Companion

The Art of Hosting & Harvesting

conversations that matter

This edition of the Art of Hosting companion was compiled and
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This Companion
belongs to:

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Introduction

Welcome! You are invited…

Why are we here together, *really?*

These days **diversity** is an inescapable fact of life in Belgian society: in language, culture, politics, ethnicity; in the gaps between professional silos, managers and workers, generations, faiths and personal histories, and more…

what would it be like to embody a society where everything & everyone can thrive?

Where can I accept & celebrate your culture and values *without having to devalue or sacrifice my own?*

As in Belgium, so in the wider world. Wherever we look, we see canyons to be crossed, bridges to be built: how can top-down meet bottom-up? How can we engage with all stakeholders? Integrate successive waves of refugees? Reach out across the boundaries between generations, faiths, languages, worldviews and cultures? How can we invite all these differences into the rich dance of humanity?

We are here together for three days to learn and practice together the Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter (also often called the Art of Participatory Leadership) - a body of methods and

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practices that can effectively support us in dealing with these questions in our everyday lives. Together we will experience a practical approach for a different kind of leadership that is essentially participatory, where we talk *with* each another, and not *about* each other. These practices help us to bring forth and base our decisions on the best collective wisdom that is present in any system.

At this training gathering, you will be invited to experience the power of collective intelligence as it is harnessed through carefully designed conversational processes, using methodologies such as Circle, World Café, Open Space Technology, Pro Action Café and others. You will also learn about the most important underpinning principles and worldviews that support successful application of the participatory approach; the basics of how to design successful processes; how to move the fruits of the conversation out of the room and into the world.

This will be a very experiential training – you will be invited from day 1 to step up and apply what you are learning directly, by hosting parts of the process yourself, with others, and with the support and guidance of the hosting team. Expect to work hard, be challenged, laugh a lot, be touched by what you hear and see, and leave larger than you were when you arrived.

About this Companion

The Art of Hosting has been described in many different ways. This makes perfect sense, since it is a multi-faceted, continually evolving set of practices and perspectives. One way of thinking of it is that the Art of Hosting is an **ongoing inquiry into both collective intelligence/wisdom and emergence** - that phenomenon of new knowledge and practices that is generated through deep conversation and that supports sustainable, pleasurable and effective collaboration.

Emergent knowledge has all the solidity of a flowing river and, consequently, the task of transmitting it in the form of a book is extremely challenging. Indeed, the very attempt to transmit emergent knowledge is self-contradictory: a symptom of our human desire to capture truth rather than trusting it to emerge out of a process of deep conversation.

Yet, emergent knowledge does not come out of a vacuum; it is the product of myriad contributions and lineages. A deeper understanding of the Art of Hosting needs an awareness of foundational concepts, practices and sources. So this companion book is an attempt to 'point to the moon', whilst humbly acknowledging the inadequacy of any such attempt at putting the rich complexity of this work into words. What we hope to offer here is an invitation into deeper collective inquiry into the mystery of emergence. And we hope that it will serve you in your ongoing exploration of how to integrate this body of practice into your own life and work.

In light of the above 'disclaimer', this companion book is offered as a support to your learning. In it you will find:

- a practical overview of the main conversational methodologies and approaches to 'harvesting' the results of conversations, together with links to more in-depth resources
- some models that can guide you in how to apply the methodologies in more complex processes (design)
- a description of the foundational practices of the Art of Hosting that turn it from a set of methodologies into a profoundly co-creative and holistic way of life
- descriptions of the world view and basic assumptions that support the above.

The Art of Hosting is like an iceberg. What appears first to the eye are the methodologies, but they are only the visible tip. Beneath the surface we find the invisible scaffolding, attitudes and practices that allow the whole thing to float. In our experience, people who are drawn to the Art of Hosting tend to enjoy understanding the big picture first, and so we begin with the deepest base of the iceberg and work upwards. If you prefer to begin with the methodologies and work down, we invite you to read in reverse order. The table of contents will help orient you.

The companion itself has been co-created over more than a decade by the global community of practitioners of the Art of Hosting. Each edition is unique, although the core is always recognisable. In other words, there is no one author. As the fruit of both collective inquiry and generosity of individual practitioners, it is evolving all the time and is protected by a creative commons license.

Tentative definition of the Art of Hosting[1]

A way of understanding what the Art of Hosting is, as a body of work and practice, and what it is for, passes through an appreciation of the **needs** it has grown up in response to. These are deeply felt needs that nestle in the hearts of humans and find many different expressions in human society. Once the needs are clearly felt, it becomes possible to articulate our **purpose**s in meeting them. The identity of the Art of Hosting is also intimately entangled with some **principles** that guide us, as practitioners, in *how* we pursue those purposes.[2]

Needs

- To go **from fragmentation to connection** – connection to your own source, connected to nature, connected to each other, connected to the greater whole.
- To access our **collective wisdom**
- To access and **draw wisdom from all our intelligences**
- To **shift our 'patterns'** of organising and interacting
- To **ground our actions** in that which is meaningful
- To be able to '**lead from the field'**.

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[1] Distilled from a conversation at the first AoH stewards' gathering in 2005.
[2] For more on working with needs, purpose and principles, see the section on Chaordic Stepping Stones.

Purposes

- To **create a container for emergence** & the practice of leading from the 'field'
- To **host a level of consciousness** where people can be together in an authentic way
- To **connect and align our inner and outer worlds** so that we can remember what we hold and have the courage to act wisely.

Principles

- The Art of Hosting **is of life** – it is generative, none of us own it
- The different practices in Art of Hosting are **gateways to connecting** ourselves, each other and the bigger whole.
- Art of Hosting **connects and unites us**.
- Art of Hosting **welcomes and celebrates diversity**.
- Art of Hosting **invites life in** so we can respond to the needs of the moment.
- Art of Hosting **consciousness** holds the ability to dance with multiple practices.
- In order to host or teach a practice, you have to hold and **embody the deeper pattern** of the practice.

Worldview and basic assumptions underlying the Art of Hosting

This section gives a short introduction to some basic assumptions underlying our work as conversational hosts. Many people who have learned the basics of the Art of Hosting at a 3-day training event and have gone on to become practitioners have found that these assumptions have become their worldview, the basis from which they live life. This worldview informs how we view organisations, recognise and interpret the dynamics at play when people work together, guide our choices in a given situation, etc.

We all have a view of the world, made up of basic assumptions about what is true or right, about what works in any given situation. Most of the time, these assumptions are implicit, even unconscious, and yet they determine our actions. As we work or live together, we rarely operate from the same worldview or the same beliefs; this usually results in a lack of mutual understanding. Here, we seek to make the foundational assumptions of the Art of Hosting explicit, to help us communicate clearly and provide a basis for shared understanding.

An approach to leadership that scales from personal to systemic

The Art of Hosting is a participatory approach to leadership that uses personal practice[3], dialogue, hosted collective inquiry and the co-creation of innovation to support the healthy unfolding of human life in the complex conditions of today's world. It is especially effective in any context where people need to work together on knotty, inter-related issues.

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

- At the **individual** level, the practice develops motivation, courage, capacities and skills that support us when we step into our personal leadership.
- At the level of the **team**, the practice develops the capacity for collective reflection and the discernment of right timing in the co-creation, co-decision and co-hosting of conversations to support wise action, whatever the purpose and context.
- At the level of the **community, organisation**, etc., the practice helps develop a culture that welcomes and embraces diversity,

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[3] For more about what we mean by personal practice, please see the section on 'Hosting self'

can discern and value shared purpose and aspires to growing into the organisation's, network's or community's full potential.

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

Mirroring the complexity that we find in the living world (including human society) the patterns of practice that make the Art of Hosting a distinct body of work are **fractal**, meaning that they recur at all these different levels of scale. How I work with myself, in my team, in a big group or at the level of society follows the same pathways and utilises the same underlying attitudes and processes. These patterns become clearer as your practice deepens and strengthens.

A shift in worldviews: from linear and mechanistic to living systems and complexity

People – both as individuals and in the organisations they create – are living systems. In other words, they are intelligent, creative, adaptive, self-organising, and meaning-seeking.

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 bodies and our organisations as we view machines—as consisting of clearly defined parts with clearly defined roles and a predictable output.

In complex situations, this mechanistic view is not adequate to informing the decisions we can take.

Living systems exist everywhere in nature—bacteria forming colonies, ants creating an anthill, complex ecosystems adapted to different climates… Organisations and networks are complex living systems as well.

Some properties of the living system

- All of life exists within one living system: there is no 'them', only 'us' (humans, nature, everything!)
- The living system self-organises, and self-organisation leads to the emergence of novel properties and qualities
- The living system seeks diversity
- The living system constantly adapts to its own changing conditions
- In the living system, everything is interconnected
- The patterns in the living system are fractal: they recur at every level of scale.

Some implications for leadership

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

Participatory approaches are needed – the Art of Hosting arises from the assumption and experience that an increasing complexity in the problems we face compels us to find new solutions for the common good, whether in corporations, government, education, non-profits, communities, or families. These solutions are more comprehensive and more readily found and owned if they are co-created by all stakeholders.

Innovation grows between chaos and order - If we want to innovate or work with change, we have to be willing to let go of what we know and step into not-knowing. In nature, all innovation happens at the fringes. It is in the space between apparent chaos and order that new connections are created and new possibilities emerge. The journey of any major change or transformation will pass through chaos into fresh insights and new meaning. (See also the section on the Chaordic Path).

Conversations matter - It is common sense to bring more people together in conversation. It is how we have done it in generations past, gathering round fires and sitting in circles. Conversation is the way we develop our thinking and make new meaning together. It is also how we build strong relationships that invite real collaboration.

Shared meaning leads to wise action - People who are involved and invited to work together pay attention only to that which is meaningful to them. Conversations that surface a shared clarity on issues of importance foster ownership and responsibility for ideas and solutions that can be put into action. Actions that come out of collective clarity are sustainable.

Foundational practices and models

The Four-Fold Practice
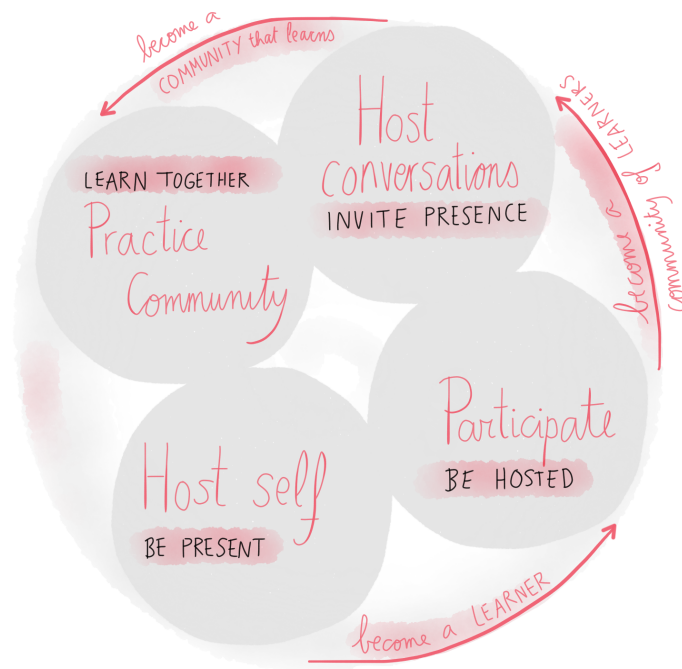
In its essence, the Art of Hosting is a practice (a repeated exercise in or performance of an activity or skill so as to acquire or maintain proficiency in it), a way of thinking and acting that leads to greater understanding and more skilful action. There are four domains of practice enfolded within the Art of Hosting practice. These are commonly referred to as the 'Four-fold Practice' and within each of the four domains, there are myriad practices.

An important implication of recognising the Art of Hosting as a practice is that mastery of the art is dependent upon ongoing practice; if we are not practicing, we are not participating in this art and we will not develop mastery. People working within the Art of Hosting are referred to as 'practitioners' because this commitment to practicing is at the heart of the art. As with any practice, capacity increases over time and practitioners discover new levels and meaning to the practices. Some aspects of deeper practice can sound strange to new practitioners and can be understood only through experience. Practice begins wherever you are and has an endless depth of possibility.

Practice within this art has a particular flavour. It is not an act of will, something that can be forced. Rather, it involves holding space - a meta-practice - for emergence of deeper understanding, new skills, greater confidence and the other fruits of practice. Holding space is the practice of letting go of control. But this does not mean that it is a passive practice or a lack of engagement. Holding space is an active, intentional, energetic process of deep presence, listening and mindfulness.

Given the myriad practices contained within the Art of Hosting, it can be helpful to focus on the domains described in the Four-Fold Practice.

Host Self

The art of hosting is the art of being: of being the embodiment of a host. No set of skills, techniques or methodologies can substitute for the consciousness of the host. Hosting requires presence - that quality of authenticity, vulnerability, confidence and courage which comes from deep personal work which cannot be done in isolation. Presence is a holistic, emergent quality incorporating physical, mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions. Presence is what allows a host to stand in the midst of intense emotion, to tolerate chaos without rushing to fix anything, to be comfortable with silence, to work in service of purpose bigger than personal ego.

Hosting self is the practice domain of holding space for the emergence of presence. On a physical level, it involves listening to your body and getting adequate rest and exercise and managing stress. On a mental level, it supports the development of an open mind that is free of habitual patterns of thinking and unconscious beliefs and assumptions. On an emotional level, it learns to recognise what triggers habitual emotional reactions and new ways of dealing with those emotions. It also helps us to own our own expectations and projections and to cope with uncertainty. It nurtures self-compassion and a willingness to take risks, be comfortable with so-called mistakes and failures and learn from them. On a spiritual level, hosting oneself connects us with the unseen world of energy and spirit, reduces attachment to ego and frees us to work with compassion and without the need to be in control. It supports us in

embracing solitude and silence and a connection to the natural world. Presence cannot be manufactured or forced, or even developed. It is the natural emergent quality available when we gently recognise and remove barriers in a self-reinforcing cycle of holding space for presence which allows for deeper holding of space and deeper presence.

The Art of Hosting does not have specific approved or recommended practices for hosting oneself. Rather, it recognises that every practitioner must find his/her own practices for letting go of control and holding space for presence to emerge. These

practices could include yoga, dance, martial arts, meditation, contemplative writing, prayer, psychotherapy, time in nature, solitude, tantric sex, art, music or… The importance is finding a set of practices that increase your personal capacity for presence and then to commit to regular practice.

Participate

With the presence which arises from hosting self, we are ready to participate. On one level, this means engaging in conversations and allowing yourself to be hosted. As the practice of participating deepens, it can evolve into a participation with all of life. At that level, participation becomes involvement with what is, without expectations and without a desire to attain any particular outcome. It is about showing up with your full self and your own interests whilst sensing what wants to happen and discerning how to align yourself and your interests in service of larger purpose.

Participating fully requires trust and letting go of control. It invites a depth of conversation in which silence is a welcome participant and in which connection transcends spoken words and includes nonverbal and energetic components. Participation is an invitation into the unknown, an opening to being changed and the field from which emergence is possible.

Participation manifests through conversation, and conversation is an art. It is not just talk. It demands the presence to listen carefully to one another, to nature and to the unseen. It demands silence as well as

words. It demands that we offer what we can in service of the whole, to speak with deep intention while listening with deep attention. Participation flows from the mood of curiosity, recognising that curiosity and judgment cannot live together in the same space. If we are judging what we are hearing we cannot be curious about the outcome, and it will be difficult for the conversation to move beyond defending preconceived positions. Skilful participation in conversation requires an open mind, open heart and open will. It calls for mindfulness and the ability to slow a conversation down to allow deeper listening and clarity to arise.

Practices within the domain of participation include active listening; dialogue[4]; asking powerful questions[5]; owning ones own projections, expectations and assumptions; clarifying intentions; check-ins and other elements of 'circle practice'; cultivating a mood of curiosity and openness and listening to nature.

Host Conversations

The domain of hosting conversations is often perceived as the tip of the iceberg. This is the domain of methodologies, yet it is so much more. Hosting conversations is the art of creating and holding a container in which people can do their best work together. This holding of space involves sensing all of the conditions that will allow a group to settle into collective presence,

holding that space through chaos so that new order and clarity can emerge. Such conversations do not just happen, they are the product of clear intentions, a powerful calling question, a compelling invitation, good design, skilful framing of the context and the holding of space in which the work can be done, and most of all the presence to hold space for emergence. All of these are practices and skills of hosting conversations.

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

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[4] For more about dialogue – a central pillar of the art of hosting – see the section on practicing dialogue.

[5] See the section on powerful questions.

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presence to be able to hold space for deeper or more challenging conversation. Eventually, the practice also includes more subtle aspects including preparation of the physical space, invitation and welcoming and working with the energy of the group. While much of the attention of hosting is focused on the external work - the actions - an equally important aspect of hosting practice is to attend to one's inner state and learning. Hosting inevitably challenges us at our growing edge, whether that is the ability to let go of control or to feel competent and adequate as a hosting team member or in finding the right language to invite deeper participation or to find the courage to overcome fear. A practitioner of hosting is engaged in both the internal and external practices.

None of the practices are best done alone but it is particularly important to work as part of a team when hosting.

Practice community

The fourth domain of the four-fold practice is holding space for the emergence of co-creative learning communities, communities of practice.

It is one thing to go to a training and to learn the basics of hosting practice. But what then? How do you implement your learning and stay connected to other practitioners? How do you sustain your learning and keep your practice alive and growing? The traditional way of addressing such challenges is to create an organisation or association and to listen to the wisdom of the experts. But, this approach doesn't work in emergence. The shared knowledge is the result of collaboration and conversation, not in the possession of an expert. There are no rules or formulas or formal requirements for doing this work. Practitioners are all encouraged to innovate and collaborate and to discover new models and processes. Yet, there is also a need to recognise and protect the essential DNA of this body of work and to learn from those practitioners with more experience. How does a community of practitioners participate together where there are no clear guidelines or agreements?

This has been the challenge and the beauty of the Art of Hosting community for over a decade. From a few friends sharing ideas together, the community has grown to several thousand with a website and open-source workbook (and now this companion guide) and other materials. All of this without any licensing or copyrighting, without any organisational structure or staff or headquarters, without any financial expectations or agreements. As a community, we did not start out knowing how to do this. We began with a focus on shared purpose, shared principles and friendship. As friends, this community of practitioners looked for opportunities to work together, to learn together and to share their learning. What has emerged over time is a group of more experienced practitioners who are recognised as stewards and periodic gatherings to sense into the needs of the community and to make any necessary collective decisions. Newer hosts are encouraged to apprentice to more experienced hosts and one of the few 'rules' within the community of practice is that there needs to be a steward involved in any Art of Hosting training. This has provided a framework in which practitioners can learn and develop their capacity while also protecting the deeper patterns and essence of our shared practice. What has also emerged has been an online platform for communicating and for collecting and disseminating learning, models, materials and other artefacts of our learning.

This community of practice pattern has emerged regionally throughout the world in response to local trainings and local needs. While it does not look the same everywhere, there are many shared elements. This experience of building a community of learners is not unique to the Art of Hosting and the learning of this particular community is not held as the 'right way'. The beauty of this fourth domain of practice is that we are all learning together what it means to hold the space for learning together, and how we can collectively hold space for the emergence of the work. Like so much within the Art of Hosting, this is fractal; what we are learning in the global community has relevance in local and regional communities of practice and vice versa. The practices that we have learned together are being applied and tested and refined as we create communities of practice. Together we are learning how to learn together and as we learn this we are able to apply it to the work we do.

Finally, as we learn together we are also confronted with our blind spots and those parts of our practice that are less skilful or conscious. This provides an opportunity for us individually and collectively to increase our capacity through hosting ourselves. Thus, the Four-Fold Practice is a cycle leading to deeper practice and ever increasing capacity.

Divergence, Emergence and Convergence[6]

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

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

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

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[6] Inspired by Sam Kaner's Diamond of Participation.
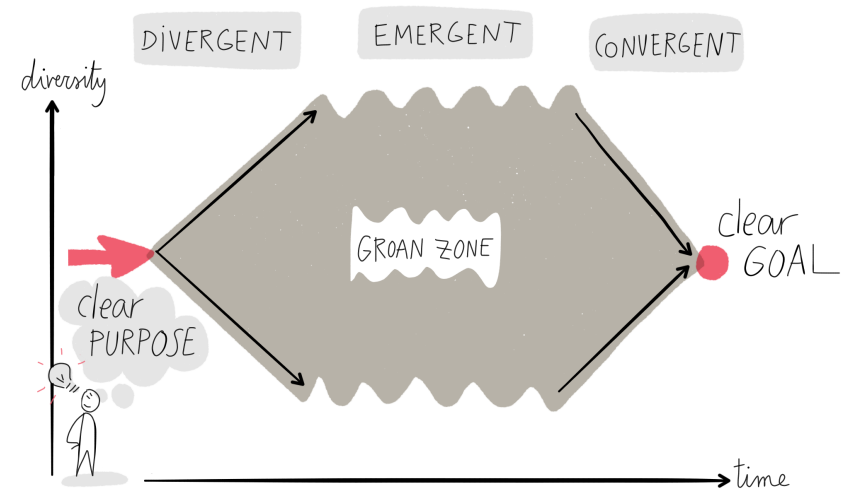
- **Divergent phase** - In this phase, there is as yet no clear shared goal. Rather than there being a clear goal or desired outcome, the direction is given by a clear shared purpose, most often impelled by a pressing need or question of some kind.

  This phase can best be guided by the kinds of questions that awaken the ability of the group to diverge from what is familiar and move beyond the known into a new understanding. Divergent thinking typically unpacks the problem, engaging in free-for-all open discussion to gather diverse perspectives and generate an abundance of alternatives. The divergent phase is non-linear and needs "chaos time". Closing this phase too soon will reduce the potential for newness or innovation.

- Emergent phase – There comes a moment when the divergence is sufficiently explored and it is time to move into the emergent phase. This phase has the quality of timeless suspension, like the pause between the in-breath and the out-breath. We are saturated with the overwhelming mess of ideas, perspectives, alternatives, all seemingly without structure or form. Holding it all is a stretch and people who have not experienced such processes before can be strongly tempted to throw up their hands, declare the whole exercise a failure and escape to the pub. This is where experienced facilitators want to pull out their favourite processes to move the group out of the chaos. If the process is not well held, this can deteriorate into disagreement about the best path forward. Experienced practitioners fondly call this phase the 'groan zone', because it often feels so desperately uncomfortable. It is where we can abandon all pretence at knowing what to do and simply allow the new understandings and insights to emerge. This often happens quite suddenly and unexpectedly. The following clues can help when working with emergence:

    - *Embrace mystery* - ask questions instead of coming up with answers: what wants to happen?

    - *Follow life energy* – tune into intuition in addition to making plans

    - *Choose possibility* - attend to our dreams and aspirations, not just goals and objectives.

- **Convergent Phase** – Once the emergent phase has run its course, the energy in the room typically shifts again. It is time to sort ideas into categories, summarise key points, evaluate alternatives, and formulate general conclusions and next steps. This phase is goal-oriented and focused, linear, structured and usually subject to time constraints. The group can then leave with decisions taken and next steps to take.

This movement from divergence through emergence to convergence, with its energy of breathing in and breathing out, is at the heart of process design in the Art of Hosting. Every process will typically go through several such cycles. Certain methodologies seem to lend themselves particularly well to the different phases – for example, World Café is an excellent means for inviting divergence, Open Space Technology works excellently in moments of emergence, and Pro-Action Café is serves well to converge. However, it is possible to use these methodologies at any phase, but doing so would require a different type of guiding question and style of hosting. (See also the chapter on process design.)

It is important to realise that individuals have both different levels of tolerance and different preferences for all three of these phases. The same holds true of groups and organisations of all kinds. As a host, it is useful to recognise your own preferences and worth exploring ways of increasing your tolerance in the phases where you are less comfortable. This is also reason why it is so important and valuable to seek diversity in a hosting team.

The Chaordic Path

The dance of chaos and order in nature

The history of the universe is a story of order emerging from chaos - from the big bang, to stars producing new elements, to the formation of planets. Here on Earth, we can see this process happening as a forest ecosystem matures through stages following a fire. Our individual lives, organisations and communities are all microcosms of this same process.

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

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

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

Chaos and order in human systems

Within human systems, order is maintained by conventions and agreements and just because the orderly processes work for those involved, no top-down control is necessary. When these systems no longer work, chaos results out of which a new order will emerge. Sometimes within human systems, however, it is necessary to maintain strict conformity with the order once it has been established. For instance it is essential to follow established practices for landing an aircraft or performing routine surgery. In these cases, systems of control are important and can take the form of standard operating

procedures, laws, licensure - all of which typically require top-down monitoring and enforcement. One of the big challenges in modern organisations and societies is to discern where control is needed and where to trust the natural process of order emerging from chaos. Within organisations, this wise application of just enough control is the work performed by conscious managers.

Control is an essential function of all mechanistic systems (the 'obvious' or 'complicated' domains of the Cynefin framework presented in the next section). Machines need to behave in standard and predictable ways and mechanical systems are incapable of creating order out of chaos. When conditions change in a mechanistic system, the system needs to be adjusted and new controls implemented. However, the world and times we live in are neither predictable nor stable and more and more of our systems are complex, calling for more flexibility, since "more-of-the-same solutions" will not meet the challenges.

The chaordic path

The Chaordic Path is a model based on this recognition of order emerging naturally from chaos. The model proposes three basic conditions: chaos, order and control. The transition between chaos and order, that place of emergence and innovation, is referred to as the 'chaordic path'.

Hosting is the process of walking this chaordic path, holding space and processes to allow emergence and innovation to happen. Walking this chaordic path requires the courage and practices to stay in the dance of order and chaos long enough to support a generative emergence that allows the new, collective intelligence and wise action to occur. As we tread the line between chaos and order, individually and collectively, we move through confusion and conflict toward clarity. It is in the phase of not knowing, before we reach new clarity, that the temptation to rush for certainty or grab for control is strongest. We are called to presence born out of hosting ourselves, in order to walk this path with open minds and confidence to reach something wholly new.
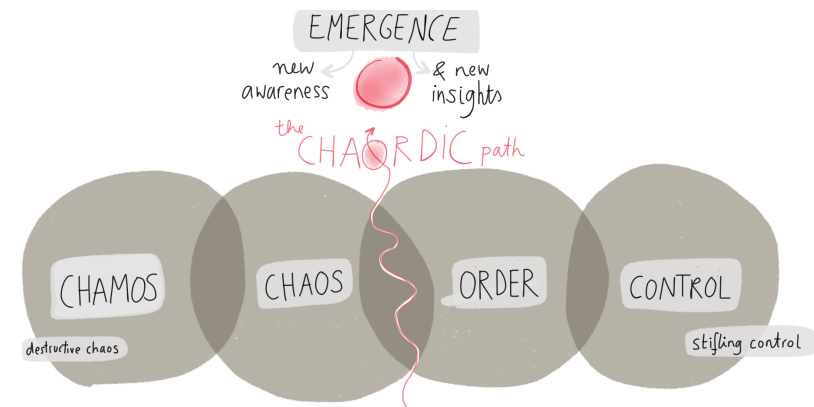
The art is to stay in a fine balance between chaos and order. Straying too far to either side is counterproductive. On the far side of chaos is 'chamos' or destructive chaos where everything disintegrates and

dies. On the far side of order is stifling control—where all absence of movement also eventually means death. When we move toward either of these extremes, the result is either apathy or rebellion—the very opposite of chaordic confidence.

The Cynefin Framework – an aid to navigating complexity

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

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

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

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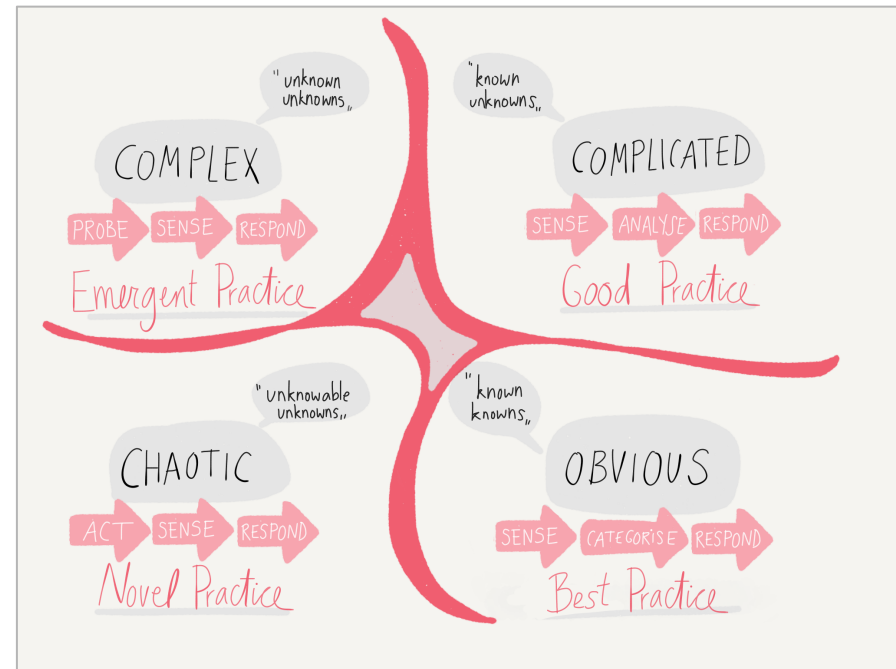
have multiple effects requiring analysis or some other form of investigation and/or the application of expert knowledge. The approach is to *Sense - Analyse – Respond*. You observe what is happening, then you need some analysis to figure it out (because it is complicated), after which you can respond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

Because it is a mechanical system in which the actors are merely cogs in a machine, this is the area of experts, who know better than

the actors how the system's relationships actually fit best together. The experts design the path to follow and managers implement their advice. In complicated systems, although there are linear cause-effect relationships, they are so many and so obscure that some expert insight is necessary to find a good way through.

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

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

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

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

- **Disordered.** Where there is no clarity about what type of causality exists (a 'disordered' situation), people will naturally revert to their own comfort zone in making a decision about how to act.

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

References:

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cynefin
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mqNcs8mp74 (brief explanation of the Cynefin framework)
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Miwb92eZaJg (how to organise a birthday party for 13-year-old boys)

Dialogue – a conversation with a centre, not sides[7]

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

The art of thinking together

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

While *discussion* is a powerful mode of exchange, it has its limitations because it focuses on either/or thinking, closure and completion, and controlling the outcome - thus, more appropriate for convergent processes..

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

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[7] Inspired by the book 'Dialogue' by William Isaacs.

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

Defend or suspend

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

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

Four basic skills

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

Listening - *What does it take to really listen?*

- **Developing an inner silence**. It is hard to listen when our minds are full of our own inner dialogue. Learning to listen is learning to be present, to notice what we are feeling *now.*
- Recognising that **much of our reaction to others comes from memory** – in other words, stored reaction, not fresh response. In this case we are not really listening, we are simply "downloading" from memory what we already know.
- Learning to **distinguish between the inferences we make about experience and the experience itself**. Stick with the facts, don't jump to conclusions.

- **Following the disturbance** – when we are emotionally triggered by something we hear, we tend to close down and act out. Instead of looking for evidence that confirms my point of view, I choose to listen for the source of the difficulty – in myself and in others.
- **Listening while noticing resistance** – this helps us to become conscious of the ways in which we project our opinions about others onto them, and distort what is said without realising it.

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

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

view points can be integrated. Otherwise disturbances will continue.

- **Learning to hold tension** – when a group is working collectively on a shared endeavour, every individual can act as a sense organ in service of the field. Each tension felt by an individual can then be critical information for the whole. When the group can hold the tension that arises without *reacting* to it, its capacity for dialogue rises to a whole new level.

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

- Dialogue is possible only among people who can **be surprised** by what they say, who can recognise and embrace what they do not already know.
- The first step is to **disclose**: we make available (to ourselves and others) the contents of our consciousness so we can see what's going on.
- The next step is to become aware of the processes that generate our thought. **Observing our thought processes**, we transform them.
- Suspension asks us to **refrain from fixing**, correcting and problem-solving in favour of *inquiring* into what we observe.

- At the core of inquiry is the **question**[8]. A really good question creates a tension in us that we must learn to tolerate – suspend the search for answers and see what emerges.

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

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

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

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[8] Asking good questions is another core skill of the Art of Hosting – see the section on powerful questions.

Powerful Questions

Questions are key to meaningful conversation, and so the ability to craft powerful questions is an important hosting skill.

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

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

Knowing what questions to use when

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

Open-ended questions support a divergent process. Such questions do not call for yes/no or either/or answers (or even multiple choice answers). They explore what is - the "what?" questions and

the "so what?" questions. They invite deeper reflection and allow space for different, even paradoxical responses that represent diverse perspectives. A good question in the divergent phase invites inquiry and curiosity, rather than immediately prompting action or problem-solving. Generally, questions of "what" and "how" are much more useful than "who", "when" or "why".

In the convergent phase, helpful questions narrow down possibilities and move the group toward decisions and action. Here, closed-ended questions - who will take responsibility?, by when?, etc. - are useful. This is the realm of the "now what?" questions.

Where traditional meetings frequently begin with an agenda, a meaningful conversation is more often prompted by an inviting question. This 'calling question' engages potential participants with curiosity and embodies the purpose of the meeting. Within the meeting, each discussion topic or process may have its own question that engages and focuses participation.
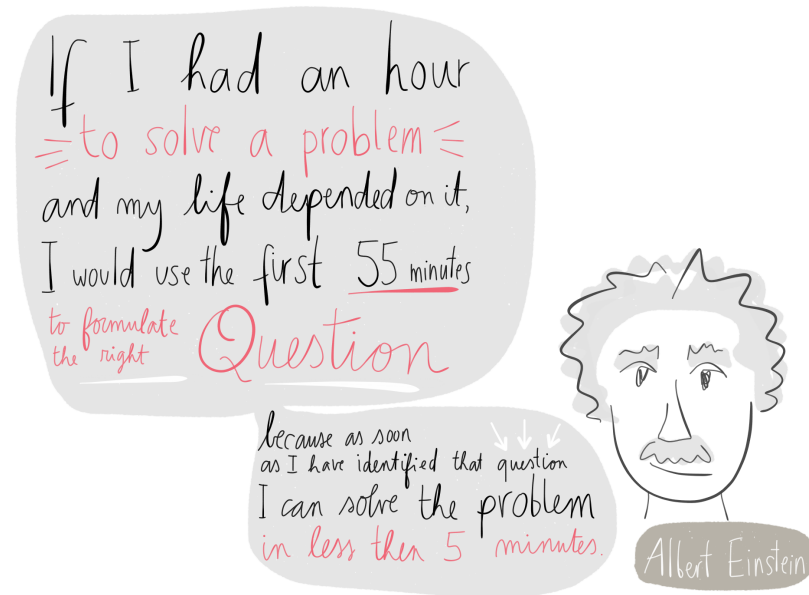
Core methods – part 1: Hosting conversations

Many of the methods introduced here predate the Art of Hosting and are lovingly stewarded by a specific community of practice, which practices the method with nuance and flexibility, as an art form. Each of these methods deserves to be studied and practiced in depth and we invite practitioners of the Art of Hosting to engage in these other communities of practice. The Art of Hosting provides an introduction to these methodologies and explores how they can be woven together in hosting practice. Attending dedicated trainings in the methodologies and working with experienced practitioners is a good way of deepening understanding and skill.

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

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

Circle

The practice of circle has been with humanity since we gathered around fires in our hunter-gatherer past. It is found in all cultures.

The circle is a natural way to gather for conversations. It offers democratic space where we can look each other in the eye, lean in and listen, and include all voices with a sense of equality. The practice of Circle deepens our understanding of each other. When skilfully hosted and held, Circle practice strengthens our capacity

to embrace diversity and disturbance without rupture. It allows us to go deep, to sit in silence, to find the space where collective healing can happen, where mystery can show up.

When to use circle

Circle can be adapted to all kinds of groups, issues, and timeframes. It offers a chance for people to stop, to sit down, and to listen to each other. Circle can be the process used for the duration of a gathering, or it can be used as a means for 'checking in' at the beginning and 'checking out' at the end. It can even be used to host conversations within another methodology such as an Open Space session. It is equally at home in the divergent phase, the emergent phase and the convergent phase of a process.

Circle can be used to build relationship, to have difficult conversations and make difficult decisions, to help a community through transitions. It can be used for a couple or family or a company of hundreds. Wherever people need or want to gather for conversation, Circle practice invites meaningful dialogue.

Find out more

For a more detailed explanation of Circle and instructions on how to host it, see the Circle Way basic guidelines (scroll down the page for different language versions):
 http://www.thecircleway.net/resources-1/

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

The World Café

Picture a room full of people, all sitting in groups of 4 or 5 around small tables, in rapt conversation with each other around the same question – a question that is engagingly relevant to their lives or their work. After 20 minutes or so, something unusual happens: all but one person at every table get up, move randomly to another table, sit down again and carry on talking, continuing the conversation around that same question. 20 minutes later, it happens again – people move on to sit in another constellation, and continue to talk. At the end of this round, groups are invited to share the insights that have arisen from the conversation at their tables. These are noted, displayed, captured for further action. This is the essence of the World Café.

This is just one description of how a World Café conversation can unfold. There are many possible variations: a different question can be used for each round, with each building on the previous. The conversations can be 'harvested' in between each round instead of at the end, especially where this helps the build up. Perhaps there is time for only two rounds, or perhaps there might be four. The possibilities are almost endless.

When to use World Café

World Café fits very well in the **divergent phase** of any process, and can serve equally well for **convergence** and harvesting, provided the questions are crafted appropriately. It is particularly

effective in surfacing the collective wisdom of large groups of diverse people. The small-table format ensures that the voices of all participants (even the most timid) can be heard in a short time, regardless of the size of the group, and that the full range of perspectives in the room can be surfaced for the whole group to see. When used early on in a longer process using multiple conversation formats, World Café is a great way of breaking the ice and giving people the appetite to engage with people they do not know.

The café format is very flexible and adapts to many different purposes - information and knowledge sharing, relationship building, reflection, exploration and action planning.

Find out more

For a more detailed explanation of the World Café and instructions on how to host one, see:
http://www.theworldcafe.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Cafe-To-Go-Revised.pdf

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

The World Café community:
http://www.theworldcafecommunity.org/

Open Space Technology

Imagine going to a meeting where there is no preset agenda, only an invitation in the form of a question that is burningly relevant to your work or your life, and the knowledge that you will meet others who are as passionate about the topic as you are. Together with the other participants you will take full responsibility for ensuring that you get to talk about what you want to talk about. Individuals post sessions on the large blank agenda on the wall and everybody moves freely between self-organising conversations in break-out rooms or small circles for most of the duration of the meeting. Towards the end, everybody gets back together to share the fruits of their conversations and announce any action that they have decided to take as a result.

One of the most powerful components of Open Space Technology – which many practitioners adopt as a life principle – is the **law of two feet**: *if you find yourself somewhere where you are neither learning nor contributing, leave and go somewhere where you can.*

In Open Space, participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme of strategic importance. With groups of 5 to 2000+ people, Open Space can work for different durations: a session of 2 hours, a one-day workshop, or a three-day conference.

When to use Open Space

Open Space works best when the group shares an issue of real concern, the work to be done is complex and urgent, the people and ideas involved are diverse, and the passion for resolution (and potential for conflict) are high. Designed to unleash the self-organising capacity of groups of any size, Open Space is an ideal method to use in the **divergent** and **emergent phases** of a longer process using different methodologies. People generally love the sense of spaciousness and freedom afforded by Open Space.

Find out more

General introduction:
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Space_Technology

A more detailed explanation of Open Space Technology and how to host it: http://openspaceworld.org/wp2/open/

A brief users' guide to Open Space Technology:
 http://www.openspaceworld.com/users_guide.htm

The Tao of Holding Space, by Chris Corrigan:
http://www.chriscorrigan.com/parkinglot/the-tao-of-holding-space/

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a strategy for intentional change that identifies the best of 'what is' in order to pursue dreams and possibilities of 'what could be'. It is an intentional move away from the 'problem-based' perspective towards a cooperative search for strengths, passions and life-giving forces that are found within every system.

Appreciative inquiry is often offered as a comprehensive, structured change process in organisations and communities. When used in this way, it goes through four successive phases: *Discovery* (identifying organisational processes that work well); *Dream* (envisioning processes that would work well in the future); *Design* (planning and prioritising those processes); *Delivery* (implementing the proposed design).

The Art of Hosting practice rarely applies the full AI process. Rather, it has adopted the *spirit* of Appreciative Inquiry, which leans towards possibility and an appreciative mindset, often with a transformational impact. The phase most commonly applied in hosted processes is the discovery phase, often through conversations or semi-structured interviews in pairs or triads.

When to use Appreciative Inquiry

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 also be used as a way of opening a

meeting or conversation by identifying what already works. What do you most value about yourself, your colleagues / neighbours, your work, your organisation / community? It is most often used in the **divergent** phase of a hosted process.

Find out more

Appreciative inquiry commons: https://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/
Appreciative inquiry Europe network: http://aicommunity.net

Pro Action Café

Pro Action Café is a child of the Art of Hosting community. A blend of World Café and Open Space, it was first conceived by Rainer von Leoprechting and Ria Baeck in Brussels, Belgium, in 2006.

Pro Action Café is a space for creative and action-oriented conversation where participants are invited to bring a project, idea, question or whatever they feel called by and need help to manifest in the world. People host conversations around their topic, and these conversations link and build on each other as people move between café tables, cross-pollinate ideas, and offer each other new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work, organisation or community.

When to use Pro Action Café

Pro Action Café can be a regular feature in the life of a network or community, or as a methodology for a specific group, organisation or community to engage in creative and inspirational conversation leading to wiser and more collectively informed actions.

As part of a more complex process, Pro Action Café is an excellent format to use during the **convergence** phase.

Find out more about Pro Action Café:

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

See also the resources available on the Art of Hosting community website (scroll down to 'ProAction Café' section): http://artofhosting.ning.com/page/core-art-of-hosting-practices

Core methods – part 2: Harvesting conversations

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

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

Strategic overview of the Art of Harvesting

What if we were planning not a meeting or an event but a harvest – a transformation, even? When we understand the process of meaningful conversations as a series of connected phases ("breaths"), we see that each must somehow feed into the next.

When approaching any meeting or conversation in this spirit, we must be clear about **why** we are initiating the process. The Art of Hosting and the Art of Harvesting are two aspects of the same thing.

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

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

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

They all harvest differently from the field. The results of their work go to different places and are put to different uses. But they all have a few things in common; they have a purpose for being in the field and a set of questions about that purpose, they have a pre-determined place to use the results of the harvest, and they have specific tools to use in doing their work. Despite the field being the same, the tools and results are specific to the need, purpose and inquiry.
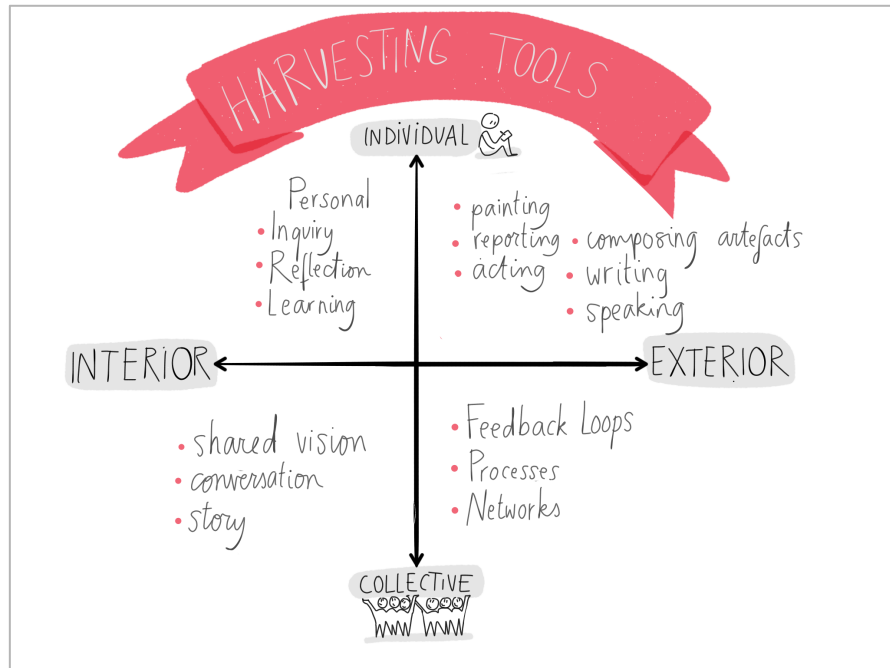
Stages of harvesting

- **Stage 1: sensing the need**

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

We sense that we are hungry and from there we plant a garden, knowing that the work of planting, cultivating and harvesting lies before us but that the end result meets the need for sustenance. The need is not complicated; it is real and clear and it speaks deeply and inspires invitation and action. Everything begins from this need, and the way we respond to it and invite others to do so will contribute to the harvest that we take away at the end of the day. The need for the harvest creates the need for the conversation which informs the calling question.

- **Stage 2: preparing the field**

In some cases the person taking the initiative to work on a given issue (the "caller") prepares the field ready by creating awareness of the need. Others with a similar need will respond to the call.

In preparing the field (sending out the call, giving the context, inviting etc.), we set the tone for the whole process. The depth and quality of the call will determine the quality of what we reap. The work of readying a field for planting can take a whole year during which we condition the soil, clear the rocks and prepare things. What

we are doing here is harvesting a field so that the seeds can be planted. In terms of conversations, it is important at this stage to be already working with the calling/hosting team in the pattern of Art of Hosting, to deepen their understanding and capacity to host and harvest something valuable.

Start thinking about the Harvest from the very beginning — not as an afterthougt !
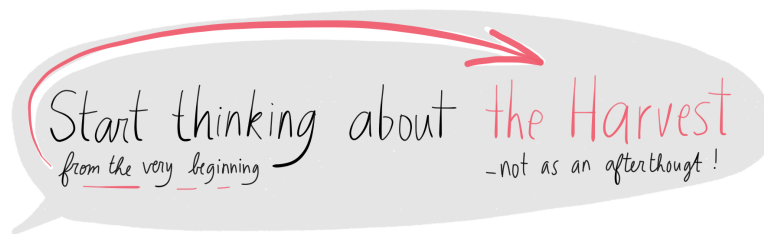
• **Stage 3: planning the harvest**

Planning the harvest begins with and accompanies the design process. A clear purpose and some success criteria for the process of the harvest itself will add clarity and direction. What would be useful and add value, and in which form would it serve best? Translated into a simple check-list, this becomes:

   o   What is your intention?
   o   Who is going to benefit?
   o   How can you add most value to the work at hand? How will the harvest serve best?
   o   What forms or media will be most effective?
   o   Who should host or do the harvesting?
   o   What is the right timing?

• **Stage 4: planting the seeds**

The questions around which we structure the hosted conversations become the seeds for harvesting. All gardeners and farmers know that planting seeds depends on the season and the conditions. You can't just plant whenever you want to. You plant once the conditions are right to maximise the yield. In hosting practice, this means being sensitive to timing when asking questions.

In sowing the seeds that will drive the inquiry (identifying and asking the strategic and meaningful questions) you determine the output. So in planning the harvest, the question is: "What does this process need to yield? What information, ideas, output or outcome will benefit us here and now, and what might take us to the next level of inquiry?"

The process itself is an on-going one. With each part of the process, you harvest something. Some of it you need to use right away, to help lead you into the next process. Some you will need later. So part of planning the harvest also involves knowing for whom, when and how you need to use what, and in which format.

• **Stage 5: tending the crop**

Protect the integrity of the crop. Nurture it as it grows, weed it and thin it to keep the strong plants growing and remove what will not nourish or serve. This involves a combination of feeding the field and letting things grow. It also invites just sitting in the field, holding space for what is emerging.

During the process, enjoy seeing your work unfold in all its complexity. The more you can welcome the growth you are witnessing, the higher the quality of the harvest. Notice both the quality of the field and the quality of the crops. The field of relationship in which we engage in conversation and exploration is where the richness of the harvest is born. The richer the soil of relationship, the richer conversation and the richer the harvest.

• **Stage 6: picking the fruits**

The simplest way to harvest a conversation is to record what is being said and done, the outputs. This creates a record or collective memory.

Recording can be done in words – personal notes, which will be subjective, or transcripts of output from conversations that have been recorded, which will be objective. Recording can also be done visually (drawings/photographs/video) - images evoke and recall feelings, atmospheres, situations. Videoing a conversation records both verbally and visually.

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

• **Stage 7: preparing and processing the fruits**

Creating a memory is the first step. Some of the fruits and seeds will be used right away, some will be used for further processing and some will be used as seed for the next season/session.

The next step is therefore collectively making sense and meaning of the initial harvest. This is where we add value and transform the data into information and, hopefully into wisdom. For maximum impact, this phase should include members representing the diversity of the system that is in conversation. There are many ways of doing this. The general idea is to take the many bits of information and transform them into "holons"—wholes that are made up of parts and also parts of greater wholes.

To help in this process:
   o Harvest in a systemic way. Ask collectively: What did you notice? What gave sense and meaning to you? Notice the patterns - they indicate what is emerging.
   o Use metaphors, mental models, drawing/graphics and stories to make complex issues more intuitive to grasp.
   o Identify audience for the various harvested fruits and craft the harvest in a form that is most understandable and useful for the intended audience.

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

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

A few comments on these 8 stages of harvesting:

o The above reflections mainly concern *collective harvesting*. Concurrent individual reflection and harvest will raise the level of the collective harvest. During learning processes, individual harvesting can be done intentionally, by using a journal as a learning tool.
o Web-based tools open up a whole world of possibilities that are not dealt with here.
o *Harvesting the 'soft'* is much more subtle and subjective than dealing with the cognitive or more objective, tangible parts. A qualitative inquiry into what we have noticed, what has shifted or changed in our relationships, in the culture or atmosphere may give us some information about the softer part of the harvest.
o For the most effective harvest, these eight steps should be planned beforehand, as part of designing the whole process.

Find out more about harvesting:

For more detailed explanations, please see: *The Art of Harvesting version 2.6* written by Monica Nissén and Chris Corrigan with input from the Art of Hosting community of practice. The full document can be downloaded from the Art of Hosting community website (scroll down to 'harvesting' section):
http://artofhosting.ning.com/page/core-art-of-hosting-practices

A **2-day training in the Art of Harvesting** Conversations that Matter is regularly offered in different locations around Europe. See the Art of Hosting website for news of these.

Collective Story Harvesting

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

Collective story harvesting is a process born out of the Art of Hosting practice, developed and stewarded by Mary-Alice Arthur. It is a process that invites the active involvement of all present: the story holders tell the story, and the members of the audience listen actively from the perspective of a specific question or focus. This allows us to track many threads or aspects of a single story simultaneously. It allows us to practice targeted listening, group learning and collective meaning making, as well as offering a tremendous gift to the story holder. Group harvesting is an ideal way to surface the many insights and innovations that dwell beneath the surface of our stories, using the wealth of diverse perspectives present in any group to enrich the experience and understanding of the group as a whole.

When to use collective story harvesting

Collective story harvesting is extremely useful at the convergence of any phase in the life of a project, to take stock of learning so far. Having outside ears listen to a story can help to surface things that hadn't seen or noticed during the experience. It can also support a story to rise above the personal to reveal insights about the local context it happened in and even the wider systemic context.

Find out more about collective story harvesting

More resources are available on the Art of Hosting community website (scroll down to the section on Collective Story Harvest): http://artofhosting.ning.com/page/core-art-of-hosting-practices

A selection of harvesting methods[9]

Here are some examples of the many ways to collect the results of important conversations and to make sense of them. Be creative and adapt them to your contexts and needs.

Harvesting a check-in circle by dedicated harvesters:

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

Cards Harvest after a World Café or in Circle:

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

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[9] This selection of harvest methods is offered by the community of practitioners of participatory leadership in the European Commission. The photos come from that context, as does the language!

Sharing results collected on flipchart sheets:

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

Exhibition / 'Gallery Walk' after an Open Space session:

With large groups, the flipchart technique described above will probably take too long. An alternative is an exhibition style in one or two rounds where each session host is invited to very briefly (30 seconds to a minute max.) share their key insights, as a way of pitching their session for more people to join the more in-depth sharing moment that follows. Once each session host has spoken, you apply Open Space principles again (the 'law of two feet' and people can go to learn from and contribute to the session(s) of their choice. This enables the host to enrich his/her harvest with new perspectives.

Collective mind map:

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

The collective mind map is a quick and simple way to create a **shared overview of issues and opportunities** relevant to a particular subject or challenge. The mind-map is led by a host and always has a clear focus that can be captured in a "burning" question.

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

The host explains the procedure for making a collective mind map and presents the **ground-rules**:

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

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

Two scribes draw up the actual map, or else one person familiar with the mind mapping software, optionally assisted by another person. The central question is at the centre of the mind map. The major themes – and different issues under each theme, are recorded on the mind map radiating out from the central question.

When all themes and issues have been recorded on the mind-map, the group can decide on the priorities by **voting**. Everyone gets a number of votes - sticky dots they can place on the themes or issues they see as most important. Voting clearly indicates which themes or issues have the highest leverage for further action.

Live clustering

Imagine you have invited a group to share (through Appreciative Inquiry) the success stories they are most proud of in their work and you want to distil out of those stories the strengths demonstrated.

At the end of the interview phase, invite each person to write on a card the key strength from his/her story. You then invite people to circulate in the room to find others with items that are same or similar. Participants will quickly self-organise into groups of different sizes and in a completely unpredictable way. People enjoy this process and it is effective with groups of any size - a group of 100 people can organise themselves in 2 to 3 minutes.

Once the groups are stabilised, go from one group to another (use a mike if necessary) and ask them to speak their key concept to everyone and maybe add some nuances in the groups. You may want

to invite the groups to stick their key concept and all their cards on a board.

If this exercise is part of a process designed to surface key challenges or possible improvements or key developments needed, you can add a next step by inviting people to reflect in their groups about what can be done in the area they have identified.

Harvesting templates: Open Space, Pro Action Café, etc.

Pre-defined templates can be suggested for session hosts to collect the key results of Open Space or Pro Action Café sessions. The template can be made available on a sheet of flipchart. If laptops are available, prepare an electronic template into which results can be input in real time. The results can then be presented by the hosts to the plenary, projected on screen and inserted into the report of the process. Give good thought to the information you want to gather, and include questions that will invite this.

Self-harvested check-out circle:

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

Taking photos during a participatory process:

As a host, taking pictures helps to focus one's attention on the process and to better sense what is happening as the process unfolds. It also helps to memorise people's faces. It is strongly recommended to systematically photograph all pieces of harvest, in case they go astray. If you take pictures of people while they are in conversation, always ask everyone for permission and mention the use you intend to make of them.

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


This always has a very positive impact on the participants. It can also inform those who could not be there. Above all, it will be an invaluable source of information for follow-up. Depending on the context and the needs, you may produce a shorter version with the key insights (sort of executive summary) and an extensive version with all detailed results. If you

intend to provide such a document, make sure the hosting team includes dedicated harvesters present throughout the process, so that the newsletter can be delivered as soon as possible after the event.

Landscape
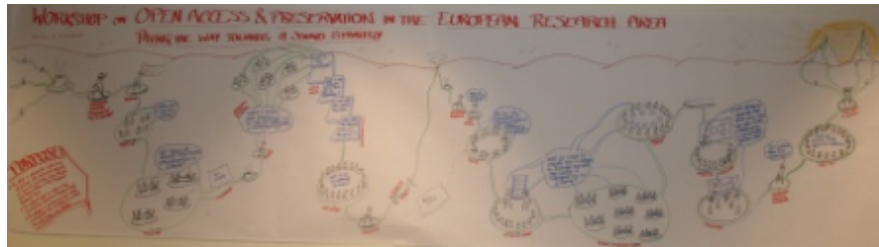
A Landscape is a visual representation of a hosted conversation process. It shows both the what and the how of the process. To many practitioners, this is one of the signatures of the Art of Hosting.

Drawing a draft landscape during the design phase can help the hosting team visualise the logical flow of a process and how the steps build on each other.

A landscape can be a work of art, or it can be very simple. The purpose is to have a visual representation of the inner logic of the process. Any graphics should support the content, not overshadow it.

A landscape piques people's curiosity about the process as soon as they enter the room. It supports presentation of the process at the start, and provides a visible, dedicated space for harvesting the results of conversations.

Graphic recording

Graphic recording – also known as strategic illustration - is an advanced harvesting technique which consists in graphically representing the outcomes of conversational processes in real time. It enhances the attention and retention of participants and highlights important insights and patterns which can be reflected back to the group to seed their next reflections. Graphic records are also a vivid memory of an event.

Process design

Conversations are the basic fractal building blocks of communication and change processes. We use this term to describe everything from a simple check-in with a friend to multi-stakeholder, multi-day processes.

Conversations can be hosted using methodologies, or be spontaneous and unhosted. Not all conversations need to be hosted in order to be meaningful, but generally meetings - even simple ones - are more effective when hosted. Hosted conversations and meetings generally use some kind of method or process, and multiple conversations can be nested within an event or meeting. Events and meetings usually take place in the context of larger projects or in the life of a community.

Presence and a good question are necessary for a meaningful conversations at all levels of scale. However, a distinguishing feature of hosted conversations and hosted meetings is that they also require intentional design. The more complex and larger the scale of a project, the greater the need for good design. This section describes **basic principles and models for designing at all levels**, from conversations to projects. It is important to recognise that each situation and context is unique and calls for a unique design; some elements of the design processes will not be appropriate in all situations. Part of the art of process design is

recognising the needs of each situation and adapting to meet the need.

The Art of Hosting uses two complementary mental models of process design: **Breaths of Design** and **Chaordic Stepping Stones**. The overlap between these two models can sometimes cause confusion. However, both complement each other and highlight the importance of maintaining coherence across the different pieces of a process.

Principles of Design

Here are some guiding principles that can inform the design of a hosted conversational process.

Content and process are an integrated whole

- The process must support the content, not overshadow it. A good process without purposeful content is meaningless.

Design for emergence

- All situations where human beings are involved are complex. Complex situations call for participatory processes that support emergence.

- Designing for emergence requires us to be open to perceive what wants to happen (open of mind, open of heart and open of will).

- Effective design is simple, elegant and held as lightly as possible. Because group processes are emergent by nature, hosts need to be prepared to abandon plans in service of the purpose.

- Expect and be prepared for the chaos of the emergence phase (between divergence and convergence). Trust that order will emerge from chaos without the need to force or control the process.

Be guided by purpose

- Methodologies and processes are in service of meaningful conversation; hold them lightly with the focus on the purpose and not the process.

- Each phase in a process builds upon the prior phases. Design must include the framing that connects the phases of the conversation.

- Methodologies provide a general process; the art in hosting is the ability to modify techniques to meet the needs of a specific group.

- Each methodology has its own energy and application. Choose the methodology that best fits the purpose and the phase of the conversation.

Host the process

- Designing a participatory process is itself a participatory process, involving the entire hosting team.

- Design processes need to be hosted, ideally by a steward or experienced host.

- Design work is done in the hosting pattern (check-in, circle practice, check-out, etc.).

- A good design process attends to the needs of the hosting team, preparing all to be able to contribute their best, building their capacity to trust each other and respond to the needs of the moment while hosting.

When the hosting team is aligned behind a clear shared purpose and intention, design can be held more lightly and a detailed script of the process is less crucial.

Breaths of Design

Over the years a number of hosting practitioners have come to see their work with different (larger scale) initiatives as a sequence of different 'breaths', different phases of divergence and convergence. This iterative flow became known among practitioners as the 'Six Breaths of process design'. This further evolved to seven, eight and maybe even more breaths of design. The actual number is less important than the concept that **all hosted conversations go through phases of divergence and convergence with emergence at each step** that feeds the next breath. The analogy of breath is used to emphasise that each of these phases involves a cycle of divergence and convergence, similar to inhaling and exhaling. Breath also provides a good reminder of the importance of presence and connection with our bodies.

First Breath: Feel the NEED and CALL

Every conversation begins with a person or people who deeply sense a need, a problem, a challenge or an opportunity. A caller is one who cares enough to invite others into substantive conversation about the issue. From this sensing and naming of the issue, the caller(s) can craft a question that will invite other people to respond to the call. At this stage, the question is not yet final. It is more in the spirit of: "who is with me to help 'what wants to happen' happen?"
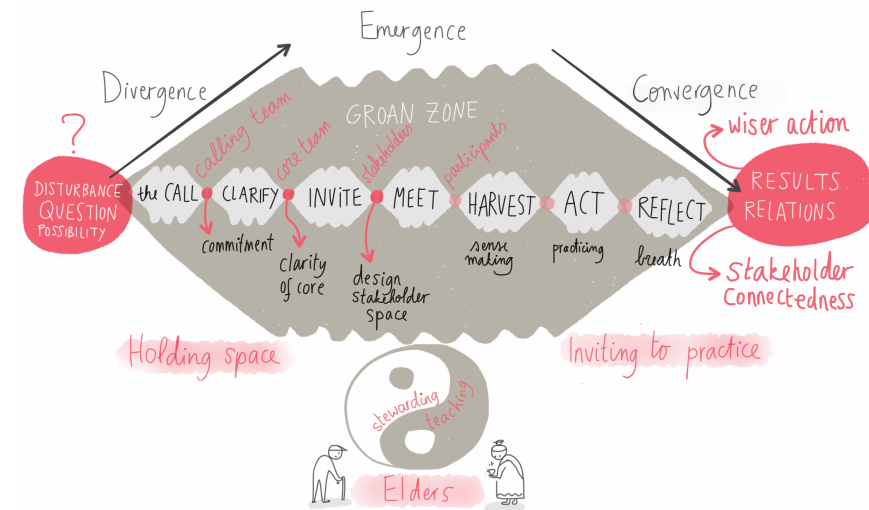
Wise action:

- **Go to the heart of the matter** - A juicy issue and a powerful calling question can cause some trembling. Step into the centre of the disturbance.
- **Don't move too fast**. Collectively sense right timing.
- **Do not host alone**. Convene a calling team that shares a deep alignment around the question. Lack of clarity or agreement around the calling question creates a wobbly foundation for the call.

Questions:

- What is really at stake here?

- What if some of us worked together to surface the real question and need that matters to the community / organisation / field?

The commitment to call a conversation about the issue is the output of this breath and input to the next breath.

Second Breath: CLARIFY PURPOSE

Because the caller is not necessarily a 'host' and may have no deep experience of hosting such conversations, one of the first invitations will go out to one or more hosting practitioners who can help the caller create the conditions for the conversation that is needed. The callers and hosts then work together to further clarify the purpose of the conversation that is being called. At this stage the group might also start to articulate some principles about how they want to work together as a core team.

Wise action:
- **Engage** - with the hosts on board and the team beginning to gel around a clear purpose, it is time to really commit, explicitly and collectively, to serving that purpose. This can be like a 'contract' with each other to stick together and support each other when the going gets tough.
- **Host yourselves and each other** - use hosting practices throughout the process, from beginning to end.

- **Don't make assumptions** - if anything feels unclear, check. It is important that the forming team learns to speak the same language and trust each others' sensing. Wherever possible, make the implicit explicit so everyone understands each other.

Questions:
- What is our purpose, really?
- How can we value and nurture the group that is forming in service of this purpose?
- How are we going to work together?

This phase is over once the core team of callers and hosts feel they have enough clarity about the purpose of the conversation they want to call to be ready to invite others to participate.

Third Breath: INVITE and DESIGN

Once the calling question is clear and the core team is solid, it is time to invite. Invitation is not a passive process; it is rooted in relationship and context. It taps into the energy of a relevant and engaging calling question that responds to real needs and is fuelled by personal passion. The inviters reach out to others in their social or professional circles and engage with them about the calling question and the intended conversation. The more potential participants are drawn in at the invitation stage, the more they will call in people from their own circles, and the more closely the conversation can be tailored to bring out the best in those present.

The invitation process starts as soon as the time is right (usually there are multiple circumstances that prevent it from going out before then!) and continues until the gathering takes place. Logistics can

also be arranged. The conversation process itself, though, will not be designed until the last responsible moment. This is because information will keep coming in that can inform the design, right up until the last moment.

Wise action:
- **Keep the purpose in the middle**, keep checking that the invitation and design serve that purpose
- **Keep the design simple** and don't start too soon (or too late!)
- **Design for the harvest**, and create opportunities for the participants to make sense and meaning themselves. Aim for something that will allow you to take the next step.

Questions:
- How do we invite people to participate in a way that moves them to show up?
- Who else needs to be there? How do we let go of our expectations that certain people need to be there?
- What is the simplest design that will meet our purpose and invite the fullest participation?

Once the meeting has been designed, a larger group of stakeholders has been invited, a good meeting space has been found: it's time to meet!

Fourth Breath: MEET

This is the breath that gets most attention. And if the preceding breaths have been well held, it should be a joy. Here is where we bring all of the art of hosting conversations into hosting a meeting.

Wise Action:
- **Check in well together** as a hosting team before the start. Your relational field is what holds the space open for conversation.
- **Host discretely**: the role of the hosting team is to host the group, the purpose, and the questions.
- **Trust the process** and each other. Hold the space intentionally. Be present, relaxed, enjoy.
- **Know the flow of the design** in your bones... and then be prepared to adapt it at need. Keep the purpose in the centre!

Question:
- What do I/we need in order to be fully present to what is happening in the room?
- What is the right balance between order and control?

When the meeting is done it is not over: it is time to make sense of what happened and prepare for action.

Fifth Breath: HARVEST

After the meeting, it is important for the core team and any stakeholders who are willing and available to come together to make sense of what emerged from the conversations and process the harvest into a form that can be fed into the larger system that is concerned by the need and the purpose, and that can support wise and generative action.

Wise Action:
- **Keep the bigger picture** in mind.
- **Look beneath the surface** details for the essence and the patterns.
- **Sit in circle** and be prepared to go deep.

Question:
- What can we see now that we couldn't see before?
- How do these insights inform our next steps?
- What communication to the wider system will best support the achievement of our shared purpose? Through which channels?

Informed by the new shared meaning, stakeholders can act.

Sixth Breath: ACT

Armed with the strategic insights born in the previous breath, stakeholders can bring their co-creation from the conversations out into the wider system. The more complex the system, the more advisable it is to take small actions: probe, sense, respond (see the section on the Cynefin framework)

Wise Action:
- **Keep noticing 'what wants to happen'**. Which actions flow easily? Where is the energy?
- **Ask** for help!

- *Question:*
- What wants to happen?

Once some action has been taken, it is time to come together to reflect.

Seventh Breath: REFLECT and LEARN

Co-creative, self-organising action in a complex system becomes sustainable when time and space are made for regular collective reflection. The core team and stakeholders sit together to pool their experiences, reflections and learning.

Wise Action:
- **Sit in circle** and prepare to go deep.
- **Keep revisiting the purpose**. Is it the same or has it shifted?

Question:
- What? (What has happened, what have we seen and learned?)
- So what? (What does it all mean?)
- Now what? (What is our next action?)

Here in the rhythm of probing, sensing and responding, the seed of community can germinate. The results are a connectedness between the stakeholders and wiser, generative action.

From here the next calling question arises and the cycle can begin anew.

Eighth Breath: HOLD THE WHOLE

The core group, perhaps together with some 'elders', holds the eagle perspective of hosting and sensing the whole. This means being aware of the flow of coherence throughout all the breaths, tending to the long-term intent and the wisdom of the actions & practices of this community of practitioners and the well being of everyone in the system.

Although the above is a step by step description, the process is not linear but rather cyclical, and sometimes synchronous. Action, sense-making (harvesting) and reflection happen throughout the process.

Chaordic Stepping Stones

The Breaths of Design provides a framework to use in designing and hosting a meeting or conversation. As we scale our work to initiatives that involve multiple meetings with multiple stakeholders over longer timeframes, the Chaordic Stepping Stones provides an additional tool for supporting our work together. You will see much similarity between the breaths and the stepping stones, since these two models are both rooted in the principles of working with emergence and have evolved based on the experience of many practitioners in the hosting community.

In an emergent process, the entire pathway is never clear; each step emerges as the path is walked. Consequently, detailed traditional planning processes cannot really support working in emergence. The stepping stones are clear strategic steps we can take when walking the chaordic path. They are a way of holding the space for more form and order to emerge from chaos to keep the enterprise moving forward. Remember, this is a practice which requires the presence to remain in the unknown and the chaos long enough for clarity to emerge. It means letting go of the need to control the process.

Each step of the process is a conversation that is needed in order to move forward in service of the larger initiative so all of the hosting practices are invited into the process at each step, as required.

Since meaningful conversations arise from powerful questions, the stepping stones provide questions to consider at each stage. These questions are not the 'right' questions to ask, rather, they are intended to help spark your thinking about a calling question for the conversation needed at this stage in your project.

The chaordic process is in continual motion, each step integrating and including the previous ones. It is an iterative, non-linear process supported by an ongoing harvest and feedback loop. Once you have defined the principles you check back if they support the purpose etc. The process allows us to be able to remain in both reflection and practice.

<u>Need:</u> The need is the compelling reason for doing anything. This need cannot be 'manufactured'; it must be felt by others and/or by the world. It is not about convincing someone to buy what it is we have to sell. Rather, it is about listening for the deep needs, regardless of whether we have any idea how to respond. This stepping stone calls for the courage to sense and listen without jumping to solutions.

- What 'time' is it in the organisation, team, field, system?
- What is the pain or discomfort?
- What is the unfulfilled potential?
- What we longing for?
- What would we like to change?
- What are the challenges and opportunities we are facing?
- What is the need that this enterprise can uniquely meet?
- What does the world need this project/organisation to be?

Purpose: The purpose addresses how the need could be met. Typically, the context you are in will impose its own constraints (resources, cultural expectations, time frames, etc.) on just how this can happen, and so the purpose is to meet the needs within those constraints. It needs to be expressed simply and clearly, in a way that invites others to join in. Again, the purpose is not what *we* want to see done but what we sense that the world is calling for.

- What's the purpose that we can adopt that would best serve the need?
- If this work should live up to its fullest potential, what do we dream (or vision) is possible?
- What is the simplest and most powerful question we could hold at the core of our work?

Principles: Principles of cooperation help to guide how we will work together in service of the purpose. They need to be simple, co-owned and well understood so that they can support us to work together at our best. They need to be specific to the team and its shared work, and to emerge from the team's own conversation. Therefore, they are not platitudes or principles adopted from elsewhere. Rather, they are crisp statements of how we agree to operate together and be accountable to each other and the purpose. They are what enable us over the long term to sustain the relationships that make this work possible.

- What is the essence of how we want to work with the participants and each other?

- What principles do we want to enact for our learning?
- What unique ways of working and being together do we want to practice?
- If we should live up to our fullest potential - what do you dream (or vision) possible for this team?

People: Once the need and the purpose are in 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 system, field or network helps us to see who else is engaged in the field of our need/purpose, and who could be interested in participating in the way forward. This is also the place for identifying what skills and capacities will be needed for the project. This will necessarily be an iterative process, with the gradual clarifying of structure, where roles and needs will become more apparent. It is essential that, as people are added to the project, the group revisit purpose and principles to assure that everyone is aligned with them. The addition of perspectives brought by new members to the team may contribute to the evolution of the purpose. When this happens, it is important that all members of the team confirm the new purpose.

- Who is in the room?
- What gifts, skills and capacity do we each bring?
- Who else needs to be in the room and how do we invite them?
- Who is this work really for? Who else really cares?
- Who is interested in the results?
- How do we leverage relationships to propagate the ideas generated

by our work together?

Concept: As we move to a more concrete idea of what shape our project will take, we begin to explore the concepts that will be useful in support of our pursuit of our purpose. 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 conversations which lead to different structures for doing our work. Depending on the project/endeavour, there might already be forms and models out there we can adopt and adapt. If not, perhaps there are some forms already spontaneously beginning to form as our work takes shape. In that case, now is the time to start naming them, making them more explicit, and experimenting with them, adapting until they fit.

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

Limiting beliefs: So much of what we do when we work together is based on unquestioned models of thought and behaviour. 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 call forth results in line with our purpose. Engaging in this work together brings us into a co-creative working relationship, where we can help each other into new ways of working together, alleviating the fear and anxiety of the unknown.

- What habits, behaviours, thinking get in the way of our working together?
- What do we think might prevent us from succeeding?
- What do we need to let go of?
- 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?
- What do we each need from our core team to feel supported in the places that make us anxious?

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. We assign tasks, agree upon schedules, and create smaller task groups that can support the work of the whole. This is also where communication systems and protocols are developed or adapted. Always, it is important to remember that order will naturally emerge from chaos if we hold the space for it and that attempts to impose and exert control are really counterproductive. It is worth adopting an appreciative stance and noticing what is already working well, what forms of self-organisation are already

spontaneously manifesting. These are the structures to adopt and adapt, as they are the ones that are already at work.

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

Practices:

The ongoing practice within the structures we build is important. This is the world of to-do lists, conference calls and email exchanges. The invitation here is to practice working with one another in alignment with all that has been born from the previous steps. In particular, it means revisiting the principles to ensure that the practices support them.

- How will we meet?
- How will we work together between meetings?
- 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 our practices support our principles for working together?
- 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 endeavour?

Harvest: There is no point in doing work in the world unless we plan to harvest the fruits of our labours. 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. While harvesting is given its own stepping stone, it is important to remember that each stone is its own conversation and, as such, each of them has fruits to be harvested. The harvest focus needs to be in support of the purpose of the work while also attending to what learning can be of value outside the project.

- What are the forms of harvest from our work that best serve the need?
- What intentional harvest will serve our purpose?
- Which artefacts can best represent what we have created?
- How will we carry the DNA of our work forward?
- What feedback loops can ensure that learning and change accelerate?
- How will we stay open to emergent learning?
- Who else would benefit from our learning?

When to say "No" to hosting a participatory process

There are times when the conditions are not conducive to hosting conversations that are truly meaningful. Sometimes the culture of the context, community or organisation is simply not ready – the time is not yet right, the invitation is not yet there. it is better *not* to try to host a participatory process in the following circumstances.

- There is no real question/uncertainty about how to do the work (something in the simple or complicated domain, like an accounting system)
- Leaders and/or sponsors believe they already know the answer(s) and are looking for ways to sell or impose those ideas on the rest of the organisation or community
- Leaders and/or sponsors believe that they are the only ones responsible for, or really necessary for, the organisation to do its best work
- Leaders and/or sponsors are seeking the appearance of participation, but are unwilling or unable to deal openly and directly with high passion or concern, increasing complexity, real diversity of people or opinions, and/or the urgent need to make decisions and take action[10].

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[10] Adapted from the Wikipedia entry on Open Space Technology.

Now what?

Now that you have experienced the basics of the Art of Hosting, what is the next step on your journey of learning and mastery of this art? Every person's path is unique and (in the spirit of walking the chaordic path) it is not necessary to see beyond the next step. At the same time, there is power in intention, so you are invited to express your intention in writing below. There is also power in sharing your intention, so you might also consider sharing it with another person who can support you and encourage you to follow through. Here are a few ways in which practitioners before you have deepened their practice.

Start or resume a personal practice: It all starts with hosting self. Do you have a personal practice that strengthens your capacity for presence? If not, you might review the section on Hosting Self, and consider committing yourself to a personal practice. Remember that this is a practice of open will in which you are gentle with yourself, inviting yourself without judgement or criticism to return to your practice when it lapses.

Have a conversation: A next step could be to have that conversation that you have been avoiding or procrastinating. This is an opportunity to practice the second of the Four-fold practice. You could begin by reviewing the section called 'Participate' and then consciously prepare for the conversation by visualising how you will listen with and open mind. Set an intention for yourself to practice the skills of dialogue (see the section on Dialogue) and gently assess your performance after the conversation.

Call a conversation: Do you sense the need for a larger conversation? Consider becoming a caller (the first breath of design) by starting to share your concerns with others and collaboratively developing a calling question and invitation. As a next step, invite experienced hosting practitioners to join you in hosting the conversation.

Join a Hosting Team: The third of the Four-fold practices is not something to do on your own, as advised in the expression 'never host alone'. So, to take the next step in practicing hosting, it is recommended that you join a hosting team. Many hosting teams offer opportunities for people new to the practice to join the team as apprentice members.

Introduce an element of hosting to an existing meeting: Try starting a regular meeting with a check-in, introduce a talking piece when there is need to deepen and focus a conversation, use open space during a meeting. Practice one of the methodologies or a component of one of the methodologies and assess the results.

Find a community of practice: Is there an Art of Hosting community of practice in your geographic area? Many communities have regular meetings to practice and learn together and invite one another to help with designing and hosting work. You can also join the global community of practitioners on the Art of Hosting ning site (www.artofhosting.ning.com).

Attend another training: One way to deepen your skill is to attend a training in one of the core methodologies. The communities of practice associated with Circle Way, Open Space and World Cafe offer trainings throughout the world. The Art of Hosting community also frequently offer Art of Harvesting trainings and advanced trainings are starting to emerge, such as "Art of Hosting Beyond the Basics", offered by experienced practitioners. Because each Art of Hosting training is unique, there is also much value to be gained by attending another basic Art of Hosting training, either as an apprentice host or as a participant. A listing of currently planned Art of Hosting trainings is found at www.artofhosting.org

Become an apprentice: Learning within the Art of Hosting community is based upon an apprenticeship model in which less experienced practitioners work with more experienced practitioners. In some cases, this takes the form of being an apprentice on a hosting team. At some point, apprentices gain enough experience that they are invited to serve as a host on a team. It has become accepted practice for any Art of Hosting training to have an identified steward on the hosting team, specifically to help hold the space for the learning of hosts and apprentices, as well as to guarantee that the DNA of the Art of Hosting is present in the training. Another way of apprenticing is to request an individual mentoring or stewarding relationship with an experienced practitioner. Such relationships are individualised to meet the needs of the apprentice, who is responsible for 'asking for what you need'.

Explore the Ning: This is a site with over 1000 global practitioners; lots of resources (videos and documents); possibility to form and join groups (local or thematic); possibility to announce your AoH-related events and start and contribute to conversations.

Read: There is a substantial bibliography is available at: http://artofhosting.ning.com/page/book-list. Begin anywhere and see where your curiosity leads.

My intention for deepening my hosting practice:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Date: _____

Additional resources

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

Art of Hosting online presence:

- **Art of Hosting**: www.artofhosting.org

  Basic information and list of upcoming trainings

- **Art of Hosting online community**: artofhosting.ning.com

  Site with over 1,000 global practitioners; lots of resources (videos and documents); possibility to form and join groups (local or thematic); possibility to announce your AoH-related events and start and contribute to conversations.

- **Art of Hosting Facebook group:**
  https://www.facebook.com/groups/artofhosting/

  With over 6,000 members, this is an international, global, closed group for Art of Hosting practitioners, where short news can be shared - to get a feeling of what is going on in the AoH world.

- **Art of Hosting email list** where a lot of questions are asked/answered and announcements are made.

  You can join the list by going to:
  www.artofhosting.org/home/stayconnected/

Reading list

A substantial bibliography is available at:
http://artofhosting.ning.com/page/book-list

Glossary

Within the Art of Hosting community, we sometimes use unfamiliar language - specialised or scientific terminology. Or we use common words in uncommon ways. This can lead to complaints about jargon. Our community is based upon values of inclusion and transparency and so it is uncomfortable to hear such feedback. At the same time, we are working with phenomena that are not (yet) part of the common experience and, consequently, there is no adequate terminology within the old paradigm. We would therefore like to invite everyone into the process of co-creating an Art of Hosting lexicon.

The following is a first step toward co-creating this lexicon. For it to be true co-creation, we need your help. If you hear something that sounds like hosting jargon, please identify it. Question it at the time and follow up with a hosting team member. Also, please challenge the definitions offered here for clarity. Clarity will only come through conversation, so please contribute in service of the field.

Chaordic

This is a term coined initially by Dee Hock, combining 'chaos' and 'order'. It is used to describe the natural process in which order emerges from chaos in a living system (see the section on the Chaordic Path). The term 'chaordic' is often used to describe the process of hosting the emergence of order (chaordic path), a process that substitutes for planning in complex domains, and works with emergence (chaordic stepping stones). It is also sometimes used to describe the presence needed to work in emergence (e.g. chaordic confidence).

Check-in

This is a Circle Way practice for opening a circle. However, we have adopted and adapted it for much more within the Art of Hosting. It is used as an opening for any meeting, including conversations among practitioners. In essence, a check-in is a way of working with energy by marking the beginning of a conversation or meeting - moving away from the busy energy of daily life into the protected space of conversation. It is a tangible way of marking this shift as well as an actual process to welcome presence. The check-in can take many, many forms (verbal, nonverbal, music, dance, etc.). The form is less important than the intention with which it is offered and practiced.

Check-out

The check-out mirrors the check-in by marking the energetic end of a process, meeting or conversation. Sometimes it provides an opportunity for some personal reflection. At other times, it just puts an energetic exclamation point on the end of the work and releases participants' energy to leave the protected space of the conversation and re-enter the 'normal world'. As with check-ins, the art is to design a check-out that provides the appropriate energetic transition from the level of work that has been shared.

Community of Practice

The fourth of the Four-Fold practices (see the section on the Four-Fold practice) is to 'practice community' by holding space for the emergence of co-creative learning communities. The work of collaboration cannot be done in isolation. Relationships, connections, networks are essential. When these are focused around developing hosting capacity and nurtured with care and intention they can develop into communities of practice. This process cannot be forced or accomplished entirely through planning and organisation. When it happens, it is a gift, born of friendship, generosity and curiosity, with help from the right conditions and timing.

Complexity

Complexity has a very specific scientific definition and is the focus of 'complexity theory'. Its insights have been applied in numerous other domains (living systems) including organisations. The Business Dictionary defines complexity theory as a "set of concepts that attempts to explain complex phenomena not explainable by traditional (mechanistic) theories. It integrates ideas derived from chaos theory, cognitive psychology, computer science, evolutionary biology, general systems theory, and other related fields to deal with the natural and artificial systems as they are, and not by simplifying them (breaking them down into their constituent parts). It recognises that complex behaviour emerges from a few simple rules, and that all complex systems are networks of many interdependent parts which interact according to

those rules." Biologist Rupert Sheldrake prefers the term 'habits' to 'rules' when talking of natural living systems, and this might account for the ease with which nature adapts! According to the Cynefin Framework (see the section of that name), complexity is the only domain in which emergence occurs and, thus, the context in which hosting practices have their true relevance.

Container

The Art of Hosting is the art of working with energy. Such work requires some way of holding the energy so that it does not disperse. The process of creating a space within which energy can be contained and worked with is what we called creating a container. A strong container is influenced by the physical space, the clarity of the purpose being pursued, the design of the process, the hosting of the process, the level of trust among the participants and much more. A container that is too tight or too small (overly controlled) or too porous (not well hosted) will not allow the group to do its work; hosting is the art of creating and sustaining a container that serves the purpose.

Emergence

This is another term with a specific scientific definition. From Wikipedia: "emergence is a process whereby larger entities, patterns and regularities arise through smaller or simpler entities that themselves do not exhibit such properties." Stated more simply, it is the common hosting experience of everyone leaving a conversation with something that no one had prior to arriving. Emergence is a

property of complex systems and, as such, is the domain and focus of hosting.

Field

This is another energetic concept. It has much in common with the container (see above). However, where the container bounds a conversation, the field transcends temporal and spatial boundaries. It includes the entire lineage of learning about and experience of hosting and everyone who has every been involved in hosting practices. The field of a particular conversation is activated and strengthened through presence, intentions and quality of relationships of the core team throughout the design process (see the section on Breaths of Design).

Fractal

Fractals are patterns that occur at every level of scale within a living system. With the Art of Hosting, we use this to refer to patterns such as divergence/emergence/convergence that occur at all levels of scale, from simple one-off conversations to large, long-term, multi-stakeholder processes.

Harvest

The Art of Hosting community has adopted the term 'harvest' to refer to the process of capturing or recording the output/outcome of hosted conversations (see the section on harvesting).

Practice

As both a verb and a noun, practice is an essential of hosting. The verb 'to practice' denotes "repeated skill in or performance of an activity or skill so as to acquire or maintain proficiency in it." When we host, we are practicing hosting. When we hold space, we are practicing holding space. This implies that we are constantly in the process of becoming, of learning and of acquiring greater proficiency. We are constant learners. The noun 'practice' denotes the set of activities that we engage in. For instance, the practice of holding space, the practices of harvesting, the practice of mindfulness meditation. Given that we work in emergence, our practices are constantly evolving and changing and are always open to innovation.

Presence

This is an intangible, but essential, component of hosting developed through the practices of hosting oneself. Presence points to the confident, easy, vulnerable, spacious qualities of a host that invite trust and vulnerability in others. It comes from a connection to one's inner source of sensing and knowing, and is communicated nonverbally as well as verbally. Presence is the necessary capacity for holding space. Presence is the quality that emerges from intention and attention.

Source

'Source' in this context is an esoteric term which refers to the realm of unmanifest potential. Our connection to that realm is felt through the subtle energies that we feel in our bodies, rather than conceiving

with our minds. It's the 'feminine' mode that resides in darkness and has to gestate outside the purview of the mind until ready to manifest. Closely connected with this is the notion of 'right timing'. Things simply don't manifest until their gestation period is over. And we cannot know when that is until it happens. When the things we want to make happen *don't* happen, it is often because the time isn't right.

Space

This term includes the physical space in which a hosted conversation takes place, but includes much more. It also covers the emotional, interpersonal and energetic space as well as the intrapersonal space of the participants. Hosting practitioners frequently speak of 'holding space', another word for creating and maintaining the 'container' (see above). Space is held by practicing presence. The term 'opening space' is also used, frequently but not exclusively as part of Open Space Technology, to describe the process of inviting the group into deeper conversation at a transition or at the beginning of a particular process.

Stakeholder

Anyone and everyone who cares about or is affected by a process or set of circumstances that give rise to a conversation process. One of the arts in hosting is the ability to sense and identify who the unrecognised stakeholders are and to invite them into the process.

Steward (stewarding)

Within the Art of Hosting community, stewardship is the practice of holding the whole (the Art of Hosting field) with love and care. Being a non-hierarchical non-organisation, this community looks to stewards to protect the essence of this work while resisting attempts to control or commoditise it. Stewardship is a role that emerges from the practice of working within a commons where traditional hierarchical roles are not appropriate.

Geetbets, Belgium

6, 7 & 8 February 2016