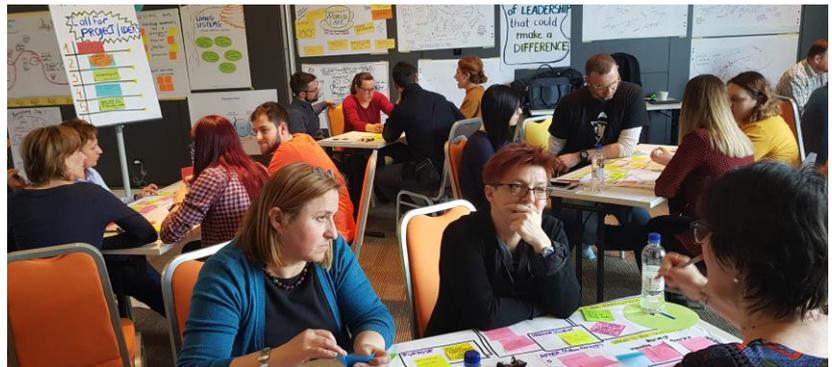
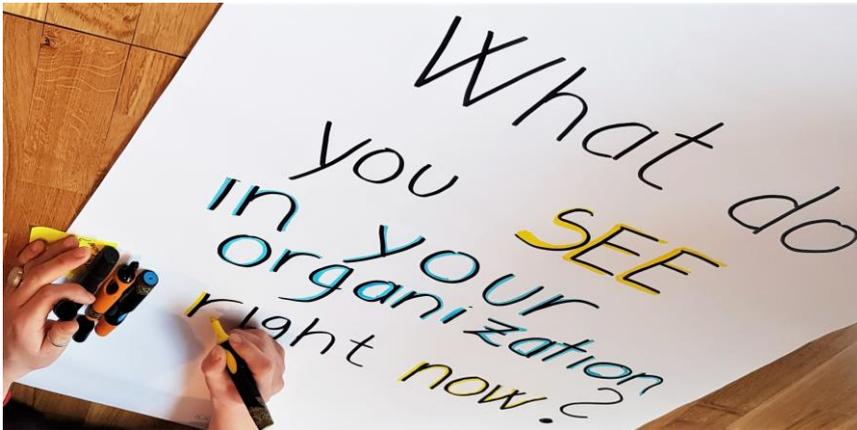




# The Art of Participatory Leadership through Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter

## Practitioners' Guide



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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to “The Art of Participatory Leadership through Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter”.

A new type of leadership is being called for in corporations, businesses, non-profit organizations, associations, schools, communities and families. This style of leadership generates fresh thinking and creates shared commitment to solving critical challenges in sustainable, inclusive ways.

We call this Participatory Leadership.

This kind of leader can skilfully call important conversations and connect diverse perspectives to address complex challenges and enable development and growth of creative possibilities. He or she knows how to create opportunities based on existing experiences and valuable knowledge in a group /team /organization, which can be shared in a short period of time and thus engage the collective intelligence that will lead towards creating new solution.

The Art of Participatory Leadership (AoPL) is an approach to leadership that scales up from personal to systemic usage of dialogue, facilitation, collaboration and co-creation of new solutions to address complex challenges that we face in our organizations today. It's a structured set of practices for facilitating group conversations of all sizes, supported by principles that maximize collective intelligence, welcome and listen to diverse viewpoints, maximize participation and transform conflict into creative cooperation.

## Background

The Art of Participatory Leadership is based on the work originally called “Art of Hosting conversations that matter”. The name Art of Participatory Leadership is used when “Art of Hosting” is practiced in business environment (corporate sector or public administration), or any organization with focus to offer new perspective of leadership. Rather than the traditional leader pointing the way forward and driving the whole organisation towards set goals, we see the leader as a host, convening the diversity of perspectives required to make sense of a certain context in order to identify wise ways forward together. In situations where new solutions are needed, we as leaders (whatever our position in the organisation is) need to create the conditions for the emergence of better solutions.

Today’s complex and high-speed environments are calling us to engage multiple styles of leading and learning. We must know how to generate collective intelligence and how to call on everyone’s participation and leadership. We need to generate shared clarity of purpose and create spaces for non-judgmental learning. At the same time, we are asked to exercise hierarchical leadership. We are accountable to our stakeholders and must take decisive action when needed. Learning how to stand in this paradox and how to navigate the territory between too much chaos and too much control is the key to leading transformational change.

In this programme, we will practice staying focused and centred in the midst of both chaos and control. We will share stories from corporate and public organisations about what has worked. We will gain frameworks and skills for hosting conversations that matter, for inviting collaborative leadership, for generating collective intelligence and learning to create wiser solutions together

## About this workbook

This practitioners' guide or workbook or manual (different names are used in different contexts), is intended to be your personal reference journal, to help you remember, focus, deepen your learning and support you in practice. It shares the basic assumptions and a summary of our current understanding of the topic and how the Art of Participatory Leadership through hosting Conversations that matter as a practice can serve. It includes several tools and practices and it provides you with different resources i.e. books, links and information that can guide you further. The Workbook has been co-created over time by many practitioners. We thank to all who have contributed from the steward, hosting and practice field of the Art of Hosting community.

**Use it wisely and enjoy your learning journey!!**

## Purpose of This Training

The Art of Participatory Leadership training creates a rich learning environment in which you will:

- Explore how participatory leadership can be applied in the context of corporate business and public administration
- Practice hosting conversations as a core leadership competence
- Learn participatory methods and tools as Circle, Appreciative Inquiry, World Café, Open Space, Chaordic design
- Work with questions relevant to your specific context and design your projects where this approach will be applied
- Become part of practitioners' network around the globe from which you can constantly learn and get support!

In this training we will be exploring what it takes to consciously design and host processes that deepen your dialogue and leadership skills. We introduce the elements of design, mental frameworks to understand how to work with emergence and complexity, and practical tools to support you as practitioners in your line of work.

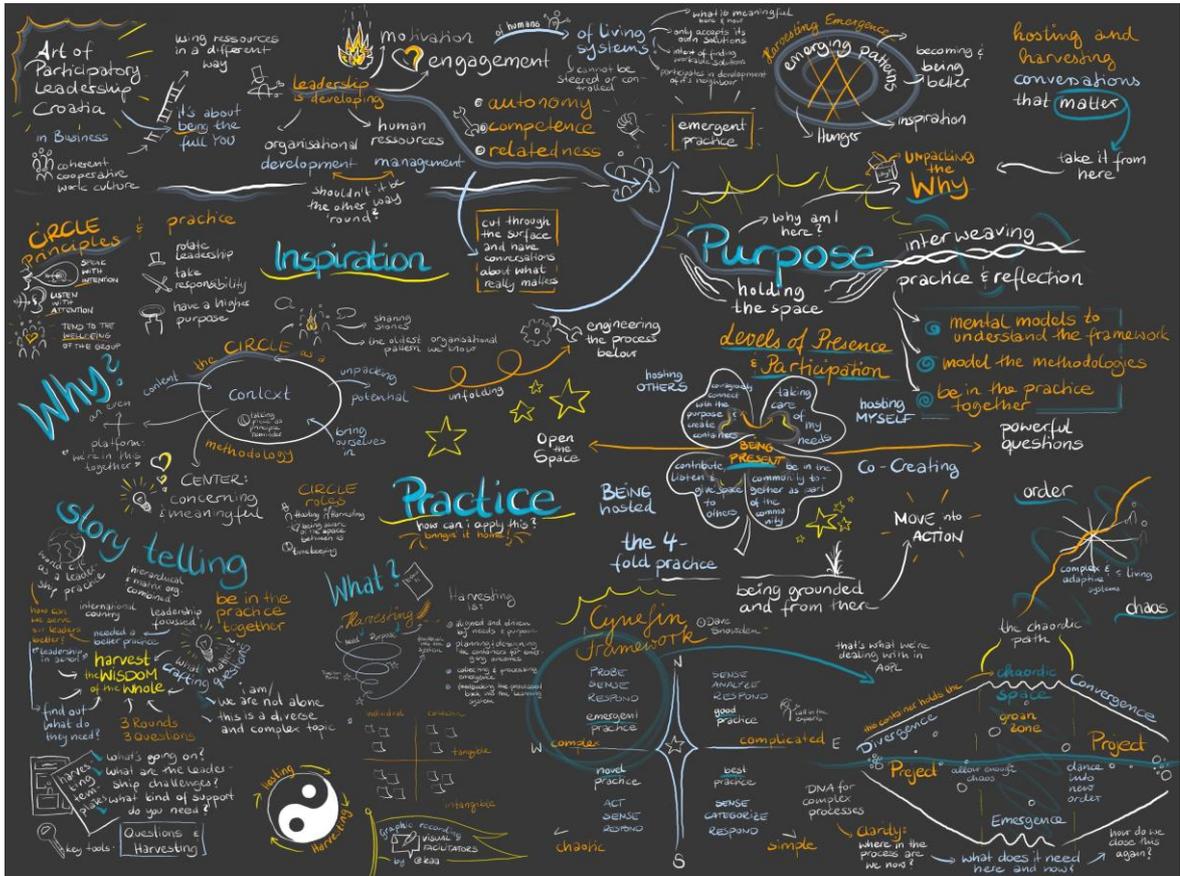
Participatory leadership offers models and methods which enable shifts in mind-set and behaviours that are required to lead, organize, motivate, manage, and engage the 21st-century workforce. You have a chance to use your own specific business challenges as your learning and practice playground – thus leave the training with new ideas, expanded support network, renewed energy and fresh motivation for action 😊

Finally, we will work with our own leadership capacity through four simple practices,

- 1.) Staying focused and present in the midst of both chaos and control
- 2) Engaging skilfully with others, though attentive listening and intentional speaking,
- 3) Hosting others in conversations that matter and
- 4) Being in a co-creative process with others i.e. working with emergence.

# Content of the Training

Graphical overview of the training (visual harvesting by Katrin Faensen, Croatia 2018)



The following is a structured overview of the topics or items, which are presented in this guide and will be part of the training.

<b>WORLD VIEWS AND BASIC ASSUMPTIONS</b>	Organisations as Machines vs. Living systems – or complex adaptive systems Approach to leadership that scales from personal to systemic
<b>FOUNDATIONAL PRACTICES AND MODELS</b>	The Four-fold practice Divergence & Convergence Working with emergence The Chaordic Path Dialogue as a core practice Powerful Questions
<b>CORE METHODS</b>	<b>Core Methods – part 1 Hosting Conversations:</b> Circle World Café Open Space Technology Appreciative Inquiry Collective Mind-mapping Pro Action Café Designing for wiser action <b>Core Methods – part 2 Harvesting Conversations:</b> The Art of Harvesting Collective Story Harvesting Decision Making
<b>PROCESS DESIGN - BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER</b>	Seven Little Helpers Principles of design The Chaordic Design Process “Stepping Stones” Eight Breaths of Design Organisational paradigms

*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*

## Paradoxes at Work

In leading organisations today, we operate in a world that is not black or white—but rather black and white and all the shades in between. When working with participatory or collaborative leadership, we need to be able to operate in complexity and hold opposites or paradoxes:

- Chaos and Order
- Content and Process
- Leading and Following
- “Warrior” and “Midwife”
- Action and Reflection
- Hosting and Consulting
- Individual and Community

## An approach to leadership that scales from personal to systemic

The Art of Hosting comprises a body of practice intended to build participatory leadership capacity for people at all levels of organisation and society to host and harvest conversations that matter in a way that leads to more sustainable solutions and wiser action. These practices scale up from the personal to the systemic, focusing on multiple levels of learning, each of which informs the others:

At the **Individual level**, the practice develops motivation, courage, capacities and skills that support us when we step into our personal leadership.

At the **team level**, the practice develops the capacity for collective reflection and the discernment of right timing in the co-creation, co-decision and co-hosting of conversations to support wise action, whatever the purpose and context.

At the **level of the community**, organisation, etc., the practice helps develop a culture that welcomes and embraces diversity, can discern and value shared purpose and aspires to serve and meet the needs of our organisation or community.

At the **global level**, the practice supports the formation of a healthy collaborative ecosystem of diverse communities and organisations, understanding the larger context we are always embedded in and benefitting from the knowledge and experience born of our diversity.

### “Art of Hosting” - A Community of Practice

The “Art” is about becoming skilful in engaging the collective intelligence of a community, business or organisation to find better and more sustainable solutions to complex challenges. A steadily growing group of practitioners is adding to the inspiration and evolution of this “Art”.

“The Art of Hosting” (AoH) is not a company or a trade mark but rather a community of practice engaging in the Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter – be it in the family, in organisations or in large scale assemblies or summits.

This web or network of practitioners is connected across all continents serving the needs of different communities in different contexts. It involves sharing learning and experiences of what happens when we engage the collective intelligence in co-learning and co-developing solutions to complex challenges.

We have learned that the principles of self-organisation, participation, ownership and non-linear solutions are the key to both individual and collective discovery.

This is different and complementary to more traditional ways of working, which are often, based on rational planning and full control of the process in order to ensure that planned results are achieved. - Both approaches are needed.

Participatory Leadership is particularly useful in dealing with issues and challenges of a complex nature, when innovation is needed or when ownership of the results is important.

*To find out more about the network and join the AoH email list visit [www.artofhosting.org](http://www.artofhosting.org).*

*More in-depth conversation and knowledge sharing can happen online, on the AoH Ning site <http://artofhosting.ning.com>*

# WORLD VIEWS & BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

*“There is an emerging group of methodologies for facilitating conversation in groups of all sizes, supported by principles that help maximise collective intelligence, integrate and utilise diversity and minimise or 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 stakeholders 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.”*

(Source unknown)

The following sections in this Practitioners Guide will give a short introduction to some basic assumptions of how we view organisations and some of the dynamics that happen when people work together.

We all have a view of the world and some basic assumptions about what is true or right or what works in our world or a given situation. Many times, these assumptions are unspoken or even unconscious to us, yet they determine our actions.

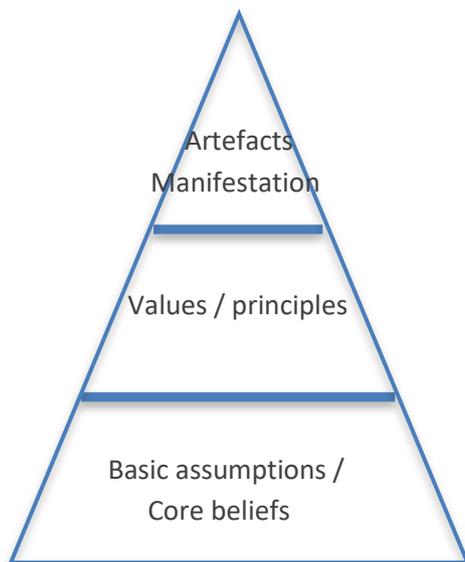
As we communicate or work together, we do not always operate from the same “world view” or same assumptions. This usually results in a lack of mutual understanding.

Making these assumptions clear and explicit helps us communicate and bridge our understandings.

To be able to talk about our assumptions or make these world-views explicit we sometimes use metaphors or “mental models”. They are like road maps that we can use to orient ourselves. And, of course, the map is not the territory, so these models are clearly simplifications of the truth.

Change starts with a change of perspective or in our basic assumptions.

Edgar Schein, a well-known organisational theorist, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), suggests that corporate culture can be considered on at least three distinct levels.



**The visible level** consists of:

1) “Artefacts” or how our assumptions manifest in the visible world e.g. language, rules and procedures, organisational structures etc.

**The invisible level** consists of two levels:

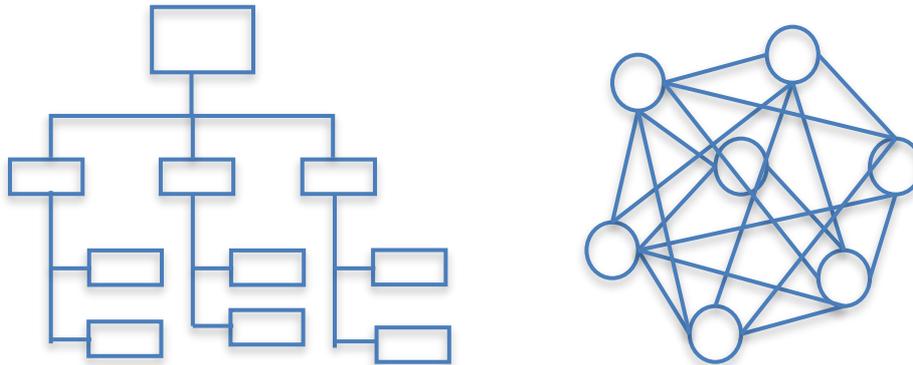
2) **Values** or what we believe is good and right or the principles that guide us in our co-operation and pursuit of our goals.

3) **Basic assumptions** or our core beliefs, whether we are aware of them or not ultimately decide how we act and how we manifest and shape our organisations and our world.

## Two world views: from linear and mechanistic to living systems and complexity

The following sections attempt to give an explanation of how we see the world of organisation and why and when the chosen approach of “Participatory Leadership” makes sense and how it compliments more “traditional” ways of leading.

These two images each represent an organisational pattern. The first one is a mechanistic organigramme, the second is an image of a network.



The basic assumptions behind these two patterns are different.

In a mechanistic worldview we rely on rationalism and linear thinking. This is a thinking that has been inspired by great minds like Descartes and Newton and has been the predominant worldview for more than 300 years. We have trusted that through rationalism we can figure things out and be ‘in control’. We have tended to view our organisations as we view machines—as consisting of clearly defined parts with clearly defined roles and a predictable output. It is a linear system, which makes it streamlined and effective in stable environments

More recent science has offered a different view of our world as a living system or complex adaptive system.

The second image above, is that of a network. A network is a complex adaptive system. It relies on the ability to self-organise. It is a parallel system (as opposed to linear), which makes it resilient, flexible and adaptive in changing environments.

These two paradigms are almost diametrically opposite and often cause a polarisation of views either favouring one or the other. Instead, the complexity of our time calls for both. We need to learn how to lead and participate in both contexts, embrace both worldviews and know what is needed when.

“Leadership” in these two “systems” requires a different set of skills, as does “followership”. We are invited to embrace opposites and hold both worldviews.

There is a way of thinking and operating in between these two worlds that actually contains and combines elements of both. We call it chaordic leadership. Chaordic leadership is also a highly collaborative form of leadership.

Dee Hock, founder of VISA, addressed this dichotomy in the early 1990. Based on his VISA experience he both coined the phrase “chaordic” (containing both chaos and order) and explored the “chaordic” organisation. This is the path we will explore in this training and guidebook.

## Some implications for leadership

If we accept a living systems world view, what implications does this have for our work? Below are some of the implications that have emerged from practicing the Art of Hosting and distilled through conversations among practitioners over time.

### **New Solutions Are Needed**

AoH is built on the assumption and experience that an increasing complexity in the problems we face compel us to find new solutions for the common good, whether in corporations, government, education, non-profits, communities, or families. These solutions are more comprehensive and more readily found and owned if they are co-created by the stakeholders.

### **New Solutions Grow Between Chaos and Order**

If we want to innovate or work with change, 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.

### **Conversations Matter**

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.

Conversation is the way we think and make meaning together. It is the way we build strong relationships that invite real collaboration.

### **Meaningful Conversations Lead To Wise Actions**

Human beings that are involved and invited to work together only pay attention to that what is meaningful to them. 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 sustainable.

### **Organisations Are Living Systems**

When human beings join together in an enterprise or organisation, they have more in common with a living system than with a machine. Living systems are intelligent and capable of self organising their own and unique solutions. The way you “lead” a living system is radically different from operating a machine.

When these systems grow big enough, they organise in levels. They need structures, containers and boundaries that can facilitate or act as host for the collective resources and intelligence. The structures are there to support what needs to happen rather than impede it.

## Chaordic Organisations

See also the  
“Complex  
adaptive  
systems”  
The Cynefin  
framework

*“By “chaord”, I mean any self-organising, self-governing, adaptive, nonlinear, complex organism, organisation, community or system, whether physical, biological or social; the behaviour of which harmoniously blends characteristics of both chaos and order. Loosely translated to business, it can be thought of as an organisation that harmoniously blends characteristics of competition and cooperation; or from the perspective of education, an organisation that seamlessly blends theoretical and experiential learning “*

*Dee Hock*

### **Chaordic organisations:**

- Are based on clarity of shared purpose and principles
- Are self-organising and self-governing in whole and in part.
- Exist primarily to enable their constituent parts.
- Are powered from the periphery, unified from the core.
- Are durable in purpose and principle, malleable in form and function.
- Equitably distribute power, rights, responsibility and rewards.
- Harmoniously combine cooperation and competition.
- Learn, adapt and innovate in ever expanding cycles.
- Are compatible with the human spirit and the biosphere.
- Liberate and amplify ingenuity, initiative and judgment.
- Are compatible with and foster diversity, complexity and change.
- Constructively utilize and harmonize conflict and paradox.
- Restrain and appropriately embed command and control methods.

*“Throughout the universe order exists within disorder and disorder within order. We have always thought that disorder was the absence of the true state of order. But is chaos an irregularity, or is order just a brief moment seized from disorder? Linear thinking demands that we see things as separate states: One needs to be normal, the other exceptional. Yet there is a way to see this ballet of chaos and order, of change and stability, as two complimentary aspects in the process of growth, neither of which is primary”*

Margaret Wheatley – Author of *Leadership and the new Science*

## Organisations as Living Systems

Taking a deeper look at how living systems work can inform what kind of leadership is needed. One of the basic assumptions underlying a living systems world-view was formulated by Margaret Wheatley & Myron Kellner-Rodgers, in their book “A simpler way”

*“People are intelligent, creative, adaptive, self-organizing, and meaning-seeking. Organisations are living systems. They too are intelligent, creative, adaptive, self-organising, meaning-seeking”.*

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.

From a leadership perspective there are two exciting phenomena in nature and living systems:

- 1) Nature has the **capability to self-organise** and all parts of the system participate in doing what is needed to sustain the system. The self-organising capacity can shift a system to a higher order.
- 1) Self-organisation can lead to **emergence** i.e. the emergence of totally new properties and qualities, something totally new and surprising.

If our organisations really are living systems and there can be a simpler way of organising that opens up the possibility for emergence - provided the right conditions are in place?

What would our organisations and communities look like then?



*“In a living system we will need to stop describing tasks and instead facilitate process. We need to become savvy about how to build relationships, how to nurture growing, evolving things.*

*All of us will need better skills in listening, communicating, and facilitating groups, because these are the talents that build strong relationships”*

*Margaret Wheatley*

*"If organisations are machines, control makes sense. If organisations are process structures, then seeking to impose control through permanent structures is suicide. If we believe that acting responsibly means exerting control by having our hands into everything, then we cannot hope for anything except what we already have .."*

Margaret Wheatley –  
"Leadership and  
The New  
Science"

Here are some of the qualities of living systems that studies have discovered:

- A living system accepts only its own solutions—we only support those things we are part of creating
- A living system pays attention only to that which is meaningful to it
- 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
- Nature seeks diversity. New relations open up to new possibilities. Diversity increases our chance of survival
- Experimentation opens up to what is possible here and now. "Life is intent on finding what works, not what is right"
- All the answers do not exist 'out there'. In complexity we must experiment to find out what works
- A living system cannot be steered or controlled—it can only be teased, nudged, titillated to see things differently
- A system changes when its perception of itself changes
- Who we are together is always different and more than who we are alone. Our range of creative expression increases as we join with others. New relationships create new capacities.
- We human beings are capable of self-organising, given the right conditions
- Self-organisation shifts to a higher order

***A living system can also be called a complex adaptive system.***



## Two Loops Model of Change

### Exploring How Living Systems Change

As described in the previous chapter there are two distinctly different ways of viewing organisations and systems. The prevailing worldview being the Newtonian or mechanistic view, and complimentary to that, the living systems view.

A map or model that is helpful in describing living systems view of change comes from the work of Margaret Wheatley and the Berkana Institute. Margaret suggested our metaphors for organizing and leadership are outdated, and if we treat humans like machines we are in big trouble. She looked to the new science of chaos, quantum physics and living systems, and began applying those metaphors to ways of working in the world.

This map or model, which is an attempt to describe how systems might change and what roles of leadership are needed to support the transition from a declining system to an evolving new system.

The model is called the Two Loops. It tells the story of how systems die, and new systems emerge. It happens at every level of scale, it can easily be a map of ideas, a map of life, of a family, of a community, and organization or large systems like the fossil fuel economy. It works on all kinds of levels.

It has two lines – but it isn't a linear timeline. More like a top map.

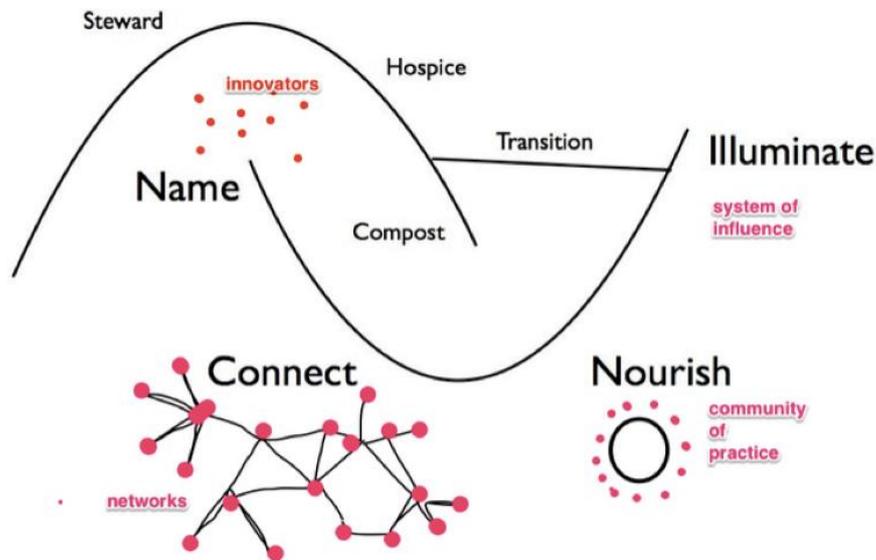
If we follow the trajectories of systems, we see that they all have life cycles. They have a beginning, a middle, and an end. We organise ourselves in order to have a better chance of survival. Any organisation or system is born and evolves as a response to a need. When a need is met, the system tends to stabilise (institutionalise) and solidify, making it less flexible when a new context and need calls for a different response. At this point the systems starts to decline or fall apart. We can see many of our modern systems failing to sustain themselves in the complexity of our times.

### Supporting an emerging system

Human systems, like systems in nature, do not tend to change through plans or dictates, but through emergence. If we want to support movements taking hold, the best thing we can do is foster critical connections between pioneers who are working on the ground to create fresh and relevant solutions, which gradually evolve into new systems.

At the Berkana Institute, the practice has been to support the creation of new systems at four levels while old systems decline.

1. Naming the work of pioneers.
2. Connecting pioneers into networks of shared interest and purpose.
3. Nurturing networks into deliberate communities of practices.
4. Illuminating the stories of communities of practice to help them become more far-reaching systems of influence. From the former fringe into a new social norm.



### Complimentary roles of leadership

The pioneers of a new system start to show up as small experiments – just as the predominant system starts its decline. While **stewards of the old system** do what they can to bring the system back on track, **pioneers or “trail blazers”** start to experiment with alternatives.

The innovators are working against the prevailing paradigm. Not everyone is capable of walking out of the current system. Some are needed to stay behind and **maintain or steward** as best as they can because the new system isn't ready yet.

A support for the emerging system is to **name** what is going on, what the “trail blazers” are doing... so they can find each other. “What are you working on? Green economy... hey I know someone else who is looking into that!”

Naming what is happening helps innovators of the new system to **connect** with each other, establish relationships and create **networks of greater influence**. When these networks grow and work more purposefully together, they form **Communities of Practice** for experiments and rapid learning. Failing forward and upwards as the new system continues to emerge. The leadership role here is to **nourish**, provide resources and support for the new system to grow.

To help turn the corner and begin the upward journey as the new system, the leadership role is to **illuminate** what is happening, to make results visible and share the stories.

There is also a leadership role here of **protecting what is emerging**, so the current system doesn't oust it; like antibodies forcing out a perceived threat – an autoimmune reaction.

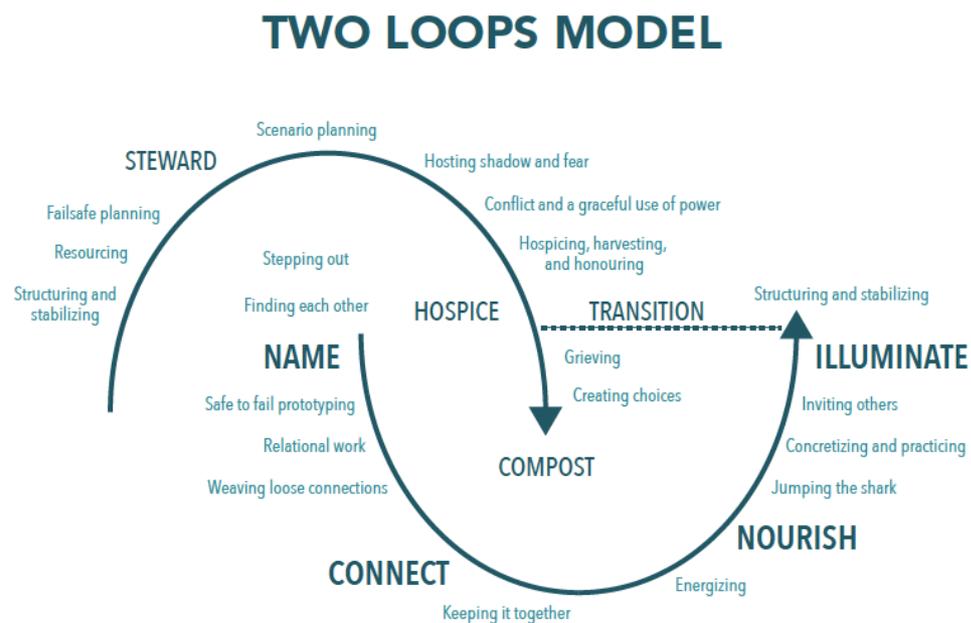
The old is dying, the new is struggling... a leadership move up here is the **graceful use of power**. Are you hanging on to the old in a way that is completely toxic? Or might you be able to support both the people trying to maintain the current system with duct tape and band aids long enough until

the new system is ready, and be funnelling some resources, connections, support and more to the innovators below?

Naming fear and shadow is also important work here. What are we afraid of? Leaving these unspoken does incredible damage. And we will cart these fears into the new system and build our structures from them.

**To hospice** the dying system is important work as well as allowing the grieving and letting go of the old. It's a leadership role to **host both the hospice and the grieving**. This is the compost heap: decomposed, restructured material and energy that is released into the environment for the new system to build from.

This is a powerful skill – not to just walk away, but to harvest what we have learned, relationships, people; what do we want to remember? Everything is used. What is still needed in the new that will serve us well?



*The text in this chapter has been inspired by and edited from material from Berkana Institute and Amanda Fenton*

For more information please see:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcyHKKc2LVg>

<https://vimeo.com/36162067>

<https://vimeo.com/36165153>

# FOUNDATIONAL PRACTICES AND MODELS

The following sections in this Guide will give a short introduction to some of our core practices and some mental models that guide our work.

## The Four-fold Practice

The Four-Fold practice is at the core of the “Art” of hosting conversations that matter. In its essence the Art of Hosting is not about any given methodologies but about the “Hosting” of the conversation and the emergence of the collective intelligence of a group. Being a good host of conversations means being present, being an attentive listener and an intentional speaker and engaging with others in an authentic way, when you are participating, leading, co-leading or co-creating with others.

There are four basic practices that are key to the Art of Hosting and Participatory Leadership:

- 1) **Host yourself** in order to be **present**
- 2) **Participate**, allow yourself to **be hosted**, engage,
- 3) **Host conversations**
- 4) **Co-create** (and co-learn) with others. Becoming a community of practice

These practices are nested – one within the other. So, the second practice “includes and transcends” the first practice. In other words, it is difficult to be a good participant and engage with others unless you are fully present. The third practice, hosting conversations, is difficult unless you are present and know how to be a good participant with all the skills that entails. And lastly, being in co-creation with others draws on all three previous practices.

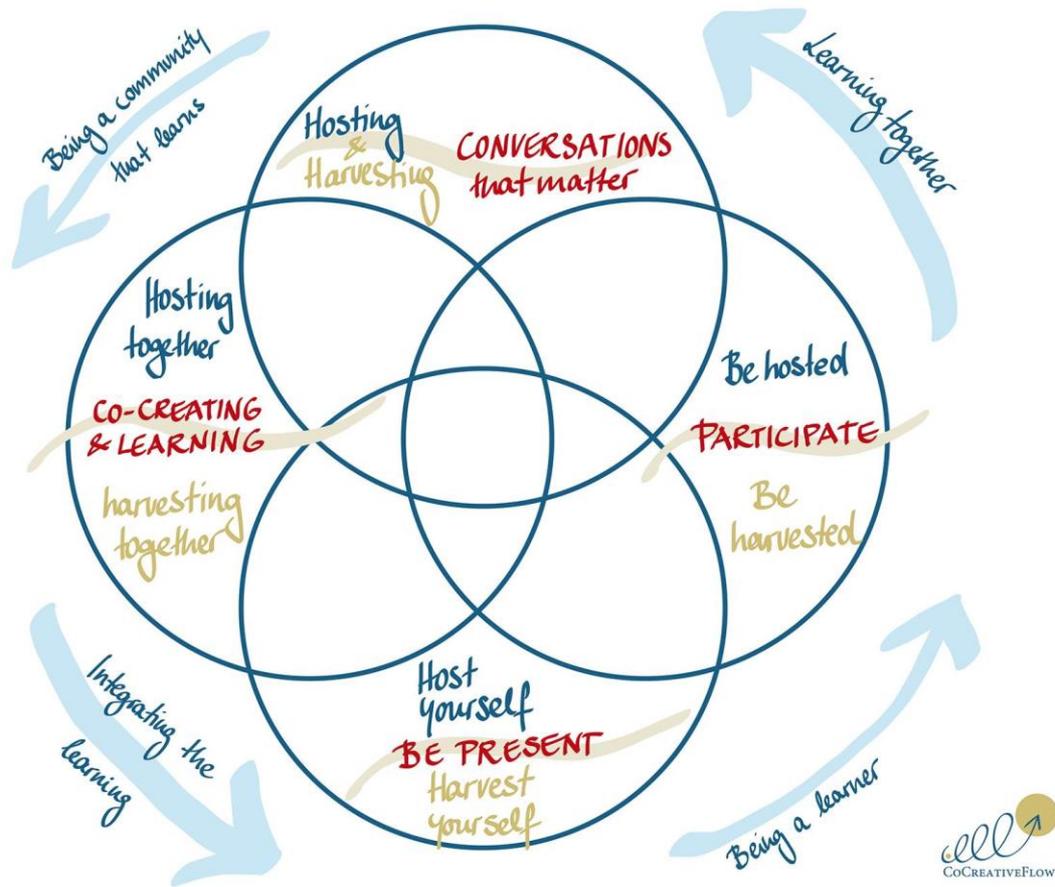
Being truly present, engaging skilfully in conversations, being a good host of conversations and engaging with others in co-creation are all practices or skills that are easily understood, but it takes continuous practise to hone these skills.

**Practice means: “A repeated exercise in our performance of an activity or skill so as to acquire or maintain proficiency in it.”** (Oxford dictionary)

An important implication of recognising the Art of Hosting as a practice is that mastery of the art is dependent upon on-going practice; if we are not practicing, we are not participating in this art and we will not develop mastery. People working within the Art of Hosting are referred to as ‘practitioners’ because this commitment to practicing is at the heart of the art. As with any practice, capacity increases over time and practitioners discover new levels and meaning to the practices.

The following pages give a more detailed description of the Four-Fold practice.

## 4 FOLD - PRACTICE



### 1. Host yourself in order to be present

Being present means showing up, without distraction, prepared, clear about the need and what your personal contribution can be, in other words, being fully there, physically, emotionally and mentally.

Hosting conversations that matter requires presence or that quality of authenticity, vulnerability, confidence and courage, which comes from knowing oneself and being able to rest in oneself. Presence is what allows a host to stand in the midst of intense emotion, to tolerate chaos without rushing to fix anything, or to be comfortable with silence, and to work in service of a purpose bigger than personal ego.

There are many different personal practices that bring us into the present e.g. walking in nature, jogging, doing yoga or martial arts, journaling, playing with our children etc.

The Art of Hosting does not have specific approved or recommended practices for hosting oneself. Rather, it recognises that every practitioner must find his/her own practices for being present.

The ability to be present is however crucial when working with people who engage in questions that matter to them or face complex challenges where the answers are not given, and uncertainty

and a level of chaos is part of the process.

Being able to be fully present in ourselves, makes it is easier to invite a group to be collectively present, which is the best starting point for any meeting.

## **2. Participate, allow yourself to be hosted, engage**

With the presence, which arises from hosting self, we are ready to participate. Participation means to be willing to listen fully, respectfully, without judgment and with an open mind.

Participation manifests through conversation, and 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 bigger purpose of the meeting. It may also mean, if needed, that we are willing to slow down to fully hear each other, or allow time for reflection to enhance the quality of our conversation and participation.

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 it will be difficult for the conversation to move beyond defending preconceived positions. Skilful participation in conversation requires an open mind, open heart and open will. It calls for deeper listening for clarity to arise.

When engaging with others we are invited to, to speak with deep intention while listening with deep attention as well as suspend our own assumptions and biases to be able to expand our perspective.

Practices within the domain of participation include active listening; dialogue; asking powerful questions; owning one's own projections, expectations and assumptions; clarifying intentions; check-ins and other elements of 'circle practice'; cultivating a mood of curiosity and openness and listening

## **3. Hosting Conversations**

Hosting means being courageous, inviting and being willing to initiate conversations that matter, crafting powerful questions with the stakeholders and then making sure you harvest the insights, the patterns, learning's into wise actions...

The domain of hosting conversations is often perceived as the tip of the iceberg. This is the domain of methodologies, yet it is so much more.

Hosting conversations is the art of creating and holding a container (good boundaries, a hospitable space) in which people can do their best work together. Hosting means being aware of all of the conditions that will allow a group to settle into collective presence, holding that space through chaos so that new order and clarity can emerge.

Such conversations do not just happen, they are the product of clear intentions, a powerful calling question, a compelling invitation, good design, skilful framing of the context and the hosting or holding of space in which the work can be done, and needed insights and new solutions can emerge and captured (harvested) to be put to good use. All of these are practices and skills of hosting conversations.

Initially, hosting is likely to consist of mastering the core methodologies. In time, the practice calls

for increasing depth of presence to be able to hold space for deeper or more challenging conversations.

Given the level of complexity that hosting conversations in groups, small or large, means, it is wise not to host alone. Rather host in a diverse team to cover all the skills needed. Or to paraphrase new science “it takes a field to hold a field”.

#### 4. **Co-creating With Others - Becoming a Community of Practice**

The fourth practice is about co-creating and co-learning with others, blending our knowledge, experience and practices with other practitioners is where our own learning can be nurtured among peers. It is a generative and creative field where we are pushing our own as well as our collective edge of knowing. This is how co-creative learning communities and communities of practice are formed.

As a practitioner, the “expertise” lies in the level and depth of experience. Much of what we as practitioners know is tacit knowledge which is best passed on in collaboration and conversation with others. It is also in this field of collaboration that tacit knowledge becomes explicit. This is how we learn together, experiment, explore, discover new methods and evolve new practice.

##### **A community of Art of Hosting practice**

As the “Art” of hosting and harvesting conversations that matter is largely emerging from our practice, the evolving Community of Practice has been a vital support, sharing methods, experiences from the field and relevant theory.

It is one thing to go to a training and learn the basics of hosting practice, but what then? How do you sustain your learning and keep your practice alive and growing?

There are no rules or formulas or formal requirements for doing this work. Practitioners are all encouraged to innovate and collaborate and to discover new models and processes. Yet, there is also a need to recognise and protect the essential DNA of this body of work and to learn from those practitioners with more experience.

How does a community of practitioners participate together where there are no stamps of approval, copyrighting or licensing, without any organisational structure or staff or headquarters, without any financial expectations or agreements?

This has been the challenge and the beauty of the Art of Hosting community for over a decade. From a few friends sharing ideas together, the community has grown to several thousand with a website and open-source workbook and other materials. As a community, we did not start out knowing how to do this. We began with a focus on shared purpose, shared principles and friendship. As friends, this community of practitioners looked for opportunities to work together, to learn together and to share our learning.

What has emerged over time is a network of practitioners with different levels of experience, some with more than 25 years of experience, sometimes recognized by themselves and others as stewards of the practice. Newer hosts are encouraged to work together with more experienced ones to build their skills and competence and one of the few 'principles' within the community of practice is that it is recommended to have practitioners with a solid level of experience involved in any Art of Hosting training.

*See also “Art of Hosting – a Community of Practice” (Page 6)*

There are also periodic open and self-organised “practitioners’ meetings” where practitioners can share and learn together.

This has provided a self-organised framework in which practitioners can learn and develop their capacity while also protecting the deeper patterns and essence of our shared practice. What has also emerged has been an online platform for communicating and for collecting and disseminating learning, models, materials and other artefacts of our learning.

This community of practice pattern has emerged regionally throughout the world in response to local trainings and local needs.

### **From a Learner to a Community That Learns**

The four-fold practice is connected to a four-fold learning cycle.

As we learn to be truly present and engage with others, as attentive listeners and speaking with intention, we become learners. As learners many doors are open to us.

As we begin to host conversation and connect with others in conversations that matter to us as hosts or practitioners, we become a community of learners or practitioners. As a community we own a much bigger capacity than as individual learners.

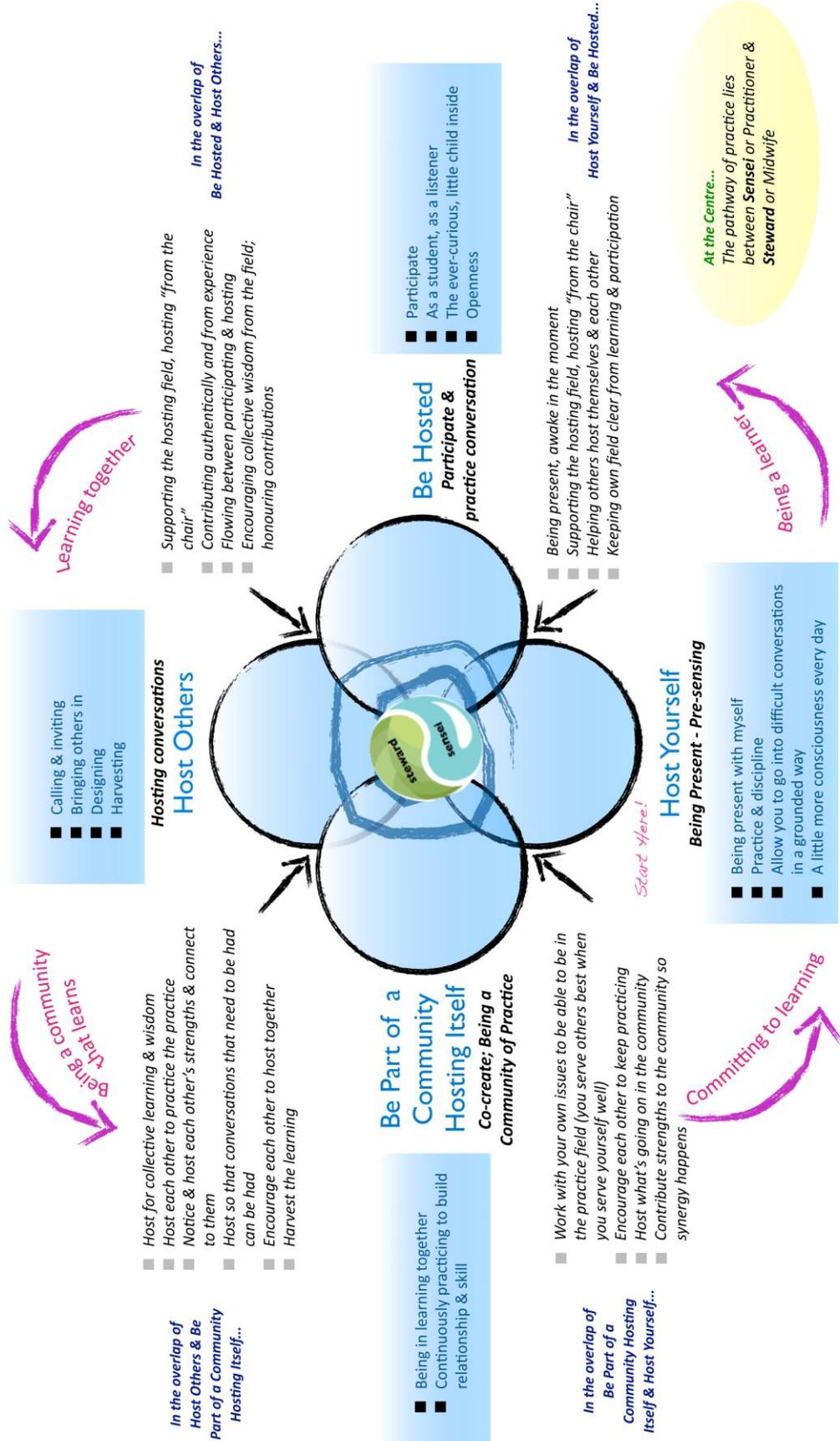
As a community of individual practitioners or learners truly becomes “a community that learns”, that is where we really enter the collective intelligence. We multiply our capacity and enter the field of emergence.

The cycle is then completed as we integrate what we have learnt into our practice.

# The Four Fold Path

Being truly present, engaging skillfully in conversations, being a good host of conversations and engaging with others in co-creation are all practices or skills that are easily understood, but it takes continuous practice to hone these skills. *A practice means actively and regularly doing something to maintain or enhance a skill or ability.*

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 or practitioners, we become a community of learners or practitioners. As a community we embody a much bigger capacity than as individuals learners. As a community of individual practitioners or learners truly becomes "a community that learns", that is where we really enter collective intelligence. We multiply our capacity and enter the field of emergence.



*What if the Art of Hosting is really a way to help people uncover their power to hold their ground and not be afraid of change?  
 What if the methodologies are an excuse for teaching people they can change in intelligent ways?*

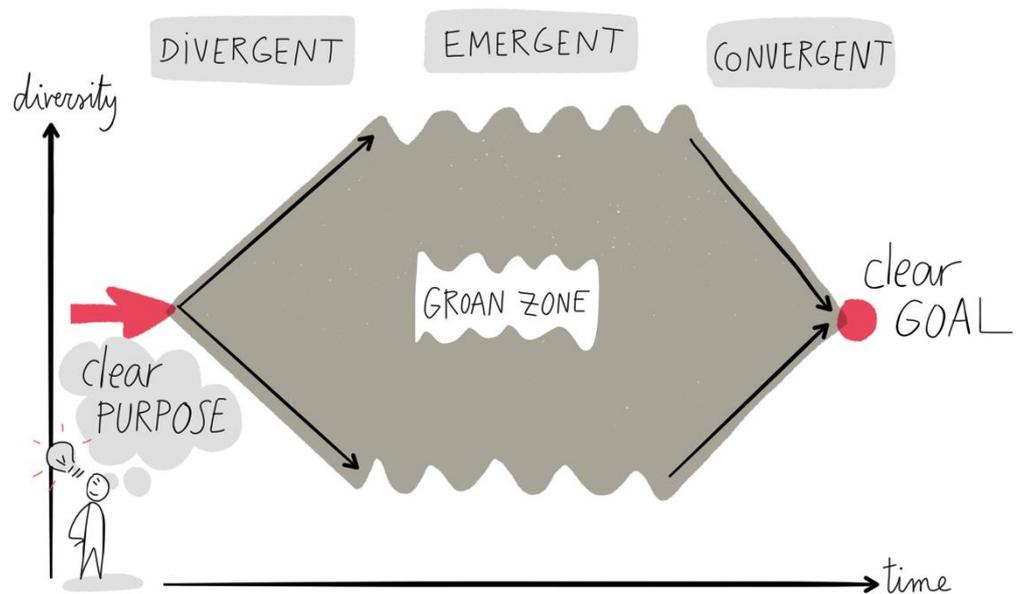
## Divergence and Convergence

Inspired by  
Sam Kaner & all

“Facilitators Guide  
to Participatory  
Decision Making”

There is a recurring pattern and dynamic, which inevitably shows up when working with emergent practice in complex human systems. Experiencing the pattern without recognising it can feel very uncomfortable: like being thrown blindly into chaos. Most often this experience triggers an almost overwhelming urge to try to exert control, shut things down, get things back on track or run away. Giving in to this urge has the unfortunate consequence of shutting down the potential for something new and unimagined to show up.

Having a ‘map’ of the territory of emergent practice can help us to understand what is happening, so that we can more easily navigate the choppy waters of the unknown for long enough to allow the novel insights and discoveries to emerge that will help us on our way.



There are three phases to an emergent inquiry process: **divergent, emergent and convergent**. Each phase has a different quality in terms of the kind of thinking elicited, the pace and timing, the energetic quality. Each therefore calls to be designed, hosted and held in a distinct way.

These phases can be likened to the three phases of breathing: breathing in (lungs expanding/diverging) holding, breathing out (lungs contracting/converging). The ‘breath’ of divergence and convergence, of breathing in and breathing out, is at the heart of our process design. Every process goes through several such breathing cycles (See also the section on process design).

**The Divergent phase** is also sometimes known as a “Pre-ject” phase.

In this phase, there is as yet no clear, shared goal. Rather than there being a clear goal or desired outcome, the direction is given by a clear sense of shared purpose, most often impelled by a pressing need or question of some kind.

This phase can best be guided by the kinds of questions that awaken the ability of the group to diverge from what is familiar and move beyond the known into a new understanding.

Divergent thinking typically unpacks the problem, engaging in free-for-all open discussion to gather diverse perspectives and generate an abundance of alternatives.

The divergent phase is non-linear and needs “chaos time”. Closing this phase too soon will reduce the potential for newness or innovation.

### Emergent phase

There comes a moment when the divergence is sufficiently explored, and it is time to move into the emergent phase. This phase has the quality of timeless suspension, like the pause between the in-breath and the out-breath. We are saturated with the overwhelming mess of ideas, perspectives, alternatives, all seemingly without structure or form. Holding it all can seem like a stretch and people who have not experienced such processes before can be strongly tempted to throw up their hands, declare the whole exercise a failure and escape to the pub. This is where experienced facilitators want to pull out their favourite processes to move the group out of the chaos. If the process is not well held, this can deteriorate into disagreement about the best path forward.

Experienced practitioners fondly call this phase the “groan zone”, because being in inquiry, not having the answers for a prolonged time is uncomfortable for most people. 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 and abandon pretence at knowing what to do and simply allow the new understandings and insights to emerge. This often happens quite suddenly and unexpectedly.

The time to move on into a convergent phase, is ideally when an obvious solution has emerged or at least a few viable options have surfaced as a way forward.



## Convergent Phase

Once the emergent phase has run its course, and we begin to see some possible solutions, the dynamic shifts again. It is time to sort ideas into categories, summarise key points, evaluate alternatives, and formulate general conclusions and next steps. This phase is goal-oriented and focused, linear, structured and usually subject to time constraints. The group can then leave with decisions taken and next steps to take.

## Moving from divergence through emergence to convergence

This movement from divergence through emergence to convergence can be likened to the three phases of breathing: breathing in (lungs expanding/diverging) holding, breathing out (lungs contracting/converging). The 'breath' of divergence, emergence and convergence, is at the heart of our process design. Every process will typically go through several such breathing cycles.

Certain methodologies seem to lend themselves particularly well to the different phases – for example, World Café is an excellent means for inviting divergence and exploring possibilities, Open Space Technology works excellently in moments of emergence, and “Pro-Action Café” or “Designing for Wiser Action” serves well to converge. However, it is possible to use these methodologies at any phase, but doing so would require a different type of guiding question and style of hosting.

It is important to realise that individuals have both different levels of tolerance and different preferences for all three of these phases. The same holds true of groups and organisations of all kinds. As a host, it

is useful to recognise your own preferences and worth exploring ways of increasing your tolerance in the phases where you are less comfortable. This is also reason why it is so important and valuable to seek diversity in a hosting team.

## Working with Emergence

Working with emergence is different than working in a linear command and control structure. Put simply, emergence is the phenomenon of Order arising out of Chaos.

A more nuanced definition goes like this:

*Emergence is higher-order complexity arising out of chaos, in which novel, coherent structures coalesce through interactions among the diverse entities of a system. Emergence occurs when these interactions disrupt, causing the system to differentiate and ultimately coalesce into something novel.*

Participatory leadership works with emergent change processes. The work is done *not* by traditional 'command and control' approaches, but instead by:

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

See also  
chapter on  
process  
design

This section is  
adapted from  
Engaging  
Emergence –  
turning upheaval  
into opportunity,  
by Peggy Holman

There are some catches to working with emergence, that can be especially challenging to leaders in traditional cultures.

**Getting started is a leap of faith** - the seeds of most great ideas are initially misunderstood, dismissed or discouraged by others.

**Success can be a hurdle** – since engaging emergence involves the unknown, it is risky. Organisations are afraid to proceed without certainty.

**Outcomes can be difficult to recognise** – when we encounter novelty, our first impulse is to try to fit it into our existing frame of reference. Sometimes seemingly minor shifts can change fundamental assumptions about how things work. Yet years may pass before we appreciate the implications.

**What's most important is probably not on our radar screen** – organisations tend to measure tangibles like 'number of projects launched and successfully implemented'. But the most powerful fruits of emergent change processes tend to be intangibles, like *trust* and *friendship*. Self-organising networks arise that can be catalysed into action if an intention of sufficient magnitude arises.

**Not everyone makes the trip** – most of us have experienced situations in which others have dived in, by we've chosen not to play. Are we missing something? Or is everybody else dangerously deranged?

**Death or loss is usually part of the mix** – perhaps fear of loss is the biggest reason why we resist emergence. Few of us choose to experience emotional turmoil if we can avoid it, so we invent strategies that bury the root causes of disturbance, perhaps inadvertently setting up a system to die.

## The Chaordic Path

### **The dance of chaos and order in nature**

The history of the universe is a story of order emerging from chaos starting with the big bang. In nature, we can see this process happening as a forest ecosystem matures through stages following a fire. Our individual lives, organisations and communities are all microcosms of this same process.

Chaos is the natural fertile ground of creativity. The diversity and messiness of chaos provides the ingredients for emergence of order. This is where life innovates, where things are not hardwired, but are flexible enough for new connections and solutions to occur. Within chaos, there is no clarity, no roadmap or instruction manual and, consequently, this is often an uncomfortable place for many people and organisations. There is often a tendency to try and force resolution to chaotic situations in an effort to return to the more familiar and comfortable realm of order or control. Unfortunately, forced order usually does not take the needs and interests of all participants of the system into account and this can result in a premature, pseudo-order, which is neither stable nor sustainable.

Given time and communication, the natural order, which wants to emerge will fit the needs of the system and its participants. Order is the preferred state of mature living systems. It provides a sense of predictability and allows for collaboration and coordination of efforts. Things are easier and less energy is required in an orderly system. Given the desirability of order, it is a natural human tendency to try and create and preserve order through methods of control. Living systems have feedback systems that naturally maintain order or homeostasis. When the population of rabbits exceeds the limits of the ecosystem, more predators will show up and the rabbit population will decline. If it declines too far, the population of predators will be reduced. In healthy human systems there are also feedback loops that help to maintain homeostasis or the status quo.

When excessive change occurs within a system - think a devastating fire in an old growth forest or a drastic cut of resources to an organisation - chaos usually results. This chaos is necessary for a system to adapt and change and it will result in a new order and new homeostasis. The cycle of chaos to order to chaos to order is the natural way of systems.

### **Chaos and order in human systems**

Within human systems, order is maintained by conventions and agreements and just because the orderly processes work for those involved, no top-down control is necessary. When these systems no longer work, chaos results out of which a new order will emerge.

Sometimes within human systems, however, it is necessary to maintain strict conformity with the order once it has been established.

For instance, it is essential to follow established practices for landing an aircraft or performing routine surgery. In these cases, systems of control are important and can take the form of standard operating procedures, laws, licensure - all of which typically require top-down monitoring and enforcement. One of the big challenges in modern organisations and societies is to discern where control is needed and where to trust the natural process of order emerging from chaos. Within

organisations, this wise application of just enough control is the work performed by conscious managers. Control is an essential function of all mechanistic systems (the ‘obvious’ or ‘complicated’ domains of the Cynefin framework presented in the next section).

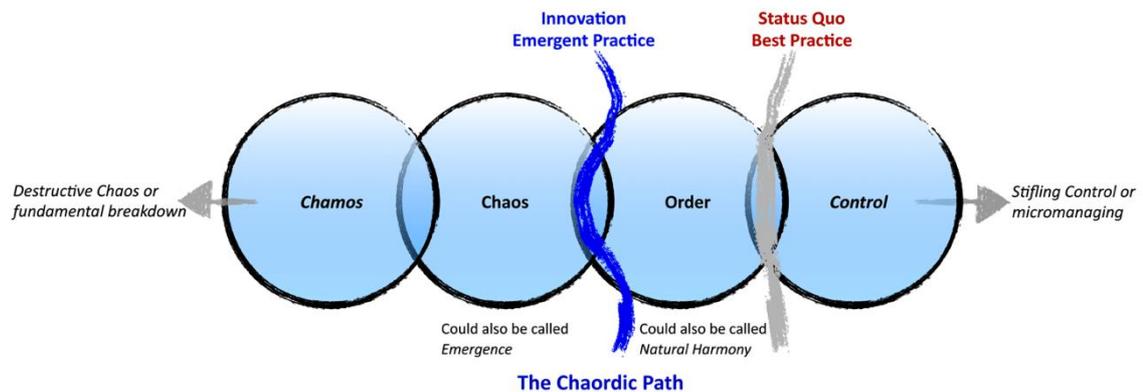
Machines need to behave in standard and predictable ways and mechanical systems are incapable of creating order out of chaos. When conditions change in a mechanistic system, the system needs to be adjusted and new controls implemented. However, the world and times we live in are neither predictable nor stable and more and more of our systems are complex, calling for more flexibility, since “more-of-the-same solutions” will not meet the challenges.

The Chaordic Path is a model based on this recognition of order emerging naturally from chaos. The model proposes three basic conditions (operating fields or organizational states): chaos, order and control. The transition between chaos and order, that place of emergence and innovation, is referred to as the ‘chaordic path’.

*The term “Chaordic” was first coined by Dee Hock, CEO and co-creator of the VISA card*

*For a description of the chaordic design process, see the Deeper Process Design Section*

*For the VISA story, see the additional resources section*



**Chaos—Order—Control** are different states of being and experiencing. We tend to feel safest in the state of order, or for some people, in control. Being out of control is scary if we are looking for predictability. If we have a mechanistic view on organisations, our tendency will be to stay within the realms of order and control, where things are predictable and stable—and where we produce status quo or “more of the same”—which in some cases is exactly what is needed.

The world and times we live in are, however, neither predictable nor stable and call for more flexibility, as “more of the same” solutions are not meeting the challenges. If we are looking for innovative, new solutions we will find them in a place between chaos and order—the chaordic path.

The chaordic path is actually the story of our natural world, as form arises out of nonlinear, 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.

As in nature, so in organisations the path between Chaos and Order leads us to the new—to collective learning and real-time innovation. Instead of relying on controlling every detail in our organisations 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.

To lead our organisation on the chaordic path we need “chaordic confidence”, to have the courage to stay in the dance of order and chaos long enough to support a generative emergence that allows the new, collective intelligence and wise action to occur.

As we tread the line between chaos and order, individually and collectively, we move through confusion and conflict toward clarity. It is in the phase of not knowing, before we reach new clarity, that the temptation to rush for certainty or grab for control is strongest. We are all called to walk this path with open minds and some confidence if we want to reach something wholly new.

In this space of emergence, we leave our collective encounters with something that not one of us individually brought into the room.

The art is to stay in the fine balance between chaos and order. Straying too far to either side is counterproductive. On the far side of chaos is chaos or destructive chaos where everything disintegrates and dies. On the far side of order is stifling control—where there is no movement that eventually means death. When we move toward either of these extremes, the result is apathy or rebellion—the very opposite of chaordic confidence. Staying on the chaordic path is where the balance is and where life thrives.

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

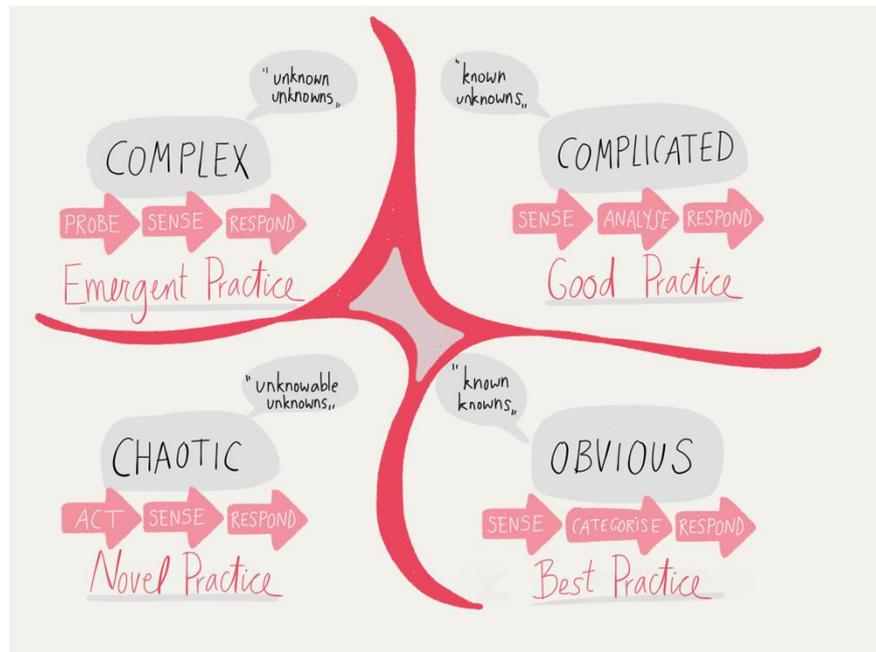
In an organisational context, the practice of leadership and particularly participatory leadership resides in the place between chaos and order. When facing new challenges that cannot be met with the same way we are currently working, we need to learn new ways of operating. It is during these times of uncertainty and increased complexity, where results cannot be predicted, that leaders need to invite others to share diverse knowledge to discover new purpose and strategy 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 are achieved. It is the place where ‘more of the same’ is required, e.g. landing an airplane safely, operating on a patient, etc. Therefore, it is where predictability is called for and where procedures and standards are clearly defined and need to be adhered to.

## The Cynefin Framework

The Cynefin framework, – a model to navigating complexity, developed by the Welsh researcher Dave Snowden, distinguishes five different types of situations, classified by their state of complexity and order, and provides guidance on strategies to employ in each.



### The First Four Domains Are:

#### 1. Simple or obvious

These are situations where the relationship between cause and effect is obvious to all: if you do A, you get B. You repeat A and you get B again. The approach is to *Sense -Categorise – Respond*. You observe what is happening, you put the situation in the right category and the response is easy. Consequently, in simple systems, we can apply best practice. There is only one way to do this right.

This is the area we know from the assembly-line factory. The work and the environment constrain actors in the system so much that they are left with few options and perform as the system instructs them to.

#### 2. Complicated

Situations are complicated when there is not a simple relationship between cause and effect. One cause can have multiple effects requiring analysis or some other form of investigation and/or the application of expert knowledge. The approach is to *Sense - Analyse – Respond*. You observe what is happening, then you need some analysis to figure it out (because it is complicated), after which you can respond with a few options, any of which produce the desired effect. Thus, in complicated systems, we can apply good practice, as there are a few options that work well.

Because it is a mechanical system in which the actors are merely cogs in a machine, this is the area of experts, who know better than the actors how the system's relationships actually fit best together. The experts design the path to follow and managers implement their advice. In complicated systems, although there are linear cause-effect relationships, they are so many and so

obscure that some expert insight is necessary to find a good way through.

### **3. Complex**

These are situations where the relationship between cause and effect can only be perceived in retrospect, but never in advance! The approach is to *Probe - Sense – Respond*; try little, different things, learn quickly what their effect is and then apply your learning. In complex systems, we need emergent practice.

This is the realm where hosting practices are relevant. Here the actors are more than cogs. They are active participants in a living system. They have agency and their actions mutually influence the system's relationships and behaviours. Thus, it is impossible to discern causal relationships in advance, and experts will fail to do so as much as anyone else. Leading in complexity is a game of trial and learning. The perspective and experiences of each participant in this system provides important information for the system to be able to see the mutual relationships. The art is to launch a number of different possible actions together and see which works better. Those are then amplified, while the less effective approaches are stopped or revised. There is no best or good practice, because there is no clear and visible linear causality, only an intricate web of entangled factors and relationships.

### **4. Chaotic**

When any pattern of relationship between cause and effect at systems level is beyond the human capacity to discern (think 'tsunami'), Snowden calls it chaotic. The approach is to *Act – Sense – Respond*. Just do something (there is no time left for experimentation) and see what the effect is. After some time, the chaos stabilises into 'normal' complexity where further actions can be tested. In chaotic systems, we can discover novel practice.

Leading in chaos is stressful - as the whole system is in stress mode. Chaotic systems tend to be unstable and subject to catastrophic collapse back into simple systems. As the simplification brought into the system tends to be excessive, suppressing the system's inherent complexity, the system is liable to revert to chaos again.

**The 5<sup>th</sup> domain, specific by not-knowing about causality:**

### **5. Disorder**

The fifth domain is Disorder, which is the state of not knowing what type of causality exists and in which state people will revert to their own comfort zone when making a decision. In full use, the Cynefin framework has sub-domains, and the boundary between simple and chaotic is seen as a catastrophic one: complacency leads to failure.

The Cynefin framework shows us that leading in complexity is actually simple – although not easy! It suffices to keep breathing: inhale (divergence), suspend (emergence), exhale (convergence) as we constantly test new or improved ways of acting to respond to constantly fresh constellations in a world where all actors have a large degree of freedom lightly constrained by the boundaries and rules of the system.

References:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cynefin>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7oz366X0-8>

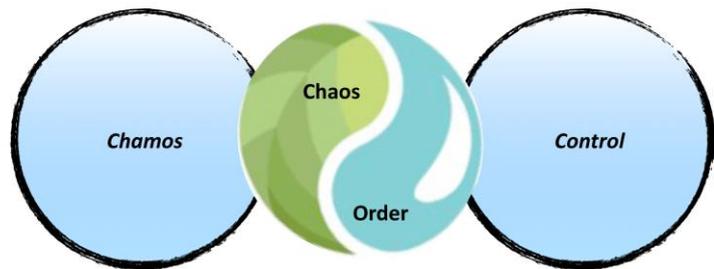
## Linking Chaordic and the Cynefin Framework

The path between **Order and Chaos** is informed by the complexity insights: Order emerges out of Chaos and is stabilised against it. We know that we do not know, and we stay in constant learning mode.

The path between **Control and Order** is when we begin declaring and defining best practices or recipes or procedures to follow. They are not emergent and fluid but constrain the whole system.

We are then leading as in the simple or complicated domain with the inherent risk of increasing the possible chaos, and to suppress creativity and learning. Here we assume that we know, and reality has to follow.

When you learn to practice the Chaordic Path, it begins to look like this...



## Dialogue – A Conversation with a centre, not sides

Participatory Leadership practices are all about dialogue. In many contexts what we know of conversation equals debate and discussion. Once we learn to recognise the difference between debate and discussion on the one hand, and dialogue on the other, we can learn to switch from one to the other when appropriate.

### The art of thinking together

Fundamentally, the difference lies in the choice between thinking alone and thinking together. In our society, we are much more used to thinking alone, and this draws us into **discussion** and **debate**, where we find ourselves defending our views and sustaining our positions against opposing views and positions.

While *discussion* is a powerful mode of exchange, it has its limitations because it focuses on: *Either/or thinking, closure and completion and controlling the outcome.*

Discussion can easily move into *debate*, the root of which means "to beat down". This often creates frustration and bad feeling among people who need to work together.

**Dialogue** is based on the assumption that in every situation there is an underlying wholeness. Not only is there is room for all perspectives, but unless all perspectives are expressed, held and honoured, that wholeness cannot fully emerge and be seen.

### Defend or suspend

Learning to dialogue is about learning to make conscious choices, and so it is a path of personal development. We can transform any conversation into a dialogue by choosing to **suspend** rather than **defend**.

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

Marcel Proust

**Suspending** means listening without resistance (we dis-identify from our own starting position). This leads to **reflective dialogue**, where you can explore underlying causes, rules and assumptions, to get to deeper questions and framing of problems. From here, it is possible to enter **generative dialogue**, where together you can invent unprecedented possibilities and new insights. A collective flow emerges which is energising and enlightening. We are **inquiring together into what matters**.

#### Four basic skills

Dialogue requires four basic skills: **listening, respecting, suspending** and **voicing**. A little unpacking shows that these simple words contain an enormous harvest of wisdom and depth.

#### Listening

*What does it take to really listen?*

- **Developing an inner silence.** It is hard to listen when our minds are full of our own inner dialogue. Learning to listen is learning to be present. We must learn to notice what we are feeling *now*.
- Recognising that **much of our reaction to others comes from memory** – it is stored reaction, not fresh response. In this case we are not really listening, we are simply "downloading" from memory of what we already know.
- Learning to **distinguish between the inferences we make about experience and the experience itself**. Stick with the facts, don't jump to conclusions.
- **Following the disturbance** – when we are emotionally triggered by something we hear, we tend to close down and act out. Instead of looking for evidence that confirms my point of view, I can listen for the source of the difficulty – in myself and in others.
- **Listening while noticing resistance** – this helps us to become conscious of the ways in which we project our opinions about others onto them, and distort what is said without realising it.

#### Respecting

*What does respect look like in practice and how do we learn it?*

- **Honouring boundaries** –When I treat the person next to me as a teacher, I can discover what they have to teach me that I do not know? What is highest and best in the other and what changes when I treat them as a mystery that I can never fully comprehend.
- **Assuming coherence** – look for the whole. The new science proposes that human beings are intimately part of the overall fabric of life. However, we are conditioned to see only parts, and to assume that the parts comprise the whole. The holistic view suggests that the whole *precedes* the parts.
- **Respecting polarisations or disagreement** – to enable dialogue, we must learn to respect the polarising disagreements that arise *without attempting to fix them!*
- **Supporting the people who challenge.** Dialogue requires willingness to hold the space open for inquiry, so that different viewpoints can be integrated. Otherwise the disagreement will continue.

- **Learning to hold tension** – when a group can hold the tension that arises without *reacting* to it, its capacity for dialogue rises to a whole new level.

### Suspending

*What becomes possible when we suspend our certainties in favour of curiosity?*

- Dialogue is possible only among people who can **be surprised** by what they say, who can recognise and embrace what they do not already know.
- The first step is to **disclose**: we make available (to ourselves and others) the contents of our consciousness so we can see what's going on.
- The next step is to become aware of the processes that generate our thought. **Observing our thought processes**, we transform them.
- Suspension asks us to **refrain from fixing**, correcting and problem solving in favour of *inquiring* into what we observe.
- At the core of inquiry is the **question**. A really good question creates a tension in us that we must learn to tolerate – suspend the search for answers and see what emerges.

### Voicing

*What happens when we speak what is true for us?*

- Simply ask: **what needs to be expressed** now? What is it that people together are endeavouring to say here?
- Finding our **authentic voice** requires willingness to speak in the circle without knowing what we will say.
- Let there be **silence** – make space to let the meaning bloom.
- **Speak to and from the centre**, recognising that it is not only about interpersonal relationships, but that there is something larger at stake.

Mastering these four skills would be basic to becoming a fully-fledged adult in an enlightened society. May it one day come to pass.

*(Inspired by the book 'Dialogue' by William Isaacs)*



## Powerful Questions

***“An answer is always the part of the road that is behind you.  
Only questions point to the future.”***

*Jostein Gaarder*

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.

### **Powerful questions**

Questions are key to meaningful conversation, and so the ability to craft powerful questions is an important hosting skill. Questions come in many shapes and serve many purposes. We often unthinkingly assume that the purpose of questions is to find answers. In the scientific world, for example, questions are framed to help us understand why and how things happen in order to better control them. A good answer within science provides a bit of certainty and eliminates unsupported hypotheses. This is the realm of the “why?” question.

When working with the emergence inherent in living systems, questions perform a different function. They invite us into the unknown, opening into the realm of new possibilities and connections. They invite more questions, welcome uncertainty and unknowing, are unafraid of paradoxical answers.

### **Knowing what questions to use when**

Some questions effectively open up possibilities while other questions close them down. Convergence and divergence, those basic elements of process design, likewise act to open and close possibilities. A powerful divergent question, then, will be counterproductive in a convergent process and vice versa. In order to craft a good question, you need to be clear about its purpose and function within the process or conversation you are designing, and then you need to construct the question in a way that will help move the conversation in the desired direction.

Open-ended questions support a divergent process. Such questions do not call for yes/no or either/or answers (or even multiple choice answers). They explore what is - the “what?” questions and the “so what?” questions. They invite deeper reflection and allow space for different, even paradoxical responses that represent diverse perspectives. A good question in the divergent phase invites inquiry and curiosity, rather than immediately prompting action or problem-solving.

Generally, questions of “what” and “how” are much more useful in this phase, than “who”, “when” or “why”.

In the convergent phase, helpful questions narrow down possibilities and move the group toward decisions and action.

Here, closed-ended questions - who will take responsibility? by when? etc. - are useful. This is the realm of the “now what?” questions.

Where traditional meetings frequently begin with an agenda, a meaningful conversation is more

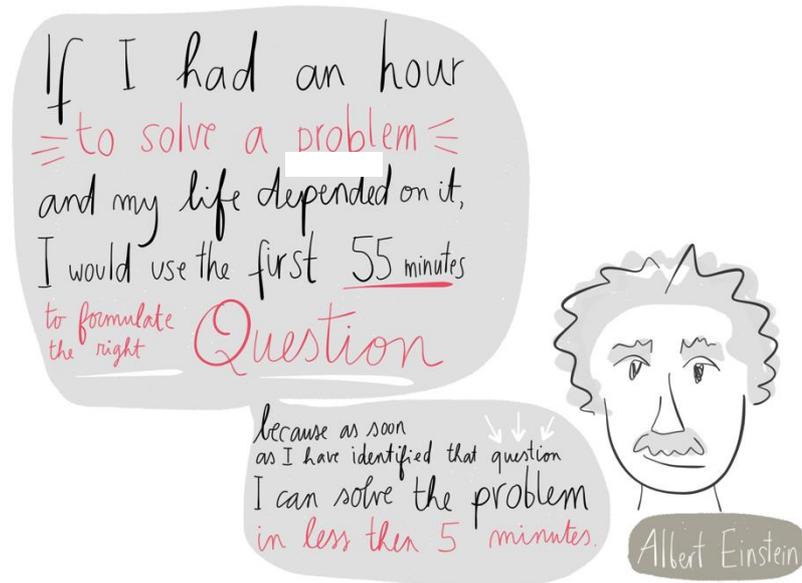
often prompted by an inviting question. This 'calling question' engages potential participants with curiosity and embodies the purpose of the meeting. Within the meeting, each discussion topic or process may have its own question that engages and focuses participation.

Summing it up, a powerful question:

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

A powerful question focuses **Attention, Intention and Energy**

(inspired by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs)



## Working with Vision and Purpose

*Having a clear vision and/or a clear purpose are the first steps in bringing order into complexity or the chaotic space.*

**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 organisation 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 organisation, 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 business.

It reminds you of what you are trying to build.

***"It is not what the vision is but what it what it does, that is important"***

- Peter Senge

**The Purpose of Purpose: Why we are 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 efforts together. This is because it defines why we are working towards something 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.

***"Collective clarity of purpose is the invisible leader"***

*Mary Parker Follett*

To be a useful navigational tool in seeking the way forward, purpose contains three elements:

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

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

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

When these three elements are aligned and collectively understood – the greater good of why we need to take action, the clarity of what we are pursuing in order to ground the higher intent and the will to do this regardless of the conditions – then purpose becomes a powerful attractor that allows people to combine their individual efforts to work together on making a difference for all.

In an organisation or a community many purposes co-exist. All too often, insufficient effort is given to interconnect these purposes so that it can feel that different and conflicting purposes are at play. It is therefore important to remember that different purposes are at play. For example:

- The purpose of the stakeholders that the organisation serves
- The purpose of the whole community / organisation
- The purpose of the core group
- The 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 or project?
- How does my purpose align with the purpose we are all here to accomplish?
- 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 with entanglements, confusion and even conflicts 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.

*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*

# CORE METHODS

## Part 1- Hosting Conversations

The following pages will give a short introduction to some of the core methodologies that are simple and useful practices in the Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter. They are designed to engage a group of people (large or small) in conversations, where our collective wisdom and intelligence can be engaged in service of finding the best solutions for a common purpose.

There are many other methodologies that could be useful, depending on context and purpose, than the ones mentioned in this booklet

Common to these methodologies are, however, some **basic principles or qualities** that are shared, e.g.

- They offer a **simple structure** that allows us to engage small or large groups in conversations that can lead to results.
- They each have their **special advantages and limitations**.
- They are usually **based on dialogue**, with **intentional speaking** and **attentive listening** (listening to understand) as **basic practices**, and **suspending assumptions and biases**, allowing us to go on an exploration and discovery together, rather than trying to convince each other of our own present truths.
- Circle is a basic conversational form whether used as the only form (e.g. circle practice) or used as many smaller conversation circles, woven into a bigger conversation, (e.g. World Café, Open Space). Meeting in a circle is a **meeting of equals**. Generally all these methodologies inspire peer-to-peer discovery and learning.
- **Inquiry or powerful questions are a driving force**. Answers tend to close a conversation while inquiry keeps the conversation going deeper.
- The purpose of all this is to “think well together, that is to **engage the collective intelligence for better solutions**.
- **Facilitating** these engagements or conversations is more like stewarding or “**hosting**”, allowing the solutions to emerge from the wisdom in the middle.
- There are a number of **conditions** that need to be in place for engagement to work well. Any engagement or strategic conversation needs to be based in a **real need** and has to have a **clear purpose**. Any “**givens**” or **boundary conditions** need to be clear ahead of time. You may also have defined success-criteria or have an idea of the outcome even if the concrete **solutions will emerge from the conversations** (see also the section on design)

Many of the methods introduced here predate the Art of Hosting and are lovingly stewarded by a specific community of practice, which practices the method with nuance and flexibility, as an art form. Each of these methods deserves to be studied and practiced in depth and we invite practitioners of the Art of Hosting to engage in these other communities of practice. The Art of

Hosting provides an introduction to these methodologies and explores how they can be woven together in hosting practice. Attending dedicated trainings in the methodologies and working with experienced practitioners is a good way of deepening understanding and skill.

The Art of Hosting takes the basic architecture, principles and processes of these methods, and mixes, matches and adapts them to meet the needs of whatever context it is serving. This weaving and blending are part of the art. One thing that all these methodologies have in common is that they don't just happen spontaneously. They must be invited, designed, hosted. The art lies in knowing when to use each in order to get the most out of it.

In this section, you will find a brief description of the different methods through the lens of the Art of Hosting. Wherever a method has its own community of practice, we direct you to their website for more detailed instructions and insights into practice.



## The Circle Practice

The circle, or council, is an ancient form of meeting that has gathered human beings into respectful conversation for thousands of years. The circle has served as the foundation for many cultures.

**What transforms a meeting into a circle is the willingness of people to shift from informal socialising or opinionated discussion into a receptive attitude of thoughtful speaking and deep listening and to embody and practice the structures outlined here.**

### When to use circle?

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 and be ready for the deep wisdom it can uncover!

### The components of the circle

- Intention
- Welcome Start-point
- Centre and Check-in/Greeting
- Agreements
- Three Principles and Three Practices
- Guardian of process
- Check-out and Farewell
- Tend to the well-being of the group remaining aware of the impact of our contributions

### Intention

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. Additionally, the centre of a circle usually holds a focus that can be supported by placing the question in the centre or objects that represent the intention of the circle.

### Welcome or starting point

Once people have gathered, it is helpful for the host, or a volunteer participant, to begin the circle with a gesture that shifts people's attention from social space to council space. This gesture of welcome may be a moment of silence, reading a poem, or listening to a song--whatever invites us to be centred.

### Establishing the centre

The centre of a circle is like the hub of a wheel: all energies pass through it, and it holds the rim together. To help people remember how the hub helps the group, the centre of a circle may, when appropriate, hold objects that represent the intention of the circle. Any symbol that fits this purpose or adds beauty will serve: flowers, a bowl or basket, a candle. In more organisational settings, placing the main question in the centre creates focus.

### Check-in / greetings

Check-in helps people into a frame of mind for council and reminds everyone of their commitment to the expressed intention. It insures that people are truly present. Verbal sharing, especially a brief story, weaves the interpersonal net. 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. Sometimes, when appropriate, people place individual objects in the centre as a way of signifying their presence and relationship to the intention.

### Setting circle agreements

When using a circle for longer period or a deep inquiry, the use of agreements creates a safe environment allowing 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:

- We will hold stories or personal material in confidentiality.
- We listen to each other with compassion and curiosity.
- We ask for what we need and offer what we can.
- We agree to employ a group guardian to watch our need, timing, and energy. We agree to pause at a signal, and to call for that signal when we feel the need to pause.

### Three principles

The circle is an all leader group.

1. **Leadership rotates** among all circle members.
2. **Responsibility is shared** for the quality of experience.
3. **Reliance is on wholeness**, rather than on any personal agenda.

### Three practices

1. To speak with intention: noting what has relevance to the conversation in the moment.
2. To listen with attention: respectful of the learning process for all members of the group.
3. To tend the well-being of the circle: remaining aware of the impact of our contributions.

### Forms of council

The circle commonly uses three forms of council: talking piece, conversation and reflection.

*Talking piece council* is often used as part of check-in, check-out, and whenever there is a desire to slow down the conversation, collect all voices and contributions, and be able to speak without interruption.

*Conversation council* is often used when reaction, interaction, and an interjection of new ideas, thoughts and opinions are needed.

*Reflection, or Silent council* gives each member time and space to reflect on what is occurring, or needs to occur, in the course of a meeting. Silence may be called so that each person can consider the role or impact they are having on the group, or to help the group realign with their intention, or to sit with a question until there is clarity.

### Guardian

The single most important tool for aiding self-governance and bringing the circle back to intention is the role of the guardian.

To provide a guardian, one circle member at a time volunteers to watch and safeguard group energy and observe the circle's process.

**The guardian usually employs a gentle noise-maker, such as a chime, bell, or rattle, that signals everyone to stop action, take a breath, rest in a space of silence. Then the guardian makes this signal again and speaks to why he/she called the pause. Any member may call for a pause.**

### Check-out and farewell

At the close of a circle meeting, it is important to allow a few minutes for each person to comment on what they learned, or what stays in their heart and mind as they leave.

Closing the circle by checking out provides a formal end to the meeting, a chance for members to reflect on what has transpired, and to pick up objects if they have placed something in the centre. As people shift from council space to social space or private time, they release each other from the intensity of attention being in circle requires. Often after checkout, the host, guardian, or a volunteer will offer a few inspirational words of farewell or signal a few seconds of silence before the circle is released.

### Materials needed

- Chairs arrange in a circle – people should be able to view each other without impediments (i.e. tables or desks)
- Object for the centre – this is to bring focus. It can be flowers, a poster stating the intention or purpose of the gathering or any other object that has meaning
- Talking piece
- Chime, bell or other instrument to call everyone to attention
- Materials for harvesting conversation



### Find out more

The Circle Way is stewarded and supported by a dedicated global community of practitioners. You can find out more here: <http://www.thecircleway.net/>

*This handout is a gift from PeerSpirit, Inc. an educational company devoted to life and leader-ship through Circle, Quest and Story. Founded in 1994, PeerSpirit has taught circle process in the US, Canada, Europe and Africa. It is a consortium consisting of Christina Baldwin, Ann Linnea and teaching colleagues with areas of expertise in health care administration, religious/church administration and congregational health, education, nonprofit boards, environmental and community revisioning.*

<https://peerspirit.com/>

## Appreciative Inquiry

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

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 and that hold potential for inspired, positive change. (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987)

### 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 into 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

### What is Appreciative Inquiry good for?

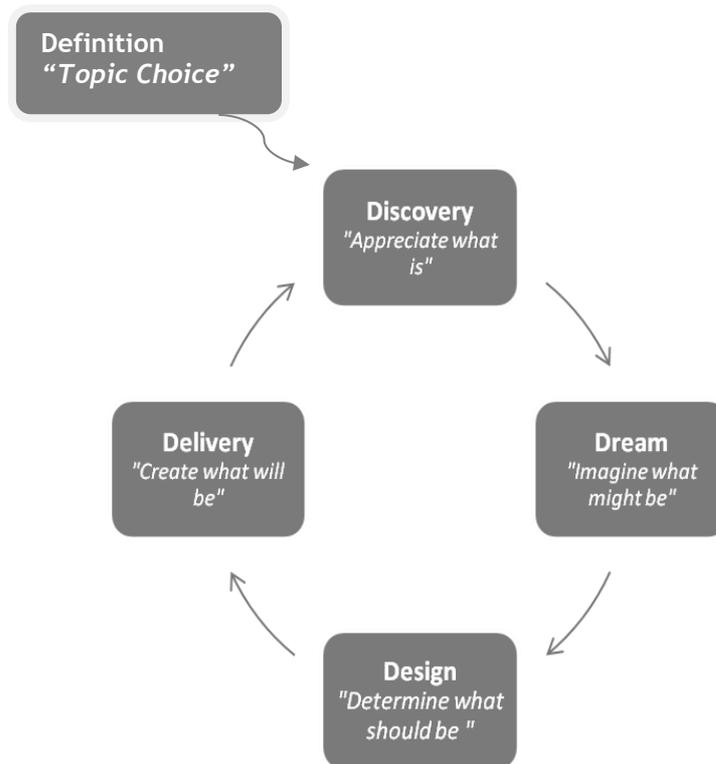
Appreciative Inquiry is useful when a different perspective is needed, or when we wish to begin a new process from a fresh, positive vantage point. It can help move a group that is stuck in “what is” toward “what could be”. Appreciative Inquiry can be used with individuals, partners, small groups, or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

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 organisation is a problem to be solved.	Basic assumption: an organisation 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 5 phases of:

- Definition:** Surfacing the focus for inquiring appreciatively.
- Discovery:** Identifying organisational processes that work well.
- Dream:** Envisioning processes that would work well in the future.
- Design:** Planning and prioritising those processes.
- Delivery:** Implementing the proposed design.



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

At the centre 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 yourself, work and organisation?

#### **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 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.

#### **Materials Needed:**

Varies depending on how the methodology is used.

For more information: <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

## The World Café

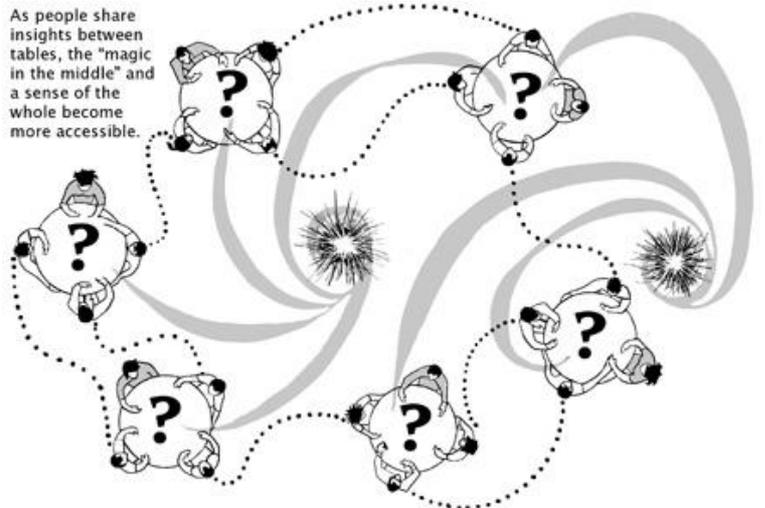
Resource:  
[www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

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 organisations, and our communities, we are, in effect, moving among 'table conversations' at the World Café. (From The World Café Resource Guide)

### Operating Principles of World Cafe:

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

As people share insights between tables, the "magic in the middle" and a sense of the whole become more accessible.

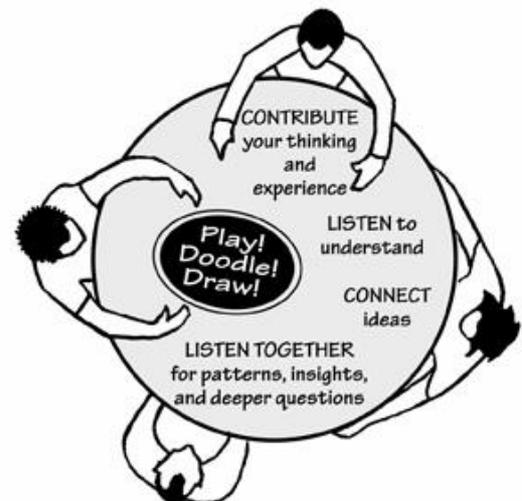


### Assumptions of World Cafe:

- The knowledge and wisdom we need is present and accessible.
- Collective insight evolves from honouring 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.

### CAFÉ ETIQUETTE

FOCUS  
on what matters!



**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 with 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.

**What is World Café Good For?**

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.



**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 paper for harvesting collective knowledge or insights
- Posters/table tents showing the Café Etiquette
- Materials for harvesting

*This information  
was adapted  
from Café to Go  
at  
<http://www.the-worldcafe.com/>*

The World Café website: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/>

## Open Space Technology

Resource:  
[www.openspace  
world.org](http://www.openspaceworld.org)

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. Typically, Open Space meetings result in transformative experiences for the individuals and groups involved. It is a simple and powerful way to catalyse effective working conversations and to truly invite organisations to thrive in times of swirling change.

### 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 it's over it's over

### The Law of Two Feet:

- If you find yourself in a situation where you are not contributing or learning, move somewhere where you can.
- Follow your PASSION & take your RESPONSIBILITY



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

### Roles in Open Space:

- Host—announce and host a workshop
- Participant—participate in a workshop
- Bumble bee—“shop” between workshops
- Butterfly—take time out to reflect

### 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 announces it to the group.

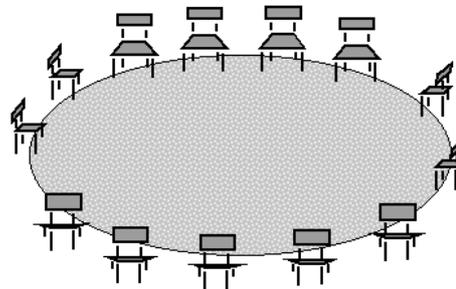
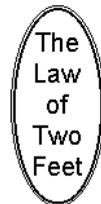
These people are "conveners." Each convener places their paper on the wall and chooses a time and a place to meet. This process continues until there are no more agenda items.

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

Dialogue sessions convene for the rest 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.



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### 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.

### 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

## The Art of Participatory Leadership

- 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



A more detailed explanation of Open Space Technology and how to host it:

<http://www.openspaceworld.org>

A brief users' guide to Open Space Technology:

[http://www.openspaceworld.com/users\\_guide.htm](http://www.openspaceworld.com/users_guide.htm)

## Collective Mind-map

*This process is adapted and inspired by "Future Search"—a social technology developed by Marvin Weisbord & Sandra Janoff*

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

Wikipedia

### A Collective Mind-Map

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

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

### Ground-Rules for Making a Collective Mind-Map:

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



The host explains the procedure and rules of making a collective mind-map. Participants present their ideas and suggestions.

### Making the Mind-Map

The mind-map process is led by a host. All participants have access to post-it notes. When anyone has an idea or issue they want to suggest for the mind-map, they write their name on the post-it and hold it up. Runners will collect the post-its and give them to the facilitator, who will then call out the names in the order received. Once a person's name is called, they can present their idea or issue.

If the group is large there will be a need for radio-microphones. These will be provided by the runners when it is the participant's turn to speak.

Two scribes draw up the actual map. The central question is at the centre of the mind-map. The major themes and different issues under each theme are recorded on the mind-map radiating out from the central question.

### Voting

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

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



Scribes capture what is said and draw the mind-map, either on a big mind-map or on a screen.

In the voting process everyone gets a certain number of votes to place on the themes or issues they believe are most crucial.

## The Pro Action Café

The Pro Action Café 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 Café is a blend of 'World Café' and 'Open Space' technologies. It was first conceived by Rainer von Leoprechting and Ria Baeck in Brussels, Belgium.

### What is Pro Action Café Good For?

As a conversational process, the Pro Action Café is a collective, innovative yet simple 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 café tables, cross-pollinate ideas, and offer each other new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, organisation or community.

As a process, the Pro Action Café 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 Café can be used with a network of people and/or as a methodology for a specific group, organisation or community to engage in creative and inspirational conversation leading to wiser and more collectively informed actions.

Pro Action Café is also a growing global community of people, groups, organizations and networks that practice this conversational format.

### General Flow of a Pro Action Café:

Start with a quick check-in circle to connect to the 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 ½ to 3 hours for a good Pro Action Café. Invite participants 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 stand up, speak it and write it on the agenda that corresponds to a numbered café table, other participants are invited to move around and engage around the themes proposed by others.

Dividing the number of participants by 4 gives the number of callers with projects that can be worked. For example, with 40 people you can have maximum 10 callers each with a project. **The principle is first come first served.** If you have fewer callers add chairs to café tables but no more than 5 at each table. During this process each contributing participant (those who do not step forward) gets to support 3 of the different projects.

When the agenda has been created, invite the callers to go to their numbered café tables. There will be 3 rounds of 20 to 30 minute conversations in café style, 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 need and purpose of the call. Digging under the surface of what we know already.

Round 2:

**What is missing?** – When the quest has been deepened, a discover question explores what could make the project complete and more 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 his/her project.

This 3rd round is in two steps:

- First 20-25 minutes for the callers to reflect by themselves on the 4 questions above and harvest their key insights.
- Then a last round where 3 new contributors visit the tables to listen to the harvest of the caller, their learning, their next steps, help needed, and then offer any insights and further support.

Between each round it is advisable to create short breaks for the contributors to have a drink, relax together and get ready to support another caller in their quest/ project.

Last step is to meet in the circle and invite the callers from each table to share answers to these 2 questions:

- **What am I grateful for?**
- **What are my next steps?**

If there is time the whole group reflects shortly on: **What applications do we see for practising Pro Action Café in our contexts?**

End the Pro Action Café 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 café tables with 4 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, colour pens and markers as basic café 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 4.

Have fun and do good work together.



More Info on:

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

## Designing for Wiser Action

Remember the practice of *Apehei*:

*"It is kind to ask for help. – A person who cannot ask for help cannot be trusted"*

- *Nuu-chah-nulth tribal wisdom*

### About this process

Designing good process flow is an art. *What is the need? What is the purpose? Who is the group? What methods will most support the group into wise action? What kind of harvest will serve this wise action?*

These are questions a host needs to be able to work with.

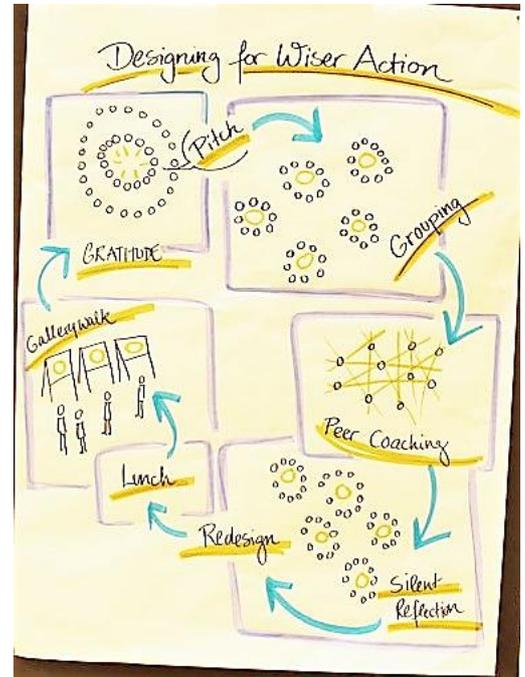
The Designing for Wiser Action process was created to give "project owners" an opportunity to ask for help and the rest of us an opportunity to practice both design and generosity.

### Purpose

To enable some of us to get support and wise advice about the upcoming concrete projects / processes we need to host and the rest of us to put what we've learned about Art of Hosting and its methods to work on real life cases.

### Roles

- *One or two Hosts*: Introduce the process to the group, host the callers into clarity prior to the process (and you may need to challenge them to name a concrete project with a clear purpose), and host the full group process
- *Caller*: Is the person who wants helps on becoming clear and crafting focus, design and practice in action, applied to a particular event or events.
- *Co-designers*: Are the people who help with the first brush strokes of co-creating design. This is a practice of generosity.
- *Full group*: Work with all elements from our practice in a practical way, so they all manifest in the process being designed and make Art of Hosting as helpful as possible and easier to grasp.
- *Resource team*: If there are more seasoned hosts and a good-sized group of participants, they may want to act as a resource team, bumble-being between teams to give additional support.



## Information for the overall process host(s)

Criteria to become a caller and get help

- You have decided to host a process/meeting where Art of Hosting & Harvesting practice can be helpful. You have a project or at least idea about the project, you are a caller.
- There is a first level of clarity around the need and purpose. Why does this event need to happen?
- The process needs involve and serve more people than yourself. Who is involved? How many others?
- The event will be happening within the next year. When? What is the wise timing of this?
- What is your initial sense of forms/methodologies? What is it – one meeting? A series of meetings?
- How is this needing to unfold? Is it a hosting team hosting one meeting, are you needing to train many people to train others?

## Stages of the process

### 1. Make an invitation to those who want to be callers.

Invitation is made to people, so they can ask for help to design the process they want to host. Work with those who want to step in to get clear about their intention. This process needs a concrete project to work with, rather than a vague intention still being shaped. The project needs to be happening from one day to one year in the future. If you are using this during an AoH training, make sure to invite callers at least the night before the process will be hosted.

### 2. Introduce the process

Why is it important to be skilful in the work you do and why is it important to ask for help in designing your process? You might want to show the InCommons video on community conversations: <http://vimeo.com/40679035> to help frame how this work can travel into communities and build capacity, as one example of why it is important to be skilful. Conditions for self-organising – a powerful triangle.

### 3. Clarity of need and purpose is the invisible leader

Clarity of need and purpose is the invisible leader and creates a natural centre for the work. As a caller, become as clear as possible. The clearer you are, the more others can help you. At very least, you will be hosting a clear process to find the purpose.

### 4. Respectful relationships

Being in good relationship with yourself and others helps. If you are in good relationship with yourself, you can have good relationships with others. Then you will enjoy and benefit from the diversity of others. It does not mean that you have to agree on everything - but even if you disagree you can still be in respectful relationship and focus on getting the work done.

### 5. Acting more wisely for the world

Good work should always yield real results. The Hopi Indians say “Will it grown corn for the people?” What are your actions going to create that will be useful for your world?

6. Introduce the projects

Gather the callers in a circle at the centre of the group. Ask each of the callers to introduce their project briefly for 2 minutes. Each of the callers then stands in the room and others go to join them. Remind the group this is a time to practice generosity – next time it might be you!

7. Introduce how we will be working

Show the guiding questions and the harvesting templates. Each group will move to its own table or room. Warn the callers not to spend so much time on introducing your project that there is no time to work on it!

Step through the questions the groups will be working with and suggest that the group uses *Post It notes* on the template because the peer coaching process might change your perspective and you will need to move things around. Be careful not to get stuck – keep the process moving and keep harvesting clarity!

- We start in our teams with the caller introducing the project briefly.
- Work together for the first period of time. Host and stewards may be available to give input and support or help you get unstuck if needed.
- Teams will meet together for a peer coaching session. Each group will work with another group to sharpen their design.
- Then there will be a period of integrating and refining back in the groups.
- Finally, we will come back together and hear some next steps.
- You will stay in the same teams for the entire time, so we can get some good work done.

Tools to get the work done

- Guiding questions
- Harvesting template
- A good work space

*How the session works / timing (optimal timing, 3-4 hours)*

- Introducing the process/hearing from the callers/forming groups around the callers (30 min)
- Working in teams supporting the callers on their projects (1.5 hours min)
- Peer coaching (20 min = 8 - 10 min caller presents the work to date, coaches listening/8 – 10 min coaches giving feedback)
- Return to teams and integrate (20 – 30 min)
- Return to full group and report back (10 – 20 min depending on the number of callers)

If more time available here are some additional possibilities:

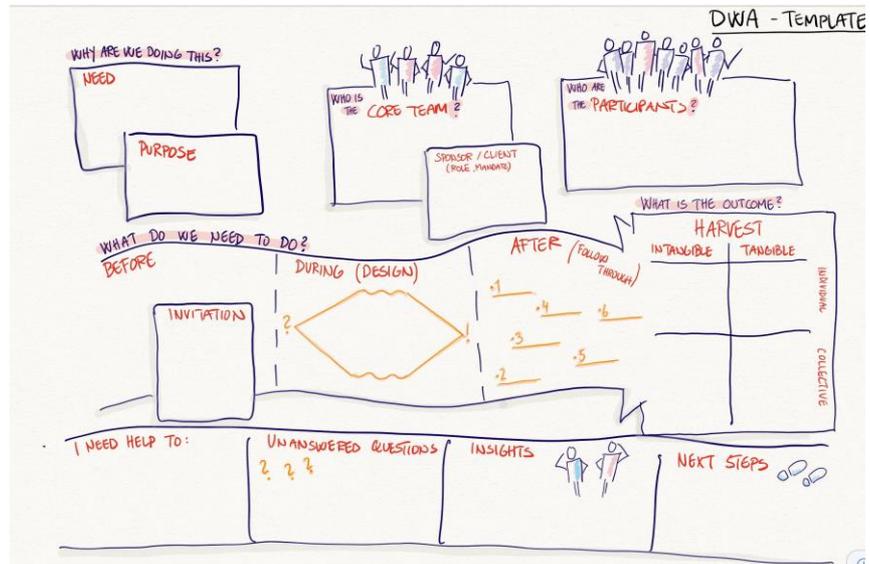
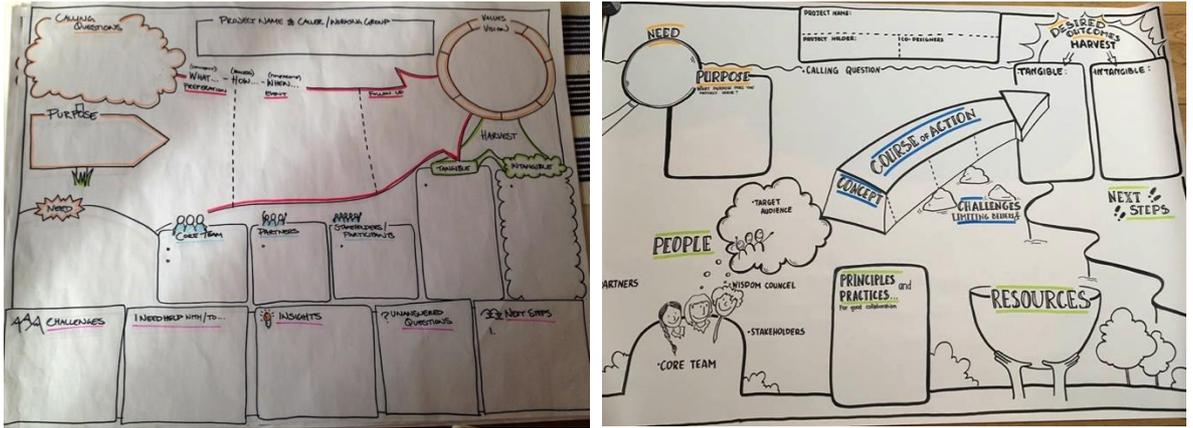
- Two peer coaching rounds, alternating teams
- Time for the callers to reflect alone

8. When the group comes back together

Callers again sit in the middle and answer these questions:

- What are you grateful for?
- What are your next two wise steps?

The Art of Participatory Leadership



Example of harvest templates. The template can be customised to each context.



## CORE METHODS

### Part 2 - Harvesting Conversations

#### The Art of Harvesting

The Art of Hosting community has adopted the term 'harvest' to refer to the process of capturing or recording the output/outcome of hosted conversations and reflecting the insights back to the group. This natural metaphor does justice to the systemic complexity of what is entailed.

**And what does *harvesting* mean?** It's about generating meaningful outcomes that add value. Harvesting can be created in many different forms – visuals, texts, stories, photos and a lot more. By making different perspectives visible we can be more mindful of what we use, how we use it and when. We also gain more clarity about what is needed when, as harvesting supports the unfolding of collective sense and meaning making.

One definition of good harvesting practice could be:

***“Anything that supports our individual and collective sense making and meaning making and thus supports our collective intelligence and clarity is good harvesting”***

In this section you will find an overview of the harvesting process, some specific methodologies that support a group in producing its own harvest through hosted conversation, and some tools and methods for capturing the output of hosted conversations, especially useful in the convergence phase of a process.





*The Art of Hosting and  
the Art of Harvesting  
dance together  
as two halves of the same thing.*

### **What if we start at the end**

What if we were planning not a meeting but a harvest? When we understand the process of meaningful conversations as a series of connected phases (“breaths”), we see that each must somehow feed into the next, and the oxygenation of the greater system requires the fruits of the conversation to leech out into the wider world. When approaching any meeting in this spirit, we must become clear about why we are initiating the process.

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?

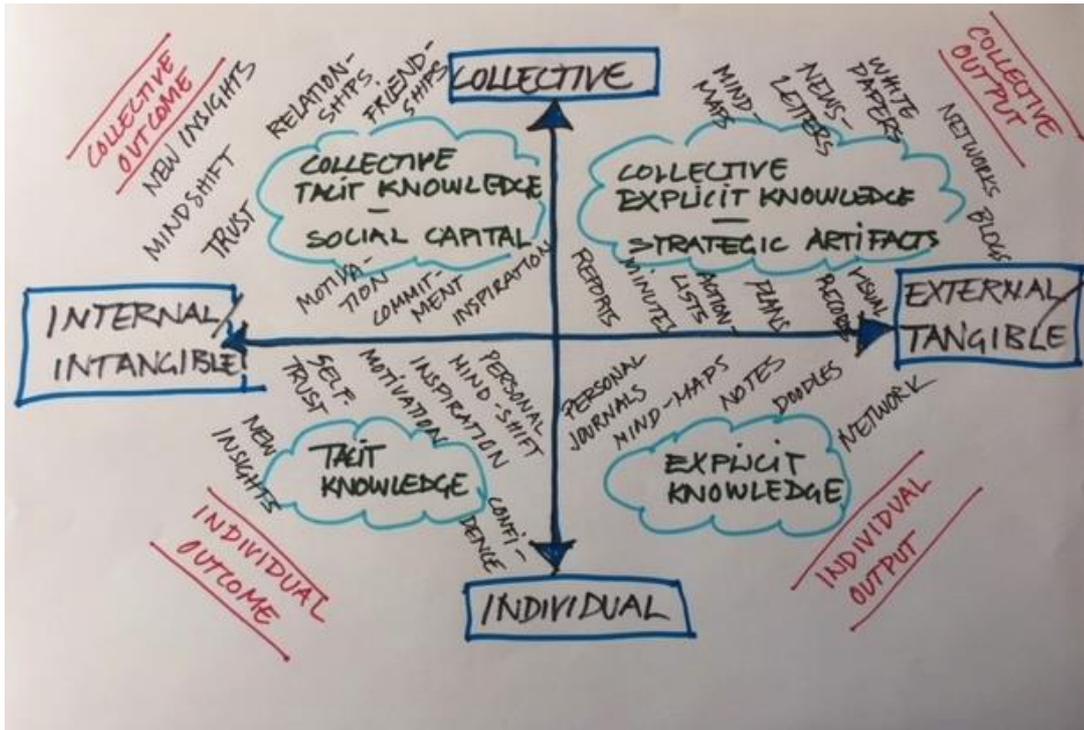
We first imagine the harvest from that field as a farmer using equipment to cut down the wheat, thresh it, and separate the seeds from the stalks. The farmer might store the grain, further refine it, sell it quickly or wait for the price to increase. Now imagine a geologist, a biologist and a painter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

## Strategic overview of the Art of Harvesting

### **The four quadrants of harvesting**

Working with hosting and harvesting participatory processes, we have discovered that there are different types of harvest, some of the harvest is **tangible or external** as artefacts, explicit models etc. other kinds of harvest are **intangible or internal** e.g. new insights or relationships etc. Similarly, we harvest **individually** as well as **collectively**.



### Individual and collective harvest

Change and evolution happens when our perspective and perception of the world changes. As individuals we constantly make sense of what we see and hear and what is happening around us. That is how we orient ourselves and we respond accordingly. In a way, we are harvesting all the time. **Individual harvest** in participatory processes can be supported through reflection, journaling etc. The individual harvest enhances individual learning and the individuals' contribution to the collective inquiry.

**Harvesting collectively is crucial when we need to act together and in alignment.**

There is a quote that has been attributed to Peter Senge saying that:

*“You can have a group of individually intelligent people, but until the group knows what it knows together, the group itself is not intelligent”.*

The quote may not be 100% accurate but the point remains. We need shared insights and a shared pool of knowledge to engage our collective intelligence. Harvesting collectively seems to have a greater potential for emergence and yields more than harvesting alone. It becomes the next level of conversation, a meta-level, where we make sense together.

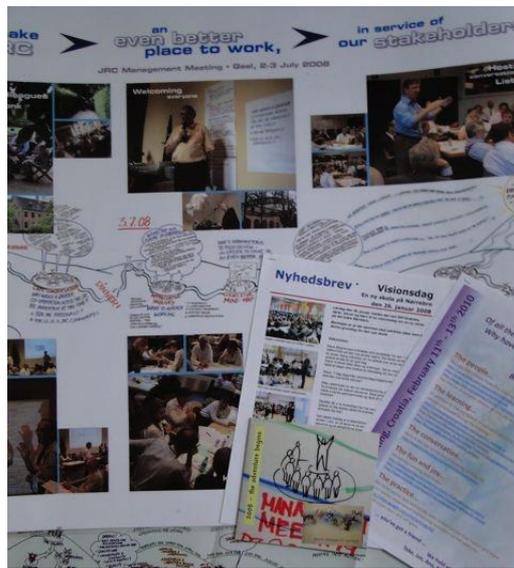
Some of the best experiences of harvesting have been when the stakeholders themselves have engaged 100% in the sense making and done it together, collectively.

This is sometimes not possible to do in a fully participatory manner due to time constraints or amount of people or data. If the stakeholders cannot do the harvest, it is wise to gather a good, inspired and diverse harvesting team, that have a diversity of perspectives and skills, and plan a way to feed the harvest back into the system (a feed-back loop), preferably real time.

**Tangible / external and intangible / internal harvest**

**Tangible artefacts:** Some of the main takeaways from a participatory meeting can be transformed into tangible artefacts e.g. newsletters, reports, visual records or landscapes, action-plans etc. that can serve the further development and work. The value of an artefact is, that it is tangible and visible, it can act both act as a tangible memory and it can also travel outside the room and over time, be it hard copy or electronic version.

**Strategic artefacts** can capture our collective clarity and understanding and will support our decision-making and our further work.



*“The quality of the intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener!”*

*Bill O’Brien*

**Intangible harvest:** Other major takeaways are internal and intangible e.g. mind-shifts, change of perspectives, motivation and commitment, new connections, trust in own colleagues and the work at hand, etc.

Change starts when our perspective changes and change is sustained by our trust, commitment, inspiration, motivation and valuable connections and relationships. When this happens collectively, it is called **“social capital”** and is crucial for any successful evolution or change-process in an organization or community. Social capital is almost always one of the fruits of participatory meetings, whether intended or not.

In a way this constitutes our collective tacit knowledge bank.

Both are needed to create sustainable change, development or growth.

**On an individual level** the **intangible** harvest builds our tacit knowledge bank. When we make this knowledge explicit through notes, mind-maps, articles etc. our knowledge becomes **tangible**. We become conscious of what we know as well as are able to share our knowledge with others. Nurturing our individual knowledge will enhance our ability to contribute to the collective knowledge.

## Collective Memory and Meaning

In harvesting it is good to create a collective (or individual) **memory = a record or data bank**, that you can return to when needed or use it to dive deeper into the subject matter if you need more detail or need to re-evaluate the data. A memory bank can be quite extensive and is not always actionable.

To create an overview and make data useful, we need to **make sense and meaning of the multitude of data we produce**. Data becomes information when it is put together to form a message and information becomes knowledge to us – when we need it – the rest is noise and is discarded by our conscious brain. Meaning is always created in relation to what we already know.

### The sense-making process

Crystallising the essence i.e. the sense-making happens through a process of clustering, analysing/synthesizing and prioritizing (not always in this order though). This is the way we can go from noise to clarity. Clarity is what we need to make choices and decide what we need to act on.

Part of this collective memory and meaning is created during a process or meeting through the shared insights and experiences. The purpose of the harvesting is to support both of these functions, and during the process the meaning-making (processing) part can enhance our shared learning real time.

The process of clustering-synthesizing-prioritising is a process of simplification. In the process of clustering and synthesizing we run the risk of losing the nuances, like going from colour to black-and-white.

The danger here can be oversimplification – ending up with themes and headlines that are so general they do not really communicate. E.g. we need “more co-operation” or “we need better communication”, which probably is true for a majority of companies and organisations. It is good to know the main area or theme, and it is also good to be a bit more specific. Bottom line is how much do we need in order to have sufficient information (detail) and still have the overview. **Be aware of the balance!**

### Using technology and other tools to process data

Data-handling and processing tools and skills can be very useful and in combination with the more qualitative harvest, it can lead to a potent and rich harvest of combining the quantitative with the qualitative.

Computer based tools are fast and “accurate” at data-processing but are not able to distinguish qualitative information as human beings can. Using computer-based tools gives us instant results but really requires asking the right questions and feeding the right data to get a useful output. – It is also good to have a plan-B if technology should fail.

## Who should do the harvesting?

*Whoever does the harvest will enjoy the fruits of it.*

“Picking the fruits” i.e. recording and transcribing, can be done by most people and can be delegated. But making sense of the multitude of input, noticing the emerging patterns, finding the seeds/questions to feed forward, is where the fruits of the harvesting really lie.

If we think of harvesting as collective meaning or sense making, then:

- Having one person make sense of the data in the end is like having everyone contributing but one (very important) brain cell making sense of it all.
- Having a diverse team make sense is having a few brain cells with diverse angles making sense together (like triangulating).
- Having the stakeholders themselves make sense together is like engaging the whole brain – less chance for misinterpretation and tends to yield a richer harvest.

**This meaning making is best done with the stakeholders, those who own the project, know the content and need to act on it.**

**On the other hand, if a wide buy in is needed, the more collectively the sense-making is done, the more ownership to the results there will be.**

*So consequently, one wise principle to follow is to build in as much as possible of the harvesting / sense making into the process, so that people concerned identify the important issues, themes or priorities.*

*This means allowing enough time for a convergent conversation after a divergent one. We can support this convergence through good process design.*

## Planning the harvest

Planning the harvest is happening as an integrated part of planning any participatory conversation or process. A conversation matters when it leads to something meaningful.

As a starting point for planning a good harvest it is wise to keep in mind the very purpose of harvesting:

***The purpose of the harvesting is to support individual and collective meaning or sense making, in other words, to support the collective intelligence of the group.***

*This would also include to make collective knowledge visible, accessible and useful, illuminate collective achievements and to give back energy to the group to continue working, staying together and being resourceful in the face/space of complexity for the life of the project*

## Setting the main “co-ordinates” or “fix-points” for the harvest.

There are some main coordinates or fix-points that need to be in place before you can design a good harvest.

*“The quality of the field determines the quality of the yield.”*  
Claus Otto Scharmer

- 1) **Assessing the Need** – what is the real need and how compelling is it.
- 2) **Understanding the Context** – what is the bigger context we are working in. (How does this process or event fit into everything else that is happening around it) Context determines tools, methods etc.
- 3) **Clarifying the Purpose** of the event, process or meeting
- 4) **Clarifying the “deliverables”** (tangible and intangible) – what output or outcome do you need to have as a result of the meeting or process to be able to move forward.
- 5) What is then the **purpose of the harvest**, in other words: Who will need it? When? For what purpose? etc. – Many times, there are more than one end user e.g. a CEO, board and/or the rest of the participants. They may need different kinds of harvest – one size does not fit all.

These are some of the main co-ordinates that can help us focus and design the harvest. Once they have been defined, they become the sounding board for planning the harvesting process.

### Designing the harvesting process

The second help to structuring is thinking of what we need to do or harvest before-during-and after the event. - Designing a good harvest is part of the process design and starts at the very beginning.

### Harvesting before the “event”

Before the event you need to prepare the field, design the harvest / make a harvest-plan, including a strategic choice of questions, processes, “baskets”(= how will you capture the output or data from the conversations) and help participants and the team to get ready and willing to give their best.

### Harvesting during the “event”

Any clarity that can be created, real time, during the process is useful (e.g. using clustering (bingo process), collective mind-mapping, voting, graphic recording, visual landscapes or templates, witnesses/rapporteurs, etc. Some of these harvests can be used right away to lead into a next conversation. Others may need a more thorough analysis before the results can be fed back.

Real time harvesting can be supported by electronic devices where participants can vote on given options instantly resulting in pie charts etc.

Using laptops and templates that participants fill out, real time, tends to give a more detailed harvest when content matters.

Some of the above methods help us stay with a shared bigger picture (seeing the forest not just the trees)

*“A thought which does not result in an action is nothing much, and an action which does not proceed from a thought is nothing at all.”*

*George Bernanos*

## Harvesting after the “event”

This is where the more detailed processing and digestion of data and information (output and outcomes) can take place as well as the main stakeholders (callers etc.) taking time to digest it and see what it means and use it for decisions, action plans etc.

When actions are implemented, they can lead to concrete **results**.

When concrete results are implemented, they can lead to change – having an effect or **impact** on the organisation, or system, that can be assessed (impact assessment), or in hindsight some **reflections** can be made on the overall journey and **what has been learned** from it on a more systemic level.

### Roles

Harvesting is not just one thing. *I find myself having 4 roles during the harvesting process. These roles do not come in a linear sequence but surface according to need during the process.*

- 1. Consultant** – This is where we can coach and consult the main stakeholders on what is possible and what is needed to get there. This phase / role is crucial because this is where we build the foundation for the understanding and acceptance of the harvesting part as well a commitment for the follow-up and follow-through. Without this foundation you can do a brilliant harvesting that leads nowhere.
- 2. Strategist** - Thinking strategically about what questions need to be asked, how you best capture the input, how the conversations and the harvesting can create clarity and momentum in the moment – and above all how these choices harmonise with the purpose and meet the deliverables (the needed outcome or output). **And last but not least how you build the harvesting into the process.**
- 3. Host** – Being a host for the whole harvesting process and the team or participants involved in harvesting.
- 4. Harvester** – actually engage in the recording, sense-making and production of the artefacts.



## A few principles for creating a good harvest

These could be some of the principles guiding our harvesting practice:

### Harvesting Principles

1. **Harvesting should serve the collective wisdom, intelligence and/or clarity of the organisation, group etc.**
2. **Let harvesting be part of your thinking and process-design from the very beginning,**
3. **Host the harvesting process** i.e. holding the intent for the whole time (before, during and after) and host the harvesting team.
4. **Let it be intentional, be clear on purpose and deliverables** i.e. know why you are harvesting something. What is the tangible output or intangible outcome needed? Who will need it? How will they use it? How will you capture it and process it?!
5. **Don't leave "loose ends"- make necessary feed-back loops** i.e. if you ask people to harvest something, think of how that harvest will be used, where it should go so it is useful and has leverage, do not just harvest for the sake of harvesting.
6. **Make it participatory** i.e. as much as possible build it into the design, let the stakeholders themselves make sense and meaning of what is emerging.
7. **Designing a good harvest is strategic.**
8. **Questions matter**, what and how you ask, determine what you get
9. Harvest can be both **intentional** (looking for something specific) **and emergent**, pay attention to both.
10. **Use many modalities of harvest and choose what is appropriate at any given time.** Different modalities e.g. written material, digital tools, visuals, stories, play etc. are each effective in different ways.
11. **Less is sometimes more.** The purpose is to create collective clarity, not to add to the collective confusion (overdoing it sometimes creates more noise than clarity).
12. **Use your own creativity and common sense**, there is no substitute for it.

## Overview of Harvesting Tools

The following is an overview of harvesting tools based on Participatory Leadership practices in the European Commission.

### Overview of Harvesting Tools

When?	What?	How?
PRE-EVENT – Preparing the ground, team, process and harvest	Context Needs Long-term purpose Short-term purpose of the process and purpose of the harvest Logistics	Team meetings (min. 3 x 1,5 h for a 1 day process): make sure all key players are there, especially the decision-makers Meeting reports Overview document that can become the process script and harvest plan later on Invitations to participants: - Save-the-date - Formal invitation - Welcome Letter (make it look special) Background document to be sent in advance to participants
	Stakeholders' perspectives	Pre-questions sent by participants or results of focus groups or individual interviews that can be synthesised (into a mind map for example) and shared with all beforehand Beware: do not ask for people's contributions if you are not going to use them!
	Conversation process and programme: red thread, key questions and steps	Process Script: background on context, needs, purpose Public Programme / Agenda Landscape Slide-show to guide the process throughout
	Harvesting process	Set up a diverse harvesting team to prepare and process the harvest Harvest plan Prepare your 'harvest basket' (harvest sheets, mind map, Landscape can also be used to harvest throughout the event, graphic record...)
DURING THE EVENT – Host and Harvest as much as possible in real time	Key inputs and perspectives	Key points of speakers / information and perspective givers / framers
	Outcomes of conversations	Who is in the room and why people are showing up Clustering of cards (on board, floor, bingo...) Harvesting templates, electronic or to be filled up by hand (sheets with guiding questions e.g. in World Café, Open Space session, Pro Action Café...)
	Big picture – Meta-harvest and key patterns	Collective mind map (electronic or handmade) Graphic Recording Landscape Diagrams Distillations Feed forward Rapporteurs and witnesses
	Prioritised leverage points	Voting with sticky dots on collective mind map or clustered cards Electronic device Decisions council (thumbs up, sideways, down)
	Memory of the event: people, relationships, inspirations...	Photography Video Music Poetry Theatre
AFTER THE EVENT – Digesting and synthesising towards follow-up	Key messages	Executive summary for busy readers (1-2 pages) Newsletter: short with key messages from the whole process
	Full outcomes of the process	Full record with all details of the material harvested throughout the process
	New knowledge Next actions	Follow-up meeting with the whole team and the decision-makers
	Actual next steps	Implementing actions Embedding follow-up in daily activities Researching more – next level of inquiry Tracking developments with stakeholders
	Continuing the conversation and engagement with stakeholders afterwards	On-line follow-up conversations: Ning, Linked in, Facebook... Planning the next process with stakeholders if any
	Story and impact of the process	Organise a story-telling session with some distance from the process to further learn from it

## Some examples of Harvesting & Convergence Methodologies

There are many ways to collect the results of important conversations and to make sense of them. These are just a few examples. Be creative and adapt them to your context and needs.

### Spoken or written harvest

#### Harvesting a check-in circle by dedicated harvesters:

When you open a process and invite a group to check in for example in circle, it usually is delicate to ask people to write on cards because you need them to become present to themselves and to the process first. So, a good solution is for a pair of dedicated harvesters to write in turn the contribution from everyone. They should ideally sit next to each other with a card of stack and a marker each so they can complement each other and avoid duplications. After the circle they may display the cards on a board or a flipchart and cluster the contributions by meaning to surface the patterns.

#### Cards Harvest after a World Café or in Circle:

After a Café session, you may invite each person in the room to identify their key insights or questions inspired by the conversation they have just taken part in. A good way of then collecting the cards/insights on a board or a wall is to ask anyone to start with one (and only one) item and for the others to attentively listen and add to this item something similar or close. This way, the participants themselves create some natural clusters of meaning. Ideally, as a host, let the group make sense for themselves or have a dedicated host by the board helping with the clustering (to avoid getting trapped into the content). You can propose the same process in circle with cards dropped on the floor and clustered in real time. The method always needs to be adapted to the size of the group and the context you work in.



### Sharing results collected on flipchart sheets

Certainly, one of the most often used ways of converging the reflections after any type of process (Open Space, World Café, Ritual Dissent...). The hosts of the sessions or spokespersons of the groups bring their flipchart into the group (usually in circle) and speak in turn what their key findings are (issues explored, solutions identified, next steps...). Keeping the discipline of the speakers when time becomes short can be a challenge!

### Exhibition/Maxi-Gallery Walk after an Open Space session

With large groups it is more difficult to apply the flipchart technique above because of the time needed for it. You can organise an exhibition style in one or two rounds where you invite each session host to very briefly (30 seconds to a minute max.) share their key insights, more as a way of pitching their session for more people to join the more in-depth sharing moment that follows. Once each session host has spoken, you apply Open Space principles again and people can go to learn from and contribute to the session(s) of their choice. This enables the host to enrich his/her harvest with new perspectives.

### Meta reflection

A collective meta-reflection can be a good way of creating a bigger picture / meta harvest of insights. Usually it is done in a circle using a simple structure or compass of four directions. North stands for “courageous leadership, breaking new ground”, East stands for “vision and creativity”, South stands for “community”, West stands for “action”. Anyone can step into the circle and share their individual or collective insights relating to the four directions.

### Collective mind-map

A collective mind-map is a quick and simple way to create a shared overview of issues and opportunities relevant to a particular subject or challenge. The mind-map can be done either on a large sheet of paper or electronically, with a mind-map program, projected on a screen. *For more see dedicated section above.*



### Live clustering of individual key items:

Imagine for example that you invited a group to share in Appreciative Inquiry mode the success stories they are most proud of in their work and you want to distil out of those stories the strengths demonstrated. At the end of the interview phase, invite each person to write on a card the key strength from his/her story. You then invite people to find each other in the room who have the same or similar or close items. In a very lively manner people will self-organise in a short time in groups of different size and in a completely unpredictable manner. It is effective with groups of any size. A group of 100 people will organise themselves in 2 to 3 minutes maximum. Once the groups have formed themselves, go from one group to another (use a mike if necessary) and ask them to share their key concept with everyone and maybe add some nuances from their conversations. You may want to invite the groups to stick their key concept and all their cards on a board. This can also lead

to a next step where you invite people to reflect, in their groups, what could be done in this area if the process was about surfacing key challenges or possible improvements or key developments needed.

**Having a check-out circle harvested by the participants themselves:**

A good and swift way of checking out of a process is to invite participants to identify their key learning from the process, write it on a card, drop it on the floor in front of them so you can see when everybody is ready and then hear what is on the card (and nothing more). This allows a group of 100 people to check out in less than 10 minutes. And you collect all insights afterwards.

**Taking pictures during a participatory process:**

Taking pictures helps to focus one's attention on the process and to better sense what is happening in the process as it is unfolding. It also helps to memorise people's faces. It is very much recommended to systematically take pictures of all pieces of harvesting, in case they would ever get lost. If you take pictures of the conversations, always ask for permission to everyone and mention the use you intend to make of them.

**Using cards, harvest sheets or templates:**

It is often useful to use harvesting sheets to capture key insights from a process. This captures more data or information than the spoken word. The contents can then be displayed or processed according to need.

Another practice that is often used is asking participants (individually or in groups) to capture key insights on individual cards. This allows key insights to be captured and clustered.

Templates, as well as harvest sheets, usually have a set of guiding questions. This makes the output more coherent and comparable. The questions need to be custom made for each context to capture the data needed and they also need to be open and carefully crafted so as not to overly directive or prescriptive.

Pre-defined templates are often used to collect the key results of Open Space or Pro Action Café sessions. They can be made available on flipcharts or - ideally - on an electronic template when laptops are available to type in the results in real time. The results will then be presented by the hosts to the plenary, projected on screen and/or inserted into the report of the process.

Visual templates are excellent in many contexts e.g. used for exhibitions, in creative processes or with children.

**Creating a newsletter / harvest letter / report of the process:**

Such a harvest letter will contain all results of the process. It will serve as a living memory of the process, especially when it can be illustrated with pictures. This always has a very positive impact on the participants, especially if it can be delivered swiftly after the event. It can also inform those who could not be there. And above all it will be an invaluable source of information for the follow-up. Depending on the context and the needs, you may produce a shorter version with the key insights (sort of executive summary) and an extensive version with all detailed results (record). Important: ideally you should plan for a dedicated harvesting team during the process and the newsletter could

be delivered the day after. If that is not possible, always plan time in your Calendar to create it, otherwise it will become a burden afterwards and risks to never be issued and eventually be a source of frustration. Again, develop your own template and enjoy yourselves while doing it!

## Using other modalities for harvest

### Landscaping or “learnscape”

A landscape is a visual representation of a participatory process. It includes both what we are going to do during the process and how we are going to work together.

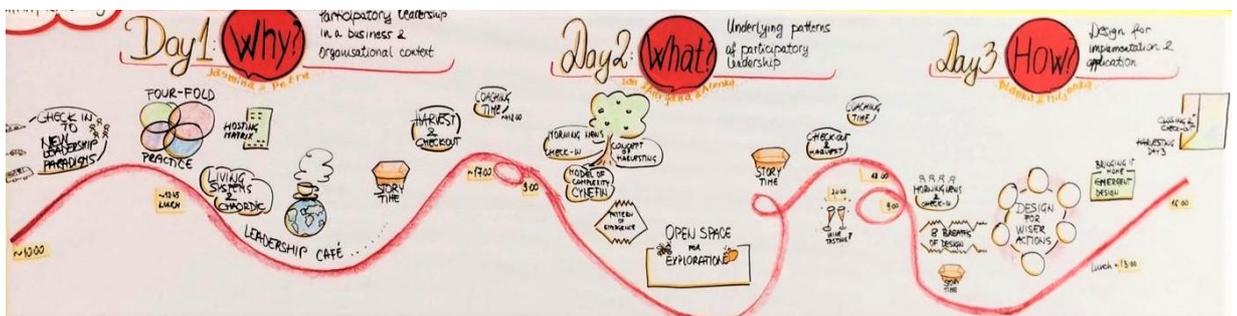
In the preparation phase by the hosting team, drawing a visual Landscape is very effective to make visible the red thread of a process, and how each step will build on each other. There may be several interactions needed. At the same time, it functions as a visual agenda.

It does not need to be very graphically advanced. Simple 'clouds' already help to have a more visual representation of the inner logic of the process. And in any case, the graphics should not hide the content but support it.

During the participatory process, a Landscape is a good way to raise people's curiosity about the process as soon as they enter the room, to present the process at the start, and to have a dedicated and visible space where to harvest the key results of conversations.

“Learnscape”- once you use the landscape to harvest key insights into, as you go along, it becomes a record or harvest of the event, i.e. a learnscape. Sometimes, this is enough as a memory or even report of an event. It also helps to easily bring the latecomers into the process. You can also use it at the end of the process as a way of checking out, by inviting participants to add their key learning's or 'A-ha' moments with post-its or markers. After the process has ended

Using a landscape or learnscape in this way can create a coherent visual memory based on key insights, at the same time as offering an overview.





**Music, poetry, sketches etc.**

These are all different modalities of harvesting. They are particularly strong in creating fun and an informal atmosphere, which are all great for building relationships and social capital.

**Story**

Story is another means of harvesting that is extremely potent in making sense of complex situations and contexts. – The next chapter introduces a method, based on sharing stories, that has been evolved from our practice. See “Collective Story Harvesting”

**Using different modalities**

Mixing and using different modalities can be very useful. We need a joyful good atmosphere to connect and open up, but we also need to engage our brains and discover what we know together in a more cognitive way. – The context may determine what is most useful.



## Collective Story Harvesting

**Collective Story Harvest** is a methodology developed in the Art of Hosting Community. Mary Alice Arthur has been instrumental to the co-creation and honing of this method. As this method has a strong focus on harvesting and sense making, it is part of the harvesting section instead of the hosting section, even though it is a hosted process.

**Storytelling** is mankind's oldest knowledge management tool – and still one of the most effective. Our stories contain both the experience and learning that can grow our capacity to function in our complex contexts.



**Collective harvesting** allows us to track many threads or aspects of a single story simultaneously. We can practice targeted listening, group learning and collective meaning making, as well as offering a tremendous gift to the story holder. Group harvesting is an ideal way to surface the many insights, innovations and a-ha's that dwell beneath the surface of our stories, using the full wealth of the diverse perspectives present in any group in order to enrich the experience and understanding of the group as a whole.

### Preparation Phase

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

**Allow enough time** - You need to allow at least 90 minutes for the whole process. If you're working with people who haven't done this type of process before, keep the storytelling to around 30 minutes so people don't get overloaded. If you want to maximise the learning around a story, you may want to work on the interplay between story, harvest and learning for half a day, a day or even longer.

### Select the story with care

- You will need a story that is *relevant* to the purpose and the context or system you wish to serve with this exercise. Ideally it should have enough *complexity, scale* and *duration* to make it interesting.

- The best people to tell the story are those who are directly connected to it. It can be more interesting to hear from more than one person involved in the story. More voices add depth and richness, as well as a variety of points of view.
- The story does not have to be an often-told one, or polished in any form. In fact, this process can be used to help polish a story and enable the storytellers to focus and refine it for different audiences.

### **Take care with your invitation**

Be intentional about how you invite the story holders to come and tell their story. Stories respond to invitation, and when a heartfelt invitation is present, often a story will come out in a whole new way and offer new learning to those telling it. A group harvest is a gift to those telling *and* those harvesting and should be offered as such.

### **Select the threads**

Decide on the threads you want to harvest. Ideally, this should be agreed with the story holders and the listeners, depending on where they want to focus their learning. Take as much time as you need to discuss exactly what you want to get out of this process and what will happen to the harvest afterwards. You'll need at least one person harvesting each thread you've chosen, and more than one person can harvest the same thread simultaneously.

### **Possible threads to choose from:**

- Narrative thread - The thread of the story – people, events, stages. You might also capture facts, emotions and values that are part of the story.
- Process - What interventions, processes, applications, discoveries happened?
- Pivotal points - When did breakthroughs occur? What did we learn?
- Application - What can we learn from this story about application in our own or other systems?
- Taking change to scale – What can we learn from this story about taking change to scale?
- Questions – What questions arise from this story that we could ask of any system?
- When things just came together – What were the times when the right people showed up and things just flowed naturally? (Synchronicity & magic)
- Specific theme – Harvest the story using a specific theme (like participatory leadership) and see what it tells you.
- Specific participatory leadership patterns – e.g. the eight breaths of process design: where did each breath occur during the story? The 5th organisational paradigm: Where did new forms of governance and working occur? Core team/calling team: What did we learn about holding the centre of this work?
- Principles – What principles of working can be gleaned from this story? What principles of complex living systems were reflected in this work?
- Challenges encountered and how they were overcome
- The story field - How did the field of the system's story change? Can you name the story or metaphor the system started with and what it moved to?

### **Identify other possible harvesting modes**

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

### **Suggested process**

If you only have one story or have more than one story, but decide to share all stories in plenary, then follow the process described below.

In case you have more than one story to share and want to do parallel story sessions you start by allowing the storytellers to briefly introduce the theme and scope of their story in plenary. After the introduction, participants can choose the story they find most relevant to their context. Still making sure that all stories are covered with a minimum of participants. Once the groups are formed, they go to their allocated space and share the stories following the process described below. It is recommended that each session is hosted.

**Framing and introduction:** Welcome people to the session. Make the invitation publicly to the storytellers. Explain the harvesting threads and ask for volunteers.

**Storytelling:** Ask the storytellers to tell the story and the group to harvest. Be clear about the time allocated for the storytelling. (It can be helpful to use a chime to let the storytellers know when they have 5 minutes left)

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

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

**Closing the session:** Thank the storytellers and the harvesters. Any final remarks about what will happen to the harvest now that it has been heard. Is there enough here to return to it again and see what else surfaces? Do you want to come back as a group and hear the next version of the story?

### **Materials and set-up**

**Room set-up:** Ideally create a large circle with the storytellers as part of the circle. You may need some small tables for those harvesting onto flipcharts (if needed).

**Supplies:** coloured pens and other art supplies.

**Equipment:** Recording equipment if you want to video the process and its results.

Camera to photograph any graphic harvests there might be.

**What else is collective story harvesting good for?**

### **For the story holders**

Collective harvesting is an ideal input both for taking stock of the learning so far in a project and for polishing a story so that it can be told to another audience. Having external ears listen to your story can help to surface things you haven't seen or haven't taken notice of during the time you were living

in the experience. Often an experience is so complex and moves forward with such speed that it is almost impossible to see how it all fits together from the inside.

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

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

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

#### **For the Listeners and Harvesters**

If storytelling is a skill that is both inherent to humans and one that can be polished with practice, then so is listening. Listening is the companion skill to storytelling; indeed the story arises in the space between the teller and the listener. In essence, a story *needs* a listener to become what it can be. We don't often get the opportunity to listen well, especially with a specific purpose, and to provide a necessary feedback loop to those within a committed project. Group story harvesting can provide such a practice and feedback loop, strengthening the community around a project shared in this way. Harvesting is also a skill that needs practice, and it is important to experience the wide variety of ways a story or an experience can be harvested, each bringing its own richness, much as another facet brings sparkle to a gemstone. Purposeful harvesting is both a good experience and an excellent way to practice. Story listeners and harvesters may want to debrief afterwards on their experience, surfacing their challenges and learning as a way for the group to become more skilful in the future.

#### **For the wider community and networks**

Harvests of projects that have gone to scale, as well as those that have faced many challenges are a valuable contribution to the wider community and beyond, helping us to increase the learning within our networks. Sharing practice stories is one of the quickest ways for principles and practices in any field to be understood and integrated.

#### **The strengths of Collective Story Harvesting**

- It can deal with complex realities and bring simplicity as well as surface understanding and learning from complexity.
- It is a harvesting of current reality – how we got to where we are now?
- It creates a rich learning field.
- It creates a strong connection and shared understanding between those involved in the process.
- It is a gift to the storytellers and others, with lots of resonant learning happening.

- It is a simple, but powerful tool that can be used regularly to take stock, capture learning and refocus the field.

### Applying collective story harvesting

There are many ways to apply collective story harvesting:

**Systemic story harvest for applied learning:** *a group focuses on one systemic story to harvest the learning's and apply them to its own work.* As in the process described above, a systemic story is told, the group harvests threads and discusses the learning's. This works equally well for a practice group or a working team or hearing a story from another organisation.

**Full system team building/strategy session:** *Harvesting an organisation or group's own story for learning, teambuilding and strategic enhancement.* Working with the story in this way brings the group into a collective field of meaning. Vision or mission statements can be enhanced and integrated, strategic plans can be invigorated.

**Many stories/collective learning:** *Harvesting a variety of stories simultaneously in small groups, then converging the learning across the full group.* A variety of stories are selected that offer different aspects to the group. Participants attend and harvest the story that most interests them. Collective meta-learning is harvested by the full group.

**Creating a new field of work or practice:** *Telling the story of the wider context up to now in order to set the scene for the new work or practice field to arise in find its potent focus.* This process might also be used for systemic evaluation.

*Adapted from the document of the same name by Mary Alice Arthur, which can be found at: <http://artofhosting.ning.com/page/core-art-of-hosting-practices>*

Other ways of harvesting stories may include graphic recording or music



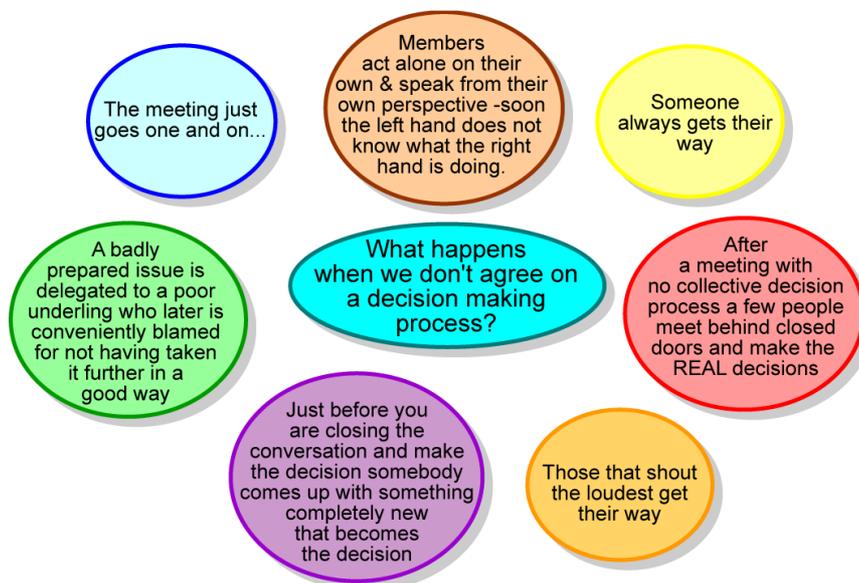
## Decision-Making

With inspiration from “Facilitator’s Guide to Collective Decision Making” Sam Kaner & all

In working with participatory processes, the important thing is to agree on the decision-making process ahead of time. Consensus usually ensures that everyone is on board and ready to act once the decision has been taken. Other agreements can be to settle for 75% consensus, or have a democratic decision-making process, or simply collect in-put and let a chosen group make the decision—whatever serves the purpose best.

### What Happens When You Don’t Agree on a Decision-Making Process?

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



### Consensus Decision-making

Consensus can be a very powerful model of participatory decision-making when it is to be a “win-win” process and held as integral to the purpose of the group. Although it is sometimes abandoned as being overly complex and time consuming, consensus decision-making in itself opens the process to careful consideration, listening, and negotiation.

In this context, decisions must be fully understood and agreed to by all members of the group, and the group holds the process of making a decision, which is in the best interests of everyone.

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

***Consensus does not mean going for the lowest common denominator, but truly finding the most sustainable solution for all, in other words; looking for the highest possible agreement!***

Source: Sam Kaner & all, Facilitators Guide to Participatory Decision

### A simple way to use consensus decision making

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.

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.

It may take a few iterations before you reach consensus.

# PROCESS DESIGN – BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

*The following pages give a short introduction about how to combine and apply some of the Core Methodologies in implementing Participatory leadership in a strategic organisational context.*

The following qualities or conditions support a successful implementation.

- Participatory leadership and the approach described in this workbook are particularly useful when **working with complexity** (complex problems and situations), where there are no clear, unambiguous, fixed solutions, but where the context is constantly changing, and you have to work flexibly with what is **emerging**.
- To create a successful intervention **you have to plan a process not an event**. This means that there is a preparatory phase or process, the actual engagement process (one event or a series of events), and a follow-up process, each with some steps that need to be clarified before proceeding to the next phase or “breath”. (See The 8 breaths of design)
- Planning and designing an **emergent process or strategy** (rather than a prescriptive one) means operating in the “**chaordic space**.” (See “The Chaordic path” in the “Basic Assumptions and Core Patterns Section” section).
- Designing a process in this context means creating a framework or light structure (process design) within which one can operate and produce results in an environment of self-organising order rather than control.
- The “Chaordic stepping stones” and “Chaordic design process” offer a step-to-step approach to structuring and creating progress in this space.
- A good knowledge of the methods and means available will allow you to choose **the right means for the right situation**.
- A good process design is **responding to the need in the moment**, allowing yourself to be well prepared but flexible and able to respond to what is actually happening.
- **Fully combining and integrating content with process, each in support of the other is crucial for creating good results**. (A good content combined with a poor process or a good process without some real content, both fall short of the mark.)
- To be able to operate well in this environment one needs to **embrace both the ability to work in a highly structured way as well as in a “chaordic” way**. The 5<sup>th</sup> paradigm shows a way of organising that combines both. (See the 5<sup>th</sup> organisational paradigm).

In the following we are offering two, slightly different but related, design tools.

1. The seven little helpers a generic and simple checklist for hosts.
2. **The chaordic stepping stones.** A way to structure a complex project / process and stay open and flexible as long as possible. These stepping stones were first defined by Dee Hock, who was part of the team creating the VISA card.
3. **The 8 “breaths” of phases of design.** A description of eight phases of process design. Things to consider before, during and after a participatory process. This model has emerged from many years of practical experience in our network.

## Seven Little Helpers

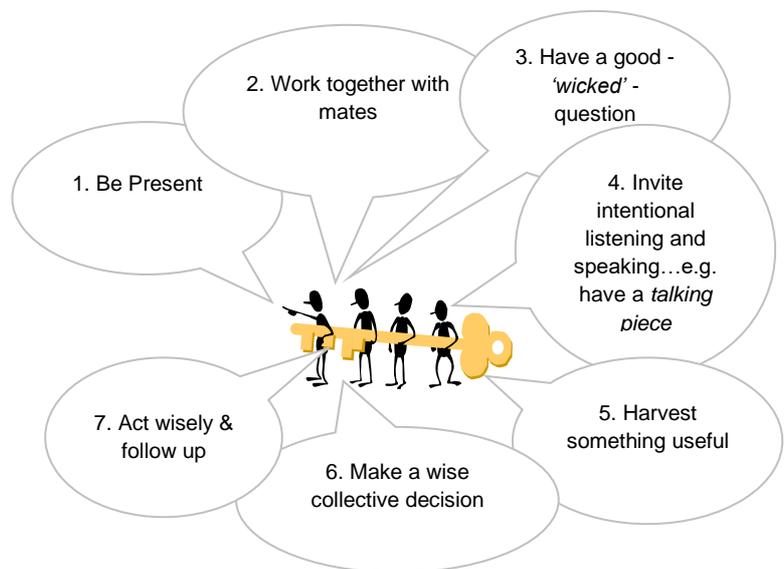
In one of the early Art of Hosting Trainings, after having spent three days exploring mental models and conversational tools, one of the participants asked Toke Møller, one of the facilitators, what you need as a minimum to host a strategic conversation. The answer was:

- 1) Be present!
- 2) Have a good & powerful question?
- 3) And have a stone—a talking piece, which is the simplest structure or tool that can be used to create intentional speaking and listening—all other conversational tools and methods are just more sophisticated versions of the talking piece.

Over the years, these initial three tools have expanded to include ‘seven helpers’ that are the source of good conversational design. At the bare minimum, if you use these tools, conversations will grow deeper and work will occur at a more meaningful level.

These seven helpers bring form to fear and uncertainty and help us stay in the chaos of not knowing the answers. They help us to move through uncomfortable places together, like conflict, uncertainty, fear and the groan zone and to arrive at wise action.

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



## Be present

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

- Start with a moment of silence or a prayer, when appropriate, or..
- Check in with a personal question related to the theme of the meeting, or..
- Pass a talking piece and provide space for each voice to be heard, or ..
- Or simply start by hearing everyone's needs, concerns or wishes for the topic or meeting you are entering.
- Start well. Start slowly. Check everyone in.

## Have a Good Question

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

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

## 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 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. In this way, for instance, 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 purpose of the meeting to find the right structure for each situation.

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

## Harvest

The purpose of harvesting is to support our collective sense- or meaning making, so that we can be wiser and act wisely together. Never meet unless you plan to harvest your learning's. 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.

*For more information on Powerful questions see "Powerful Questions" section*

*For more information consult The Art of Harvesting booklet available from Monica Nissén or Chris Corrigan*

*Or read the chapter on the "Art of Harvesting"*

To harvest well, be aware of four things:

1. Create an artefact. Harvesting is about making knowledge visible. Make a mind map, draw pictures, take notes, but whatever you do create a record of your conversation. An artefact can act both as a tangible memory and it can also travel be it hard copy or electronic version.
2. Have a feedback loop. Artefacts are useless if they sit on the shelf. Know how you will use your harvest before you begin your meeting. Is it going into the system? Will it create questions for a future meeting? Is it to be shared with people as news and learning? Figure it out and make plans to share the harvest, be it before, during or after the meeting.
3. 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.
4. 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.

#### **Make a Wise Decision**

If your meeting needs to come to a decision, make it a wise one. It is useful to have an agreement on a decision-making process ahead of time. There are many different methods to choose from ranging from informed authoritarian decision making, to democratic decision making or to consensus. Wise decisions emerge from conversation, not voting. The simplest way to arrive at a wise decision is to use a consensus decision making process (see the chapter on decision making above in the Harvest section)

#### **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 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.

#### **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

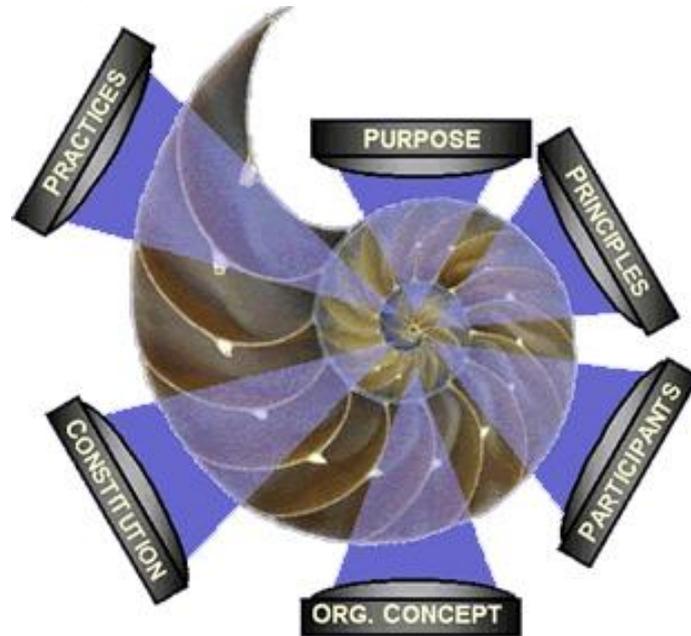
*For more, refer to The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making. Sam Kaner & all*

*Or the chapter on decision making in the harvest section.*

## The Chaordic Design Process

The following model is adapted from Dee Hock founder of VISA .

*The  
Chaordic  
Design  
Process was  
first time  
described by  
Dee Hock  
CEO and  
creator of  
the VISA  
card*



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 can examine the circumstances giving rise to the need for a new organisation or to re-conceive an existing one.

Developing a self-organising, self-governing organisation worthy of the trust of all participants usually requires intensive effort. To maximise their chances of success, most groups take a year or more to go through the process. During that time, a representative group of individuals (sometimes called a drafting team) from all parts of the engaged organisation or community meet regularly and work through the chaordic design process.

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

### **Develop a Statement of Purpose**

The first step is to define—with absolute clarity and deep conviction—the purpose of the community. An effective statement of purpose will be a clear, commonly understood statement of what 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/job would have meaning."

### **Define a Set of Principles**

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

descriptive, not prescriptive, and each principle will illuminate the others. Taken as a whole, together with the purpose, the principles constitute the body of belief that will bind the community together and against which all decisions and acts will be judged.

#### **Identify All Participants**

With clarity about purpose and principles, the next step is to identify all relevant and affected parties—the stakeholders whose needs, interests and perspectives must be considered in conceiving (or re-conceiving) the organisation. As the 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 organisational concept is sought.

#### **Create a New Organisational Concept**

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

#### **Write a Constitution**

Once the organisational concept is clear, the details of organisational 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 organisation 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 organisation trusted by all. Purpose is then realised far beyond original expectations, in a self-organising, 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 difficulties are frequently encountered, moving onto the next stage too quickly and allowing the striving for perfection to bog down the process. The first difficulty is common when working on purpose and principles, where agreement on "platitudes" can often be reached even when underlying differences persist. In these situations, finding an easy answer that pleases everyone is not enough; digging deeper to find richer and more meaningful understanding and agreement is essential. This can be taken to an extreme, of course, which leads to the second risk. Perfection is not required and will never be attained. Getting a very good answer that is "good enough" to move

on to the next step is the goal. Keep in mind that what is done at each stage will be subsequently refined.

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

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

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

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

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

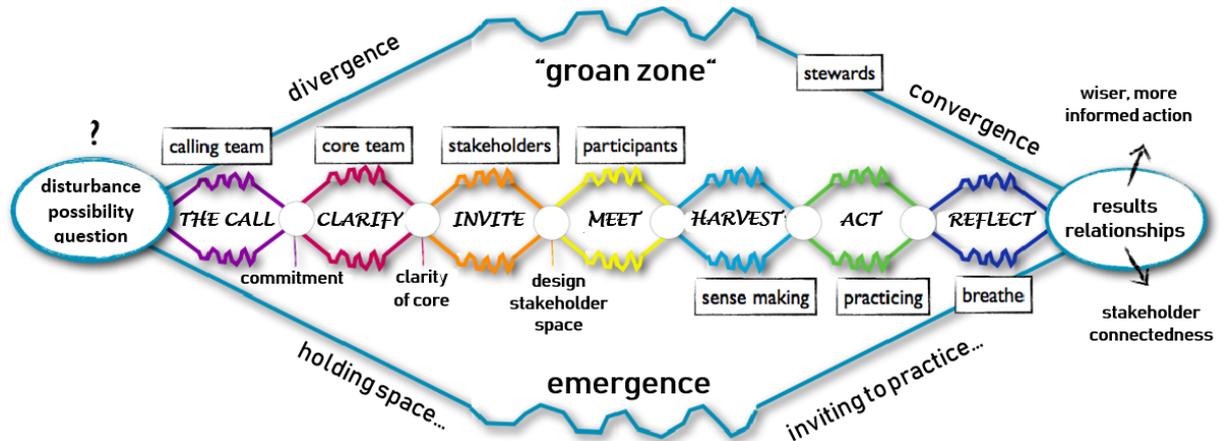
**Ongoing analytic and educational support for participants in the process.** Issues invariably arise that require more detailed research or attention by a special team. Research on industry-specific matters or mapping potential participants and their current relationships to each other, are examples.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

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

## The 8 'Breaths' of Process Design

Over the years many hosts have seen their work with different (larger scale) initiatives as a sequence of different 'breaths', different phases of divergence and convergence. This iterative flow has become known among practitioners as the 'Eight Breaths'. As we learn through reflecting on our work, this pattern will no doubt become clearer and change over time.

Process overview:



### First Breath: The CALL

**Name the issue:** calling the core question—birth of the callers

**Who:** The caller or callers

We have noticed that there is always 'a caller', a person who recognises a need, who deeply holds a question, a problem or a challenge. Sometimes there are several callers.

**Wise action:** Stay with the need. Focus on holding the collective uncertainty and fear.

**Question:** What is really at stake here? Are we willing to take this on? Who else needs to be here to make this happen?

**The harvest of this phase:** is the **commitment to move on**. The stronger the need, the stronger the call and the stronger is the commitment to act on it.

### Second Breath: CLARIFY - CLARITY OF PURPOSE

**Creating the ground / first level of clarity.**

**Who:** the callers and key stakeholders (core team)

The callers and key stakeholders work to create collective clarity of purpose and the first articulation of principles.

**Wise action:** engagement

**Question:** How to get from need to purpose? What is our real purpose?

**The harvest of this phase:** is the **shared clarity of purpose – a calling question** (i.e. the purpose formulated as an open calling question)

### Third Breath: PREPARE & INVITE

**Who:** The callers, key stakeholders and any key resources, the wider team needed.

This phase is about giving form and structure: It involves the groundwork of creating the financial and structural foundation, planning, designing both the process and the harvest, and getting ready to invite participants.

Wise action: keep checking to be sure your design and invitation serve the purpose

Question: How do we invite people to participate in a way that moves them to show up?

The harvest of this phase: **Readiness and engagement to meet.**

#### **Fourth Breath: MEET**

Who: The wider team and all the participants

Wise action: Being present, good hosting, engagement in conversations that matter.

Wise Action: our role is to host the group, the purpose, and the questions and to capture the results (harvest). Don't go alone.

Question: How can I best serve to allow the collective wisdom to emerge?... and make meaning together. During the meeting and when the meeting is done, the group of stakeholders find collective meaning and start to co-create. This is where the harvest is important—to capture key messages and insights and make sense of them.

#### **Fifth Breath: HARVEST - MAKE SENSE AND MEANING**

Who: Callers & Core / Harvesting team.

Wise action: Make sense of what has been surfaced. Harvest the harvest. Make the needed wise decisions for the wiser way forward.

Question: What are the key insights? What do we need to act on? Who will do it? What's next?

Harvest: **clarity on a way to move forward, decisions.**

#### **Sixth Breath: ACT**

Who: this could be the core team, the callers or be delegated to other key experts or project teams, depending on the context.

Practice: Perform the wise actions decided on during the conversation and harvest. Follow-up.

Wise Action: Always come back to purpose. Don't lose sight of the purpose or it won't be embodied

Question: How do we sustain the momentum? How do we measure and inform of our progress? How do we keep stakeholders in the loop?

#### **Seventh Breath: REFLECT AND LEARN**

Reflection in the core team and with key stakeholders. What have we learned? Have we gained results in alignment with need and purpose? What are the next long-term steps? Etc.

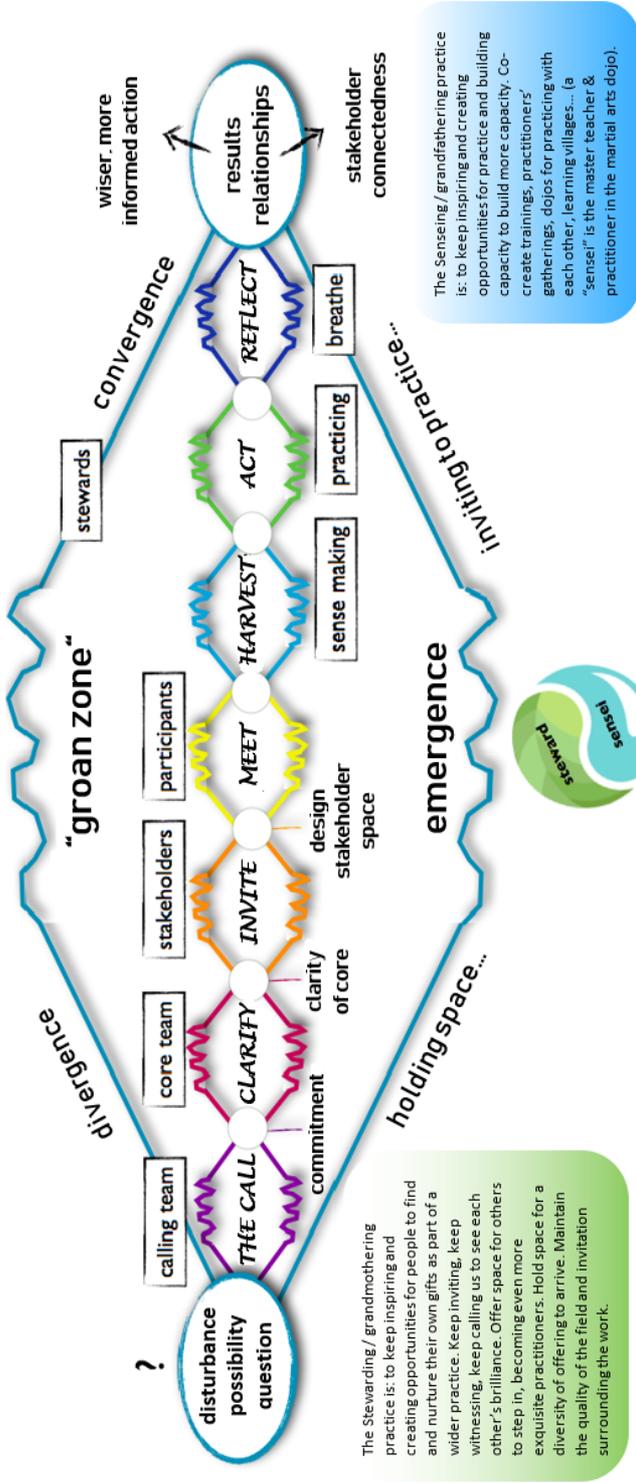
After the actions have been taken and implemented, the actual impact can be measured

#### **Eighth Breath: THE BREATH THAT HOLDS THE WHOLE**

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 wellbeing of everyone in this system.

*Although the above is 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*

# The 8 Breaths of Process Architecture



## First Breath: The CALL

- Name the issue: calling 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 ones who invite the host(s) to help them.
- Wise actions: Focus the chaos of holding the collective uncertainty and fear – step into the centre of the disturbance
- Don't move too fast
- Questions: What is really at stake here? What if some of us work together to surface the real questions and need that matters to community?
- When the caller has committed to call the process, we go to the next phase.

## Second Breath: CLARIFY

- Creating the ground: the callers and hosts work together to create collective clarity of purpose and first articulation of principles
- Wise action: engagement
- Don't make assumptions
- Questions: How to get from need to purpose? What is our purpose?
- How to see and feed the group value?
- This phase is over once the core of clarity has emerged.

## Third Breath: INVITE

- Giving form and structure: design the process and invitation
- 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)
- Questions: 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 here?
- The meeting has been designed, a larger group of stakeholders has been invited, a good meeting space has been found: it's time to meet!

## Fourth Breath: MEET

- Meeting: Conversation! Don't go alone (depending on the size of the group and knowledge/experience)
- Wise action: our role is to host the group, the purpose, the questions
- Questions: How can I best serve as the instrument / container to allow collective wisdom to emerge?
- During the meeting and when the meeting is done, the group of stakeholders find collective meaning and start to co-create. This is where the harvest is important – to capture key messages and insights and make sense of them.

## Fifth Breath: HARVEST

- Who: Callers & Core / Harvesting team
- Wise action: Make sense of what has been surfaced and meaning together
- Questions: What are the key insights? What do we need to act on? Who will do it and when?
- Harvest clarity on a way to move forward, decisions.

## Sixth Breath: ACT

- Core team, the callers, delegates, experts, project teams – depending on the context.
- Perform the actions agreed on during the conversation and harvest, Follow-up.
- Wise action: Always come back to purpose. Don't lose sight of the purpose or it won't be embodied
- Questions: How do we sustain the momentum? How do we measure and inform of our progress? How do we keep stakeholders in the loop?

## Seventh Breath: REFLECT

- Ask the core team and key stakeholders: What have we learned? Have we gained results in alignment with need and purpose? What are the next long-term steps?
- Measure the impact after the actions have been taken and implemented

## Eighth Breath: THE BREATH THAT HOLDS THE WHOLE

- 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 wellbeing of everyone in this system.

## Conditions For Successful Implementation

To sum it up, the following qualities or conditions can support a successful implementation:

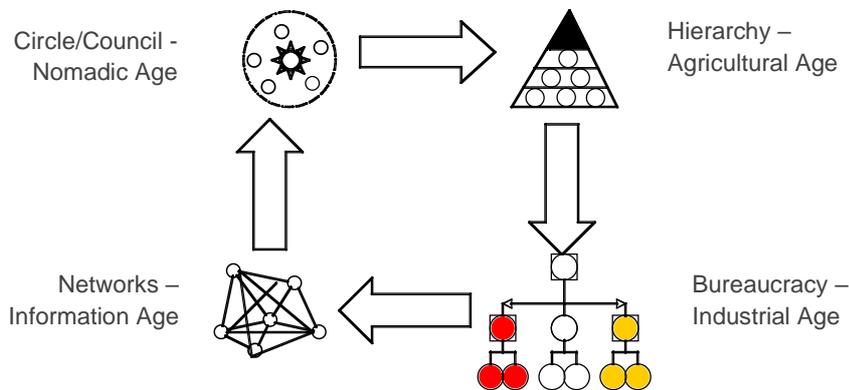
- Participatory leadership as described in this workbook is particularly useful when working with complexity (complex problems and situations), where there are no clear, unambiguous, fixed solutions, but where the context is constantly changing and you have to work flexibly with what is emerging.
- To create a successful intervention, you should plan a process not an event. This means that there is a preparatory phase, the actual engagement process (one event or a series of events), and a follow-up. Each phase contains steps that need to be clarified before proceeding to the next phase. (See the 'Eight Breaths of Process Architecture')
- Planning and designing an emergent process or strategy (rather than a prescriptive one) means operating in the “Chaordic space.” (See 'The Chaordic path'. The Chaordic Stepping Stones & Chaordic Design Process offer a step-by-step approach to structuring and creating progress in this space.)
- Designing a process in this context means creating a framework or light structure (process design) within which the group or organisation can operate and produce results in an environment of self-organising order rather than control.
- A good knowledge of the methods and means available will allow you to choose the right means for the situation.
- A good process design responds to the need in the moment, allowing you to be well prepared but flexible and able to adapt in response what is actually happening.
- Fully combining and integrating content with process, each in support of the other is crucial for creating good results. (A good content combined with a poor process or a good process without real content both fall short of the mark.)

## Organisational Paradigms

As long as human beings have lived and worked together, we have organised ourselves because we are more effective together than we are alone. Over the millennia, human beings have developed many different ways of organising together. Each new age of civilization has its signature form of organisation, which has proved effective at a given time, under given conditions. One of the questions that the Art of Hosting community is continually asking itself is “What are the organisational concepts that we can develop together that are actually good for us, and are good for this time?”

### Four organisational paradigms

Until recently we have seen four archetypal organisational forms.



#### Circle

As nomads we lived in small groups. The circle became the mother of all our organisational forms. Humans started sitting in circle as soon as they invented fires to sit around. We told stories, held elder councils and solved problems in this way. This form is very useful for reflection, storytelling, being together. Purpose is in the centre—it is shared by all.

#### Hierarchy (Triangle)

As we stopped our nomadic wandering and settled in one place, we developed agriculture. Our communities grew bigger, and the clergy (for ritual) and the warrior or soldier (for protection) classes emerged. We began to develop hierarchies and organised in “levels” where one person or group of people had power over others. The triangular form of hierarchy is very useful for action, for getting things done. Purpose is held at the top level.

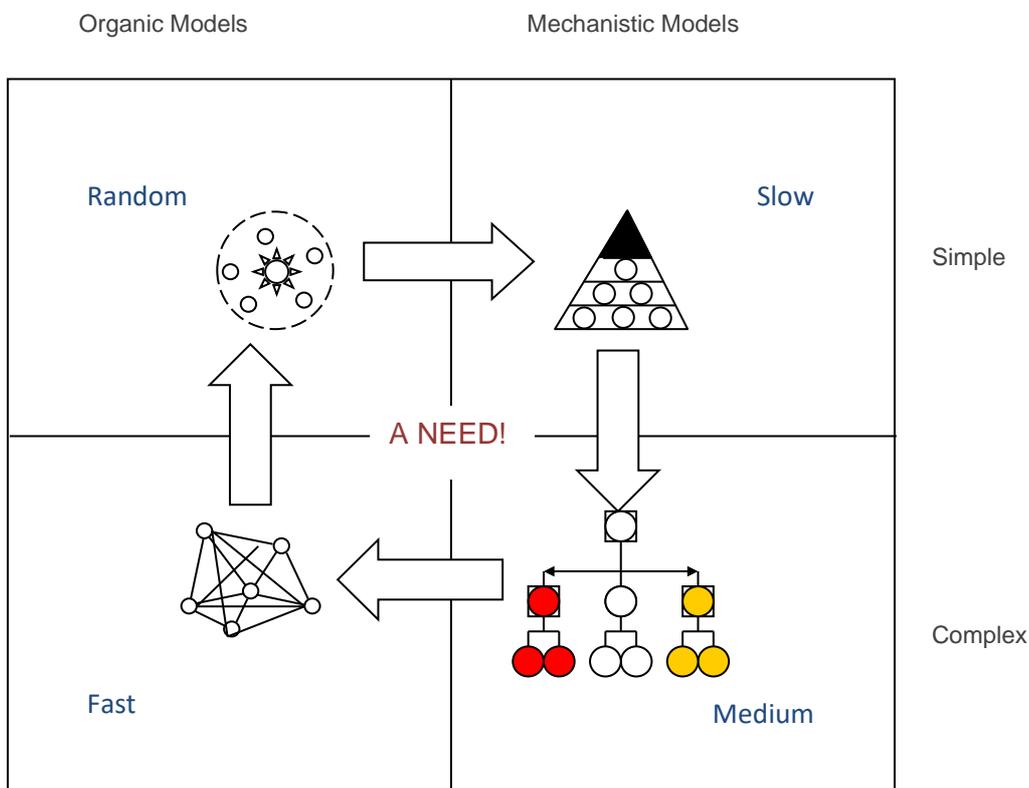
#### Bureaucracy (Square)

Simple hierarchies are not designed to deal with a high degree of complexity. The industrial age brought change and more complexity. Bureaucracy became the predominant organisational model, specializing horizontally and embracing hierarchy, which controlled vertically. Together they managed much greater complexity than either could do alone. Bureaucracy is fantastic for stability, optimising and maintaining the status quo, and for managing complex situations to a certain degree. As complexity and speed grows—the bureaucracy is not agile enough to respond quickly. It typically moves slowly in the face of change. Purpose in the bureaucracy is also at the top.

**Networks**

A more recent organisational form (first described in the 70's) of networks emerged in the information/communication age, as a response to a need to organise and re-organise quickly and flexibly. Networks are collections of individuals, circles (small groups) or triangles (hierarchies)—nodes that are connected together. Networks can link all types of organisations. Networks also exist inside bureaucracies. Networks usually gather around a shared purpose and are great for relationship, flexibility and innovation, and for getting things done fast. The connection is guided by individual purpose harmonising with a collective purpose. The different nodes are connected together because their respective purposes need each other. Once the need is no longer there, the network connection will most often lapse.

**Pace of Change**



Source: Jessica Lipner and Jeffrey Stamps

When a new organisational form emerges, the older ones do not disappear. They may even co-exist within each other. Each form has both advantages and shortcomings.

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

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

### **A Fifth Organisational Paradigm**

#### **Working in projects**

We are living in a time of increasing complexity and interconnectedness.

In our community of practice, we constantly have a need to organise ourselves in flexible ways that allow for quick responses to changing needs. Mostly our need to organise is based on short- or long-term projects or processes around strategic conversations (conversations that matter). In this context we have found that consciously using all these archetypal forms together, each where they are most effective, seems to work.

The circle or council is used for collective clarity, the triangle or project team (hierarchy) for action and the square or bureaucracy for accountability, structure and stability and the network for rapid sharing of information, Inspiration and linking all the parts together.

At the centre, always, is our purpose, held strongly by a “core team”. A Core Team would include the caller(s) and key stakeholders to cover the diversity of perspectives and skills needed to move the work forward. From this hub the work then expands in the next level of circles, into different action teams and into a wider circles of stakeholders etc.

The inner circle is reaching out to the next level, which will in turn reach out to a wider community, creating concentric circles rippling out into our society, each circle connected to the others by triangles animating action informed by the core purpose.

The circles are linked through people and shared clarity of purpose.

As the core team goes out into the community and the conversation expands, the core purpose is informed by a broader perspective and is adjusted accordingly to accommodate the next level of scale and action.

#### **Scaling up into organisations**

The changing needs and increased complexity of our times also call for different ways of organising, on a larger scale and more permanent basis. Many new organisational models are being tried out. Common denominator is that they are flatter and more flexible than the bureaucracies that have been the predominant model in the industrial age.

Some of the new organisational models include Holacracy, Sociocracy, Agile, Lean or Tiel.

For more information see:

<http://www.reinventingorganizations.com>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0Jc5aAJu9g>

<https://www.holacracy.org>

<https://sociocracy30.org>

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### The Art of Hosting Story

For more  
information  
visit:

[http://www.  
artofhosting  
.org/home/](http://www.artofhosting.org/home/)

The first generation of whole-systems practitioners broke new ground by “getting the whole system in the room” in previously unheard of numbers to participate in creating their own answers. Methodologies emerged that could support the creation of containers where diverse perspectives could lead to new collective intelligence.

The current generation is learning to mix and match these practices in creative and effective ways as seasoned practitioners from different traditions meet and learn from each other and their work in the world.

One expression of this next generation is the Art of Hosting Meaningful Conversations ([www.artofhosting.org](http://www.artofhosting.org)), discovered within a field of practitioners, friends talking, sharing stories, learning and listening together, wanting to contribute, and asking meaningful questions. This has resulted in a community of people who are called to be hosts, and are called to bring a suite of conversational technologies, (Circle, Open Space, World Café, etc.) into play in powerful ways in organisations, communities, families and all their relations. Teams of practitioners taking collective responsibility for designing practices and creating fields that open the space for imagination, inspiration, love, creativity, learning, etc. have come together in many different parts of the world. This inquiry from within a field has begun to surface the deeper patterns that live beneath the methodologies, as well as the gift of fundamental architecture for collaborative and transformative human meetings. It is engaging in questions like: Where is it that all methods meet? What is the wellspring of design? And what are the non-negotiables in an ever-changing world?

As a result of this creative foray into emergent practice, the discipline known as the Art of Hosting serves the opening and holding of fields of collective intelligence and community consciousness for the common good in any context. It is a practice for creating generative spaces in which powerful conversations can take place. These generative spaces have qualities that allow learning, wisdom, responsibility, co-creation and heart to flow. The hosts of these spaces work with this generative field—the field that emerges between the practitioners and participants—while at the same time being fully present in his/her own hosting to what is needed in the moment.

The Art of Hosting consciousness engages multiple practices, bringing the insight that to host/teach a practice, you must embrace the deeper pattern of the practice yourself (knowing methods), sense the learning edge or ‘crack’ in any given situation to invite the shift wanting to happen, (know the situation) and embrace the practice of being present in the moment so as to serve best (know yourself). Others are invited to learn and practice this consciousness through a transformative three-day learning experience, which invites individuals and teams to co-create a journey of discovery into the practices of hosting and creating space for emergence.

*Few professional development opportunities have the true potential to go beyond superficialities. The Art of Hosting does by delivering clear methodologies and building skills to enable positive, sustainable change in business, government, communities and schools. For people wanting an immersion in the dynamics of systemic change, the Art of Hosting has much to contribute*

*Originally written by Peggy Holman for the “Change Handbook*

## A Story about the Power of Questions

*"You can eat an apple,"* I said and gave him the green fruit.

It was as if he had seen an apple for the first time. First, he just held it there and smelled it, but then he took a little bite.

*"Mmmm,"* he said and took a bigger bite.

*"Did it taste good?"* I asked.

He bowed deeply. I wanted to know how an apple tastes the very first time you taste it, so I asked again, *"How did it taste?"*

He bowed and bowed.

*"Why do you bow?"* I asked. Mika bowed again. It made me feel so confused, that I hurried to ask the question again. - *"Why do you bow?"*

Now it was him who became confused. I think he did not know if he should bow again or just answer. *"Where I come from, we always bow, when someone asks an interesting question,"* He explained, *"and the deeper the question, the deeper we bow."*

That was the strangest thing I had heard in a long time. I could not understand that a question was something to bow for. *"What do you do when you greet each other?"*

*"We always try to find something wise to ask?"* he said.

*"Why?"*

First he bowed quickly, because I had asked another question and then he said: *"We try to ask a wise question to get the other person to bow".*

I was so impressed by the answer that I bowed as deeply as I could. - When I looked up Mika had put his finger in his mouth. After a long time, he took it out.

*"Why did you bow?"* he asked and looked insulted.

*"Because you answered my question so wisely,"* I said.

Now he said very loudly and clearly something that has followed me in my life ever since. - *"An answer is nothing to bow for. Even if an answer can sound ever so right, still you should not bow to it."*

I nodded briefly. But I regretted it at once, because now Mika may think that I bowed to the answer he had just given.

*"The one who bows shows respect",* Mika continued, *"You should never show respect for an answer."*

*"Why not?"*

*"An answer is always the part of the road that is behind you. Only questions point to the future."*

Those words were so wise, I thought, that I had to press my hands against my chin not to bow again...-

Jostein Gaarder, 1996 in Norway

## The Visa Story

Visa is often cited as an early prototype of chaordic organisation. Despite Dee Hock's caution that the design is "at best a third right", the story is both inspiring and instructive. What follows is an abbreviated rendition. For complete history, please read *Birth of the Chaordic Age*, by Dee Hock.

### **A Troubled Industry**

In 1958, Bank of America issued sixty thousand credit cards to the residents of Fresno, California. After years of losses, the program became profitable and the bank blanketed the state with cards. In 1966, several California banks countered by launching Mastercharge. In turn, Bank of America began franchising BankAmericard.

**Other large banks launched proprietary cards and offered franchises. Action and reaction exploded. Banks dropped tens of millions of unsolicited cards on an unsuspecting public with little regard for qualifications. Within two years, the infant industry was in chaos. Issuing banks were thought to be losing hundreds of millions of dollars, politicians were alarmed, the public was exasperated and the media was criticizing everyone involved**

### **An Intractable Problem—And Incredible Opportunity**

In 1968, as a vice president of a small bank in Seattle franchised to offer BankAmericard, Dee Hock became involved in the formation of a complex of licensee committees to look into the situation. The problems were far worse than imagined—far beyond any possibility of correction by the existing system.

It was necessary to re-conceive, in the most fundamental sense, the concepts of bank, money and credit card, and to understand how those elements might evolve in a micro-electronic environment.

Three bank managers joined Hock to begin the process of re-conceptualization. There followed days and nights of intense discussion. They could agree on nothing and were most conflicted by two questions: What is it that we want to accomplish? How will we organise it? Their deliberations led nowhere. The group was ready to throw in the towel when one of them said, "I'm beginning to think I don't know what an organisation is." Blank looks all around. They then began to explore what they considered to be the nature of organisation. As the discussions continued, several conclusions emerged.

Money had become nothing, but alphanumeric data recorded on valueless paper and metal. It would become data in the form of arranged electrons and photons that would move around the world at the speed of light, at minuscule cost, by infinitely diverse paths, throughout the entire electromagnetic spectrum. The concept of "credit card" was inadequate. Credit cards had to be reconceived as a device for the exchange of monetary value in the form of arranged electronic particles. Demand for that exchange would be lifelong and global, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, wherever the customer happened to be. Perceptions swiftly changed.

Embedded in what had seemed a hopeless problem was an incredible opportunity. Any organisation that could globally guarantee and clear monetary information in the form of arranged electronic

particles in every monetary value in the world would have the market—every exchange of monetary value in the world—that staggered the imagination. But a major problem remained.

No bank could do it. No stock corporation could do it. No nation-state could do it. In fact, no existing form of organisation could do it. It would require a transcendental organisation linking together in wholly new ways an unimaginable complex of diverse financial institutions, individual customers, merchants, communication companies, suppliers and government entities. It was beyond the power of reason or the reach of the imagination to design such an organisation or to anticipate the problems and opportunities it would face.

Yet, Hock refused to give up. He noted that evolution routinely created much more complex organisational patterns—rain forests, marine systems, body, brain, immune system—with seeming ease. The group simply hadn't "peeled back the onion" far enough.

#### **A Powerful Purpose and Set of Principles**

With that perspective in mind, they decided to reverse the normal process of immediately asking what the practices of the organisation would be. Instead, they began to ask themselves what would be the purpose and principles—its institutional genetic code—which would allow a new kind of institution to emerge and, in effect, to create and develop itself.

They focused on a single question:

*If anything imaginable were possible, if there were no constraints whatever, what would be the nature of an ideal organisation based on biological organising principles to create the world's premier system for the exchange of monetary value?*

Slowly, a dozen or so principles emerged. For example:

Power and function must be distributive to the maximum degree. No function should be performed by any part of the whole that could reasonably be done by any more peripheral part, and no power vested in any part that might reasonably be exercised by any lesser part.

It must be self-organising. All participants must have the right to organise for self-governance at any time, for any reason, at any scale, with irrevocable rights of participation in governance at any greater scale.

Governance must be distributive. No individual, institution, or combination of either or both, particularly management, should be able to dominate deliberations or control decisions at any scale.

It must seamlessly blend both cooperation and competition. All parts must be free to compete in unique, independent ways, yet be linked so as to sense the demands of other parts, yield self-interest and cooperate when necessary to the inseparable good of the whole.

It must be infinitely malleable, yet extremely durable. It should be capable of constant, self-generated, modification of form or function, without sacrificing its essential purpose, nature or embodied principle, thus releasing human ingenuity and spirit.

It must be cooperatively and equitably owned. All relevant and affected parties must be eligible to participate in functions, governance and ownership.

After drafting the principles, none of the four believed such an organisation could possibly be brought into being. A concentrated, two-year effort involving people throughout the industry and at all levels within individual banks proved them wrong. In June 1970, the organisation that would come to be known as VISA came into being.

#### **A Remarkable Organisational Concept**

In the legal sense, Visa is a non-stock, for-profit, membership corporation. In another sense, it is an inside-out holding company in that it does not hold but is held by its functioning parts. The institutions that create its products are, at one and the same time, its owners, its members, its customers, its subjects and its superiors. It exists as an integral part of the most highly regulated of industries, yet is not subject to any regulatory authority in the world.

If converted to a stock company, Visa would have an astronomical market value, excluding its thousands of affiliated entities. But it cannot be bought, raided, traded or sold, since ownership is in the form of non-transferable rights of participation. However, that portion of the business created by each member is owned solely by them, is reflected in their stock prices and can be sold to any other member or entity eligible for membership.

It espouses no political, economic, social or legal theory, thus transcending language, custom, politics and culture to successfully connect a bewildering variety of more than 21,000 financial institutions, 16 million merchants and 800 million people in 300 countries and territories. Annual volume of \$1.4 trillion continues to grow in excess of twenty percent compounded annually. A staff of about three thousand scattered in twenty-one offices in thirteen countries on four continents provides product and systems development, global advertising, and around-the-clock operation of two global electronic communication systems with thousands of data centres communicating through nine million miles of fibre-optic cable. Its electronic systems clear more transactions in one week than the Federal Reserve system does in a year.

It has gone through a number of wars and revolutions, the belligerents continuing to share common ownership and never ceasing reciprocal acceptance of cards.

It has multiple boards of directors within a single legal entity, none of which are inferior or superior, as each has jurisdiction over certain areas or activities. No part knows the whole, the whole doesn't know all the parts, and none had any need to. The entirety is largely self-regulating.

In less than five years, Visa transformed a troubled product with a minority market share into a dominant market share and the single most profitable consumer service in the financial services industry. Visa returns as much as 100% on its member's invested capital, while at the same time reducing by more than 50% the cost of unsecured credit to individuals and merchant cost of handling payment instruments. Its products are the most universally used and recognised in the world, yet the organisation is so transparent its ultimate customers, most of its affiliates and some of its members do not know how it functions or how it is structured.

## Books and Websites

Many resources are available—books, articles, websites, blogs, communities. We have included links to websites in the relevant section of this workbook.

Art of Hosting/Participatory Leadership websites and mailing list:

- Art of Hosting Global website: [www.artofhosting.org](http://www.artofhosting.org)
- Art of Hosting/Participatory Leadership Croatia: <http://aoplcroatia.weebly.com/>
- Centre for Participatory Leadership Croatia: <https://www.cplonline.eu/>

Some basic information and list of upcoming trainings co-created by many Art of Hosting stewards.

- Art of Hosting online community: [artofhosting.ning.com](http://artofhosting.ning.com)

A site with over 2000 global practitioners; lots of resources (videos and documents); possibility to form and join groups (local or thematic); possibility to announce your AoH-related events and start and contribute conversations.

- Art of Hosting email list (listserv) where a lot of questions and announcements are made. You can join the list by going to [www.artofhosting.org/home/stayconnected/](http://www.artofhosting.org/home/stayconnected/)

Here are a few books and links 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

The Circle Way—A Leader in Every Chair—Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea,

<http://www.thecircleway.net/> [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

Brown, Juanita. 2001, The World Café: Living Knowledge Through Conversations That Matter

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

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

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

<https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/>

Cooperrider, D. Sorensen, F. Jr., Whitney, D. and Yaeger, T. (2000), Appreciative Inquiry: rethinking human organisation toward a positive theory of change, Illinois: Stipes.

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

The power of appreciative inquiry: a practical guide to positive change

### **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)

**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)

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

The Change Handbook (Second Edition will be available in autumn 2018)

**Isaacs, William.**

Dialogue and the art of thinking together.

**Kaner, Sam et. al.**

The Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision Making

**Scharmer C. Otto** (2007) Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges, The Social Technology of Presencing, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, CA, [www.ottoscharmer.com](http://www.ottoscharmer.com) ,

[www.presencing.org](http://www.presencing.org), [www.theoryu.com](http://www.theoryu.com)

**Senge, Peter**

The Fifth Discipline

The Fifth Discipline Field Book (with Ross, Smith, Roberts, and Kleiner)

The Art and Practise of The Learning Organisation

The Dance of Change (with Art Kleiner, Charlotte Roberts)

**Wheatley, Margaret J.**

Leadership and the New Science:

Turning to One Another

Finding Our Now

A Simpler Way (with Myron Kellner-Rogers)

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

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

**Etienne Wenger**

Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity.

**Hock, Dee**, (2000) The Art of Chaordic Leadership, Leader to Leader, Winter 2000

**Laloux, Frederic**, Reinventing Organization

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