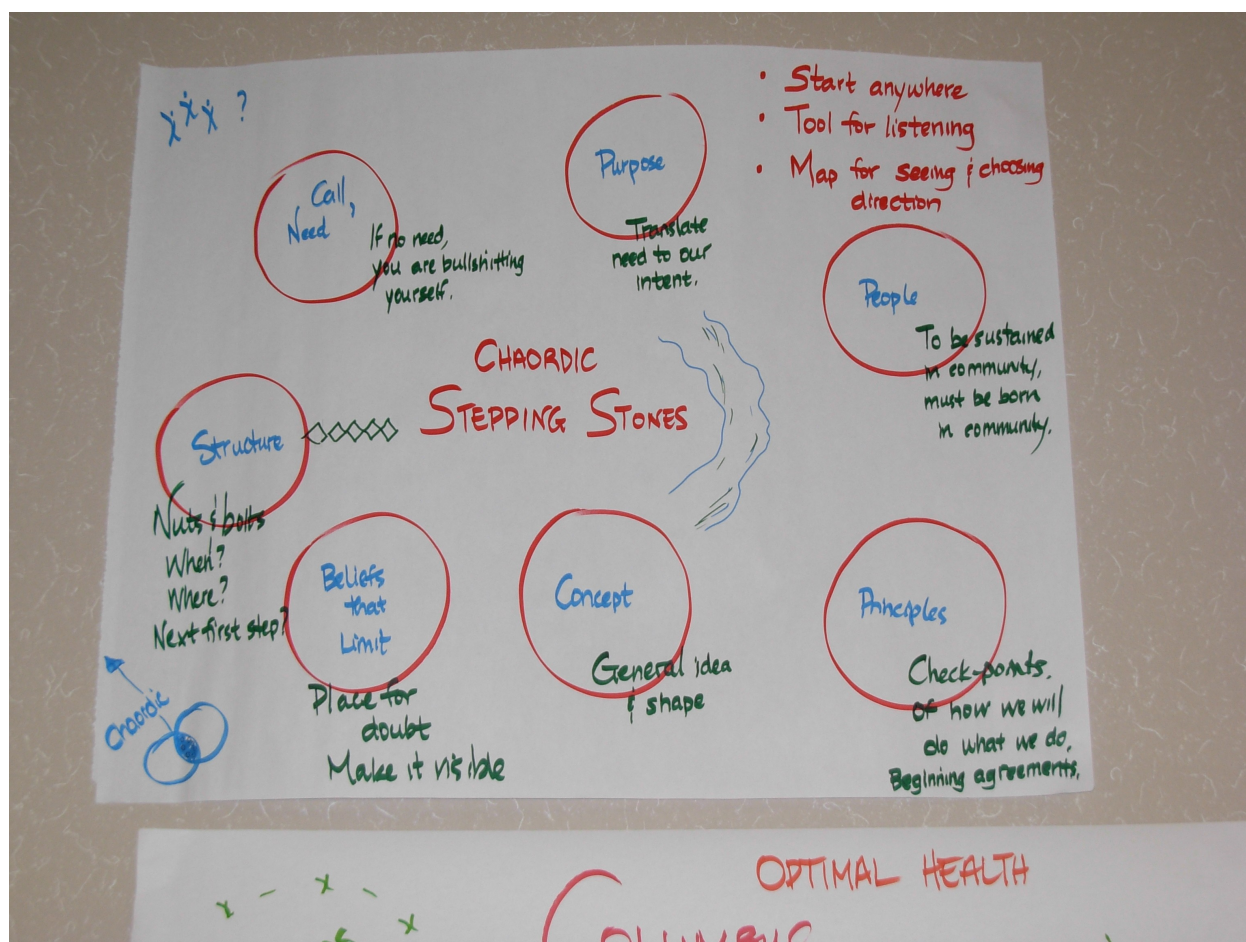


Figure 3. Chaordic stepping stones (T. Woolf, personal communication, December 10, 2007)

Practice

For the purpose of this research project, the actual practice of the Art of Hosting will be considered through four forms: the Four Fold Invitation, the Seven Hobbit Tools, the Five Breaths, and the Harvesting practice. The Four Fold Invitation establishes the values and commitments that drive the Art of Hosting practice, while the Hobbit Tools identify fundamentals of Hosting at every level of practice (individual, team, and community). The Five Breaths provide a framework for applying the Hosting practice to a specific conversation or project process, while Harvesting provides a method for collecting learning gleaned from the Five Breaths process so that it may be used to seed the next level of conversation and exploration of the question that matters.

The four fold invitation. Hosting blends four elements into the actual practice: being present, participating, contributing, and co-creating community. Figure 4 illustrates the relationship amongst these four elements.



Figure 4. The four fold invitation (Art of Hosting, n.d.)

In hosting, great importance is placed on creating and holding space for true learning to occur and the emergent to be discovered (Art of Hosting, n.d.; Wooded Glen, 2007). Being present means to create and hold that space within oneself so that the practitioner can ‘sit in the fire of the present’ reality and see it for what it is (Art of Hosting, n.d.). It provides the individual with a less-obscured place within oneself to sense what is emerging in the environment and within oneself (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994; Art of Hosting, n.d.).

In order to host oneself and others, the host must actively practice conversation within the intention of hosting (Wooded Glen, 2007). This requires the individual to listen fully and respectfully to all that is being expressed within the conversation. Judgments are suspended to maintain unbiased listening (Art of Hosting, n.d.) and to expose ones inherently held biases to promote more honest communication (Senge, et al, 1994).

Contribution refers to hosting conversations that matter within and for the community. This calls upon the practitioner to find and host powerful questions on issues that matter to the community or organization. It also calls upon the practitioner to harvest the answers, patterns, insights, and learning from these conversations so that they may be used to guide wise action and seed new levels of conversation (Art of Hosting, n.d.).

Co-creation refers to being an active part of a community of practice, co-creating and co-hosting with other practitioners. This allows a practitioner to blend their knowing, experience and practices with others, increasing the diversity of the hosting community, fostering working partnerships within the community and, as Beck (2007) writes, “growing legs for emergence” to carry hosting forward to meet future needs.

Hobbit tools. The Hobbit Tools, or Seven Little Helpers, are viewed by the hosting community as essentials for meaningful conversation (Bowen Island, 2006; Wooded Glen, 2007; Art of Hosting, n.d.). Figure 5 provides a visual representation of the harvest of a discussion about these tools.

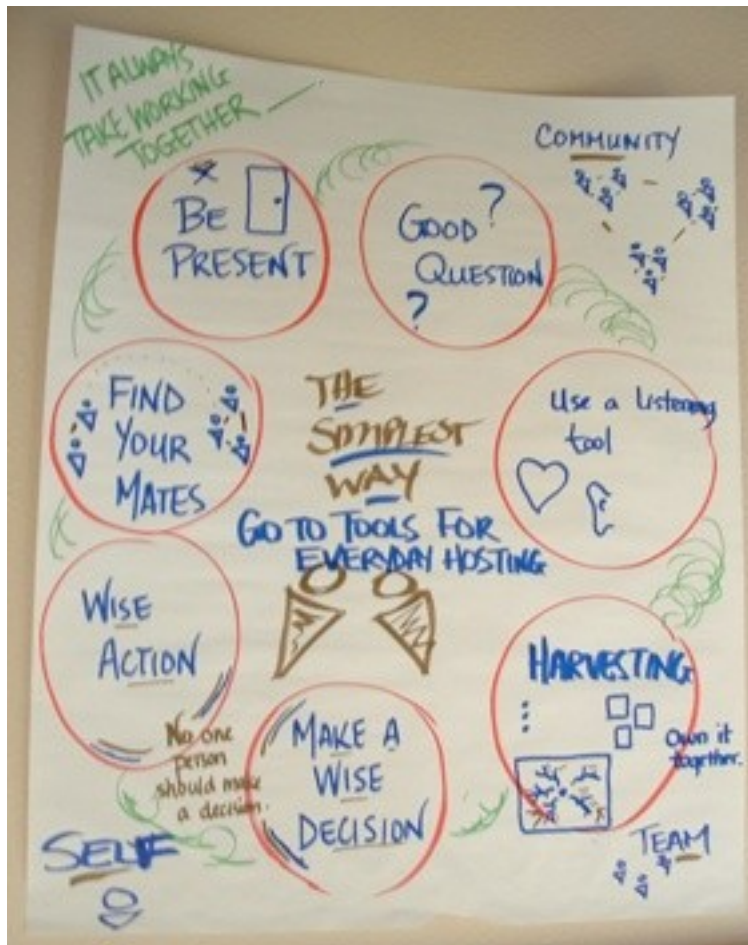


Figure 5. Photograph of a harvest outlining the Hobbit Tools (T. Woolf, personal communication, December 10, 2007)

By being present to what is and what is emerging, a host encourages and supports others to be fully present in the conversation (Wooded Glen, 2007; Evolutionary Nexus, n.d.). In finding their mates, a host is able to join like-minded people to join them in the work. Being a mate refers to a deeper level of relationship than being a team member: a mate represents a deep and lasting relationship upon which one may trust and rely (Evolutionary Nexus, n.d.). When engaged in conversation or inquiry, a powerful, or ‘wicked,’ question is crafted to cut to the heart of the inquiry (Wooded Glen, 2007; Evolutionary Nexus, n.d.).

As the conversation progresses, each host relies upon various listening tools, including their ears, heart, or use of a talking piece to preserve the space for deep attention and listening to occur (Evolutionary Nexus, n.d.). Hosts harvest the wisdom, shared learning, and co-creation that emerges from the conversation so that the conversation has lasting value for the group or community (Wooded Glen, 2007; Evolutionary Nexus, n.d.; Corrigan & Nissen, 2007). Once the harvest has been collected and understood, decisions should be made so that they create clarity and generate wise action (Wooded Glen, 2007; Evolutionary Nexus, n.d.; Corrigan & Nissen, 2007).

The five breaths of process architecture. A byproduct of the case study evolutionary process (Ryan-Hart, 2007), the Art of Hosting community recognized that the pattern for emergent conversation and learning actually repeated itself through a series when people hosted a conversation process. The shape of the diamond, with divergence, holding, and convergence, is reminiscent of the pattern of breathing: the Hosting community named this process the Five Breaths of Process Architecture (Ryan-Hart, 2007). All five breaths or diamonds are contained within a single diamond meta container, and each diamond contains a divergent and convergent

pattern, joined by a period of adjustment, as outlined in the following table (Bowen Island, 2006):

Table 6

Divergent and Convergent Processes Contained Within the Five Breaths of Process Architecture

| <i>Divergent thinking</i> | <i>Convergent thinking</i> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 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 |

Between these two movements is a space containing the struggle to integrate divergent and convergent thinking, called the groan zone. The pattern for each diamond is the same, which reinforces the fractal nature of this process, as diagramed in Figure 6 below.

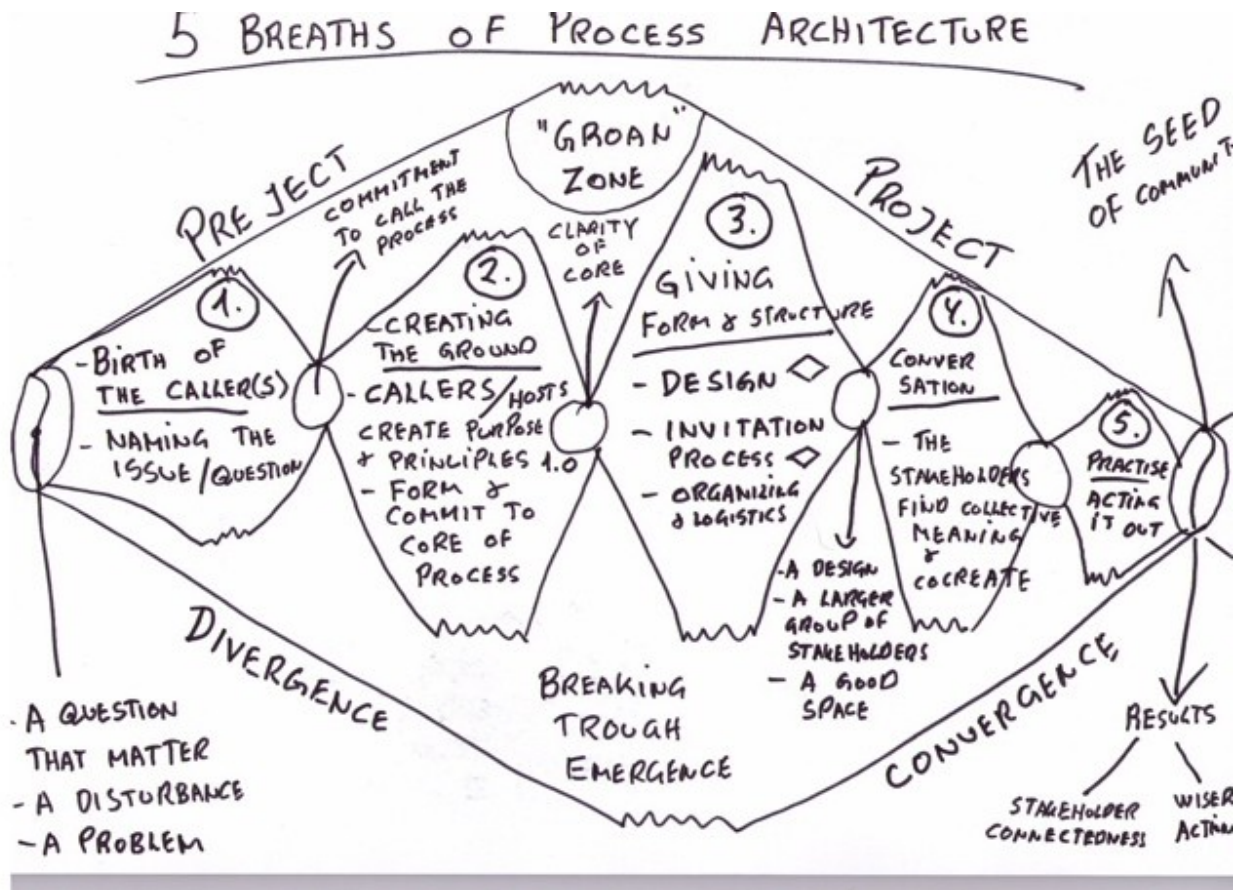


Figure 6. Five breaths of process architecture diagram (Source: Bowen Island, 2006)

As a theoretical process, the Five Breaths begins with an individual sensing a problem or disturbance in their organization. The individual, in order to accurately identify the issue or question at the heart of the disturbance, spends time being present with their understanding of the disturbance to see it clearly and without judgment (Bowen Island, 2006). Divergence occurs as facets of the disturbance are identified and explored. The groan zone is a time of consensus building and leads to convergence on a core issue and a powerful question to guide further exploration of the issue. The individual, or caller, commits to calling the process to a larger organization, and leads the process into the next breath.

In the second diamond, the ground is created and prepared for collective clarity of purpose and principles (Bowen Island, 2006). The main purposes at this stage are to identify the purpose for the conversation, establish principles by which the process will unfold, and commit to preserving the core of the process as it unfolds (Bowen Island, 2006). It is at this point in the architecture that the process enters the main diamond's groan zone. The first two diamonds constitute the preparation or pre-ject phase of the hosting process. In the height of the main groan zone, core issues and question are held until consensus emerges for guiding the process through diamonds three through five.

Hosts give form and structure to the process during diamond three (Bowen Island, 2006). Hosts explore questions such as what forum design would work best for upcoming conversations, who should be invited to participate in the process, and what form of invitation would be most likely to encourage their participation. As the program takes shape, the process leaves the main groan zone and begins to converge into the project phase of the diamond. A

design and safe space for the process are crafted, and stakeholders are identified to invite into the process of co-creating an answer to the problem at hand.

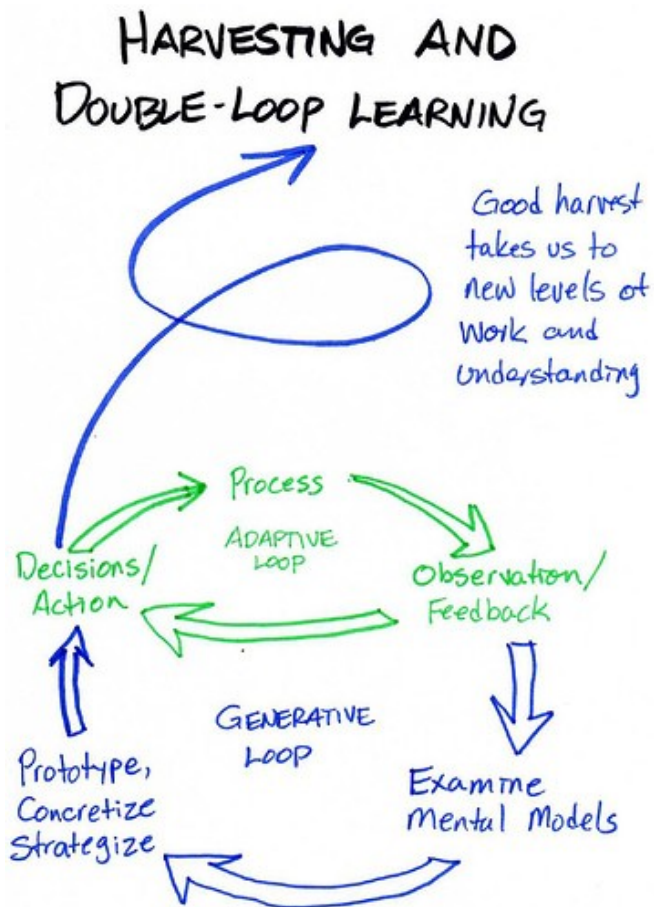
Diamond four describes the conversation process itself. Hosts implement the design of the program while holding a safe space or container for the process to occur (Bowen Island, 2006). Within the context of the design and safe space for the process, stakeholders meet to explore facets of the problem facing the organization. As the conversation process unfolds, stakeholders may access the group's collective wisdom while co-creating answers to the questions facing them. In this diamond, it is important for the hosts to work together to preserve the container and the safety of the group (Bowen Island, 2006). At the same time, it is also important for the hosts to let go of any assumptions of how the process should unfold (Bowen Island, 2006). The role of the host is to serve as an instrument to allow the collective wisdom of the stakeholders to emerge and find its own course (Bowen Island, 2006). Ideally, the process converges to a clearer understanding of the problem and specific actions for stakeholders to take.

Diamond five represents continued learning and leading from the Chaordic field. Actions identified from the conversation process are implemented to embody the purpose of the practice. With the core purpose of their conversations guiding them, stakeholders are able to engage in wiser actions surrounding the original problem or question (Bowen Island, 2006). Stakeholders connect to each other in new and deeper ways—a benefit of the relationships created through the process of conversation in which they have participated (Bowen Island, 2006). Learning achieved and harvested from the conversation process is used to build the next level of conversation addressing the original problem or issue. In other words, the end product of the current Five Breaths process becomes the starting point for the next.

Harvesting. An exploration of the Art of Hosting would be incomplete without an exploration of the harvesting process. Hosting and harvesting are complimentary aspects of the same role (Corrigan & Nissen, 2007). Nissen (n.d.) describes the relationship between hosting and harvesting thusly:

Even if we are talking in the art of hosting and harvesting meaningful conversations about one thing, the nature of these two activities may differ. If the work of the facilitator or host is to engage everyone to speak their truth, listen openly, trying to understand differing views and to bring their best to the table and work at hand; the harvesters focus is on capturing the wisdom, remembering, seeing patterns and making meaning and then making this meaning visible and available. It is as if the hosting is animating the discovery and learning process whereas harvesting is trying to embed the insights and learning - to make them as relevant and useful in our own context as possible.

The harvesting process is where learning and growth occurs in the hosting process (Corrigan & Nissen, 2007). Referring back to the Five Breaths of Process Architecture, hosting facilitates the divergent aspects of the process: culling forth the different threads knotted together (Corrigan & Nissen, 2007). Harvesting, on the other hand, represents the convergent aspects of the process: weaving these different strands together into new and useful forms (Corrigan & Nissen, 2007). To facilitate this process, harvesting relies upon a triple loop learning process as illustrated in Figure 7 below.



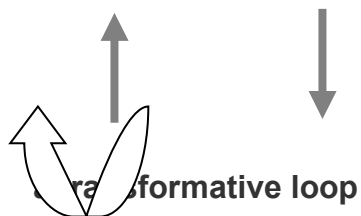
or add a third loop...

Change / renew

Change your

Mental Models

Basic assumptions



= harvesting Triple loop learning

Figure 7. Learning and the harvesting process (Source: Corrigan & Nissen, 2007)

The goal of harvesting is to gather and distill the content of understanding at a given point in the hosting process so that it may be fed back into the system and serve as a launching point for the next process iteration (Corrigan & Nissen, 2007). Just as seeds contain latent energy for a plant to grow, so does the harvest: the artifacts created through harvesting embody elements of the energy of the group's process so that it can be activated again when the artifact is revisited (personal e-mail, December 10, 2007).

Corrigan and Nissen (2007) describe eight phases of the harvesting cycle, diagramed in the below table:

Table 7

The Harvesting Cycle

| <i>Harvesting Phase</i> | <i>Process</i> | <i>Outcome</i> |
|--|--|--|
| Sensing the Need | Becoming clear on what the need or call is for the process, the purpose for gathering in the first place | A purpose for being in the field, a set of questions about that purpose, a pre-determined place to use the results of the harvest, and specific tools to use in doing their work |
| Preparing the Field | Preparing oneself as host, setting the invitation and the context of the process | Setting the tone for the process to come, a level of seriousness and depth being communicated about the process |
| Plan the Harvest | Identify the intent for the harvest. Who will benefit from it? How can the harvest best serve or add value to the work at hand? What form would be most effective for the harvested end-product? Who should host or harvest? What is the right timing for the harvest? | A clear purpose and success criteria for the harvest itself |
| Planting the Seeds | Plant the seed questions that will drive the conversation or inquiry at the right time and in the right conditions for the process | The conversations and learning that emerge from exploration of the seed questions |
| Tending the Crop | Hold the space for what is emerging from the process | Conversation and exploration |
| Picking the Fruits | Record the output of the conversation in various forms and media | Creation of a record or collective memory |
| Preparing and Processing the Fruits | Harvest in a systemic way, feeding the fruits back into the process and using the harvest to generate new questions | Creating collective meaning and value |
| Planning the next harvest: feeding forward | Using the harvest to generate new questions and clarify shared understanding | The resulting seeds of insight help to shape the needs of the next crop or iteration |

As an integral part of the hosting process, harvesting compliments the five diamonds of process architecture and makes visible the flow of emergence within that process (personal e-mail, December 10, 2007).

The 'Art' of Hosting

Hosting meaningful conversation takes more than methodologies or tools one can use to facilitate the process: it is an art that requires skill. At its heart, the 'Art' of Hosting stems from the quality of personal practice to host oneself. As Nissen (n.d.) describes it, "It is about the inner presence throughout the whole process from the first contact with the client, till finally the harvest of the conversation is done and a new round of conversations can begin."

Also important to the 'Art' of Hosting is the element of energy within the practice. As one practitioner writes:

[The Art of Hosting] is an experience that when described, often ends with "you had to be there." At one level this is a copout. Yet, it is also true. Why? I believe in the [Art of Hosting] we are working added levels of energy that are largely unseen and very untraditional in description. At least, this is true from my view. When Teresa, Tuesday, Chris and I work together [providing trainings on the Art of Hosting], we are each sensing what needs to happen [within themselves, within the group, and within the training as it unfolds]. Where does that come from? Intuition, yes. And ability to tangibly feel the information that is in the air, the field – yes. (Personal e-mail, December 10, 2007)

Methods

Our Optimal Health was selected as an information-rich case for in-depth study based on two criteria: nonprofit organizational status, and the use of the Art of Hosting as its operating system. This organization provides a unique operational construct sample of a Hosted nonprofit organization. Given the lack of data on the Art of Hosting in organizational settings, this study aimed to provide a data based assessment of Hosting practices while telling the story of the case study organization's evolution.

The focus of this study is that of the effects of the Art of Hosting on the case study organization. In part, this study conducted an implementation evaluation, described by Patton (2003) to “look at the extent to which actual implementation matches the original program design and capture implementation variations” (p. 4). This study also documented the organization's development over time, seeking to identify any unexpected or unintended consequences, side effects, or outcomes from the Hosting practice in Our Optimal Health's performance as an organization. This case study uses a mixed method of research, combining qualitative data obtained from interviews and oral histories with quantitative data obtained from document reviews. As action research, the desired outcome is to enhance knowledge and understanding of the Art of Hosting within three communities of practice: the case study organization itself, the nonprofit management community, and the Hosting community in general.

The following table describes the multidimensional analysis strategy used for this study.

Table 8

Multidimensional Analysis Strategy

| <i>Analysis Type</i> | <i>Data Type</i> | <i>Data Source(s)</i> | <i>Purpose</i> |
|----------------------|------------------|---|---|
| Inductive | Qualitative | Interviews Documents Oral Histories | Identify patterns and themes emerging from the case study |
| Deductive | Quantitative | Documents | Test and verify results of inductive content analysis |

This analysis strategy was selected to create a holistic picture of the case study organization and strengthen the study's methodological triangulation.

Data Collection Methods

Interviewing and document analysis was conducted to compose the case study. Due to limited financial and time resources, observational fieldwork was not pursued by this project researcher. As a consequence, this project researcher will not be able to include her own direct observations on the organization's functioning. This shortcoming will be addressed in greater detail in the recommendations section of this paper.

Open-ended interviewing. Interview guide and conversational interviews were conducted with two key information-rich participants to capture their perceptions of the organization (personal interview, August 17, 2007; personal interview, September 21, 2007). Some of these interviews were tape recorded, with consent obtained prior to recording. Interviews were conducted in person, over the telephone, and as e-mail conversations. Interviews followed a free flowing format in alignment with the philosophy of the Art of Hosting.

Document analysis. Various internal business documents such as meeting records and communications documents were reviewed for quantitative data. Because graphic artifacts such as visual harvests (e.g. drawings) of meeting content, development stepping stones, and

architectural processes are key elements of a hosting practice (Art of Hosting, 2007), these documents were also included for qualitative review and analysis. Additionally, various tellings of the oral history of Our Optimal Health recorded at conferences and training events were used to help weave the story of the organization's evolution.

Advantages and disadvantages. The qualitative data methods utilized for this case study aided this project researcher in painting a picture of the case study's evolution while maintaining a sense of the spirit and flavor of the Art of Hosting. The interviews, oral histories, and visual artifacts come from sources present at the conception and creation of the case study organization. At the same time, this may be a disadvantage. Oral histories and personal interviews are, essentially, self reports. Self-reports may be subjective, whether intentionally or not. Self-reports may distort past events, and visual artifacts arise from the subjective interpretations of their artists.

Qualitative data was included to help create a more detailed view of the case study organization. However, key business documents may not have been included in the review. Additionally, documents reviewed may have contributed little to the understanding of the case study as a whole. In particular, business documents, by their very nature, may not convey the involvement or effect that the Art of Hosting has on the case study organization.

The Case Study

A community health care nonprofit in a metropolitan area of Ohio served as the sample for this case study. The research design for this project included providing a case study based on qualitative and quantitative data.

Entry negotiations with the case study organization began in July 2007, when members of the Hosting community recognized the overlap between the research intentions of this project

researcher and a Core Hosting Team member of the case study organization. A series of conversations ensued via e-mail and telephone which clarified the interest and intent of both parties, including recognition of the need for formal research to quantify the effects of the Art of Hosting on the case study organization.

Interviews for the case study began on August 17, 2007, starting with the initial caller for the project. Interviews with a second Core Hosting Team member were conducted on September 22 and 23 to provide an additional perspective on the formation process of the organization, as well as observations on its current performance as a Hosted organization. This project researcher relied upon existing organizational records, oral history recordings, and process diagrams to provide greater detail to the process the case study organization experienced through its formation. Both Core Hosting Team members were cooperative and supportive of the interview processes.

Administration of a Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire to case study organization stakeholders was planned to be an integral part of this research project. However, time constraints and unforeseen delays prohibited the administration of this questionnaire in time for inclusion of this professional project. For current research, the implications are that informative research is not included in the case study review, and without direct observation of the organization the case study may lack a certain depth in understanding and detail that responses to the questionnaire could have provided.

Finally, this project researcher encountered difficulty in writing about an emerging practice in concrete terms and more accessible language for readers not familiar with the Art of Hosting or its foundations.

Case Study: Our Optimal Health

Our Optimal Health is a complex and multi-layered project, established as the result of a series of events that generated discussions among community leaders in Franklin County to explore new responses to an imminent health care implosion. While Our Optimal Health formally began in March 2005, the true beginning of this project takes place years before.

Birth of the Caller(s)

Ultimately, Our Optimal Health exists because a key person in a position of power within Franklin County was exposed to key teachings at a key time. As the CEO of the Columbus Medical Association and the Columbus Health Clinic, Phil Cass has been a respected leader of the Columbus medical community for over two decades. For fifteen of those years, Cass held leadership roles in the mental health community. Part of his responsibility in the mental health community was to lead a political campaign to encourage Lincoln County voters to approve tax levies to benefit mental health programs.

In 1995, the electorate voted down a tax levy for mental health programs resulting in loss of millions in potential mental health funding for the year (Cass & Moller, 2007). Between 1995 and 1996, Cass cut ten million dollars from the mental health care system in an attempt to garner voter support for an additional forty million for the 1996 election. A close friend of Cass' advised him to let go of his own personal need for control over the situation and hand over that need to the community in a genuine way: the community knew what it needed, and it knew what it was willing to fund (Cass & Moller, 2007). With the stakes so high, Cass shares, "letting go of control was just unbelievable and scary, but it was also true and we did it" (Cass & Moller,

2007). The electorate voted in support of the mental health care initiative, and Cass has spent the time ever since seeking to understand the dynamics of giving up personal control to a community for fostering change.

Cass describes the above experience as sparking a twelve year inquiry which led to the impetus for Our Optimal Health. In an attempt to deepen his understanding of how community and living systems work, Cass reports steeping himself in the works of Wheatley, Brown and Isaacs, and others (Cass & Moller, 2007). Attending the initial Shambhala Institute summer leadership program exposed him to the idea of conversations that matter; a concept that “cut to the heart for me” (Cass and Moller, 2007). Cass returned from the Shambhala Institute and began to experiment with the practice of holding conversations that matter by replacing traditional board meetings with World Café sessions. As Cass observes, “all of the sudden, our attendance was going way up, people started coming and kept coming” (Cass & Moller, 2007).

Cass returned to the following year’s Shambhala Institute summer leadership program, hoping for more training on the World Café. Instead, he discovered a module taught by Toke Moller, Monica Nissen, and Marianne Knuth on the Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter. Cass attended this module and “felt a level of connection to what was being taught, felt a level of connection with Toke and Marianne, and said to myself, there’s stuff we’ve got to do here” (Cass and Moller, 2007). Cass approached Moller about collaborating on a yet-to-be defined work in Columbus, explaining that the demographics of Columbus serve as a microcosm for the United States as a whole. Moller agreed, and they shook on it not knowing what that work would look like. Three years later, at another Shambhala Institute training, that work crystallized into Cass bringing Moller to Columbus to hold an Art of Hosting training for local leaders. Cass invited

other participants at the Shambhala Institute from Columbus to take part in the process of organizing the event.

Moller wanted to assess how strong the call was to hold an Art of Hosting training within the Columbus community: was it just Cass' interest, or did the interest run deeper? Moller proposed holding conversations about why it is important for leaders in Columbus to have conversations that matter, and the results of these conversations would serve as the need from where the training would be relevant. In March, 2005, Cass hosted the conversation at his home with twelve people attending. Moller guided the group through World Café and Circle sessions to discover what the Art of Hosting training could be for Columbus. Later that evening, forty more community leaders joined the conversation as the group asked itself: why is it important for me to be in conversations that matter right now, in whatever context I'm in? (Cass and Moller, 2007). All participants voiced the relevance of this question in their personal and professional lives, and agreed to the need for an Art of Hosting training to explore the question further.

On the third day of the training, a community leader asked "what could happen if we could work on questions of the community that nobody dares touch—like health care, like education, like distribution of wealth—because these are too hot for us to pick up as individuals?" (Cass and Moller, 2007). Ryan-Hart (2007) observes that because the issue of health care was in the national spotlight at the time, and because several high-profile leaders from the medical community were involved with the training, the focus settled on affordable health care for the community. Cass and three other community leaders took the question up and committed to doing something about the issue of affordable health care for the people of Franklin County.

Creating the Ground

In March of 2005, Phil Cass, Jeff Biel, Matt Habash, and Malcolm Porter became the founding callers for the yet-unnamed project. As Ryan-Hart (2007) describes, “all of the time we [core hosts] talk about how we don’t know what we’re doing and what the path is, but we are committed.” By May, 2005, the question describing the purpose of the group had been clarified: how can we create affordable and sustainable health care for all people in Franklin County? (Ryan-Hart, 2007).

That summer, the four callers attended the Shambhala Institute’s summer leadership program to participate in Adam Kahane’s module on solving tough problems. The callers realized that a key component for creating the ground for this project would be to assess the community’s readiness to take on the problem of health care (Ryan-Hart, 2007). In August, 2005, Cass funded Kahane’s consulting firm, Generon, to come to Columbus and conduct deep dive interviews with fifty five stakeholders of the health care system. These stakeholders ranged from insurance company executives to uninsured patients, and painted a wide canvas of the community (Ryan-Hart, 2007). The interviews focused on stakeholder perspectives of what is happening in the health care industry. What emerged was an overall sense of hopelessness shared by stakeholders of all levels: the system was broken, others were to blame, and the problem was hopeless to solve (Ryan-Hart, 2007). However, when the interviewer invited the stakeholder to speak with their personal voice (instead of their professional voice) to describe what they wanted to see happen within the industry, stakeholders expressed many ideas of what could be done and what they would like to see happen within the industry (Ryan-Hart, 2007).

Giving Form and Structure

At the same time, the callers committed to using the Art of Hosting practice as an operating system. The methodologies and processes guide all interactions within the project. Meetings and community assemblies would be designed using the principles of hosting. The processes and underlying values are spoken and acted upon in all project interactions. This engenders trust, strength, depth of relationship, and real shared learning (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007). Learnings from these assemblies would be harvested and shared with the community. Inclusion would be a priority. The goal of the work would be to enlist the community in the co-creation of the answers it sought to the questions of health care. A core hosting team was created from volunteers to design community assemblies, create a container for the project and community, and hold process within the parameters of the Art of Hosting.

Conversation

Once the interviews were complete and results analyzed, the first community assembly was called in December, 2005. The purpose of this community assembly was to invite them into the process for finding answers to the health care problem facing Franklin County, share results of the Generon survey, and ask for their feedback. An invitation was extended to community members, and 175 people attended: more than double what the assembly was expected to attract (Ryan-Hart, 2007).

The Generon report shared four areas that the assembly could work with in Columbus, culled from the results of the interviews. These four areas are diagramed in the following table (Ryan-Hart, 2007):

Table 9

Options for Focus to Improve the Health Care System in Columbus

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Above the Line: | ‘Institute for Innovators’ | ‘Change Lab’ |
| Changing the system | Increase individual capacity for innovation on the issue | Co-creating systemic innovation |
| Below the Line: | ‘Safety Net—Plus’ | ‘Improve the Negotiating Table’ |
| Working with what we have to make it better | Improve the current safety net for community members | Negotiate and broker for the community |

The response from the assembly was overwhelming: people wanted to invest their energy above the line. As Ryan-Hart (2007) described, “[the community] wanted to blow apart the system and do something different. And that was 175 people from the community saying that.” The assembly decided that while incremental change could be supported, the focus of this project would be transformational change (Ryan-Hart, 2007). The survey provided the foundation for what the project works with and what the community would like to see (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007).

The group’s second assembly continued the first conversation, working to gather more input on where the project should go. In March, 2006, a third assembly was held, at which the community was asked “what is the purpose of the health care system?” (Ryan-Hart, 2007). Cass and Moller describe the assembly:

Moller: On the third big meeting we had in Columbus, we called an assembly of stakeholders: what’s the really wicked question that needs to be asked. “What’s the purpose of the health care system that you would like to have in the future?” So maybe we should ask this question? 125 people, twenty five tables, an interdisciplinary group—sat at tables in [World] Café. We didn’t ask their permission to ask this question, we just asked. Half an hour later, we harvested the information, asking the stakeholders to write their learnings in such a way that their grandchildren would be proud of you to have done and been a part of this creation.

Cass: None of us hosting the event thought that there would be any coherence in the answers, but they were all the same. The [health care] system that we've got has been built on the wrong platform—a sick platform. As long as it operates from a sick platform it will always be unsustainable, and you are always engaged in a zero sum game...devoting all resources to sickness. We need to shift the platform from sickness to health. If this work that we're going to do is going to have any sustainability and impact, then it's got to be built on health. The statement of purpose was created that night by 125 people, it now includes over 3,000 people...it's been broadcast throughout the community:

“Creating health in our community, then healthcare that responds to lifelong wellness and treats illness.”

Then we discovered, like life, there is no zero sum for health. There are an infinite number of ways to support each others' health, even up to the health care system. We've been caught in these paradigms of HMOs, universal health, non-universal health...even though some of us on the hosting committee have expertise in health, there's a group of people figuring out how to organize a community around how we can promote health. Green space, walking space, walking groups, even saying to hell with the health care system and attract primary care physicians to the community for a self contained model. Playing with what the delivery system might look like. We've entered into a space of limitless possibilities. Some people are looking at taking on diabetes and wiping it out at a community level.

The core hosting team emphasized that it did not hold the answers to this question, but that to discover the answers the community needed its own input. As Ryan-Hart (2007) describes:

What we heard really very clearly is that we have a sick care system, not a health care system. So if we want to transform the system we need to look at not making better the sick care system and looking at health in a different way.

This third assembly shaped a purpose statement for the emerging project: “to provide affordable and sustainable health care that supports optimal health and wellness for everyone in our county” (Ryan-Hart, 2007). This assembly also gave name to the project: Our Optimal Health.

After the third assembly, the form changed to Open Space sessions so that community members could discuss what was important to them and the community, and identify health

project needs that were meaningful for the community. The role of Our Optimal Health was to respond to the project needs arising from these Open Space sessions (Ryan-Hart, 2007).

Practice

As the community assemblies continued, the core hosting team recognized a need to increase capacity to support fledgling community health programs. In February of 2007, Our Optimal Health hired its first employee, a project coordinator to support the hosting team and hold the process (Ryan-Hart, 2007). This led to the core hosting team looking at its structure and contemplating changes to a more traditional business structure.

The current core hosting team consists of twenty people, twelve of whom are active hosts (Ryan-Hart, 2007). This team is broken into various paths, described in the following grid.

Table 10

Core Hosting Team Paths

| Path | Description |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Engagement Path | Go out into the community and invite participation and collaboration |
| Training (or Learning) Path | Build community capacity and foster innovation within the community |
| Assembly Path | Plan assemblies that invite and involve community members |
| Stewards | Fundraising, grant writing, administration, project sustainability |
| Eagles | Group of consultants who meet with the core hosting team every two months to refocus the program on the '30,000 foot view' (Ryan-Hart, 2007) |

Discussion

The case study organization's evolution clearly follows the five breaths of process architecture framing the Art of Hosting. The organization also has reflected the purpose of the Art of Hosting: to co-create solutions to questions that matter: in this case, the questions addressing imminent health care needs within Franklin County.

Differences Between Our Optimal Health and a Traditional 501(c)(3) Organization

Our Optimal Health hosts a process. It does not claim to have answers to the problems facing the community: instead, it seeks to provide space and support for the community to collectively find its own answers. As the head of the project, the core hosting team is willing to be led by the community in its efforts: its goal is to support the involvement of the community to the best of the committee's ability. Virtually all the groups and core hosting team paths are owned by the community. Because the project is trying to learn from the future as it emerges, the core hosting team does everything it can to remain open to new alternatives and changing needs. The project is deeply inclusive: every major decision the project makes is taken back to the community in its assemblies, and received and discussed by that community.

Because the project is so focused on the emergent, Our Optimal Health does not operate with a traditional mission, goals, or objectives. As Ryan-Hart (2007) describes, "we can have a vision that we move towards, but the reality of it is that the goals and objectives emerge as we respond in various different ways."

Additionally, when the project or community gets stuck in the process of co-creating answers to community health needs, instead of becoming a barrier it becomes an opportunity for inquiry (Ryan-Hart, 2007). The core hosting team sets the initial agenda in the form of questions to be asked at the community assemblies, but they do not dictate the content that arise from the

community conversations. It is that content harvested from the previous community conversation that shapes the next round of questions, the next level of conversation in the community. Instead of relying upon external consultants or systems to guide the change process, the project has developed as its own learning system, building its own containers and tools such as developing the Five Breaths of Process Architecture and the Chaordic Stepping Stones tools (Ryan-Hart, 2007).

Finally, as a project, Our Optimal Health has been “incredibly well funded” (Ryan-Hart, 2007). As Ryan-Hart (2007) describes, “it’s like we said ‘here’s what we want to do, and people said ‘okay, here you go!’” The project’s funding success has been attributed in part to the composition and connections of the core hosting team, the sophistication of writing up what the project intends to do, the right need (health care) being addressed at the right time, and the level of community involvement with the project (Ryan-Hart, 2007).

Current Challenges Facing Our Optimal Health

Moving from process to action. The fact that Our Optimal Health hosts a process rather than running programs makes the transition difficult for the community to act. Ryan-Hart (2007) describes that Our Optimal Health has:

...been in a bit of a groan zone for several months – from planning to action. Two [project] groups are doing well. But the assembly tells us that people don’t know how to get to action. The hosting committee needs to take a more active role and provide support: ‘this is what we’re doing, can you join us here?’

Instead of inviting people to act first and think later, Our Optimal Health has invited people to think first and act later: the community is ready for action, but it does not know how to engage in such action (Ryan-Hart, 2007).

Otto Scharmer, co-author of *Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society* and author of *The U Process*, provided feedback to Ryan-Hart about

Our Optimal Health's efforts: "Stop holding a process and GET GOING! There are no adults in the room. You have to be the adults in the room. Set the parameters and get it going" (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007). When Ryan-Hart shared this feedback with the project, one of its members replied "but we're not the adults...we don't have any power...we're just asking people to do it" (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007). Ryan-Hart reflects that in the organization's quest for emergence, the core hosting team has not given people enough information about what the project would like to see emerge and how the project will support them (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007). This project rewrites the expectations of a community and an organization so that rather than being passive recipients, the community is actively involved in the co-creation of its solutions and results.

Structure. The Art of Hosting is not at all incompatible with structure; currently, the core hosting team is exploring what structure is needed to support the project's activities. As Ryan-Hart (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007) describes:

The danger for us is that we have all these accomplished people on our core hosting team that know a typical structure to not go right back to that, because they've seen it be successful. If we go back to a traditional structure, how do we keep the Art of Hosting as our operating system? It becomes who could do that...who has a deep enough understanding of the Art of Hosting?

The project experienced this challenge in February of 2007 when it hired a project coordinator who was not familiar with the hosting process and did not understand how to preserve the integrity of the process (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007). The core hosting team expects that incorporating more traditional business structures such as an executive director may be a challenge because the Art of Hosting is so counterintuitive to traditional business practices.

Evolving Process. Because the project is an evolving process, its staff and participants must release their egos as to what the project will evolve into. Some members of the core hosting team are comfortable with the chaos that emerges from this evolving process, and other members

are more comfortable with order. As one practitioner writes, “Emergence is not without boundaries. It is not without intent or structure. Yet it is a firm commitment to move in flow” (personal e-mail, December 10, 2007). Currently, the composition of the core hosting team is such that the members who thrive in chaos compliment those who thrive in order: a balance is maintained and creativity is able to flourish. However, if the guiding leadership of the project becomes concentrated into a single executive director, Ryan-Hart (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007) wonders if the new leader be able to walk that Chaordic path, since there is a balance present in the group that may be more challenging for one leader. How does Our Optimal Health keep that knowledge of the Chaordic path alive in one recognized leader as the project changes structure? (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007).

Fatigue. Ryan-Hart recognizes that there is some fatigue in the core hosting team and in the people attending the assemblies (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007). The core hosting team is exploring how it supports people to move in and out of the team itself, as these individuals need to, and at the level of involvement they need to have (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007). Ryan-Hart acknowledges that this sort of engaged and interdependent process can take over everything a person does (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007). The core hosting team is seeking structures that support the work of the project while providing opportunities for rest to its volunteers so that they do not have to hold the project together in its entirety (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007). The project is looking to examples globally on how different organizations govern. And while the project faces critical decisions regarding its structure, language, and evolution, the danger is that the project will abandon the process prematurely because its members are too tired to delve deeper into the issues facing the organization (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007).

Language. The language of the Art of Hosting is unfamiliar to many who participate in the project. Ryan-Hart says, “We can say we’re holding the space for change labs, but we’re the only people who know what change labs are!” (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007). The core hosting team speaks at the assemblies and its members are not sure if participants are even familiar with the terms and language the team uses to describe the process. To offset this concern, the project introduced meta-learning as a component of the assemblies, where core hosting team members explain the process, its language and operation, and extend invitations for assembly participants to become more involved in learning about the process by attending Art of Hosting trainings.

Conversely, as the project looks to incorporate more traditional structural elements, even words such as ‘govern’ and ‘executive leadership’ must be defined as to what they mean within the context of a hosted community or organization: Are these tasks we agree with? Who would they rest with? How would we ensure that they support co-creation and co-learning happening? (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007).

Sustaining community involvement. Ryan-Hart (2007) notes that attendance of the community assemblies has recently decreased significantly. The core hosting team went to its community in September 2007 and asked why the community thought that attendance was decreasing and what the community thought the core hosting team should do. Learnings from that assembly had not yet been released at the time of this writing, but Ryan-Hart (2007) speculates that fatigue and a desire for more concrete action may contribute to this phenomenon.

Self-organization of projects. Our Optimal Health sought to help the community identify and self-organize projects related to supporting community health (Ryan-Hart, 2007). However, the two sustaining projects under Our Optimal Health were started by members of the core hosting team (Ryan-Hart, 2007). Additionally, when the community identified a project it

wanted to pursue (e.g. community intervention for diabetes), interest was not sustained by the community (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007). It is not clear if community interest dwindled as community participation decreased at the assemblies, or if community members sought greater support and guidance from Our Optimal Health, or if it was simply not the right time for this project to mature, but the community dropped diabetes as a project (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007). The core hosting team is considering providing training to community members on the U-Process, with the aspiration that following the training a community member may step forward and commit to running a change lab and Our Optimal Health would commit to funding that process (King & Ryan-Hart, 2007).

Recommendations

More research is needed to explore how the Art of Hosting, and Our Optimal Health in particular, can facilitate a transition from process to action. While community members have demonstrated their interest and commitment to improving the quality of health care in Franklin County, the planning stage has lasted two years. While the project has a strong core hosting team, the philosophy and practice of hosting remains primarily within the core hosting team. Research is needed to determine effective ways to empower the community to implement and own the solutions they co-create.

Future case study research on this organization should include an observational fieldwork component to contrast against stakeholder reports. The organization is also a prime candidate for the Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire, in that the deficits reported by McHargue (2003) within nonprofit organization may be negated by the effects of the Art of Hosting within the case study organization. It would be beneficial to the nonprofit community to

test this theory, as nonprofit organizations could then benefit from the components of Hosting that contribute to the enhancement of nonprofits as learning organizations.

Future studies would also benefit from delving deeper into the level of personal hosting practice experienced and understood by community members associated with the project.

Conclusion

Our Optimal Health is an innovative project taking on the issues of affordable quality healthcare for all in its community. Using the Art of Hosting as an architecture within which to frame the process of hosting conversations with the community about health care has proven to be effective: the community has responded and participated in ten of these mass conversations over the last two years. One of the outcomes experienced from this process has been connection. While the level of connection within the organization and its community may not yet yield the project that Our Optimal Health seeks, it does create increased capacity to keep connecting—and connection sustains effort to keep doing the work (personal e-mail, December 10, 2007).

Our Optimal Health faces a crucial juncture now: that of moving from conversation to implementation. And while hosting works well to stimulate important conversation and co-creation of solutions to address the important questions raised in conversation, the process is lacking for actually inspiring action outside of the hosting community.

This is where Our Optimal Health faces its greatest challenge: it expects community members to own the solutions they co-create, and to be inspired to implement these solutions through wise action. The community, on the other hand, does not share this expectation. Our Optimal Health represents an organization working (albeit with the community) to meet community needs: they, therefore, are expected to hold the answers and the responsibility for implementation of those answers—not the community. The ethical implications of revising the traditional relationship between a nonprofit organization and its community must be addressed in future practice, as the Art of Hosting essentially rewrites the unspoken and understood rules outlining the roles of the community and its organizations.

Implications for Nonprofit Organizations

Just as the case study organization must explore the ethical implications of applying a new paradigm to an unfamiliar community, so must any practitioner assess the aptitude and implications of introducing a new paradigm to their nonprofit organization.

As Our Optimal Health finds its way through its current groan zone to the next phase of organizational emergence, it is useful to reflect once more upon the Art of Hosting. At its root, the Art of Hosting is a personal practice: by hosting oneself, one is able to create and hold space for others to host themselves. Perhaps this is where the value comes for implementing such a practice within a nonprofit organization: not to revamp the organization, but to bring depth to organizational experience and understanding by committing to host oneself as an individual.

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Appendix A: Online Resources for the Art of Hosting

The Art of Hosting Official Web Site

Art of Hosting: www.artofhosting.org

Communities of Practice

Hara Connection, United Kingdom: <http://www.haraconnection.com>

Kufunda Village, Zimbabwe: <http://www.kufunda.org>

Our Optimal Health, United States: www.ouroptimalhealth.org

The Shire, Nova Scotia: <http://www.oftheshire.org/the%20Shire/About%20the%20Shire.html>

Tools and Techniques

Peer Spirit Circle: www.peerspirit.com

Information on working with the tools of circle and storytelling

Open Space World: www.openspaceworld.org

Information on working with the tool of Open Space technology

The World Café Website: www.theworldcafe.com

Information on working with tools for hosting conversations that matter

Appreciative Inquiry Commons: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu>

Information on working with the tool of appreciative inquiry

Training Programs & Resources

The Berkana Institute: <http://www.berkana.org/index.html>

A resource for upcoming training and other information regarding the Art of Hosting

The Shambhala Institute: <http://www.shambhalainstitute.org/institute/home.html>

A resource for upcoming training information regarding the Art of Hosting

InterChange: <http://www.interchange.dk>

A resource for consulting and training programs rooted in the Art of Hosting