

Bundaberg, 29 February 2012



*An awareness day supported
by the Health & Community
Services Workforce Council*

PARTICIPATORY LEADERS IN ACTION



GETTING A HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE...

A day's exploration of participatory leadership focusing on the Art of Hosting & Harvesting Conversations that Really Matter

Forty-two people from throughout the social services sector participated in a one-day "Participatory Leaders in Action" training, representing organisations working in diverse areas such as Council services, childcare, Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander community support, youth work, disability support and others. They came from both the Wide Bay/Burnett area and Central Queensland. The core question of the day was "How can participatory leadership and the Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter make a difference in our work?".

Jan Ungerer from Workforce Council welcomed the group by acknowledging the traditional custodians of land on which we are meeting, the Taribelang Bunda people. She noted that some of the people here today came through being part of participatory processes in this region and had indicated their interest in more local training. The Workforce Council responded by creating this awareness day, as an opportunity for people to step into learning and practise together. Others had heard about the opportunity and joined in to gather tools, colleagues and application ideas. Jan introduced **Monica Nissén** and **Mary Alice Arthur**, who are here

to share the practise of Art of Hosting and stories from the field.

Participatory practices are becoming more and more important in the work we are needing to do with and for stakeholders. As complexity increases and the flow of information becomes overwhelming there is a need to work more effectively together to create collective wise action.

The flow of the day was depicted through a landscape on the wall. A mix of conversation and sharing some of the underlying assumptions and ways of working would weave through the day and our work together.

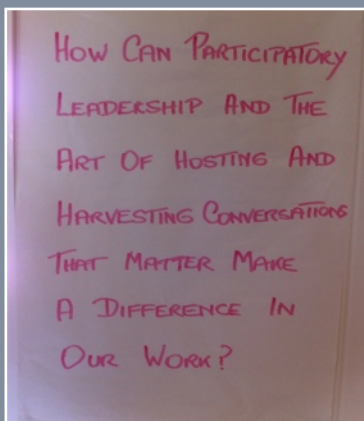
Everyone was invited to be both in the role of participant – really in the process together – and in the inquiry about application – how will I use all of this in my work? She hosted our check in circle around the question: "Of all the places I could have been today, why have I chosen to be here?". People shared a sense of their contexts and what attracted them to be in the room today. Many in the circle spoke of better understanding stakeholders and colleagues, others wanted to explore tools or increase their practise, around listening or



What are you paying attention to?

What's at the centre of your conversation? Is it a focused intent or is it the business as usual that's not really working? Try hosting a conversation instead! Speak with intention, listen with attention.

AT THE CORE



A powerful question is key

Crafting a powerful question is an art and it is also the key to participatory practices. Circle, World Café, Appreciative Inquiry and Open Space are all methodologies that have a powerful question at the centre. Hosting the space for powerful questions is a key leadership tool.

hosting conversations, for example. Some of the key themes that came through were:

- Productive & constructive conversations across many people
- Engagement & participation
- Learn methods & processes
- Effective communication to build relationships
- People/issues
- People/teams

A metaphor stuck with us during the day about the group being “teapots” – we need to seek out experiences like this day regularly to fill us up for being able to support and help others. The circle is a natural form of human meeting; a way of slowing down conversation so we can really step in, build relationship and focus on what matters. A circle conversation builds the rim and is a great way to start a meeting, even if it is brief.

Then we moved into sharing some of the **underpinnings of the Art of Hosting**. One of the underlying assumptions is conversation is a medium for human transformation (the square). Then there is the art of invitation (the cloud) – how we invite people to be in a conversation will determine how they show up. Next comes process (the circle) – what container are we using for the conversation – circle? World Café? Another process? And at the heart is a clear purpose.

After morning tea, we talked about the concept of **living systems** and shared the difference between a *mechanistic* view of organisations – ideal for getting standardised things done – and a living systems approach – ideal for working in emergence.

How will you make sure your teapot is regularly refilled?

Then a view of the **chaordic path** was offered as a way of understanding where our work is positioned. Between Control and Order is the path of management – we work here if we want to have status quo and best practice. Between Chaos and Order is the chaordic path – the path of leadership – we work here for emergence. She said that we all know how to do emergence if we know how to drive a car in the dark. We know the destination, we trust the process of being able to see about 200 metres ahead, so what’s left is the emergent journey and how we will be together on it.

Finally we talked about the **FourFold Path**, a of the grounding series of practices that underpin the Art of Hosting. First is **Host Yourself**. What is your regular practice so that you can really be present? This *becoming a learner* leads into **Participate**. Take part in conversations and be a contributor. Stay curious and in the learning. This leads into **Hosting Conversations**. Hosting with others is a practice of stepping up and creating the container for great conversations that matter. When this happens, we become a *community of learners*. And finally, becoming a **Community of Practitioners** leads us to *becoming a community that learns*. Being committed to learning leads us back around the cycle to Host Yourself again.



World Café: Taking our community conversation further...

After a small break, we were invited us into a **World Café**. We spent two rounds working with the questions: *What time is it in Queensland? What time is it in our work?* Here is some of the harvest:

What time is it in Queensland?

- Time to break down the fences/silos – things that stop us talking to each other
- To value what's important in our personal lives – remember what is important & give the time it deserves
- Election & time for great political change – anticipating the future
- A time of recovery from natural disasters
- Effect of the mining & resources sector and its impact on our communities
- Time for change of communication with social media – young people already know how to do this
- Change brings great opportunities, but we also need to slow down and wait for change to happen
- Change shouldn't bring great fear, look at it as a positive thing
- Time is a perception – physical time, universal movement. Real vs illusion, a constant, the right time...

What time is it at work?

- A time of uncertainty and instability but also growth and change. Its time for the sector to work collectively, support each other, drive change.
- Time not to worry about what we can't change, glass half full attitude around opportunities
- Changes could be political or funding driven, they impact on all of us in the workplace
- Collective communication – perceptions, involvement, transparency, engaged in vision


In the final round we discussed the question: *Knowing collectively what is going on for Queensland and in our workplaces, what does participatory leadership have to do with it?*

Knowing collectively what is going on for Queensland & in our workplaces, what does participatory leadership have to do with it?

- It provides participants with feedback, giving credit where credit is due

- Great change also has great opportunity, but people need to be part of the process to make it happen
- Conversation is what builds relationship, relationship builds partnership – that makes change happen
- A time for change and the outcomes it has – it is essential to create participation and co-created agenda – we all need to share the journey together – its all about ownership and buy-in. If we have this, we are happy to continue the tasks.
- Collective communication is a key theme – with involvement and transparency. Collective clear vision and embracing each person's potential.
- Timing, clear purpose brings about better buy in and change. Good information makes people clearer on impact and outcomes.
- Using it in change and facilitate change will bring about partnerships in our organisations and in community – we will have more of a voice united
- If we don't have this leadership, we'll have limited ability to adapt to the needs of our communities
- Allows for a healthy environment, people feel part of the process, they are searching for a new way to connect, reduces fear & creates trust, the old way doesn't work. Change is constant – life is an experiment. Ensure we have some principles or boundaries to keep people focused on the same goal so we can refine the conversation and listen to all
- It takes a lot of commitment – we have that – because it costs money and takes time to bring bigger groups together – we're hearing what everyone says, sharing the load, fear, questions – the more involved, the lighter the burden becomes. Allows us to manage up and stand up for what we want and feel. You can change what you want to change one step at a time.
- Complex change needs diverse input, productive change a key word. Keen to practise with some of the tools and participatory leaders to work with and facilitate with the whole of community involvement & embrace diversity.
- The sector needs to take the opportunity to work together – we already have some structures to do that – but we need to start having some real conversations in those networks – participation, acknowledgement, etc.

What time is it for you?

| ABOUT LIVING SYSTEMS... | CO-CREATION | MEANING | PARTICIPATORY | PERCEPTION |
|--|--|--|--|--|
|  | ... accepts only its own solutions, what it has a part in creating | ... pays attention only to that which is meaningful here & now | ... participates in the development of its neighbour | ... cannot be controlled, only nudged, tickled or titillated; it changes when its perception changes |

What practice stories could point the way to the next innovation?

After lunch we heard two **powerful stories of Art of Hosting in action**. Monica shared the story of the Columbus, Ohio initiative “Our Optimal Health” and her participation right at the beginning of this 9 year project. [NOTE: Each participant has received the blue Berkana report “From Hero to Host”, which covers this story in detail]. Jan told the story of the NDS project “Blue Skies”, and how this conversation about *inclusive communities* became an on-going, viral conversation that ended up influencing State policy.

Some of us took on the role of harvesting insights out of the stories under these headings:

- Participatory leadership & ways of working
- Pivotal moments and breakthroughs
- Principles/practices that underpin this work
- Applications for my own work
- Witness (the meta harvest perspective of how the story worked with the group)

Some questions arising from the stories that could be applied anywhere were also harvested.

With the inspiration of the stories in mind, we moved into **collective mindmapping**, offering specific applications of the tools and processes we had been looking at during the day. As each topic was offered, it was scribed into the growing map. With sticky dots, each person identified their top three priorities and the top seven were:

- Working with staff (27 votes)
- Needs: finding a good question (20)
- Inspiring communication (14)

- Communities of Practice (9)
- Stakeholder engagement (9)
- Innovation (8)
- Lateral violence (8)

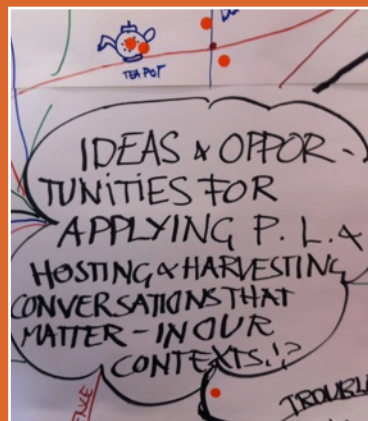
We moved into working groups around these interests and worked on practical applications and ideas. In coming back as a full group, each of the teams reported back on their conversation.

Our **check out** round focused on what questions, insights, thoughts are we leaving today with. People spoke about what they had learned during the day and what they were going to put into practice. Some had found new connections and inspiration, some had overloaded brains and others were happy “the teapot has been filled” again. Many were appreciative for the opportunity to be in practice together here in Bundaberg and were looking forward to what might be offered in the future.

To join the Art of Hosting email group, visit <http://www.artofhosting.org>.

To join our Community of Practice, visit <http://www.artofhosting.ning.com>

ON THE SPOT



Two Cool Tools

Storytelling is a powerful way to find out what we know. Sharing practice stories & collective harvesting uncovers the gold nuggets. A collective mindmap is an easy way to make visible what we think is important and to easily clarify priorities.

