

## The Four-Fold Practice



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

1. Being present (pre-sensing)
2. Engaging in conversations (participating)
3. Hosting conversations (contributing)
4. Becoming a community of practice (co-creating)

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

*A practice means actively and regularly doing something to maintain or enhance a skill or ability.*

### **1. Being present (pre-sensing)**

*...host yourself first—be willing to endure chaos—keep the “space” or possibilities open—stay in the fire of the present...*

Being present means showing up, undistracted, prepared, clear about the need and what your personal contribution can be. It allows you to check in with yourself and

develop the personal practice of curiosity about the outcomes of any gathering. Presence means making space to devote a dedicated time to working with others.

If you are distracted, called out or otherwise located in many different places, you cannot be present in one. For meetings to have deep results, every person in the room should be fully present.

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

Collectively, it is good practice to become present together as a meeting begins, be it through a welcome, a good framing, through "checking-in" to the subject matter or task at hand by hearing everyone's voice in the matter or as simple as taking a moment of silence.

Invite a collective slowing down so that all participants in a meeting can be present together.

## **2. Participate and practice conversations**

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

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

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

## **3. Hosting conversations**

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

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

You can create this container using the seven helpers (page35) as starting points, and although you can also do this in the moment, the better prepared you are the better. The best preparation is being fully present.

The bare minimum to do is to discern the need, get clear on the purpose of the meeting, prepare a good, powerful question to initiate the conversation and know how you will

harvest and what will be done with that harvest, to ensure that results are sustainable and the effort was worth it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The collaborative field can produce unexpected and surprising results.

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

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

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

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

*You can have a group of individually intelligent people—but until that group knows what it knows together—the group as a group is not intelligent*

**Inspired by Peter Senge**