

The Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter

Participatory Leadership Tools for Community Change

Workbook



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Offered for the Minnesota Communities Caring for Children network of partners and communities using the ACE Interface *Understanding NEAR/ACEs: Building Self-Healing Communities*.

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME

How can *Art of Hosting* patterns and practices help us exercise effective public engagement?

Public engagement, based on the practices and principles of the *Art of Hosting* and *Harvesting Conversations That Matter*, invites us to explore how engaging the resources and collective intelligence of a diverse group of stakeholders can lead to the creation of strategies and actions for working in increasingly complex settings.

The insights and frameworks presented in this resource book build on the experiences harvested in an international network of practitioners who share a common practice based on what is known as *The Art of Hosting* and *Harvesting Conversations that Matter* (AoH). Art of Hosting is both an international network of practitioners and a training program focusing on the transition from strategic conversations to wise action and systemic change.

Art of Hosting is based on the assumption and experience that human beings have enormous untapped wisdom and resilience and sustainable solutions lie with sharing that wisdom between us. In the current climate, tapping into the potential held in our organizations is crucial. Inviting everyone to participate with their diverse worldviews and perspectives is the key to releasing this potential. This is an essential skill and competence in exercising effective public engagement.

Purpose of the training

- To explore how collaborative leadership complements more traditional ways of leading
- To explore working collaboratively as a strategic means for dealing with increasing social complexity in our communities
- To experience and learn how to use processes that invite people to contribute their diverse knowledge, skills and worldviews to address issues of importance to our organizations, communities and institutions
- To explore how to take the learning from the training and apply it to daily working contexts

Outcomes

Participants will:

- Gain a clear understanding of collaborative leadership and its use in working on complex issues or problems
- Get a basic understanding and experience of the methods used to address complex issues
- Be able to identify the areas of their own work in which this approach could be effectively applied
- Be able to start implementing this approach in their work

WHY ART OF HOSTING?

New Solutions are Needed

Whether in education, healthcare, corporations, government, non-profits, places of worship, communities or families, the Art of Hosting Meaningful Conversations is built on the assumption and experience that increasing complexity in the problems we face compels us to find new solutions for the common good. 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, we have to be willing to let go of what we know and step into our 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 around 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 who are involved and invited to work together only pay attention to that which 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.

Organizations are Living Systems

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





“There is an emerging group of methodologies for facilitating conversation in groups of all sizes, supported by principles that help maximize collective intelligence, integrate and utilize diversity and minimize 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 support the process (because they participate in the design and the process is by definition transparent) and makes ongoing feedback, learning and course correction a natural and efficient part of life.” (source unknown)

MULTIPLE LEVELS OF FOCUS

Collaborative leadership invites us to operate at four interconnected levels at once. The learning at each of these levels informs and is present in the subsequent levels, so a natural hierarchy is the result. These four levels operate as characteristics of a whole and not as a linear path.

	<p>INDIVIDUAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To connect to our own motivation and reason for choosing a different way of leading• To strengthen our individual courage to lead as hosts
	<p>TEAM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To train the competencies of collective reflection and wise action• To practice co-creating, co-deciding and co-hosting strategic meetings, focus groups, community conversations, etc.
	<p>COMMUNITY, ORGANIZATION, ETC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To experience working in unity with other leaders• To experience new organizational forms and work at co-creating relationships, which serve the needs of our organization or community
	<p>GLOBAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To integrate the bigger context in all our actions and make it part of ourselves• To benefit from knowledge and experience of a global network of practitioners and learners in this field

IT IS TIME

the training time is over
for those of us who can hear the call
of the heart and the times

my real soul work
has begun on the next level
for me at least

courage is
to do what calls me
but I may be afraid of

we need to work together
in a very deep sense
to open and hold spaces
fields
spheres of energy
in which our imagination
and other people's
transformation can occur

none of us can do it alone

the warriors of joy are gathering
to find each other
to train together
to do some good work
from the heart with no attachment
and throw it
in the river

no religion, no cult, no politics
just flow with life itself as it
unfolds in the now...

what is my Work?
what is our Work?

This poem from Toke Moeller is an invitation to you to consider where your practice of hosting conversations will take you and the people you work and live with. Toke resides in Denmark and is an Art of Hosting Steward.

WORLDVIEW IS IMPORTANT

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

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

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

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

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

Living systems exist everywhere in nature — bacteria forming colonies or ants coming together to form a system that is capable of creating an anthill. These are not just simple systems, but include highly complex systems with incredible results. For example, termite nests even have air conditioning so the temperature stays the same inside the hill.

There are several exciting phenomena in nature and living systems that can also apply to human systems:

- 1) Nature has the capability to organize around a purpose through self-organization, Ex. it does not require someone specific to direct the organization instead all who are involved participate in what is needed to achieve the purpose
- 2) Self-organization can lead to emergence, such as results that could not be predicted and that create totally new properties and qualities or something totally new and surprising (Ex. $1+1 = 11$)

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

What would our organizations and communities look like then?

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 here and now
- In nature, a living system participates in the development of its neighbor — an isolated system is doomed
- Nature, and *all* of nature, including ourselves, is in constant change (without “change management”)
- Nature seeks diversity. New relations open up to new possibilities. It is not a question of survival of the fittest — but everything that is fit — as many species as possible. Diversity increases our chance of survival.
- Experimentation opens up to what is possible here and now. Nature is not intent on finding perfect solutions, but workable solutions. “*Life is intent on finding what works, not what is right.*”
- All the answers do not exist “out there” — we must sometimes 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 whom 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-organizing, given the right conditions
- Self-organization shifts to a higher order

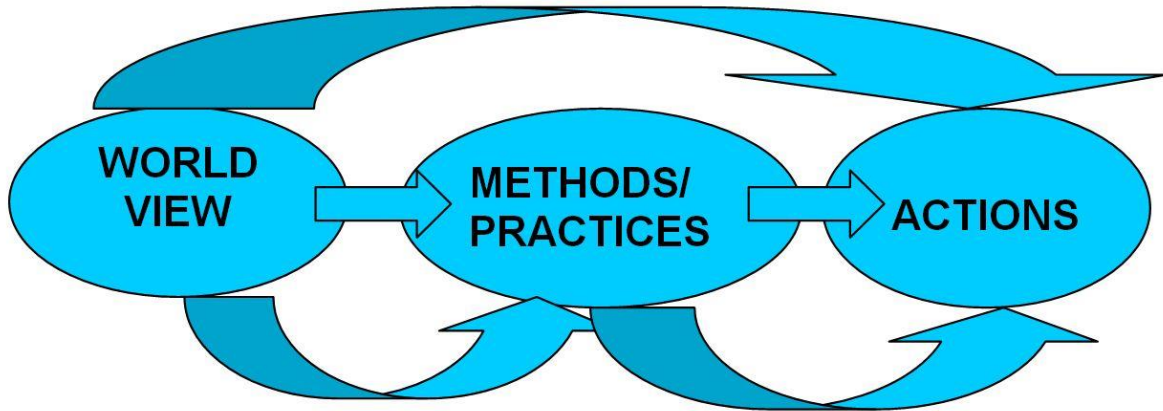
How collaborative leadership complements the more traditional ways of working in our communities:

Traditional ways of working	Collaborative leadership complementing
Mechanistic	Organic — if you treat the system like a machine, it responds like a living system
Management	Leadership
Management by control	Management by trust
Top-down	Bottom-up
Hierarchical lines of management	Community of practice
Top-down agenda setting	Set agenda together
Silos/hierarchical structures	More networks
Executing procedures	Innovating processes
Leading by instructions	Leading by hosting
Great for maintenance, implementation (doing what we know)	When innovation is needed — learning what we don't know, to move on — engaging with constantly moving targets
Analysis	Intuition
Individuals responsible for decisions	Using collective intelligence to inform decision-making
No single person has the right answer but somebody has to decide	Together we can reach greater clarity — intelligence through diversity
Wants to create a fail-safe environment	Creates a safe-fail environment that promotes learning
I must speak to be noticed in meetings	Harvesting what matters, from all sources
Communication in writing only	Asking questions
Organization chart determines work	Task forces/purpose-oriented work in projects
People represent their services	People are invited as human beings, attracted by the quality of the invitation
One-to-many information meetings	A participatory process can inform the information
Information sharing	When engagement is needed from all, including those who usually don't contribute much
Dealing with complaints by forwarding them to the hierarchy for action	Dealing with complaints directly, with hierarchy trusting that solution can come from the staff
Consultation through surveys, questionnaires, etc.	Co-creating solutions together in real time, in presence of the whole system
Questionnaires	Engagement processes — collective inquiry with stakeholders
Top-down orders — often without full information	Top-down orders informed by consultation
Resistance to decisions from on high	Better acceptance of decisions because of involvement

Tasks dropped on people	Follow your passion and put it in service of the organization
Rigid organization	Flexible self-organization
Policy design officer disconnected from stakeholders	Direct consultation instead of via lobby organizations
People feel unheard/not listened to	People feel heard
Working without a clear purpose and jumping to solutions	Collective clarity of purpose is the invisible leader
Motivation via carrot & stick	Motivation through engagement and ownership
Managing projects	Better preparation — going through chaos, open mind, taking account of other ideas
Result-oriented	Purpose-oriented — the rest falls into place
Seeking answers	Seeking questions
Broadcasting, boring, painful meetings	Meetings where every voice is heard, participants leave energized
Chairing, reporting	Hosting, harvesting, follow-up
Event & time-focused	Good timing, ongoing conversation & adjustment

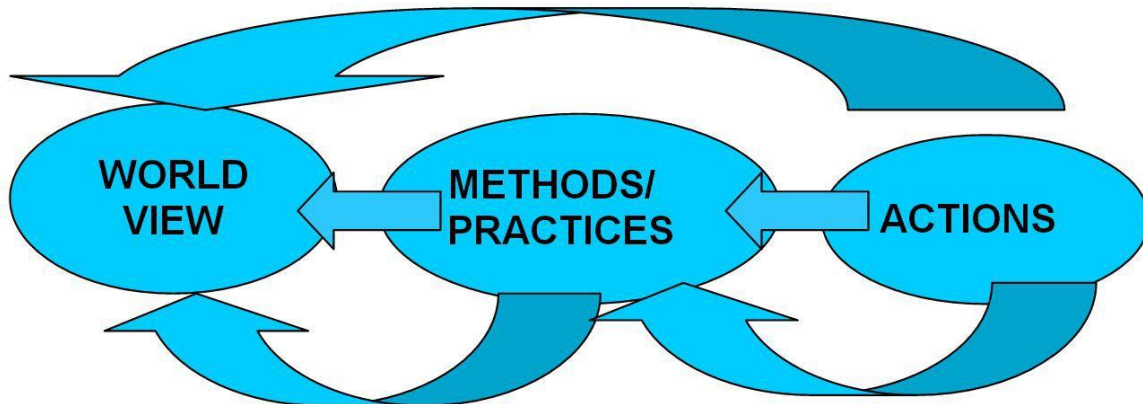
WORLDVIEW AWARENESS

Our Worldview Influences the Actions We Take



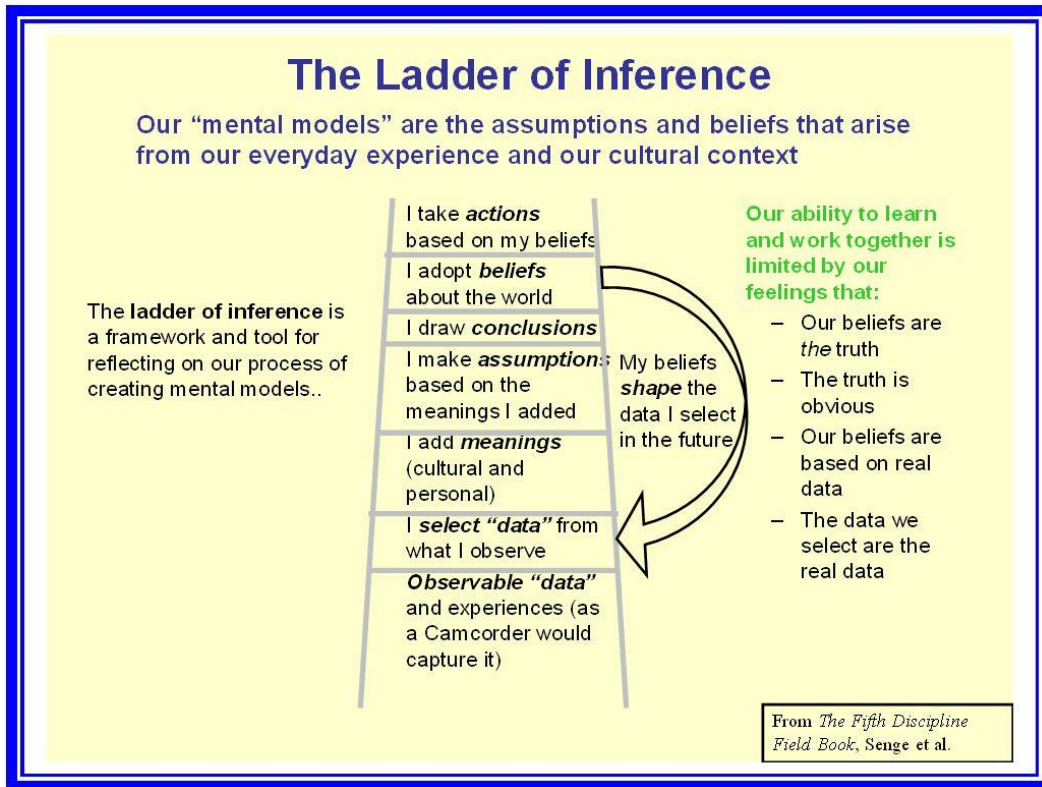
Methods are the Bridge Between View and Actions

Our Actions or Experiences Influence our Worldview



Actions Inform Future Methods and Worldviews

LADDER OF INFERENCE



CORE PATTERNS

THE FOUR-FOLD PRACTICE

There are four basic practices that are key to Collaborative Leadership and the Art of Hosting. Being truly present, engaging skilfully in conversations, being a good host of conversations and engaging with others in co-creation. These are all practices or skills that are easily understood, but it takes a continuous practice to hone them. There are also barriers or “veils” between each of the practices that sometimes make it difficult to step in fully. First the practices; then the veils.



1. To Be Present — Pre-sensing

Being present means to show up, not be distracted, be prepared, be clear about the need and understand what your personal contribution can be. It allows you to check in with yourself and develop the personal practice of curiosity about the outcomes of any gathering and the people in attendance.

Presence means making space to devote a dedicated time to work with others. If you are distracted, called out or your mind is otherwise located in many different places, you cannot be

present in your physical space. Being present also means being aware of one's environment, other people, what impacts you and how you impact others.

Collectively, it is good practice to become present together as a meeting begins, be it through a welcome, a good framing, a process of "checking-in" to the subject matter or task at hand by hearing everyone's voice in the matter or even taking a moment of silence. Invite a collective slowing down so that all participants in a meeting can be present together.

2. Practice Conversations — Participating

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 service of the whole. Curiosity and judgment cannot live in the same space. If we are judging, rationalizing or dismissing what we are hearing, we cannot be curious about the outcome. If we have called a meeting because we are uncertain of the way forward, being open is a key skill and capacity. Only by practicing skilful conversation can we find our best practice together.

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

3. Hosting Conversations/Groups/Design Processes — Contributing

Hosting conversations is an act of leadership and means taking responsibility for creating and holding the "container" in which a group of people can do their best work together. Although you can create a container in the moment, the more prepared you are the better. The best preparation is being fully present.

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

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

4. Community of Practitioners — Co-creating

In a truly co-creative process, it becomes irrelevant who said or contributed what — the gift is in the synergy and inspiration when we build on each other's knowledge in a generous and generative environment where the whole becomes much bigger than the sum of the parts.

This is how results become sustainable over time — we create networks of sustainable relationships that arise from good conversation, from friends working together, committed to results/impact over the long term. The collaborative field can produce unexpected and surprising results, especially in complex situations where multi-layered challenges need to be met simultaneously.

From a Learner to a Community that Learns

As we learn to be truly present and engage in conversations that really matter, we become learners. As learners, many doors are open to us.

As we begin to host conversation and connect with other hosts or practitioners, we become a community of learners or practitioners. As a community, we have a much larger capacity than as individual learners.

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

“You can have a group of individually intelligent people – but until that group knows what it knows together – the group, as a group, is not intelligent.” – inspired by Peter Senge

The Veils in the Four-Fold Practice

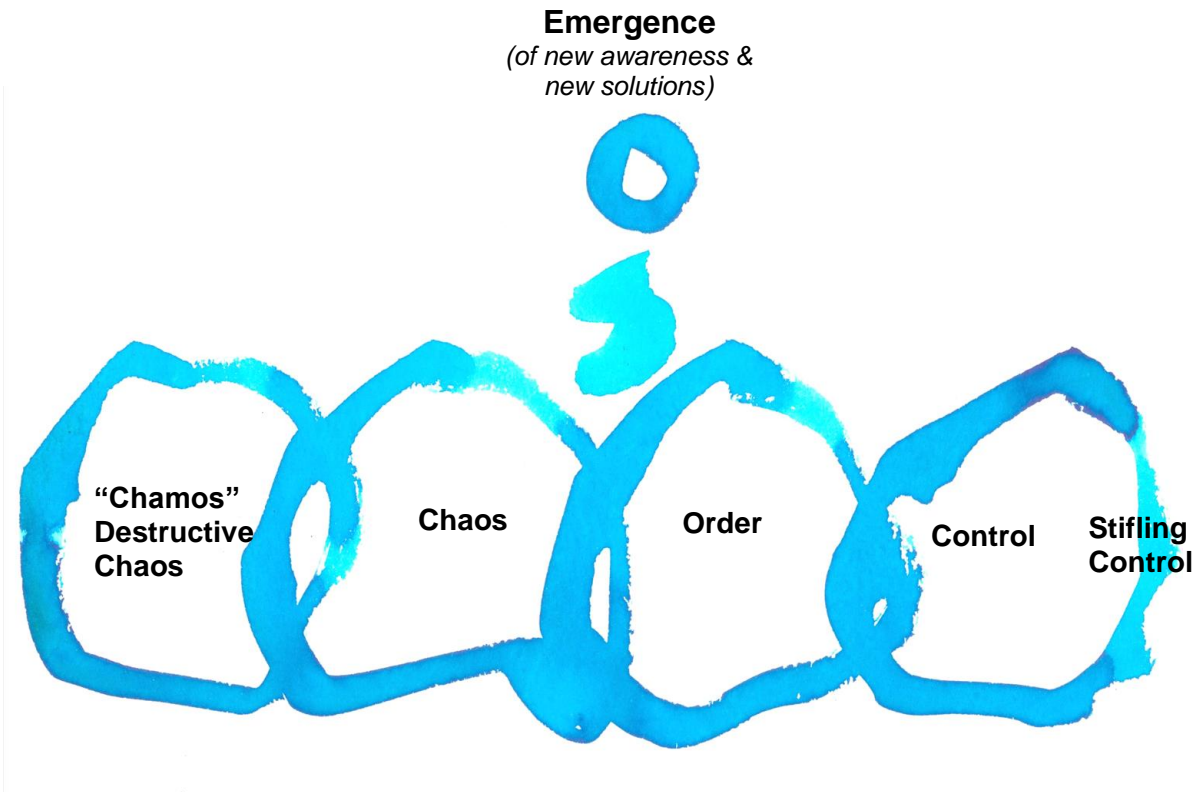
Veil of Self- Sufficiency: The inability to ask for help, to believe you can do it all alone.

Veil of Fear: The fear that you cannot step into the next level of practice – to host process, design or larger scale conversations.

Veil of Doubt: Doubting that true collaboration or co-creation is possible.

Veil of Complacency: The belief that because you/we have done this before, we know what we are doing resulting in a failure to properly prepare for whatever it is you/we are stepping into now.

THE CHAORDIC PATH



Chaos – Order – Control are different states of being and experiencing.

We each have a comfort zone – or familiar zone – a state of being and experiencing that we are most comfortable with or attached to. It might be different for different people. The interplay between each of these states of being and experiencing offers us perspectives into any given situation as well as a view to when an intervention might be needed and what that intervention could be.

The world and times we live in now are neither predictable nor stable and call for greater flexibility. “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 the story of our natural world — form arises out of nonlinear, complex, diverse systems. “At the edge of chaos” is where life innovates — where things are not hard wired and are flexible enough for new connections and solutions to occur. New levels of order become possible out of chaos.

In nature, so too in organizations, 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

organizations or communities from the top down, many leaders today see the need to access the collective intelligence and collective wisdom of everyone. This can be, at times, a “messy” process until we reach new insight and clarity.

To lead our organization 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 generative emergence that allows the new, collective intelligence and wise action processes 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 experiences/gatherings 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 *chamos*, or destructive chaos, where everything disintegrates and dies. On the far side of order is control and then stifling control, where there is no movement, which 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 a Place for Leadership

The practice of leadership resides in the place between chaos and order and we are just honing our skill and knowledge in this practice of leadership. 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.

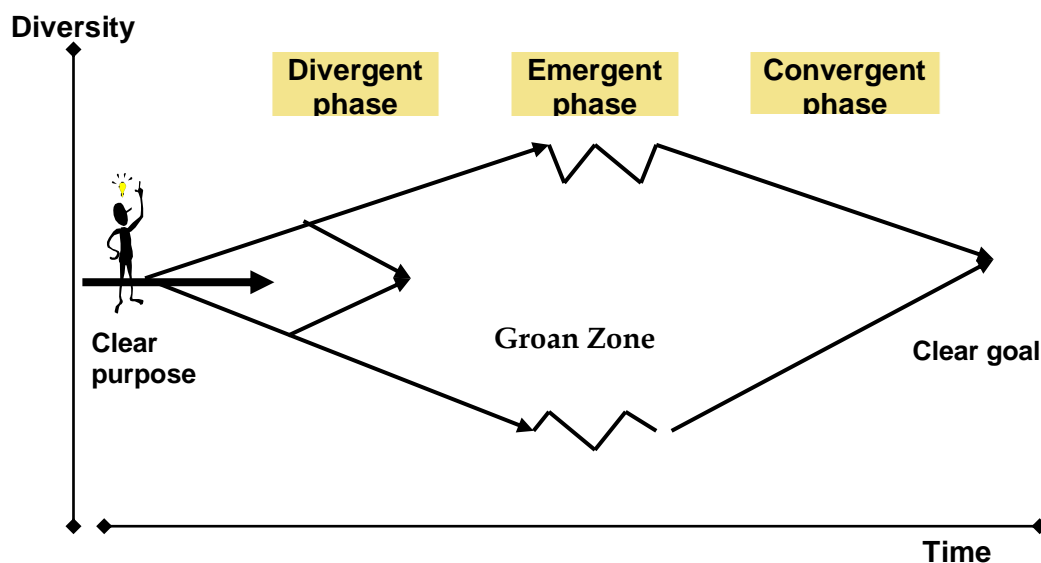
Order/Control is a Place for Management

The practice of management lies between order and control, where activities need to be maintained and executed routinely so that a particular standard results. It is the place where “more of the same” is required, where the status quo is maintained (ex. 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 adhered to.

DIVERGENCE – EMERGENCE - CONVERGENCE

In entering into an inquiry or multi-stakeholder conversation, we operate with three different phases in the process — *divergence, emergence and convergence*. Each of these phases is different, and it is important for a host to know where we are in the process — and what is needed in each phase.

The three phases of divergence, emergence and convergence are different ways of thinking and working that are complementary. These can also be seen as the three phases of breathing — in breath, (lungs expanding/diverging) pause, out breath (lungs contracting/converging). The “breath” of divergence and convergence — of breathing in and breathing out — is at the heart of designing process. Every process goes through several such breathing cycles.



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

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

Divergent thinking typically generates alternatives, has free-for-all open discussion, gathers diverse points of view and unpacks the problem. This is the phase where we get out everything we currently know so we can all see it together.

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

The emergent phase, between the divergent and convergent, is also fondly known as the “groan zone.” It is the phase where different ideas and needs are integrated and where truly emergent ideas and solutions evolve. It may require us to stretch our own understanding to hold

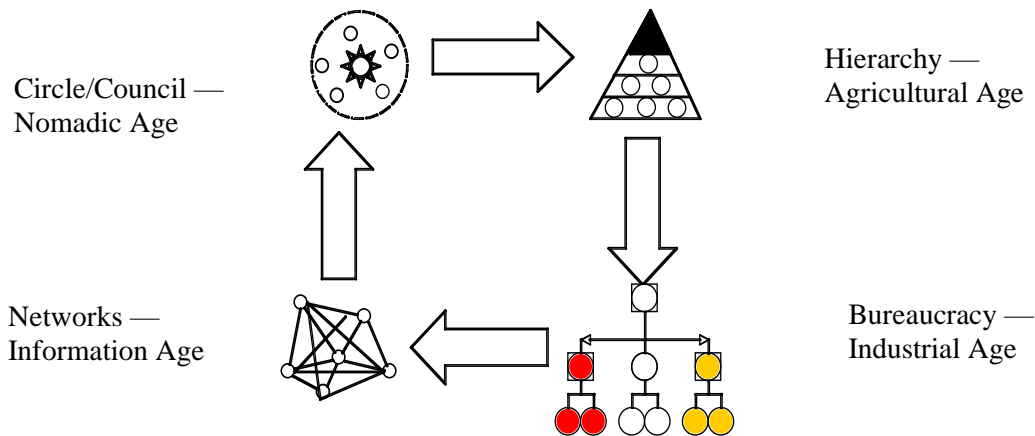
and include other points of view, perspectives or worldviews. It is often called the groan zone because it may feel messy — an uncomfortable stretch — where people are frustrated, energy is low and solutions sometimes feel unreachable – just before they emerge.

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

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

ORGANIZING PATTERNS — 4 ORGANIZATIONAL PARADIGMS

Over the millennia, human beings have developed many different ways of organizing together. Each new age of civilization has its signature form of organization. One of the questions that the Art of Hosting community of practice is continually asking itself is “What are the organizational concepts that we can develop together that are actually *good* for us and are good for this time?”



Circle

As nomads, we lived in small groups. As soon as fire was discovered, humans began sitting in circle. It is our oldest organizational form. In a circle, people come together equally to provide a multiplicity of perspectives on something. Circles are powerful for reflection, for harnessing collective insight and for making decisions. To work, people in circles need to have equal access to information, power and responsibility.

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 organized 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)

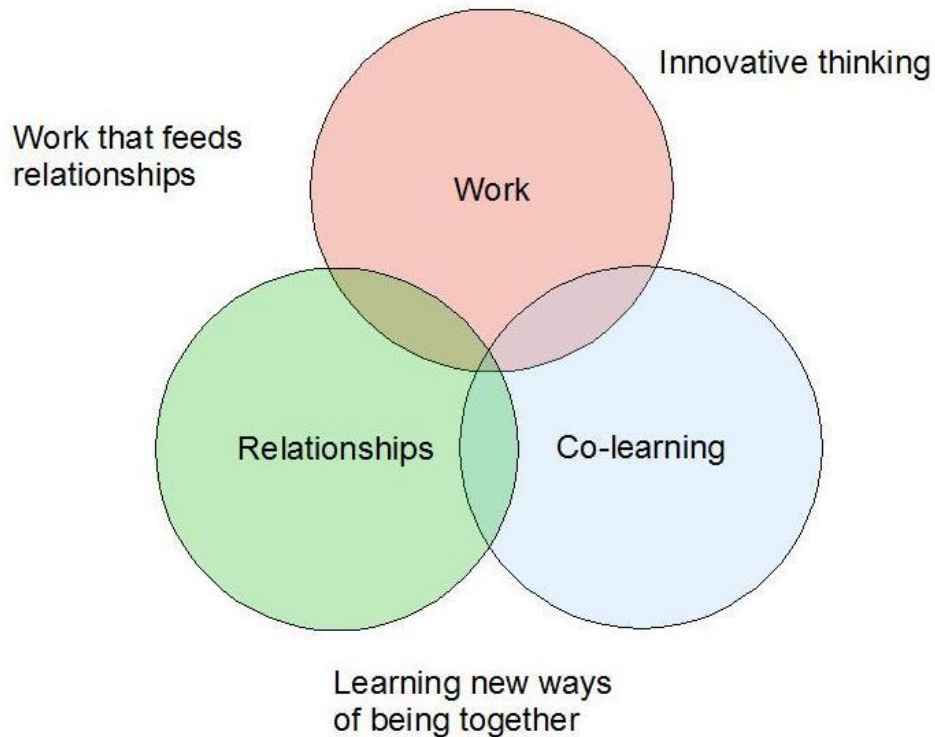
Simple hierarchies are extremely unstable in the face of the unexpected. The industrial age brought change and more complexity. Bureaucracy became the predominant organizational model, bringing in the specialization of functions horizontally with each specialized division acting as hierarchies, which controlled vertically. Together, divisions managed much greater complexity than either could do alone. Bureaucracy is best suited for creating stability, optimizing efficiency and maintaining the status quo, and for managing complex situations to a certain degree. However, as complexity and speed grow, the bureaucracy is not agile enough to respond quickly since this form usually operates as silos that, when needed to interact together,

struggle to do so. Bureaucracy typically moves slowly in the face of change. Purpose in the bureaucracy is also held at the top of each division.

Networks

A more recent organizational form (first described in the 70s), networks emerged in the information/communication age, as a response to a need to organize and re-organize 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 organizations. We rarely find networked collections of bureaucracies, but networks can and often do spring up *inside* them — especially informally. Networks are great for relationship, flexibility and innovation, and for getting things done fast. The connection is guided by individual purpose harmonizing 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.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE MODEL (ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATING SYSTEM)



Developing sustainable outcomes in a project or initiative requires attention to three domains in the formation of an effective team or work group and the project itself. Attention to these domains – work, co-learning and relationships – moves the process from just a group to a deeper connection as a team or a community more capable of producing meaningful results. The conditions are set for a group to become more cohesive and to discover new learning and emergent solutions to the issues on which they are working. Equal weight needs to be given to each domain in the process.

Work

Of course the reason for coming together is to do work. Getting the work done is key to sustainable outcomes. An important first step is to gain clarity on what the work is. There are many tools that can help groups come to clarity about the work they need to do. Tools for gaining clarity on work include design tools like the diamond of participation, the chaotic stepping stones and other project planning tools that invite clarity about questions and harvest insights back into the team's work.

Relationships

For groups to be more than just collections of individuals, they need to focus on their relationships. Relationships are the glue that keeps work sustainable. Paying attention to how we are together creates the conditions for our work to excel over the long term. Teams or communities that have to focus on toxic, competitive or unhelpful relationships spend too much energy caught in conflict and difference and can't get real work done. At the outset of working with a team or community of practice, it's important to identify relationships as a key capacity leading to innovation, excellence or success. And when things go sideways, having solid relationships in place ensures that the group can find a way out quickly and effectively.

Co-learning

If an individual or a group wants to become innovative or to think or practice its way to another level of work, learning is essential. At a personal level, cultivating curiosity is critical, so that individuals enter work, practice and conversations with questions that guide their participation in an endeavour. Beyond individual learning, collective learning or co-learning is the fastest way to breakthroughs. Engaging in collaborative inquiry is important to keep a group on the edge of its own learning. Groups need to practice courage and fearlessness to embrace new ideas and new ways of doing things.

Alive in the Intersections

The intersection of work and relationships results in one feeding the other and leads to sustainability in the kinds of endeavours one is undertaking, especially when the going gets tough. At the intersection of work and co-learning is innovative thinking that helps to drive work to new levels. At the intersection of co-learning and relationships is where a group comes to see itself as more than just a team, and learns new ways of being together and new forms of connection that serve the greater purpose. And of course at the centre of it all is the possibility of community, arising out of a balanced approach to all three domains.

ESSENTIALS OF PROCESS DESIGN

POWERFUL QUESTIONS

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

Asking the right question

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

When inviting people into a conversation that matters, it is helpful to have an overall question — one that itself embodies the purpose of the meeting and invites people into inquiring together. This is the *key question* or the *calling question* for the conversation that is compelling enough to call forth participation. For this reason, it is best to discover and formulate the calling question with key stakeholders.

The conversation may include other questions than the calling question. Questions capture the need for people coming together and therefore, they are critical to a conversation being successful.



Some guidelines for choosing questions

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

A powerful question focuses attention, intention and energy. It:

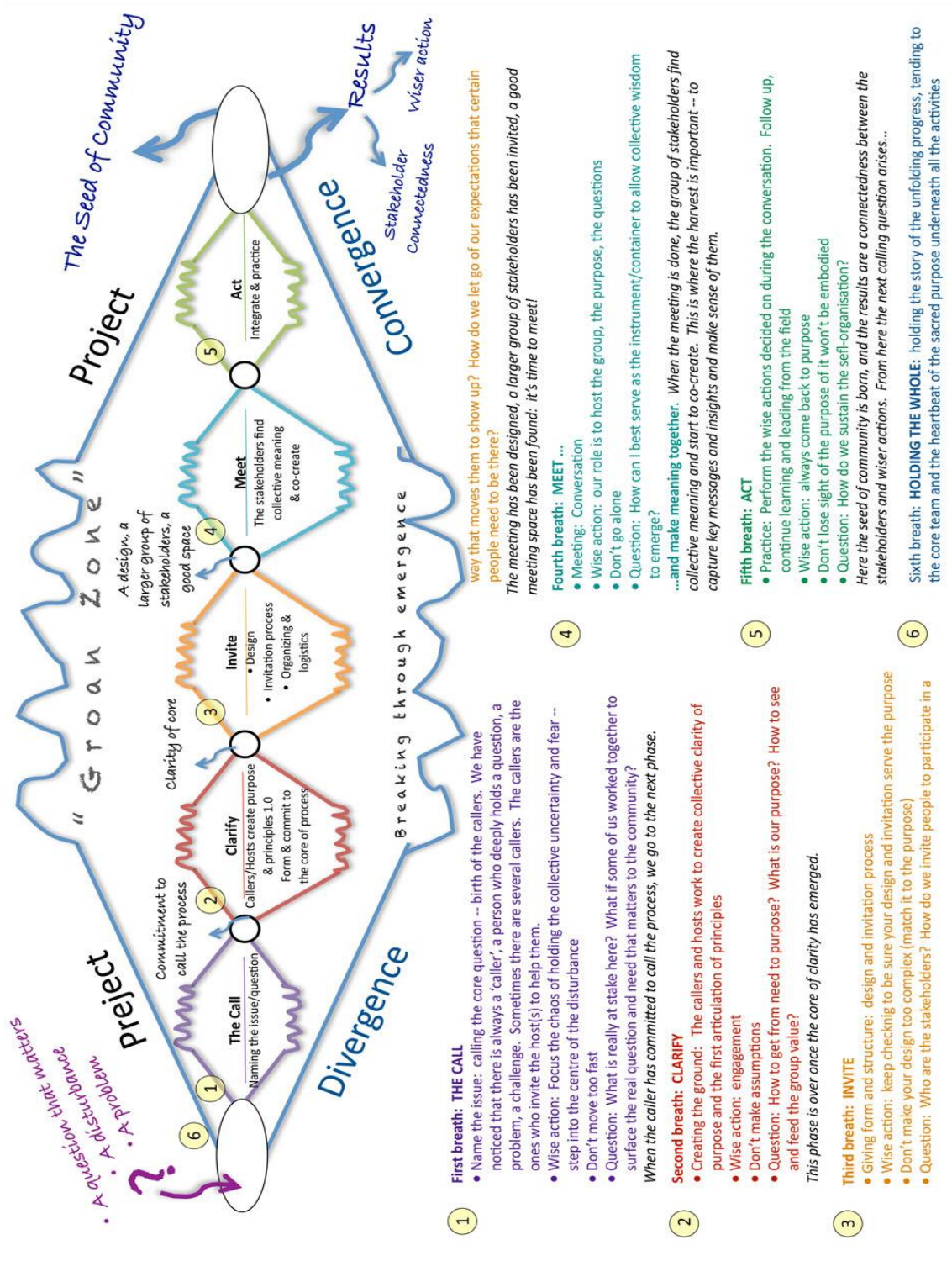
- Is simple and clear
- Is thought provoking
- Generates energy
- Focuses inquiry
- Challenges assumptions
- Opens new possibilities
- Evokes more questions

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

- Albert Einstein

THE "BREATHS" OF 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, emergence and convergence. This iterative flow has become known among practitioners as the "Breaths of Design."



THE CHAORDIC STEPPING STONES — A WAY TO WALK THE CHAORDIC PATH

The chaordic path is the path that walks between chaos and order. When we don't know where we are going, or what the future means for us, we can bring a little bit of form to our work by working with clear steps. These steps are intended to create generative structures, structures that allow us to create together, without stifling creativity and the emergence of new ideas and new ways of doing things.



There are clear strategic steps we take when walking the chaordic path. These steps allow us to create steps rooted in real need that are sustainable for the community they serve and the people working within them. These steps can be used both as a planning tool and to help understand what you are discovering about an organization, community or initiative.

In designing an initiative, we use these stepping stones as a guide. Think of them nested one within the other. You cannot build the next one until the previous one is in place.

The Stepping Stones

Each of these stepping stones is activated by asking key questions. As we design our work together, we will select from these questions (or design others) to help us explore each stone as we lay it in place.



The Chaordic Stepping Stones

Need

The need is the compelling reason for doing anything. Sensing the need is the first step to designing a meeting, organizational structure or change initiative that is relevant. The need is outside of our work. It is what is served by the work you are doing.

- What time is it in the world now?
 - What time is it for our initiative now?
 - What are the challenges and opportunities we are facing?
- What do I really need to be able to understand and work on in the world?
 - What is the need that this project can uniquely meet?
 - What does the world need this conference to be?

Purpose

From the need flows the purpose. Purpose statements are clear and compelling, and they guide us in doing our best possible work.

- If this work should live up to its fullest potential, what do you dream (or vision) is possible?
- What is the purpose we can adopt that will best meet the need?
- What could this work do/create/inspire?
- What is the next level for our work? Where should we be heading?
- What is the simplest and most powerful question we could keep at the core of our work?

Principles

Principles of cooperation help us to know how we will work together. It is very important that these principles be simple, co-owned and well understood. These are not principles that are platitudes or that lie on a page somewhere. They are crisp statements of how we agree to operate together so that over the long term we can sustain the relationships that make this work possible.

- What are the principles we want to enact for our learning networks?
- What is important to remember about how we want to work with the participants in our initiative?
- What do we think is most important to remember as we design to meet the need and purpose?
- What unique ways of doing work and being together can we bring to this work?
- If our team should live up to its fullest potential — what do you dream (or vision) possible for this team?

People

Once the need and the purpose are in the place and we have agreed on our principles of cooperation, we can begin to identify the people who are involved in our work. Mapping the network helps us to see who is in this work and who will have an interest in what we are doing.

- Who is in the room?
- Who is not in the room and how do we bring them in?
- How do we leverage relationships to propagate the ideas generated by our work together?
- Who will be interested in the results of our work?

Concept

As we move to a more concrete idea of what our structures are, we begin to explore the concepts that will be useful. This is a high-level look at the shape of our endeavor. For example, if our need was to design a way to cross a body of water, we could choose a bridge, a causeway or a ferry. The concept is important, because it gives form to very different structures for doing our work.

In our work together, we might explore the different kinds of structures, including circles and networks, and really understand what these are, how they operate, how they are embedded with various contexts and cultures, and what implications each has for our work.

- What are the shapes that we might choose for our work?
- What is the deeper pattern of our work, and what organizational forms are in alignment with that?
- How might we activate our principles to best do our work?

Limiting beliefs

So much of what we do when we organize ourselves is based on unquestioned models of behavior. These patterns can be helpful, but they can also limit us in fulfilling our true potential. We cannot create innovation in the world using old models and approaches. It pays to examine ways in which we assume work gets done in order to discover the new ways that might serve work with new results. Engaging in this work together brings us into a co-creative working relationship, where we can help each other into new and powerful ways of working together, alleviating the fear and anxiety of the unknown.

- What makes us tremble, and what do we fear about new ways of working together?
- Who would we be without our stories of old ways of working?
- What will it take for us to fully enter into working in new and unfamiliar ways?
- What is our own learning edge in working together?

Structure

Once the concept has been chosen, it is time to create the structure that will channel our resources. It is in these conversations that we make decisions about the resources of the group: time, money, energy, commitment and attention.

- Who are we becoming when we meet and work together this way?
- How do we support the aspirations of the group?
- What is the lightest structure that will serve our purpose and need?
- What role might the core team play when the project is over?
- How do we wisely combine the various organizational concepts to support our work and sustain the results?

Act/Practice

The ongoing practice within the structures we build is important. This is the world of to do lists, conference calls and e-mail exchanges. The invitation here is to practice working with one another in alignment with the designs we have created.

- What do we need to do to sustain our work together?
- What is our own practice of working in networks?
- How do we extend the spirit of the gathering into future asynchronous environments where we can't be face to face?
- How do we leverage relationships and support the work that arises from them?
- How do we sustain and nourish our relationships and collective aspirations?
- What commitments are we willing to make to contribute to the success of our endeavor?

Harvest

There is no point in doing work in the world unless we plan to harvest the fruits of our labors. Harvesting includes making meaning of our work, telling the story and feeding forward our results so that they have the desired impacts in the world (more on harvest in the next section).

- What are the forms of harvest from our work that best serve the need?
- What intentional harvest will serve our purpose?
- What are the artifacts that will be the most powerful representations of what we have created?
- How will we carry the DNA of our work forward?
- What are the feedback loops that we need to design to ensure that learning and change accelerates itself?
- How will we stay open to emergent learning?
- What are the questions we need to carry about what we are learning by meeting this way?

It is very important to note that harvesting is an activity that needs to be planned up front, in the spirit of “we are not planning a meeting, we are planning a harvest.”

THE ART OF HARVESTING

Documenting Our Work: Three Simple Guides to Harvesting

Inspired by Sheila Kiscaden, written by Kathy Jourdain

Central to good process design is understanding what needs to be captured for posterity – documented or recorded in a way that serves the purpose of the work. In the *Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter*, we call this harvesting. In an AoH training we will often invite a harvest team to take care of this on behalf of the group and offer harvest in from time to time – using words, like through slam poetry or storytelling, visually in graphic facilitation or with a Wordle, with music, movement or in any other number of ways. In a consulting process for strategic planning, community engagement, innovation or other processes, the question of what needs to be documented is in play from the very beginning. At least one or several of the team holds a primary responsibility for it.

The term harvest is used to invite us to imagine beyond the traditional (sometimes wordy, sometimes boring) report that is often the way we capture and record our work. There are many ways to approach harvest. In July 2014, in Grand Rapids, Sheila Kiscaden offered these three simple guidelines – clear, easy to understand with beautiful analogies and diagrams.

The three simple guides to consider in documenting your work: what is the purpose of the harvest, who is the audience or recipient and what are the methods available for you to choose from?

Purpose

Is the purpose of the harvest or documentation for immediate consumption, as an ingredient in something else, for preservation and perhaps later consumption, or to be transformed into something else? The analogy of grapes offers a beautiful visual that helps us think of the purpose of the harvest.

1. *Consume*



Perhaps the harvest is for immediate consumption – you want or need to eat the grapes now. In a training situation, the group might hear the themes and patterns emerging from a world café process but have no need to capture what they are hearing beyond that moment.

As an additional step you might want to have the themes that have been identified at a table or in a small group captured on post-it notes so there is a visible harvest as well as an auditory one. The post-it notes can be displayed on a wall, clustered into the themes and patterns that have emerged. Clustering can be done by someone on the hosting team and is usually more powerful when done by the people in the room. You might only need a visible harvest for immediate consumption or it might play a later role in one of the other categories identified.



2. *Ingredient*



It could be that the grapes are needed as an ingredient in something bigger, like a fruit salad. They still essentially look the same but now are mixed in with other ingredients, adding flavor, new insight and new perspectives. The harvest could be an instigator for something else or something more, part of a mosaic that creates a more complete picture. A synthesis of themes and patterns might be incorporated into a report, ideas might become part of a strategic plan. These ingredients might be essential to an ongoing dialogue.

3. *Preserve*

You could turn your grapes into jam or jelly – preserve the harvest as a record of an event, a gathering, a meeting or conversation, perhaps when it is important to have a record to note or acknowledge that this event or conversation transpired – like an annual report for an organization. People can go back and look at it and it is an end in and of itself although perhaps a useful reference point in the future when scanning the past.



4. *Transform*



Like grapes can be transformed into something else through a process – like dried into raisins or distilled into wine – it could be that the harvest will also be transformed into something else. Themes and patterns might become part of a generative conversation leading you into new conversational spaces, opportunities or ideas – like what can happen in the emergence phase of divergence-emergence-convergence. Input in stakeholder dialogues or community engagement meetings might transform into a larger purpose. A synthesis of many conversations will still hold the essence of the original ingredients and look very different in a transformational process.

Who is the intended audience or recipient?

The harvest might be just for you, a personal harvest, or it could be contributing to a group process or needed for public consumption. This will cause you to also consider how you will harvest.

1. ***Personal harvest.*** It could be that you are harvesting for yourself – taking notes or drawing in a personal journal, creating reflective space for yourself for your own current and future learning.
2. ***Sharing with small circles.*** Is the documentation required for committee meetings, to inform a sponsor of progress in a project, a record of what is shared in a circle of friends or colleagues? If so, what needs to be captured, how is it shared and how often?

3. **Share more broadly.** Perhaps your harvest is part of a larger initiative and information needs to be shared with larger audiences, inside your organization, as part of a marketing or public relations strategy, within a community, as part of a public engagement initiative. Who your audience is or needs to be will influence how you think about your harvest.

Methods

There are a myriad of methods of harvest available and the methods you choose will be influenced by the purpose of your harvest, the intended audience and the nature of the work you are engaged in. Some ideas follow. They are categorized but many of these ideas could belong in more than one category and you could be using any combination of methods at any given time. Be as creative as is helpful for your work.

Documentation

- Reports – which might look like a traditional report or document or could be enlivened with pictures, quotes and sidebars which are more likely to attract and keep attention.
- Blog posts – many individuals and organizations provide a record or reflections through blog posts, which can be captured in the moment or, more likely, provided afterwards.
- Mindmaps – a diagram used to visually track information and, more significantly, relationships between information. It can be crafted in the moment, with the group identifying and mapping the relationships, where they could also “vote” for the themes that have the greatest energy for them, and later (or in the moment) it can be transcribed into mind mapping software and distributed in a report.
- Videos – within the process, later in editing or recapping. Understanding what you hope to do with the video and having a videographer and editor who is familiar with the topic at hand, the intent of your work and the language you use is helpful in creating the best record possible.
- Interviews – people involved in your process can be interviewed about their experience and those interviews posted somewhere for access by the intended audiences. Good questions will produce good interview results.
- Post-it notes – can be used to capture information, particularly themes and patterns from conversations and processes and then used to cluster the information into a meta themes and patterns.

Art

- Graphic facilitation – the use of large scale imagery produced live in the moment to capture the essence of the conversations and outcomes of the process. It activates a



different part of the brain and helps people see what they are experience and what they know.

- Photography – of people, processes, flip chart notes and of the other ways that information is being captured. This is a very common form of harvest for individuals and for collective purposes.
- Table top documentation (like from world cafés) – while oftentimes this provides too much information and most is not that usable, sometimes there is some amazing artwork that does capture some of the important essences of the experience and this can be used also to enliven a report.

Physical

- Body sculptures – this is often an on the spot harvest of the experience where participants are asked to “sculpt” their experience – perhaps using only their own body or having participants do this in small groups, using group members to create a “sculpture” that reflects their experience. This rotates so that every person either creates their own sculpture or the group might evolve a collective sculpture.
- Movement – People are asked to offer a movement that we sometimes ask everyone else to mirror. This is a powerful experience that enables the group to embody the collective experience.
- Dance – it is not uncommon for people who have some form of dance practice to be part of a group or a process and to offer their practice as one way to harvest or even simply to introduce movement into a process at a time when it is helpful to awakening body intelligence.
- Skits – this is a beautiful way to harvest a conversation, a learning journey experience, a process evolution that illuminates other ways of knowing and gives us a glimpse into any patterns in the system that maybe at play.

Voice

- Poetry, including slam poetry and other forms of poetic harvest – many people are gifted with a talent for poetry. Sometimes it is a live capture of a circle check-in or other process. Participants always listen carefully to hear their contribution reflected back into the room and it is easier to do than most people imagine. Sometimes there are some very gifted poets in our spaces who offer their work and/or a capture in the moment. Sometimes a poem written by others shows up in the space because it is the perfect harvest in the moment.
- Story telling – on the spot storytelling invited through a question or later storytelling captured in blog posts, interviews or recordings. Using story brings the experience alive for others who were and were not there.
- Music/song – this may be music or song that someone brings that resonates with the experience of the group or it may be co-created by the harvest team or the group.

Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter

- Voice recording/radio interviews – this is a way of capturing the experience and spreading the word more widely in a community or amongst an audience.

Other

- Virtual repositories of information – websites, listservs (like the AoH listserv) – public or internal, community sites, other virtual networks and social media.
- Any combination of ways and means to document and distribute information – identified here or emerging in new ways.

In these days of a proliferation of media tools and short attention spans, sparking imagination with harvests – both within the team and for the intended audiences – can make your work more accessible to your audiences and bring it alive in new ways. It is a place where people can bring their talents, sometimes gifts they don't use in the regular course of their work. The more we access the range of learning and information styles at our disposal, the richer the resonance of our work.

CORE PRACTICES

PEERSPIRIT 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 socializing or opinionated discussion into a receptive attitude of thoughtful speaking and deep listening and to embody and practice the structures outlined here.

The Components of the Circle

- Intention
- Welcome Start-point
- Center and Check-in/Greeting
- Agreements
- Three Principles and Three Practices
- Guardian of process
- Check-out and Farewell



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.

Welcome or Start-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 centering.

Establishing the center

The center 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 center of a circle usually holds 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.

Check-in/Greeting

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 people place individual objects in the center as a way of signifying their presence and relationship to the intention.

Setting Circle Agreements

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

Agreements often used include:

- 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.

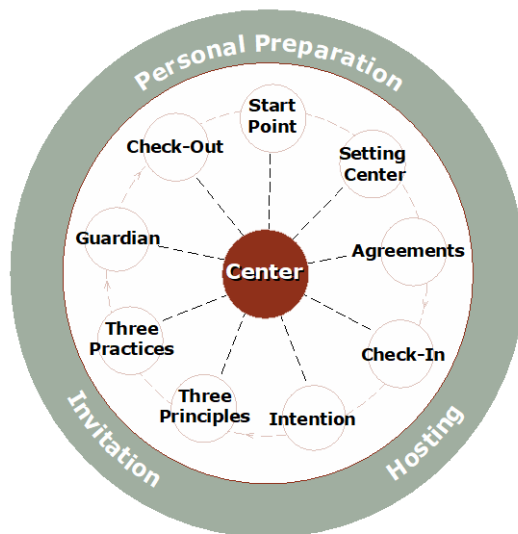
Checkout and Farewell

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 center.

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 check-out, 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.

May your circles be great teachers and places to rest on the journey.

The Components of Circle



Source:



This resource is a gift from PeerSpirit, Inc. an educational company devoted to life and leadership 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. See: <http://www.peerspirit.com>

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

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 organizations.

Problem solving	Appreciative inquiry
“Felt need” Identification of the problem	Appreciating and valuing the best of “what is”
Analysis of causes	Envisioning “what might be”
Analysis of possible solutions	Dialoguing “What should be” Innovating “What will be”
Basic assumption: An organization is a problem to be solved	Basic assumption: An organization is a mystery to be embraced

General Flow of an Appreciative Inquiry Process:

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

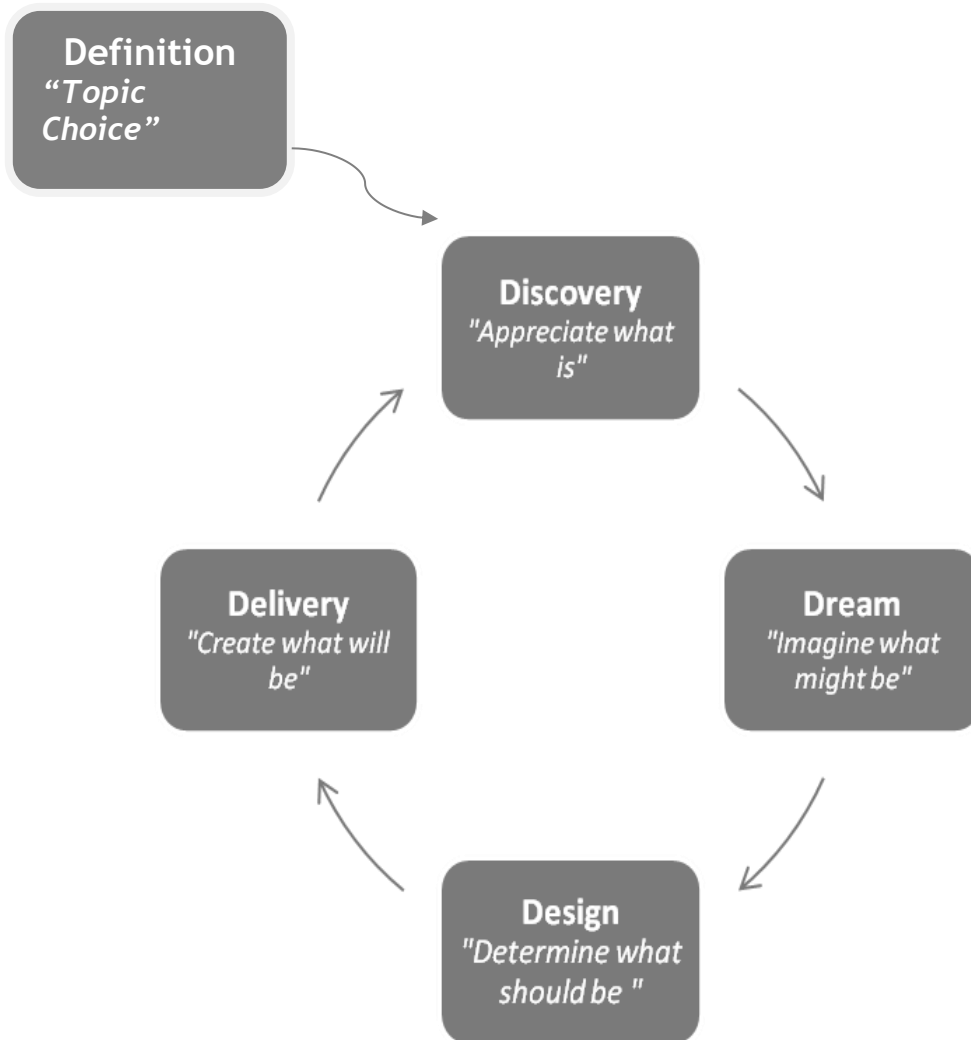
- **DEFINITION:** Surfacing the focus for inquiring appreciatively
- **DISCOVERY:** Identifying organizational processes that work well
- **DREAM:** Envisioning processes that would work well in the future
- **DESIGN:** Planning and prioritising those processes
- **DELIVERY:** Implementing the proposed design

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

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

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

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



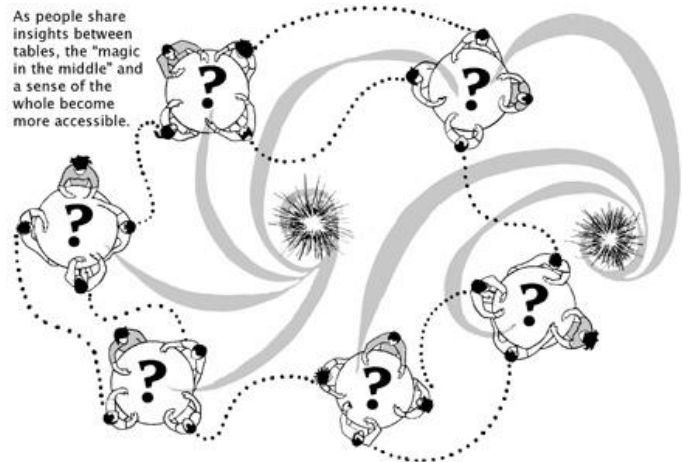
WORLD CAFÉ



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

Assumptions of World Café

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



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.

General Flow of a World Café

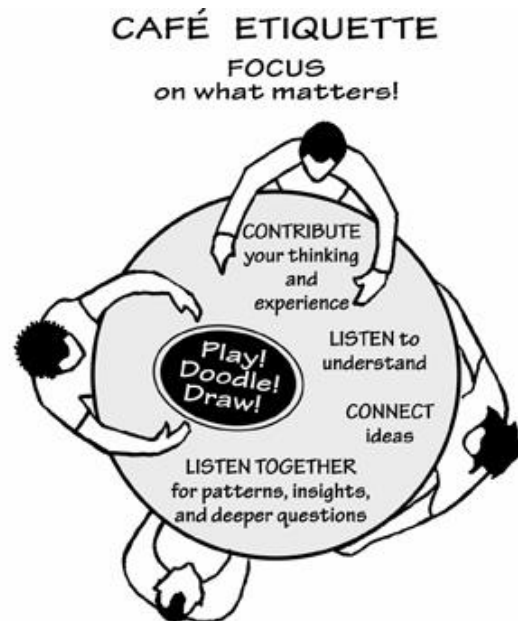
- Seat 4-5 people at café-style tables or in conversation clusters
- Set up progressive rounds of conversation, usually of 20-30 minutes each — have some good questions
- Ask one person to stay at the table as a “host” and invite the other table members to move to other tables as ambassadors of ideas and insights
- Ask the table host to share key insights, questions and ideas briefly with new table members, 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

Operating Principles of World Café

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

Material Needed

- Small tables (60 cm width), 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



For more information: www.theworldcafe.com

(The above info adapted from “Café to Go” on this website)

OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY

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 catalyze effective working conversations and to truly invite organizations to thrive in times of swirling change.

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.

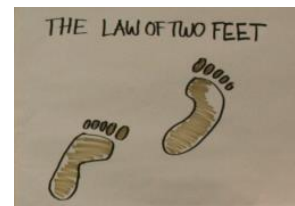
Open Space technology is an excellent meeting format for any situation in which there is:

- 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.

The Law of Two Feet/Mobility

If you find yourself in a situation where you are not contributing or learning, move somewhere where you can. Follow your **passion** and take your **responsibility**.



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

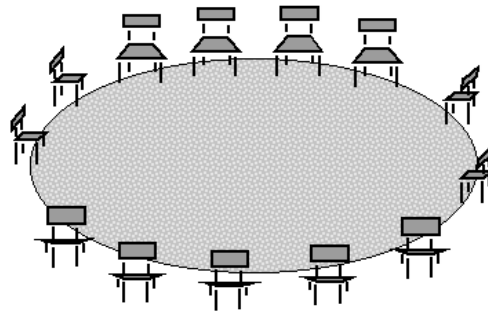
The four principles and the law work to create a powerful event motivated by the passion and bounded by the responsibility of the participants.

Roles in Open Space

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



The Law of Two Feet



Open Space Institute
13347 SE 49th Place
Bellevue, WA 98006
Phone: 425-794-4278
Fax: 425-845-8148
E-mail: os@open-space-institute.org
www.open-space-institute.org

The Four Principles

Whoever comes is the right people.

Whatever happens is the only thing that could have.

Whenever it starts is the right time.

When it is over it is over.



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 his or her 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

Material Needed

- Circle of chairs for participants
- Letters or numbers around the room to indicate meeting locations
- A blank wall that will become the agenda
- A news wall for recording and posting the results of the dialogue sessions
- Breakout spaces for meetings
- Paper on which to write session topics/questions
- Markers/pencils/pens
- Posters of the principles, law of two feet, and roles (optional)
- Materials for harvest

For more information: www.openspaceworld.org

Design Process

This is a beautiful process to use to reflect on a meeting, project or initiative you want to call. It emphasizes the thoughtfulness and intention required to establish the conditions for conversations that matter and are different than the usual conversations that show up. Usually a caller brings forth an idea and three to six people join the caller in exploring the process and questions below. (In a training, it is lovely to have at least 1 hour for this conversation and up to an hour and a half, recognizing that in a team conversation it could take several meetings to complete).

Purpose

What is the big purpose you are trying to fulfill? How does that purpose meet your understanding of the need it is intended to address?

(A Statement of Purpose defines, with absolute clarity and deep conviction, the purpose of the conversation/meeting/work/community/other. An effective statement of purpose will be a clear, commonly understood statement of that which identifies and binds the work / community together as worthy of pursuit.)

Harvest

What do you want to harvest, remembering that the harvest is how we make and share meaning of the experience? What is the purpose of the harvest and who are the audiences? Different audiences may be served better by a different harvest.

- In your hands (tangible)
- In your hearts (intangible)

Invitation

Who is it we are wanting to bring together?

What is the inspiring question that will bring people together?

How will we invite people so they know they are really needed?

(remember: How I am invited will determine how I show up..... & " If it about us don't do it without us")

Meeting/Gathering/Initiative Design Flow

What will you do to make the meeting/initiative/process more creative and powerful?

What does your design flow 1.0 look like?

What methodologies would best serve your purpose?

How will you surface and play with limiting beliefs?

Wise Action

How will you invite action?

How will you design the conclusion (convergence) of the meeting, project or initiative to help foster wiser and more committed action?

(Please do not get stuck in the details or differences of opinion....

If you need help remember that: "It is kind to ask for help – a person who cannot ask for help cannot be trusted.")

ProAction 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 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, organization 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 group, organization or community to engage in creative and inspirational conversation leading to wiser and more collectively informed actions.

General Flow of a Pro Action Café:

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

You need 2 ½ to 3 hours for good Pro Action café. Invite participants to step forward with their call and in that way they ask the community for the help they need to move their project into action. People with a call/project stand up, speak it and write it on the agenda that corresponds to a numbered café table.

Count the amount of participants divide by 4 that gives the amount of callers with projects/sessions that can be worked – for example, with 40 people you can have maximum 10 callers with a project. **The principle is first come first serve.** If you have less 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) get to contribute to or support 3 of the different calls /projects.

When the agenda has been created invite the callers to go to their numbered café tables. There will be 3 rounds of conversation in café style of 20 to 30 minutes – each guided by a few generic questions to help deepen and focus the conversations:

Round 1:

What is the quest behind the call/question/project? Or What is at the heart of your call/question/project? – The intention is to deepen the need and purpose of the call.

Round 2:

What is missing? – When the intention behind the quest has been deepened, explore what could make the project more complete and possible.

Round 3:

What am I learning about myself? – What am I learning about my project? - What next steps will I take? - What help do I still need? – The intention is to help bring it all together for the caller and his/her project.

This 3rd round is in 2 steps:

1. The first 20-25 minutes is for the callers themselves to reflect on the 4 questions above and harvest their key insights.
2. Then a last round where 3 new contributors visit the tables to listen to the harvest of the caller, their learning, their steps, any help needed – and then offer any insight and any further support they can offer...

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

The 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 can reflect briefly on: **What applications do we see for practicing 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, color pens and markers as in a 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.

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

LISTENING PRACTICES

TOP TEN POWERFUL LISTENING PRACTICES

From *The Sacred Art of Listening* by Kay Lindahl

1. Stop talking.

One person speaks at a time. One of the most irritating listening habits is that of interrupting.

2. Pause before speaking.

Allow the person who is speaking time to complete their thought, wait a few seconds before responding.

Another variation on this is to ask “Is there anything else?” There almost always is.

3. Listen to yourself.

Be in touch with your inner voice. Ask yourself, “What wants to be said next?”

4. Listen for understanding.

You do not have to agree with what you hear, or even believe it, to listen to understand the other person.

5. Ask for clarification.

If you do not understand what someone is saying, just ask.

6. Let the speaker know that you have heard them.

Be aware of body language: nodding, facial expressions.

7. Be patient and present.

Listening well takes time and your presence.

8. Listen with an open mind.

Be curious and appreciative of what you are listening to.

Listen for new ideas instead of judging and evaluating.

9. Pay attention to the environment.

Stop what you are doing to listen.

Turn off background noise when possible; move to a quieter corner of the room; clear your desk.

10. Listen with empathy and compassion.

Put your agenda aside for the moment. Put yourself in their shoes.

It only takes one minute a day to . . .

... practice silence.

Spend at least one minute each day intentionally silent.

... practice reflection.

Ask yourself, “What is emerging now? What wants to be said or done now?” Then wait for your inner wisdom.

... practice mindfulness.

Spend at least one minute per day aware of what you are doing for each second.

REFLECTIVE LISTENING PRACTICE

Reflective listening is the practice of being fully present with another person. It invites us into softening our heart, listening without judgment and with curiosity, being available for what the other person wants or needs to share without seeking explanation or clarification for our own purposes.

Benefits of reflective listening:

1. The communication level may be deepened
2. The listener may become more empathetic/compassionate towards the speaker
3. The speaker may be able to gain greater self-understanding, clarity and vulnerability through effective mirroring
4. A shift in perspective/worldview may occur through sharing reflections

The Exercise

In groups of four, each person will have the experience of each of four roles:

1. Storyteller
2. Listener for Facts
3. Listener for Feelings
4. Listener for Values

(If there are 5 people in your group, the 5th person will watch for body language.)

You will have 1 hour. For the groups of four, this is 15 minutes per person. One person shares a story where they have experienced personal challenge or conflict. Use 7-8 minutes to tell the story. The listeners will reflect back to the storyteller what they heard, without providing advice or asking questions.

Rotate roles until everyone has experienced each role.

First level: facts

The listener repeats the facts of the story as they heard them.

Second level: feelings

The listener shares back the feelings or emotions they heard as the storyteller told their story.

Third level: values

The listener reflects the values held by the storyteller that they heard as they listened.

Feelings Inventory

☺ **Likely to be experienced when our needs ARE being fulfilled**

absorbed	friendly	satisfied
adventurous	fulfilled	secure
affectionate	glad	sensitive
alert	gleeful	splendid
alive	glorious	stimulated
amazed	glowing	surprised
amused	good-humored	tender
appreciative	grateful	thankful
aroused	gratified	thrilled
astonished	groovy	touched
blissful	happy	tranquil
carefree	helpful	warm
cheerful	hopeful	wide awake
comfortable	invigorated	wonderful
concerned	involved	zany
complacent	inquisitive	zestful
composed	inspired	
confident	intense	
contented	interested	
cool	intrigued	
curious	joyous	
dazzled	jubilant	
delighted	keyed up	
eager	loving	
ecstatic	mellow	
elated	merry	
electrified	mirthful	
encouraged	moved	
energetic	optimistic	
engrossed	overjoyed	
enlivened	overwhelmed	
excited	peaceful	
exhilarated	proud	
expansive	quiet	
expectant	radiant	
exultant	rapturous	
fascinated	refreshed	
free	relieved	

☹ **Likely to be experienced when our needs are NOT being fulfilled**

afraid	distressed	irritated	surprised
aggravated	disquieted	jealous	suspicious
agitated	disturbed	jittery	tepid
alarmed	downcast	keyed up	terrified
aloof	downhearted	lassitude	tired
angry	dread	lazy	troubled
anguished	dull	lethargic	uncomfortable
animosity	edgy	listless	unconcerned
annoyed	embarrassed	lonely	uneasy
anxious	embittered	mad	unglued
apathetic	exasperated	mean	unhappy
apprehensive	exhausted	melancholy	unnerved
averse	fatigued	miserable	unsteady
beat	fearful	mopey	upset
bitter	fidgety	nervous	uptight
blah	forlorn	nettled	vexed
blue	frightened	overwhelmed	weary
bored	frustrated	passive	withdrawn
broken-hearted	furios	perplexed	woeful
chagrined	gloomy	pessimistic	worried
cold	grief	puzzled	wretched
concerned	guilty	rancorous	
confused	hate	reluctant	
cool	heavy	repelled	
cross	helpless	resentful	
dejected	hesitant	restless	
depressed	horrible	sad	
despairing	horrified	scared	
despondent	hostile	sensitive	
detached	hot	shaky	
disappointed	humdrum	shocked	
discouraged	hurt	skeptical	
disgruntled	impatient	sleepy	
disgusted	indifferent	sorrowful	
disheartened	inert	sorry	
dislike	intense	sour	
dismayed	irate	spiritless	
displeased	irked	startled	

Values

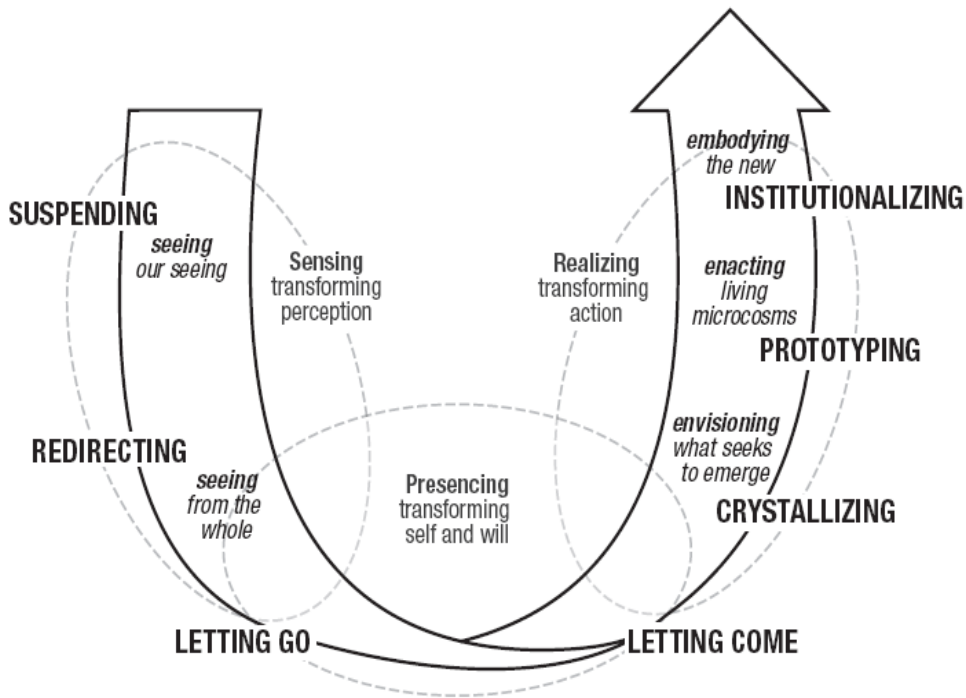
In listening deeply to one another, our hearts assist us to hear the values underneath the words, rhetoric, or strongly held positions. When we listen deeply and can reflect the values that we hear, we connect to the wholeness in the other.

BEAUTY
COMPASSION
COMMUNITY
CONNECTION
COOPERATION
COURAGE
CREATIVITY
EQUALITY
FAITH
FAMILY
FRIENDSHIP
FREEDOM
GENEROSITY
JUSTICE
GOODWILL
GRATITUDE
HARMONY
HUMOR
INCLUSIVENESS
LOVE
ORDER
PATIENCE
PEACE
RESPECT
SERVICE
SIMPLICITY
TRUST
UNDERSTANDING
WHOLENESS
WISDOM

PATTERNS OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

THEORY U

Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future



Seven Capacities of the U Movement

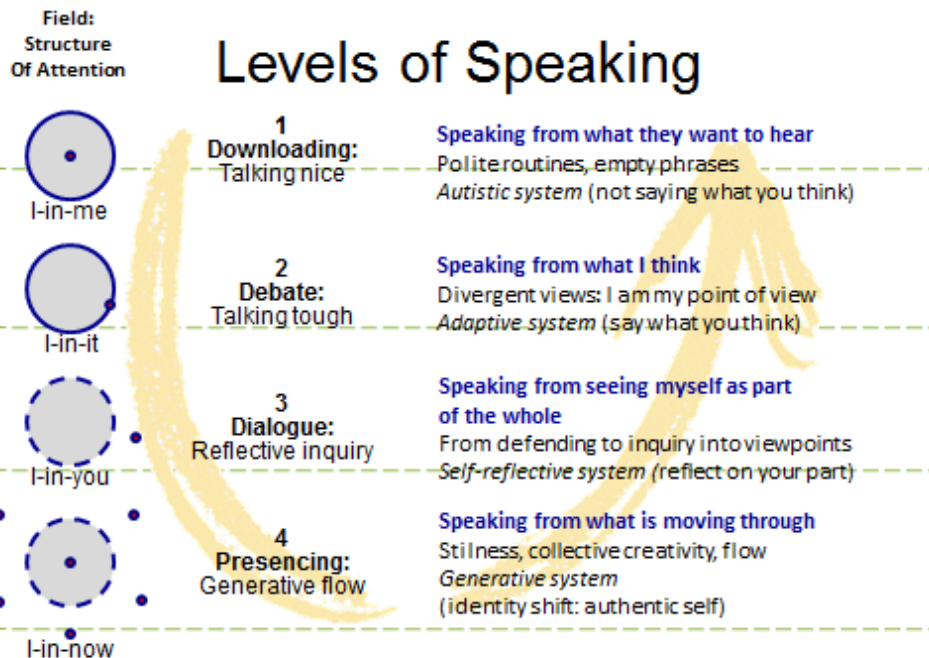
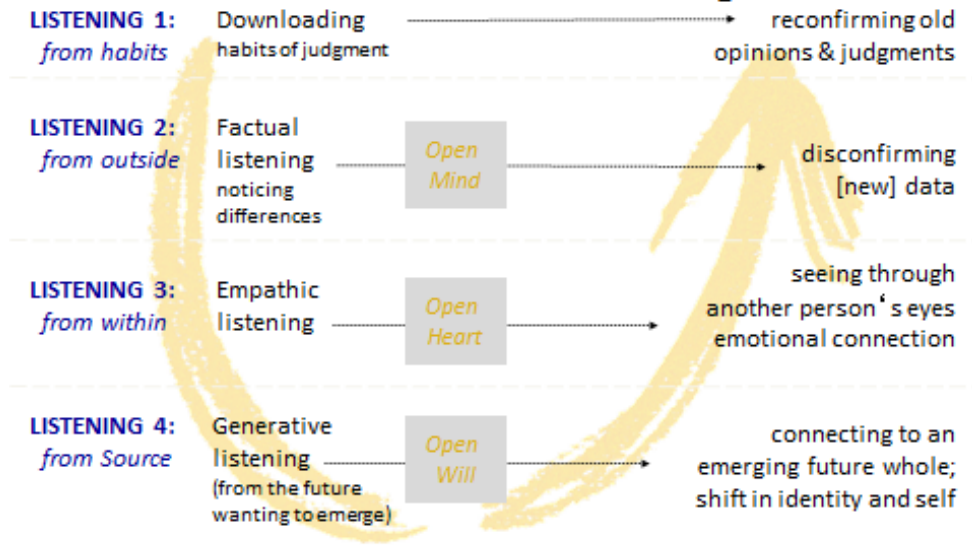
The entire U movement arises from seven core capacities and the activities they enable. Each capacity is a gateway to the next activity – the capacity for suspending enables seeing our seeing, and the capacity for prototyping enables enacting living microcosms – but only as all seven capacities are developed is the movement through the entire process possible.



THEORY U: LEVELS OF LISTENING AND SPEAKING

“Presencing” is bringing into presence, and into the present, your highest potential and the future that is seeking to emerge. Your highest future possibility is related to your own highest intention — it’s being an instrument of life itself, to accomplish, in a sense, what life wishes for me to accomplish.

Levels of Listening



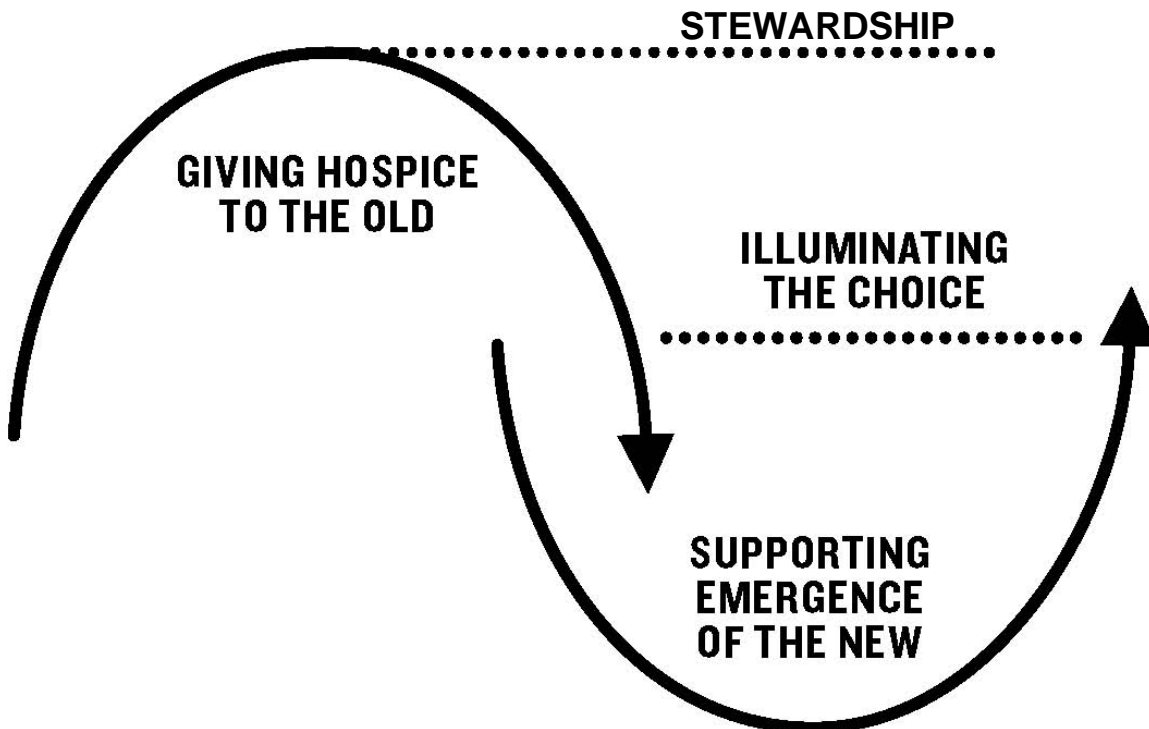
THE 2-LOOPS OF SYSTEMS CHANGE

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 can see many of our modern systems failing to sustain themselves in the complexity of our times.

Human systems, like systems in nature, don't 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.

The Berkana Institute (www.berkana.org) has been studying emergence in social innovation for several years. They have been noticing and practicing four levels that help support the creation of new systems while old systems die. Each of these steps show up on the new / bottom curve.

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.



USING EMERGENCE TO TAKE SOCIAL INNOVATION TO SCALE (A 2 LOOPS STORY)

Despite current ads and slogans, the world doesn't change one person at a time. It changes when networks of relationships form among people who share a common cause and vision of what's possible. This is good news for those of us intent on creating a positive future. Rather than worry about critical mass, our work is to foster critical connections. We don't need to convince large numbers of people to change; instead, we need to connect with kindred spirits. Through these relationships, we will develop the new knowledge, practices, courage and commitment that lead to broad-based change.

But networks aren't the whole story. As networks grow and transform into active, collaborative communities, we discover how life truly changes, which is through emergence. When separate, local efforts connect with each other as networks, then strengthen as communities of practice, suddenly and surprisingly a new system emerges at a greater level of scale. This system of influence possesses qualities and capacities that were unknown in the individuals. It isn't that they were hidden; they simply don't exist until the system emerges. They are properties of the system, not the individual, but once there, individuals possess them. And the system that emerges always possesses greater power and influence than is possible through planned, incremental change. Emergence is how life creates radical change and takes things to scale.

Since its inception in 1992, The Berkana Institute has been experimenting with the life cycle of emergence — how living systems begin as networks, shift to intentional communities of practice, and evolve into powerful systems capable of global influence. Two years ago, we created the Berkana Exchange to learn how local social innovation can be taken to scale and provide solutions to many of the world's most intractable issues — such as community health, ecological sustainability and economic self-reliance. The Exchange connects leadership learning centers around the globe, in such places as Brazil, Canada, India, Mexico, Pakistan, South Africa, the United States and Zimbabwe. A learning center is a local initiative committed to strengthening a community's leadership capacity and self-reliance by working with the wisdom and wealth already present in its people, traditions and environment. The purpose of the Berkana Exchange is to support and sustain a vibrant “trans-local” learning community — a network that connects local action so that global influence can emerge. By applying the lessons of living systems and working intentionally with emergence and its life cycle, we are learning how to create the conditions for networks of all kinds to evolve into systems of influence that spread social innovation throughout the world.

Why we need to understand networks

Researchers and social activists are beginning to discover the power of networks and networking. And there is a growing recognition that networks are the new form of organizing. Evidence of self-organized networks is everywhere — social activists, web-based interest groups, terrorist groups and street gangs.

Yet much of the current work on networks displays old paradigm bias. We repeat our habitual pattern of looking for hierarchy and control mechanisms in the belief that organization only

happens through human will and intervention. We see this in social network analysis, when physical representations of the network are created by mapping relationships — thereby depicting the form that has emerged, but saying nothing about why it formed. Other network analysts identify roles played by network members, such as “expert” and “lurker,” or make distinctions between different parts of the network, such as “core” and “periphery.” Most of these distinctions harken back to our mechanical understanding of organization — its shape, roles and physical manifestation. Although it may not be the intent of these researchers, their work is often used by leaders to find ways to manipulate the network, to use it in a traditional and controlling way.

What’s missing in these analyses is an exploration of the dynamics of networks. As the only form of organization used by living systems on this planet, networks result from self-organization, where individuals or species recognize their interdependence and organize in ways that support the diversity and viability of all. Because networks are the first stage in emergence, it is essential that we understand their dynamics by exploring such questions as:

Why do networks form? What are the conditions that support their creation?

What keeps a network alive and growing? What keeps members connected?

What type of leadership is required? Why do people become leaders?

What type of leadership interferes with or destroys the network?

What happens after a healthy network forms? What’s next?

If we understand these dynamics and the lifecycle of emergence, what can we do as leaders, activists and social entrepreneurs to intentionally foster emergence?

What is emergence?

Emergence violates so many of our Western assumptions of how change happens that it often takes quite awhile to understand it. In nature, change never happens as a result of top-down, pre-conceived strategic plans, or from the mandate of any single individual or boss. Change begins as local actions spring up simultaneously in many different areas. If these changes remain disconnected, nothing happens beyond each locale. However, when they become connected, local actions can emerge as a powerful system with influence at a more global or comprehensive level. (Global here means a larger scale, not necessarily the entire planet.)

These powerful emergent phenomena appear suddenly and surprisingly. Think about how the Berlin Wall suddenly came down, how the Soviet Union ended, how corporate power quickly came to dominate globally. In each case, there were many local actions and decisions, most of which were invisible and unknown to each other, and none of which was powerful enough by itself to create change. But when these local changes coalesced, new power emerged. What could not be accomplished by diplomacy, politics, protests or strategy suddenly happened. And when each materialized, most were surprised. Emergent phenomena always have these characteristics: They exert much more power than the sum of their parts; they always

possess new capacities different than the local actions that engendered them; they always surprise us by their appearance. It is important to note that emergence always results in a powerful system that has many more capacities than could ever be predicted by analyzing the individual parts. We see this in the behavior of hive insects such as bees and termites. Individual ants possess none of the intelligence or skills that are in the hive. No matter how intently scientists study the behavior of individual ants, they can never see the behavior of the hive. Yet once the hive forms, each ant acts with the intelligence and skillfulness of the whole. And over time, even though the individual ants die off, the hive develops greater intelligence.

This aspect of emergence has profound implications for social entrepreneurs. Instead of developing them individually as leaders and skillful practitioners, we would do better to connect them to like-minded others and create the conditions for emergence. The skills and capacities needed by them will be found in the system that emerges, not in better training programs.

Because emergence only happens through connections, Berkana has developed a four-stage model that catalyzes connections as the means to achieve global level change. Our philosophy is to “Act locally, connect regionally, learn globally.” We focus on discovering pioneering efforts and naming them as such. We then connect these efforts to other similar work globally. We nourish this network in many ways, but most essentially through creating opportunities for learning and sharing of experiences and shifting into communities of practice. We also illuminate the work of these pioneering efforts so that many more people will learn from them. We are attempting to work intentionally with emergence so that small, local efforts can become a global force for change.

The life cycle of emergence

Stage one: Networks. We live in a time when coalitions, alliances and networks are forming as the means to create societal change. There are ever more networks and now, networks of networks. These networks are essential for people finding like-minded others, the first stage in the life cycle of emergence. It’s important to note that networks are only the beginning. They are based on self-interest — people usually network together for their own benefit and to develop their own work. Networks tend to have fluid membership; people move in and out of them based on how much they personally benefit from participating.

Stage two: Communities of practice. Networks make it possible for people to find others engaged in similar work. The second stage of emergence is the development of communities of practice (CoPs). Many such smaller, individuated communities can spring from a robust network. CoPs are a self-organized. People share a common work and realize there is great benefit to being in relationship. They use this community to share what they know, to support one another and to intentionally create new knowledge for their field of practice. These CoPs differ from networks in significant ways. They are communities, which means that people make a commitment to be there for each other; they participate not only for their own needs, but to serve the needs of others.

In a community of practice, the focus extends beyond the needs of the group. There is an intentional commitment to advance the field of practice and to share those discoveries with a

wider audience. They make their resources and knowledge available to anyone, especially those doing related work.

The speed with which people learn and grow in a community of practice is noteworthy. Good ideas move rapidly amongst members. New knowledge and practices are implemented quickly. The speed at which knowledge development and exchange happens is crucial, because local regions and the world need this knowledge and wisdom now.

Stage three: Systems of influence. The third stage in emergence can never be predicted. It is the sudden appearance of a system that has real power and influence. Pioneering efforts that hovered at the periphery suddenly become the norm. The practices developed by courageous communities become the accepted standard. People no longer hesitate about adopting these approaches and methods and they learn them easily. Policy and funding debates now include the perspectives and experiences of these pioneers. They become leaders in the field and are acknowledged as the wisdom keepers for a particular issue. And critics who said it could never be done suddenly become chief supporters (often saying they knew all along).

Emergence is the fundamental scientific explanation for how local changes can materialize as global systems of influence. As a change theory, it offers methods and practices to accomplish system-wide changes so needed at this time. As leaders, we need to intentionally work with emergence so that our efforts will result in a truly hopeful future. No matter what other change strategies we have learned or favored, emergence is the only way change really happens on the planet. And that is very good news.

Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze ©2006

COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS

The way we lead is very much formed by how we perceive reality – our worldview. Social reality has become an object of systems research and cognitive science, which in turn offers us a whole range of realities that make up our actual reality. In what follows we introduce the notion of a system to understand social reality. A system is the whole of its elements and their relationships as well as its rules of behavior or processes. You may wonder where the borders of a system are. If the elements of a system include living beings like humans or nature, then it tends to be dynamic and may move its borders; it actually defines them by its own rules.

An instructive synopsis on the various states of systems found in the “Cynefin framework” developed by the Welsh researcher Dave Snowden distinguishes five domains of reality that a given system may represent.



The first four domains are:

Simple, in which the relationship between cause and effect is obvious to all, the approach is to Sense – Categorize – Respond, and we can apply *best* practice.

This is the area we know from the assembly line factory, work and environment constrain any actor so much that they are left with few options and perform as the system instructs them to do.

Complicated, in which the relationship between cause and effect requires analysis or some other form of investigation and/or the application of expert knowledge, the approach is to Sense – Analyze – Respond, and we can apply *good* practice.

This is the area of the "expert" that knows better than the actors how the system's relationships actually fit best together. The experts design the way to follow, and sound

managers implement this advice. It is important to note that in the complicated domain there are linear cause-effect relationships, but there are so many and not all obvious that some expert insight is necessary to find a good way through.

Complex, in which the relationship between cause and effect can only be perceived in retrospect, but not in advance, the approach is to Probe – Sense – Respond, and we can sense emergent practice.

Here the system’s relationships are mutually influenced by the actors’ behavior. Thus, it is impossible to discern causal relationships in advance, and experts fail as anyone else in trying so.

Leading in complexity is a game of trial and learning. The art is to launch a number of different possible actions together and see what works better. Those are then amplified, and the ones that work less well might be stopped or revised. Here we work on the basis that we know that we do not know the best way in advance.

Chaotic, in which there is no relationship between cause and effect at systems level, the approach is to Act – Sense – Respond, and we can discover novel practice.

Leading in Chaos is stressful, as the whole system is in stress mode. Systems tend to be unstable and fall from chaotic into simple. This is a catastrophic collapse, as the simplification brought into the system tends to overdo and to suppress the inherent complexity, the system might re-collapse back into chaos again.

The way to stabilize chaotic situations is by Acting – Sensing — acting at large scale at once (there is no time left for trying), until the chaos stabilizes into “normal” complexity where further actions can be tested.

The fifth domain is **Disorder**, which is the state of not knowing what type of causality exists, in which state people will revert to their own comfort zone in 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 new perspective gained by this is the view from complexity. Leading in complexity is actually simple — it suffices to maintain a number of high-quality learning nodes around constant experiments about what could be a new or improved way of acting in the face of constantly fresh constellations in a world where all actors have some large degree of freedom constrained lightly through boundaries and rules of the system.

References:

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

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mqNcs8mp74> (brief explanation of the Cynefin framework)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Miw92eZaJg> (how you organize a birthday party for 13-year-old boys using the various domains of systems)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES, BOOKS AND WEBSITES

Many resources are available — books, articles, websites, blogs and communities.

Art of Hosting: www.artofhosting.org

Co-created by many “art of hosting” stewards

Art of Hosting Ning Site: <http://artofhosting.ning.com/>

Meadowlark Institute

<http://www.meadowlark.co/>

Provides videos about several AoH topics and print resources

Shape Shift Strategies Inc.

www.ShapeShiftStrategies.com

Includes many posts about learning in the AoH field

Books:

Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea

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,

www.peerspirit.com

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STORIES AND ARTICLES

THE VISA STORY – A CHAORDIC ORGANIZATION STORY

Visa is often cited as an early prototype of chaordic organization. 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 60,000 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 reconceive, 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 organize 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 organization is.” Blank looks all around. They then began to explore what they considered to be the nature of organization. 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, 24 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 organization 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 organization could do it. It would require a transcendental organization 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 organization 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 organizational 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 organization 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 organization based on biological organizing 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-organizing. All participants must have the right to organize 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 organization 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 organization that would come to be known as Visa came into being.

A Remarkable Organizational 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 20 percent compounded annually. A staff of about 3,000 scattered in 21 offices in 13 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 centers 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 percent on its members' invested capital, while at the same time reducing by more than 50 percent the cost of unsecured credit to individuals and merchant cost of handling payment instruments.

Its products are the most universally used and recognized in the world, yet the organization is so transparent, its ultimate customers, most if its affiliates and some of its members do not know how it functions or how it is structured.

GRAND RAPIDS, MN - AN AO H COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STORY

Real People. Real Lives. Real Community. Real Impact.

Posted on [October 2, 2014](#) at Shape Shift Strategies Inc.

Driving from the countryside of Stakke Lake in Minnesota, through the little towns and forested roads on the three hour drive to Grand Rapids, it is easy for me to forget that I am not in Canada, but driving through the US countryside, with my partner and co-hosting colleague Jerry Nagel, on our way to a rural community that is breaking its way out of any stereotypes we might conjure up about rural communities – in Canada or the US. What is happening there could happen anywhere. It inspires hope at a time when hope, especially for our rural communities, is deeply needed in the world.



What's Been Happening

In 2013, the Blandin Foundation funded a grant to the Meadowlark Institute to bring the Art of Hosting (AoH) Conversations that Matter to the Itasca County area. Not a one-off training but, thanks to the vision of friend, AoH Practitioner and Global Steward, Bernadine Jocelyn, and her colleagues at the Blandin Foundation, a series of trainings intended to offer residents of Itasca County the opportunity to acquire and use skills of 21st Century Leadership to work with every day life and address some of the most pressing challenges in their communities. The Blandin Foundation was founded by Charles Blandin in 1941 to aid and promote Grand Rapids (population around 10,000) and the surrounding area (total population around 40,000) in such a way that it could be responsive to changing times, a beautiful alignment with the adaptive capacity of AoH offerings.



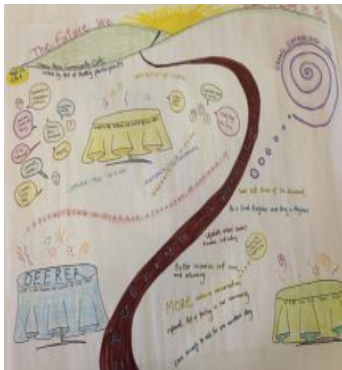
What's happening there, with organic emergence and almost astonishing interconnectedness, is a thing of beauty. Four Art of Hosting trainings (130 people altogether so far) since November 2013 with two more in the works; two Community Cafés (with almost 100 participants altogether) convened by a planning team that sparked from an Open Space conversation in the first AoH, called by Sandy Layman, a well known community leader. She asked the question “How can we become a community that hosts its own conversations?” That question is gaining momentum as it continues to spark the curiosity and inspiration of the county.

The first Community Café brought together participants from the first two AoH cohorts and was held one evening during the second training. The second Community Café was inserted into the middle of the fourth training, in an afternoon, and brought together participants from all four trainings and others who wanted to join in.

The Stories That Bring the Data Alive

All of that feels like data. It is the stories that bring the data alive, that show the nuances and interweave of connections; the stories of who is showing up in the same spaces together; the stories of willingness to dive into challenging conversations to address both long held and emerging issues; the stories of risk and courage as people bring AoH patterns and practices into likely and unlikely work settings.

Truly a fractal of the community is coming together – people who might not otherwise find themselves in the same room or the same conversations. The county administrator. Educators. A senior leader in Corrections. Senior leaders of non-profits. Advocates for mental health. Consumers of mental health services. People who have been homeless, some still in transition. People with very diverse political views. Local radio station representatives. Artists. Business people. Blandin Foundation staff. More. All on equal footing with equal voice. All responding to questions centered on “What is the future we want to live into and what can we begin now?”



The stories that are emerging from the people who have been through the training bring the impact alive and are heart opening. Our friend in Corrections, who was in the February cohort, shared with us that he only recently had the opportunity to offer a check in at the beginning of a meeting. He said it changed everything about the meeting. When we asked him how, he said, “People were very emotional.” When we asked him what his check in question was, he said, “How we are doing?” Simply, *how* are we doing? An invitation to a moment of humanity, an invitation to show up fully. They will now start every meeting with a check-in question. A small, but powerful, shift in practice.

The County Administrator shared that there is a discussion happening at the County offices about mental health funding, the number of agencies that provide services and the need for greater interagency communication. Someone at the county offices, who has only heard about AoH but not been to a training, said that what is needed for that conversation is art of hosting.

In Bigfork, another Itasca County community, community leaders have used World Café to host a conversation about an ongoing contentious issue, bringing new insight and perspective to the issue, establishing a foundation from which to move forward.

The region is facing some growing, possibly divisive issues; particularly around resource extraction (economy) and the environment; issues that are growing more complex all the time. Experience with the patterns and practices of the Art of Hosting is helping people see the possibility of different conversations; conversations that invite a multiplicity of worldviews, give voice to all the perspectives beyond the vocal few, invite people who live, work and play

Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter

in the region to imagine more of the future they all want to live into, to continue to forge new ways forward on small and large matters. There is a growing buzz in the community and a sense of urgency combined with curiosity and even hopefulness.

The Community Conversations planning team grows with each successive training. The team



is now getting ready to call and convene a county wide “Grand Gathering” on November 22, 2014 using Open Space Technology – the first community meeting of its kind in the area. This demonstrates the increasing reach of a commitment that began with that Open Space conversation during the first Art of Hosting training nearly a year ago, building on an idea inspired by the Great Gathering in Fredericton, NB; which demonstrates the interweaving of stories across borders and geographic distances. (And, incidentally, we have discovered there is a history of

relationship between New Brunswick and Itasca County thanks to the pulp and paper industry.)

KAXE, a local radio station, present at the Community Café and on the planning team, will be doing a series of radio spots leading up to the Grand Gathering, which is being hosted by the Grand Rapids Community Foundation. The team is in full volunteer recruitment and planning mode and the community is being invited to create an agenda of conversations and possible action steps that are meaningful and relevant to them. Some of the potential conversation themes have been popping up already in the Community Cafés and the AoH trainings. They include an emphasis on youth (brain gain), on revitalizing communities, coordinating resources and connecting diverse voices.

One of the many compelling themes that is emerging is around evoking stories and extending invitations. Care enough to ask for the story; bring everyone to the table to identify struggles and be open to hearing the unheard. Notice who is not there who should be and extend an invitation. Be a neighbour, bring a neighbour.

It is the tip of the iceberg. The work has only just begun. This community is carving out pathways that can be an inspiration to other communities searching for new ways to imagine and live into the future. What can we begin now?

***Real People.
Real Lives.
Real Community.
Real Impact.***

