



## The Art of Participatory Leadership

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

Michael Silverblatt



### The Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter

The Art of Hosting is a highly effective way of **harnessing the collective wisdom and self-organizing capacity of groups of any size**. Based on the assumption that people give their energy and lend their resources to what matters most to them – in work as in life – the Art of Hosting blends a suite of powerful **conversational processes** to invite people to step in and take charge of the challenges facing them.

This workbook is a collation of some of the foundational Art of Hosting Practices. It has been developed with and by practitioners from around the world. For more please visit [www.artofhosting.org](http://www.artofhosting.org)

## About Gateway Zimbabwe

The mission of Gateway Zimbabwe is to build and sustain healthy communities in order to reweave and enliven the social fabric of Zimbabwe.

We awaken personal and collective agency by using processes

that foster healing, new connections and innovative leadership;

that enable people to discover their inherent skills and wisdom,

and to use these learnings, connections and skills

to generate smart initiatives for sustainable transformation.



We have adopted the baobab tree as an image for our work and we depend upon the deep grounded wisdom of Zimbabwe's people and history. Our program plan is threefold.

**Gateway Experiences** - draw upon these roots of skills, knowledge, wisdom *and* history and combine them with new methods and experience to develop individual and collective relationships, strength and capacity. Gateway Experiences are foundational - and potentially transformative – bridging and community building experiences open to all. Gateway Experiences bring together the voices of diverse Zimbabweans in an act of healing and culture building. This Art of Participatory Leadership is a Gateway Experience.

**Fellowship Program.** People inspired by the Gateway Experiences with an appetite for agency and leadership are invited to become Fellows and given on-going training and support.

**Gateway Initiatives:** Led by Fellows, designed from community engagement processes, supported by Innovation Fund and Gateway leadership training. Our work is both local and trans-local: A trans-local community is a community of shared interest that is not just in one location, e.g. a community of student activists. It also describes collaborations between two or more local communities.

### About this Workbook

This workbook is your personal reference journal offering the key materials of this training as well as a place for you to take notes to help you remember, focus and deepen your understanding and practice. It shares the basic assumptions and worldviews underpinning the Art of Hosting practice. It includes several methodologies and practices that the community of practitioners has found simple and helpful for you to use, improve, share. It provides you with resources - books, links, and information and where to go next – in your learning and/or reading.

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# What is the Art of Participatory Leadership

## AoPL

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



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

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

The leadership approach called the Art of Participatory Leadership activates the collective intelligence in a group to find new solutions to the increasing challenges of the world of work today.

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

AoPL practice is based on convening strategic dialogue and conversations as drivers for development and change. This form of leadership is already used with successful results in multiple sectors (government,

NGOs, and private settings) particularly in the following areas:

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

### 'A' Definition

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

And the AoPL is much more than this.

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

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

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

# What is Art of Participatory Leadership? A Few Assumptions

## New Solutions are Needed

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

## New Solutions Grow Between Chaos and Order

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

## Conversation Matters

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

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

Pericles

## Meaningful Conversation can Lead to Wise Action

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

## Paradoxes at Work

In hosting strategic and meaningful conversations we operate in a world that is not black or white – but rather full spectrum. We need to be able to operate in and hold paradoxes such as:

- Action and Reflection
- Content and Process
- Leading and Following
- Hierarchy and Community

### A Note...

Various members of the Art of Participatory Leadership network have provided the material in this journal. It is a growing, living document that has been augmented by many folks in our learning community.



# Two Complementary World Views

## Organizations as Machines and as Adaptive Systems

### Living Systems

#### A Natural Approach to Organizing Life

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

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

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

There are two exciting phenomena in nature and living systems:

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

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

What would our organizations and communities look like then?

#### Some qualities of Living Systems:

- A living system only accepts its own solutions (we only support those things we are a part of creating)
- A living system only pays attention to that which is meaningful to it (here and now)
- In nature a living system participates in the development of its neighbour - an isolated system is doomed.

- Nature and all of nature, including ourselves is in constant change (without ‘change management’)
- Nature seeks diversity – new relations open up to new possibilities. It is not survival of the fittest – but everything that is fit – as many species as possible. Diversity increases our chances of survival.
- ‘Tinkering’ opens up to what is possible here and now – nature is not intent on finding perfect solutions, but those that are workable
- A living system cannot be steered or controlled – they can only be teased, nudged, titillated
- A system changes (identity) when its perception of itself changes
- All the answers do not exist ‘out there’ – sometimes we must experiment to find out what works
- Who we are together is always different and more than who we are alone - possibility of emergence. Our range of creative expression increases as we join others. New relationships create new capacities.
- Human beings are capable of self-organizing – given the right conditions

Self-organization shifts to a higher order

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

**Meg Wheatley**

# AoPL and Living Systems as a Complement to Traditional Leadership Models

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

## A Note on Worldviews ...

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

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

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

# Mental Models

## Working with Vision and Purpose

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

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

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

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

Discovering purpose is to discover why something exists. Often we hurry to get into action, before we properly understand why we need to take action. Gaining clarity on purpose, and especially gaining collective clarity is setting the right course for taking action. A purpose, therefore, becomes a navigational tool like a compass as it helps us to discover the direction of travel for our efforts so they can be of service.

Purpose can also be described as 'the glue' that brings people's contribution and why it is worth working on this together. In fact, purpose becomes an invisible leader as it both connects different actions taken and supports everyone to know why their contribution is valuable.

**A Statement of Purpose defines, with absolute clarity and deep conviction, the purpose of the community. An effective statement of purpose will be a clear, commonly understood statement of that which identifies and binds the community together as worthy of pursuit. When properly done it can usually be expressed in a single sentence.**

**Participants will say about the purpose, "If we could achieve that, my life would have meaning."**

**Dee Hock**

In an organization or a community, many purposes co-exist, and often not enough effort is given to interconnect these purposes so that it can often feel that different and conflicting purposes are at play.

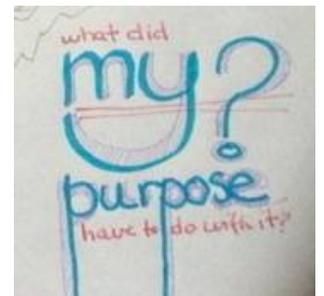
It is therefore important to remember that different purposes are at play, for example:

- purpose of the stakeholders that the organization serves
- purpose of the whole community / organization
- purpose of the core group
- purpose of each member of the core team

In the light of this, the following questions may inspire your collective inquiry into your shared purpose:

- What is our collective purpose?
- What is the purpose of our function, team, project?
- How does my purpose and the purpose we are all here to accomplish align?
- What is the purpose that is at the heart of this work and that will align us all to accomplish it?

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



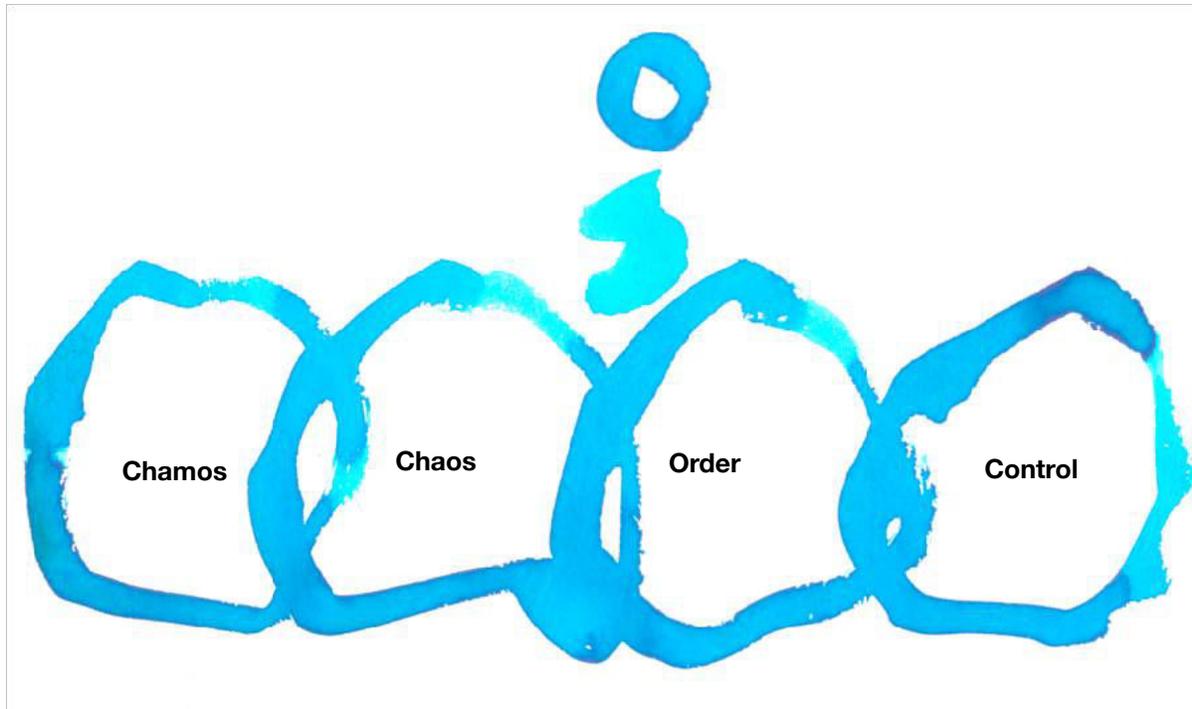
## Collective clarity of purpose is the invisible leader.

**Mary Parker Follett**

# Mental Models

## The Chaordic Path

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



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

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

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

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

And in fact, we will move between chaos and order – this is the generative dance, an oscillation often seen in the natural world. A balance between two seeming polarities, which are instead compliments of each other.

As we move between chaos and order, individually and collectively, we move through confusion and conflict toward clarity. We are all called to walk this path without judgement – some will feel more comfortable with chaos, others with order. Both are needed as, together, we walk the edge that is between these two toward something wholly new.

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



How much order do we need?

How much chaos would be helpful here?



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

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

#### **Chaos/Order is the Place for Leadership**

The practice of leadership resides in the place between chaos and order. When facing new challenges that cannot be met with the same way we are currently working, we

need to learn new ways of operating. It is during these times of uncertainty and increased complexity, where results cannot be predicted that leaders need to invite others to share diverse knowledge to discover new purpose and strategies and decide the way forward.

#### **Order/Control is a Place for Management**

The practice of management lies between order and control where activities need to be maintained and executed routinely so that a particular standard results. It is the place where “more of the same” is required. Therefore, when predictability is called for and where procedures and standards are clearly defined and need to

### **My Reflections on the Chaordic Path...**

# Mental Models

## Divergence and Convergence

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

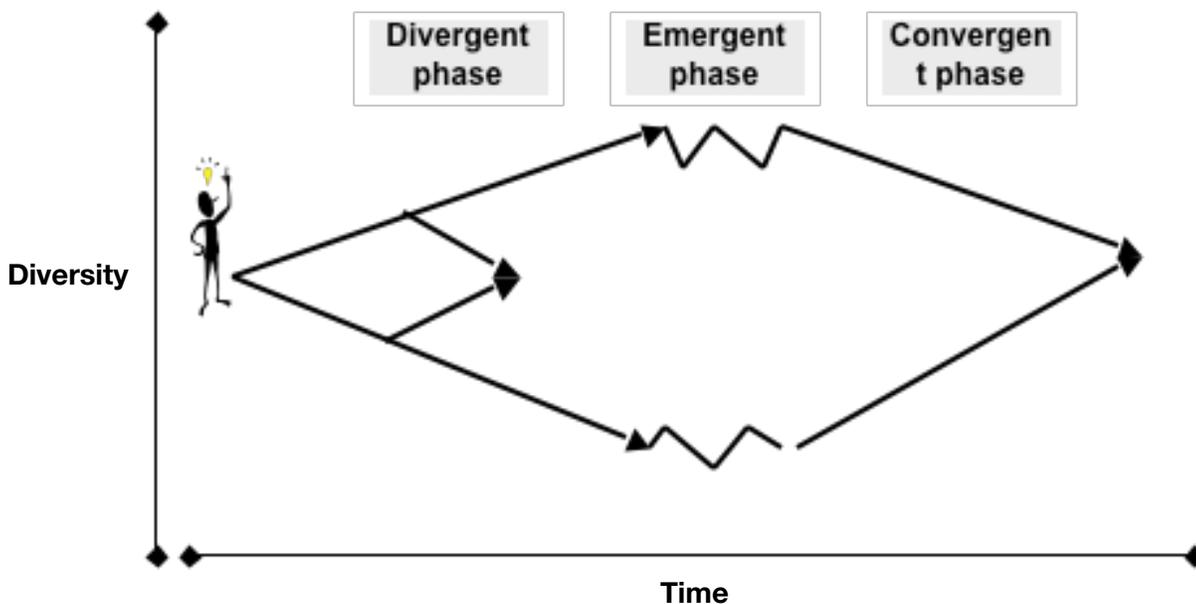
The “breath’ of divergence and convergence, of breathing in and breathing out is at the heart of our process design. Every process goes to a few or more of these ‘breathing’ phases.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

*Order arising out of Chaos.* Participatory leadership works with emergent change processes.

The work is done not by traditional 'command and control' approaches, but by:

- Setting clear intentions
- Creating hospitable conditions
- Inviting diverse people to connect

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

**Reflections on Divergence and Convergence:**

# When Practicing Dialogue

## Helpful Hints

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

### Focus on what matters

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

### Suspend judgments, assumptions, certainties

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

### Speak one at a time

Invite to speak with intention.

### Listen to each other carefully

Invite to listen with attention

### Listen together for insights and deeper questions

Do not remain at the surface of what you already know. Engage fully with others into bringing what we do not know yet to the surface.

### Link and connect ideas

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

### Slow down

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

### Be aware of your impact on the group

Do not monopolise the speaking time. Make sure everybody can be heard.



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

### Accept that divergent opinions are okay

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

### Contribute with your mind and heart

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

### Play, doodle, draw

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

### Have fun!

What if enjoying ourselves was the

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

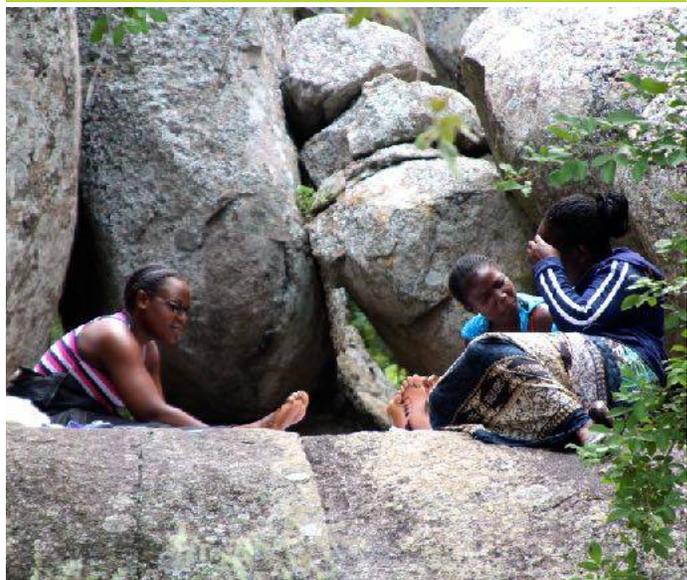
**Margaret Mead**

key to improving our learning and performance?

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



# Powerful Questions Focus Attention, Intention, and Energy



## Powerful Questions inquiring about things that matter

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

### Asking the right question

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

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

The conversation may include other questions than the

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

### Some guidelines for choosing questions:

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

## **A powerful question...**

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

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

**Albert Einstein**

## **Reflections on powerful questions:**

**Which are my own burning questions right now?**



## 2. Participate and practice conversations

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

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

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

## 3. Hosting conversations

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

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

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

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

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

## 4. Co-creating with others – becoming a community of practice

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

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

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

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

The collaborative field can produce unexpected and surprising results.

### **From a learner to a community that learns.**

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

# Methodologies and Practices

## An Overview

	<p><b>Circle</b></p> <p>Adaptable to a variety of groups, issues, and timeframes. Circle can be the process used for the duration of a gathering, particularly if the group is relatively small and time for deep reflection is a primary aim. Circle can also be used as a means for “checking in” and “checking out” or a way of making decisions together, particularly decisions based on consensus.</p>
	<p><b>Appreciative Inquiry</b></p> <p>Useful when a different perspective is needed, or when we wish to begin a new process from a fresh, positive vantage point. It can help move a group that is stuck in “what is” toward “what could be”. Appreciative Inquiry can be used with individuals, partners, small groups, or large organisations.</p>
	<p><b>World Cafe</b></p> <p>Process used to foster interaction and dialogue with both large and small groups. Particularly effective in surfacing the collective wisdom of large groups of diverse people. Very flexible and adapts to many different purposes – information sharing, relationship building, deep reflection exploration and action planning.</p>
	<p><b>Open Space Technology</b></p> <p>Useful in many contexts, including strategic direction-setting, envisioning the future, conflict resolution, morale building, consultation with stakeholders, community planning, collaboration and deep learning about issues and perspectives.</p>
	<p><b>Proaction Cafe</b></p> <p>Effective way to support people in developing their projects further. It can be done in large and small groups. 25 percent of participants get to ask for help in an open space set up and are coached by the rest in a cafe where each round takes them deeper into clarity of their project and the way forward.</p>

# Circle

## practicing an ancient form

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

[www.peerspirit.com](http://www.peerspirit.com)

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

### Principles of Circle:

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



### Practices of Circle:

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

### Setting Circle Agreements:

The use of agreements allows all members to have a free and profound exchange, to respect a diversity of views, and to share responsibility for the well-being and direction of the group. Agreements often used include:

1. Listen without judgment (slow down and listen)
2. Whatever is said in circle stays in circle
3. Offer what you can and ask for what you need
4. Silence is also part of the conversation
5. We agree to employ a group guardian to watch our need, timing, and energy.

### General Flow of the Circle

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### What is Circle Good For?

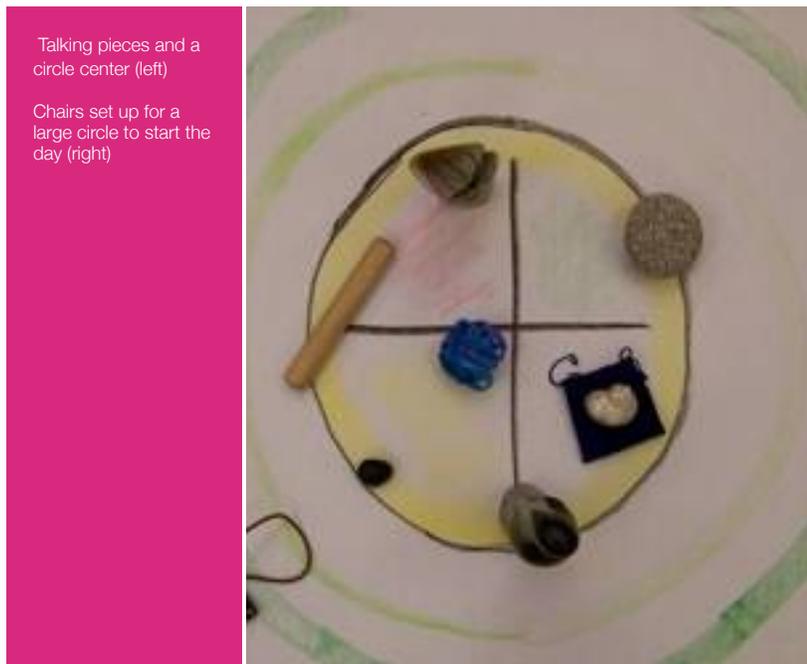
One of the beautiful things about circle is its adaptability to a variety of groups, issues, and timeframes. Circle can be the process used for the duration of a gathering, particularly if the group is relatively small and time for deep reflection is a primary aim. Circle can also be used as a methodology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

### Materials Needed:

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

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

**Flora Edwards**



# Appreciative Inquiry

## working with what's possible

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

<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

### Assumptions

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

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

### General Flow of an Appreciative Inquiry process:

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

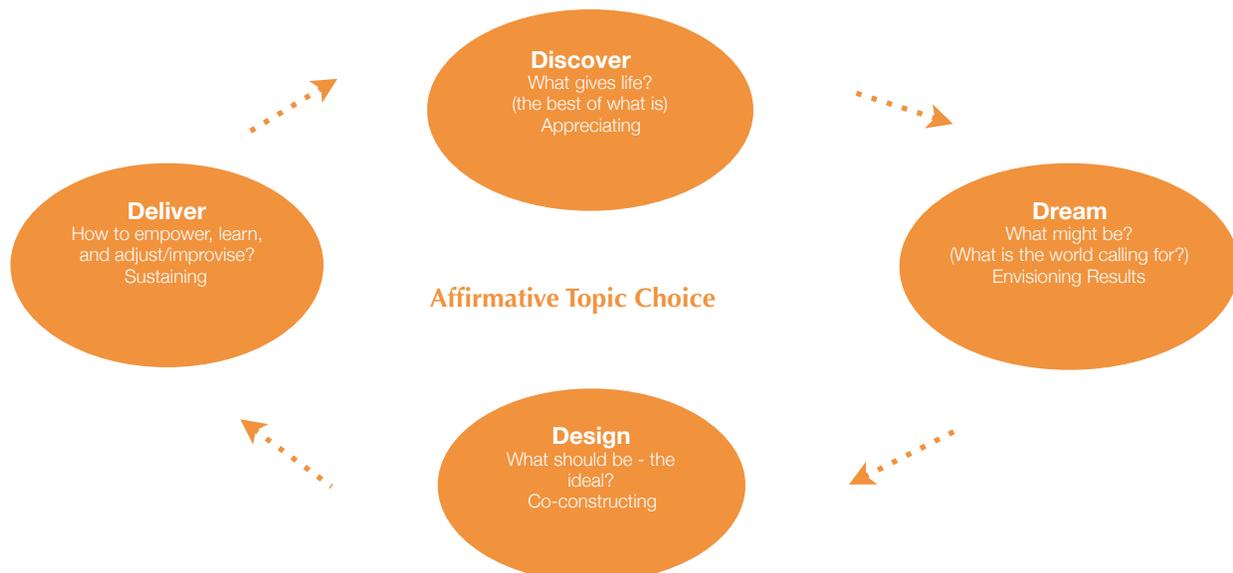
**DISCOVER:** identifying organisational processes that work well.

**DREAM:** envisioning processes that would work well in the future.

**DESIGN:** Planning and prioritising those processes.

**DELIVER:** implementing the proposed design.

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



Problem Solving	Appreciative Inquiry
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Basic Assumption: an organisation is a problem to be solved	Basic Assumption: an organisation is a mystery to be embraced

At the center is a positive topic choice – how we ask even the first question contains the seeds of change we are looking to enact.

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

#### What is Appreciative Inquiry Good For?

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

#### Materials Needed:

Varies depending on processes used.

**We grow in the direction of the questions we ask.**

# The World Café

## dialogue for large and small groups

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

[www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

### What is World Café Good For?

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

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

### Operating principles of World Café:

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



### Assumptions of World Café:

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

### General Flow of a World Café:

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





## Cafe Etiquette

Focus on what matters

Listen to understand

Contribute your thinking

Speak your mind and heart

Link and connect ideas

Listen together for themes, insights, and deeper questions

Play, Doodle, Draw - HAVE FUN!



### Materials Needed:

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

(The above info adapted from Café to Go at [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com))

# Open Space Technology

participants call the conversation



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

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

[www.openspaceworld.org](http://www.openspaceworld.org)

### What is Open Space Good For?

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

### Open Space Technology is an excellent meeting format for any situation in which there is:

- A real issue of concern
- Diversity of players
- Complexity of elements
- Presence of passion (including conflict)
- A need for a quick decision

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

### Principles of Open Space:

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

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

**General Flow of an Open Space Meeting:**

The group convenes in a circle and is welcomed by the sponsor.

The facilitator provides an overview of the process and explains how it works. The facilitator invites people with issues of concern to come into the circle, write the issue on a piece of paper and announce it to the group.

These people are "conveners." The convener places their paper on the wall and chooses a time and a place to meet. This process continues until there are no more agenda items.

The group then breaks up and heads to the agenda wall, by now covered with a variety of sessions. Participants take note of the time and place for sessions they want to be involved in.



**Roles in Open Space**

**Host - announces and convenes a conversation**

**Participant - participates in a conversation**

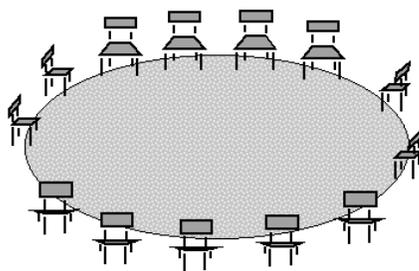
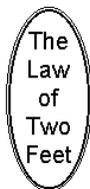
**Bumble bee - moves between conversations, cross-pollinating**

**Butterfly - takes time out to reflect**

Dialogue sessions convene for the balance of the meeting. Recorders determined by each group capture the important points and post the reports on the news wall. All of these reports will be harvested in some way and returned to the larger group.

Following a closing or a break, the group might move into convergence, a process that takes the issues that have been discussed and attaches action plans to them to "get them out of the room."

The group then finishes the meeting with a closing circle where people are invited to share comments, insights, and commitments arising from the process.



**The Four Principles**

Whoever comes is the right people.

Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.

Whenever it starts is the right time.

When it is over it is over.

**Materials Needed:**

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

**The Law of Mobility**

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

**Passion and Responsibility**



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

Marcel Proust



## Pro Action Cafe combining world cafe and open space

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

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

### What is Pro Action Cafe Good For?

As a conversational process, the Pro Action Cafe is a collective, innovative methodology for hosting

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

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

## General Flow of a Pro Action Cafe

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

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

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

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

### Round 1

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

### Round 2

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

### Round 3

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

Round 3 is in 2 steps:

1. First 20-25 minutes for the callers to reflect by themselves on the 4 questions above and harvest their key insights.

2. Round proceeds as the previous rounds - in conversation with participants. The new participants visit the table to listen to the harvest of the caller, their learning, their steps, help needed - and then offer any insight and any further support they can offer.

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

Last step is to meet in circle and invite the callers from each table to share answers to these two questions:

1. What am I grateful for?
2. What are my next steps?

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

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

## Materials and Set Up

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

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

# The Art of Harvesting

## making meaning of our conversations

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

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

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

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

They all harvest differently from the field. The results of their work go to



different places and are put to

different uses. But they all have a few things in common; they have a purpose for being in the field and a set of questions about that purpose, they have a pre-determined place to use the results of the harvest, and they have specific tools to use in doing their work.

Despite the field being the same, the tools and results are specific to the need, purpose and inquiry. There are eight stages of harvesting, elucidated in the companion book to this one. Briefly they are:

### Stage 1: Sensing the need

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

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

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

### Stage 2: Preparing the field

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

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

**In other words: start thinking about**

**the harvest from the very beginning – not as an afterthought.**

### Stage 3: Planning the Harvest

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

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

Translated into a simple check-list, it becomes:

- What intent are you holding?
- Who is going to benefit?
- How can you add most value to the work at hand – how will the harvest serve best?
- What form or what media will be most effective?
- Who should host or do the harvesting?
- What is the right timing?

### Stage 4: Planting the seeds

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

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

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

a sample harvest

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

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

### Stage 5: Tending the crop

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

During the process, enjoy seeing your work unfold in all its complexity. The more you can welcome the growth you are witnessing, the higher the



quality of the harvest. Now you are in the pulse of noticing both the quality of the field and the quality of the crops.

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

### Stage 6: Picking the fruits

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

Recording can be done in words.

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

Recording can also be done with pictures / photographs / video / film. Pictures evoke and recall feelings, atmospheres, situations. or you can video the conversation - record both verbally and visually

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

### Stage 7: Preparing and processing the fruits

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

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

a harvest team hard at work

Things that can help in this process:

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

### Stage 8: Planning the next harvest - feeding forward

Most harvesting is done to bring closure to a process or bring us to the next level of understanding. More importantly, it helps us to know collectively, to see the same picture and share the same understanding together.

#### A few comments

The above reflections mainly concern collective harvesting.

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

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

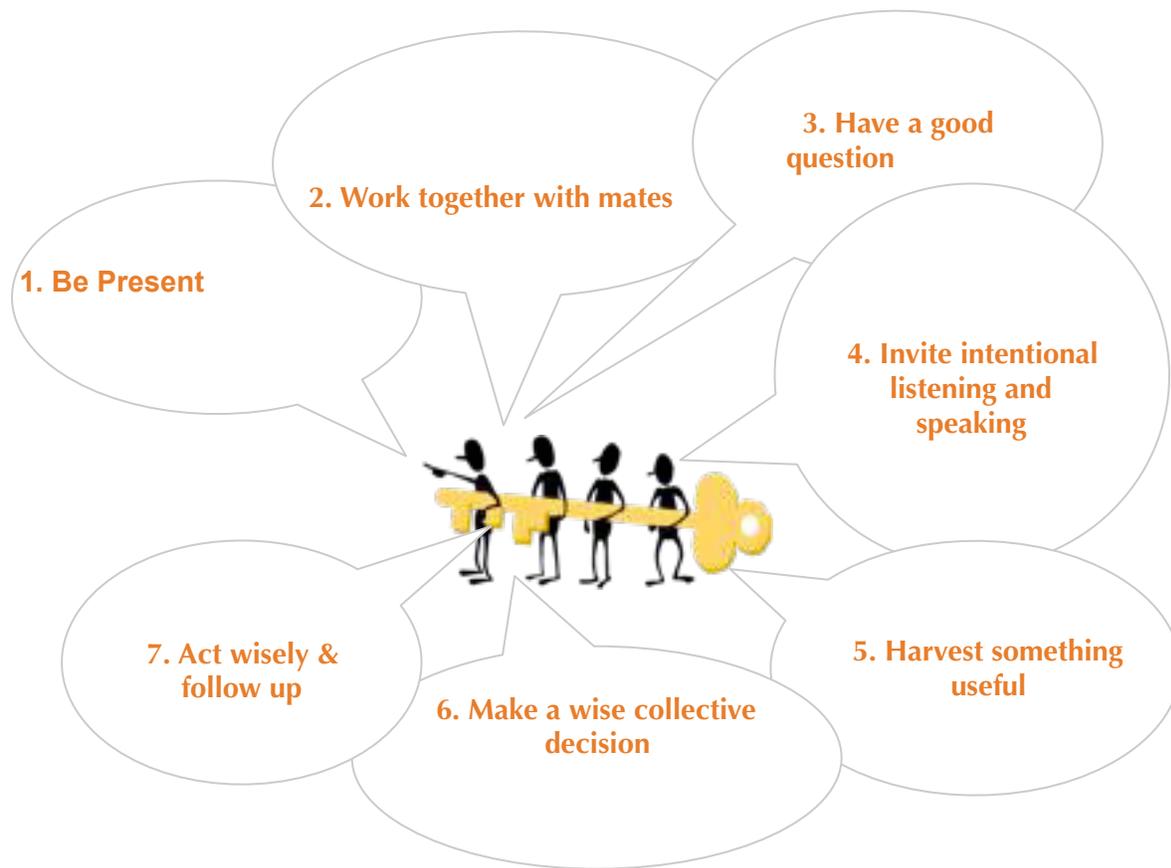
Harvesting the “soft” is much more subtle and subjective than dealing with the “cognitive” or more objective, tangible parts. A qualitative inquiry into what we have noticed, what has shifted or changed in our relationships, in the culture or atmosphere may give us some information about the softer part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

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

(Summary of The Art of Harvesting version 2.6.; written by Monica Nissen and Chris Corrigan with input from the Art of Hosting Community of Practice. The full article can be downloaded from the Art of Hosting website.)

# The Seven Little Helpers

## essentials of conversation



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

### 1. Be Present

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

Start well. Start slowly. Check everyone in.

### 2. Have a good question

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

A good question has the following characteristics:

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

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

### 3. Use a talking piece

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

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

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

### 4. Harvest

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

To harvest well, be aware of four things:

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

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

### 5. Make a wise decision

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 6. Act.

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

### 7. Stay together

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

# The Chaordic Stepping Stones

## walking the chaordic path



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

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

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

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

# The Chaordic Design Process

## dee hock

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

### 1. Develop a Statement of Purpose

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

### 2. Define a Set of Principles

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

constitute the body of belief that will bind the community together and against which all decisions and acts will be judged.

### 3. Identify All Participants

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

### 4. Create a New Organizational Concept

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

### 5. Write a Constitution

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

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

### Drawing the Pieces into a Whole

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

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

# Working Together Using AoPL hosting and designing as a team

## Working Together to Create a 'Container'

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

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

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

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

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

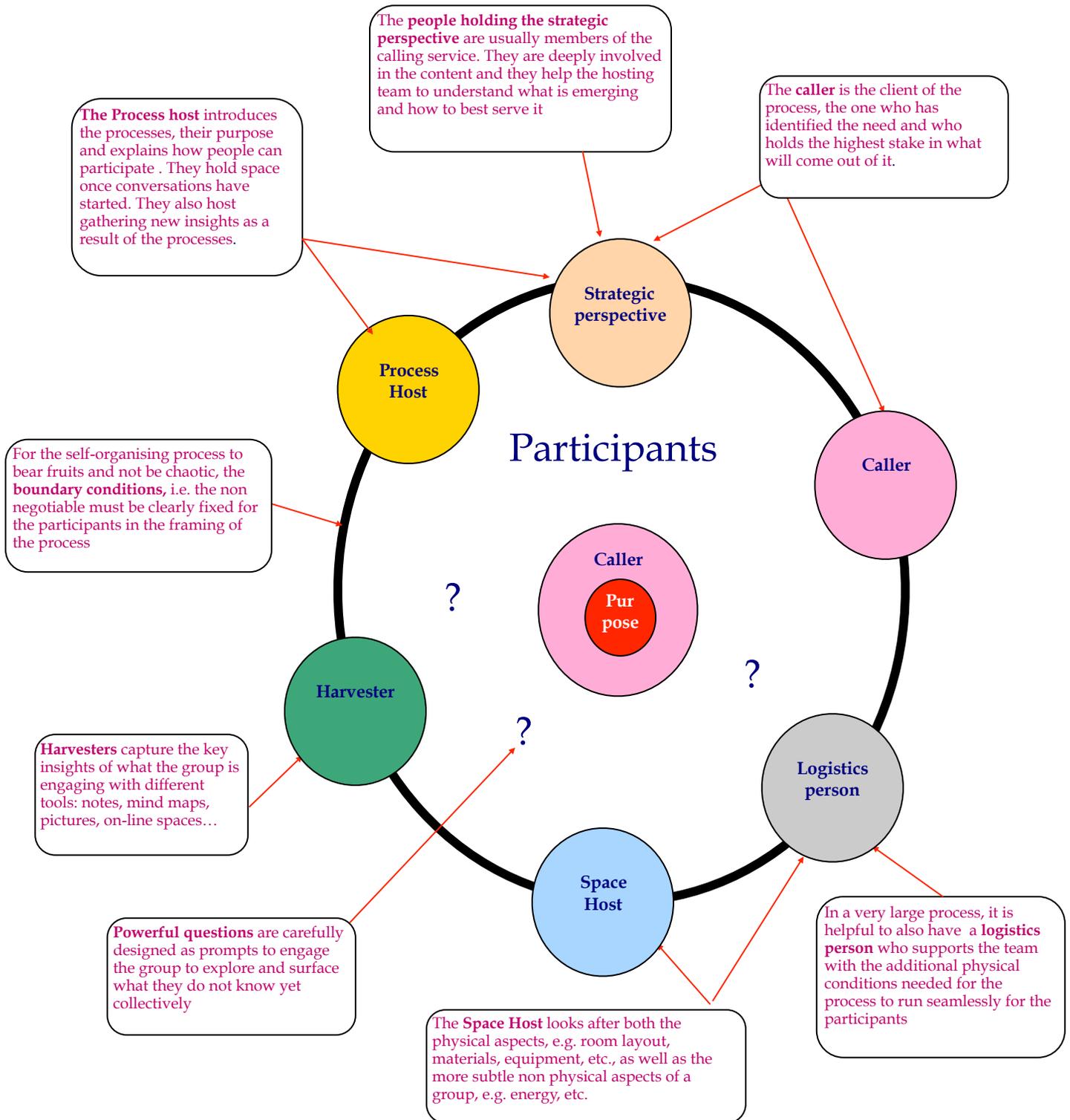
Exploring principles of cooperation using an exercise with ropes



# A Core Hosting Team Holds a Field

## hosting and designing as a team (cont.)

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



## Who Makes Up a Core Hosting Team

An ideal hosting team consists of:

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

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

### A Core Hosting Team is About Learning Together

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

### Detailed Roles in a Core Hosting Team

#### Caller

The caller is the client of the process. They have sensed the need for it and have invited the hosting team to help them initiate a process where others are invited in order to produce outcomes from sharing their knowledge together. The caller is part of the process and:

- Co-drafts and send the invitation

- Welcomes people
- Frames the context and the purpose
- Listens to what is coming out of the conversations
- Helps the hosting team to adapt the process if necessary
- Commits to follow-up on the outcomes

#### Strategic Perspective Holders

The people who hold the strategic perspective include the caller and other people who have a key stake in the outcomes of the event. These people specifically:

- Liaise with speakers to help them see where their interventions fit
- Liaise with guests to help them catch up when they arrive and make sense of the outcomes of the seminar
- Listen intentionally for horizontal questions
- Capture the key aspects learned by the group
- Liaise with the hosts to keep the event on tracks

#### Process Hosts

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

#### Speakers

At different points during an event, e.g. welcome, framing a process or closing, a speaker offers in perspective. The purpose for doing this is to inspire and catalyse the

subsequent conversations that the participants will engage in. Perspective can be offering in the key challenge that needs to be faced or the most important questions that if engaged in would make a difference. It can also be offering in a new way of looking at issues. This role of speaker is different to more traditional speakers in that they do not take the stance of an expert with the preferred approach or option. Instead they offer their knowledge and perspective to invite in more diversity of views and collective intelligence.

#### Harvesters

During the design phase of a process, thinking ahead to what we wish to collect as a result of the conversation, i.e. the harvest is very important and shapes what the Harvesters will be gathering and looking out for during an event. Specifically, during an event their role includes

- Being of service to the strategic group and speakers at anytime
- Collecting the results of the conversations depending on the level required, e.g. detailed notes of what was spoken, worksheets participants have filled in, graphic recording, meta level, etc.
- Collecting all pieces of harvesting throughout the event, e.g. worksheet, flipcharts, etc.
- Recording real time visually, e.g. mind maps, photographing, videoing, creating a visual landscape
- Producing the artefacts of what the process produced, e.g. landscape, newsletter/live minutes, full record, strategic report, etc.

## Space and Beauty Hosts

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

### Physical Hosting

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

### Energetic Hosting, sometimes known as holding space

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

### Logistics and Admin Team

When hosting a very large event, then it is applicable to have a logistics person or even team as tending to the practical details becomes even more important when working with large number. Specifically, this role includes:

- Liaise with people in charge of the venue on any issue
- Ensure proper set-up of the space
- Handle laptops & USB sticks whenever used
- Handle requests coming from all other teams
- Test all equipment: microphones, PC, projector...

### FOLLOW-UP / STRATEGIC CONTINUITY

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

# Developing and Implementing Conversations in Specific Contexts

## Checklist for the design of processes

### Before the process – meeting

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

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

### The Process - the meeting

**1. Opening of the meeting/process** (Purpose to create a "safe space", acceptance, meaning and overview.)

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

### 2. The meeting/process

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

**3. Closing the meeting/process** (Purpose: summary/wrap up, conclusion, closing) -

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

### After the meeting/process

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

### 'Learning Ecology'

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

### Other possible ingredients

#### Disturbance

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

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

**To dare let go of control.**

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

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

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

## Purpose

It is important to let the purpose shape the meeting.

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

## Different Purposes

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

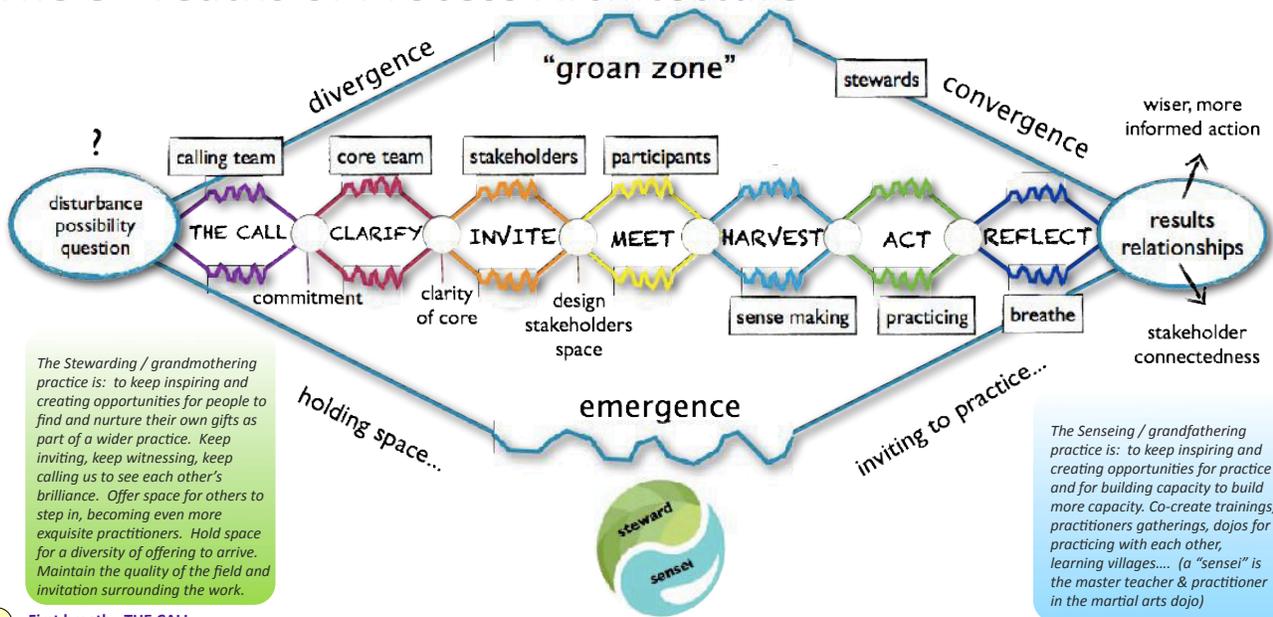
Types of meetings	Formal structure	Open structure
Creative	(Directed/'controlled') design and planning meetings	Idea-generation meetings, brainstorming, development meetings
Learning	Education, Information meetings	Interactive processes, Dialogue meetings, Experience sharing, etc.
Decision making Common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

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

# The 8 Breaths of Process Architecture

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

## The 8 Breaths of Process Architecture



*The Stewarding / grandmothering practice is: to keep inspiring and creating opportunities for people to find and nurture their own gifts as part of a wider practice. Keep inviting, keep witnessing, keep calling us to see each other's brilliance. Offer space for others to step in, becoming even more exquisite practitioners. Hold space for a diversity of offering to arrive. Maintain the quality of the field and invitation surrounding the work.*

*The Senseing / grandfathering practice is: to keep inspiring and creating opportunities for practice and for building capacity to build more capacity. Co-create trainings, practitioners gatherings, dojos for practicing with each other, learning villages... (a "sensei" is the master teacher & practitioner in the martial arts dojo)*

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

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

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

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

Elders

- 3 Third breath: INVITE**
  - Giving form and structure: design and invitation process
  - Wise action: keep checking to be sure your design and invitation serve the purpose
  - Don't make your design too complex (match it to the purpose)
  - Question: Who are the stakeholders? How do we invite people to participate in a way that moves them to show up? How do we let go of our expectations that certain people need to be there?

*The meeting has been designed, a larger group of stakeholders has been invited, a good meeting space has been found: it's time to meet!*
- 4 Fourth breath: MEET**
  - Meeting: Conversation
  - Wise action: our role is to host the group, the purpose, the questions
  - Don't go alone
  - Question: How can I best serve as the instrument/container to allow collective wisdom to emerge?

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

- 5 **FIFTH breath: HARVEST**
- Practice: Collective Meaningmaking
  - Callers & Core / Harvesting team - harvest the harvest of the assembly and make the needed wise decisions for the wiser way forward in all directions
  - Wise action: more perspectives help make sense of what one person can't see alone
  - Question: What are the underlying patterns we can now see? How do they shape our intended actions? What will we practice to make these intended actions come and stay alive over time?

*Here a deeper view of the patterns in the system can be seen. A multi-layered understanding is possible and new actions may arise.*

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

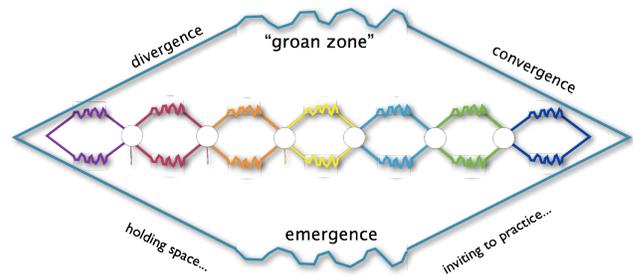
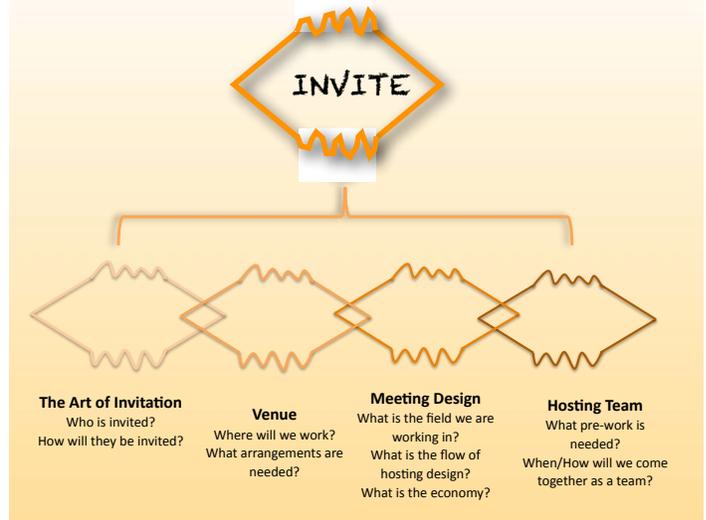
*Here the seed of community is born, and the results are a connectedness between the stakeholders and wiser actions. From here the next calling question arises...*

- 7 **Seventh breath: REFLECT & LEARN**
- Practice: Reflection & capturing what we've learned
  - Wise action: build in a regular reflection point, experience has wisdom
  - Reflection in the core team and with key stakeholders.
  - Question: What have we learned? Have we gained results in alignment with need and purpose? What are the next long term steps? Etc.
- From here the next calling question arises...

- 8 **Eighth breath: HOLDING THE WHOLE**
- Holding the story of the unfolding progress, tending to the core team and the heartbeat of the sacred purpose underneath all the activities. The eagle practitioners & perspective -- hosting and sensing the whole -- being aware of all the 7 breaths, tending to the long-term intent and the wisdom of the actions & practices of this community of practitioners and the well being of everyone in this systems.

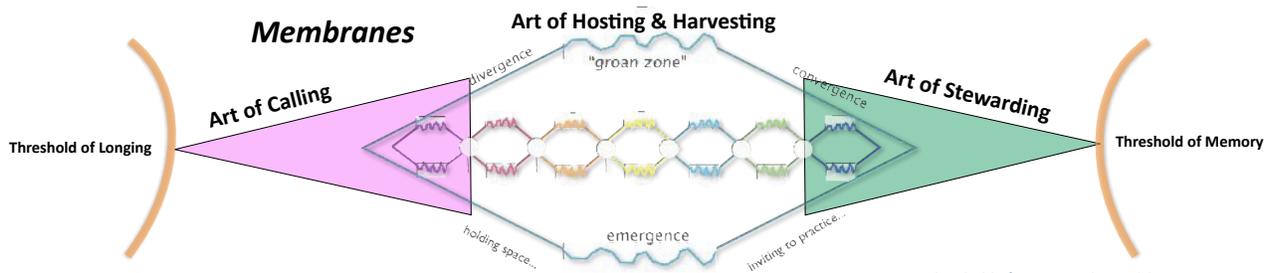
*Although we've given a step by step description, the process is not linear but rather cyclical, and making sense (harvesting), reflecting on alignment to purpose, and next wise steps happens throughout the process.*

### 3rd Breath: Preparation behind the scenes



## Basic Rhythms

Many other parts of our practice sit within and support the 8 Breaths pattern. There are different kinds of questions and stories that can be used or gathered during each part of the



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

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

# Resources

## books, articles, websites

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

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

[www.artofhosting.org](http://www.artofhosting.org) (co-created by many art of hosting stewards)

[www.evolutionarynexus.org](http://www.evolutionarynexus.org) An online conversation and knowledge space, with a separate Art of Hosting section.

[http://www.evolutionarynexus.org/community/art\\_hosting](http://www.evolutionarynexus.org/community/art_hosting) or <http://www.vimeo.com/groups/hosting> Provides videos about several AoH topics

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

### **Baldwin, Christina**

Calling the Circle – The First and Future Culture

Storycatcher – Making sense of Our Lives through the Power and Practice of Story

[www.peerspirit.com](http://www.peerspirit.com)

### **Brown, Juanita with David Isaacs & the World Café Community**

The World Café – Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter

[www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

### **Corrigan, Chris**

The Tao of Holding Space

Open Space Technology – A User's Non-Guide (with Michael Herman)

[www.chriscorrigan.com](http://www.chriscorrigan.com)

### **Cooperrider, David and Srivastva (2000)**

Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Toward a Positive Theory of Change

[www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu](http://www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu)

[www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/whatisai.pdf](http://www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/uploads/whatisai.pdf)

### **Owen, Harrison**

Open Space Technology – A Users Guide

Expanding our now - The Story of Open Space Technology

The Spirit of Leadership - Liberating the Leader in Each of Us

[www.openspaceworld.org](http://www.openspaceworld.org)

### **Holman, Peggy (Editor), Tom Devane (Editor)**

The Change Handbook (Second Edition Available this Fall)

### **Isaacs, William.**

Dialogue and the art of thinking together.

### **Kahane, Adam**

Solving Tough Problems

Power and Love

### **Kaner, Sam et. al.**

The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making

# Resources

## books, articles, websites

### **Scharmer, Otto**

Presencing  
Theory U

### **Senge, Peter**

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

### **Wenger, Etienne (Communities of Practice)**

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

### **Wheatley, Margaret J.**

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

### **Whitney, Dianna and Trosten-Bloom, A.**

The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: a Practical Guide to Positive Change.