



the weave

v1

Participatory Process Design Guide
for Strategic Sustainable Development



Tracy Meisterheim, Steven Cretney, Alison Cretney

“The gift of good process is that it allows people to be in learning together. The gift of content is that it gets work done. When you have these two together, you get good results.”

– Toke Paludan Møller, Art of Hosting, Denmark

“There is a very intimate linkage between intellectual content on one hand, and process and engagement on the other.”

– Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt, The Natural Step, Sweden



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The Weave was developed by Tracy Meisterheim, Steven Cretney and Alison Cretney. It is the outcome of our 2011 Masters in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability (MSLS) thesis research at Blekinge Tekniska Högskola, Sweden. The final thesis, *Integrating Participatory Processes in Planning for Strategic Sustainable Development*, is available at www.bth.se/msls.

This guide includes the collective input of twenty two sustainability and hosting practitioners from around the world, including the founder of the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development

(FSSD), Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt, and co-founder of the Art of Hosting, Toke Paludan Møller. Our work was recognizing overarching patterns and synthesizing them into principles and strategic guidance for process design. We gratefully acknowledge this generously offered wisdom and offer it back to the practitioner community as prototype Version 1. Full references and citations are included in our final thesis.

Theories and methodologies of participatory leadership have been integrated with the FSSD, creating systematic guidance for strategic planning

process design. We recognize that the language used to describe aspects of *The Weave* may not be familiar to all sustainability practitioners. Language reflects the organizational learning and leadership theories and methodologies taught in the MSLS programme and embraced by the Art of Hosting network. Please refer to the glossary for definitions as necessary.

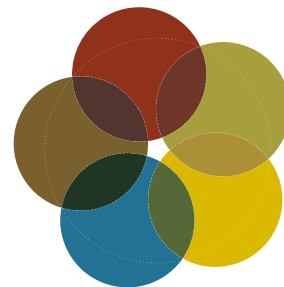
The Weave v1, has not been field-tested. It is our hope that you will be inspired to contribute to the continued development of this prototype. We welcome your input at www.theweave.info.

v1 *The Weave v1* published June 2011. Design by www.theforest.ca, cover photo by Tamar Harel.

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v1



Participatory Process Design Guide for Strategic Sustainable Development

With the goal of creating transformative change that lasts, *The Weave* tries to answer the question: what would the ideal engagement look like? It provides guidance for sustainability practitioners wishing to more deeply engage people in creating their sustainable future.

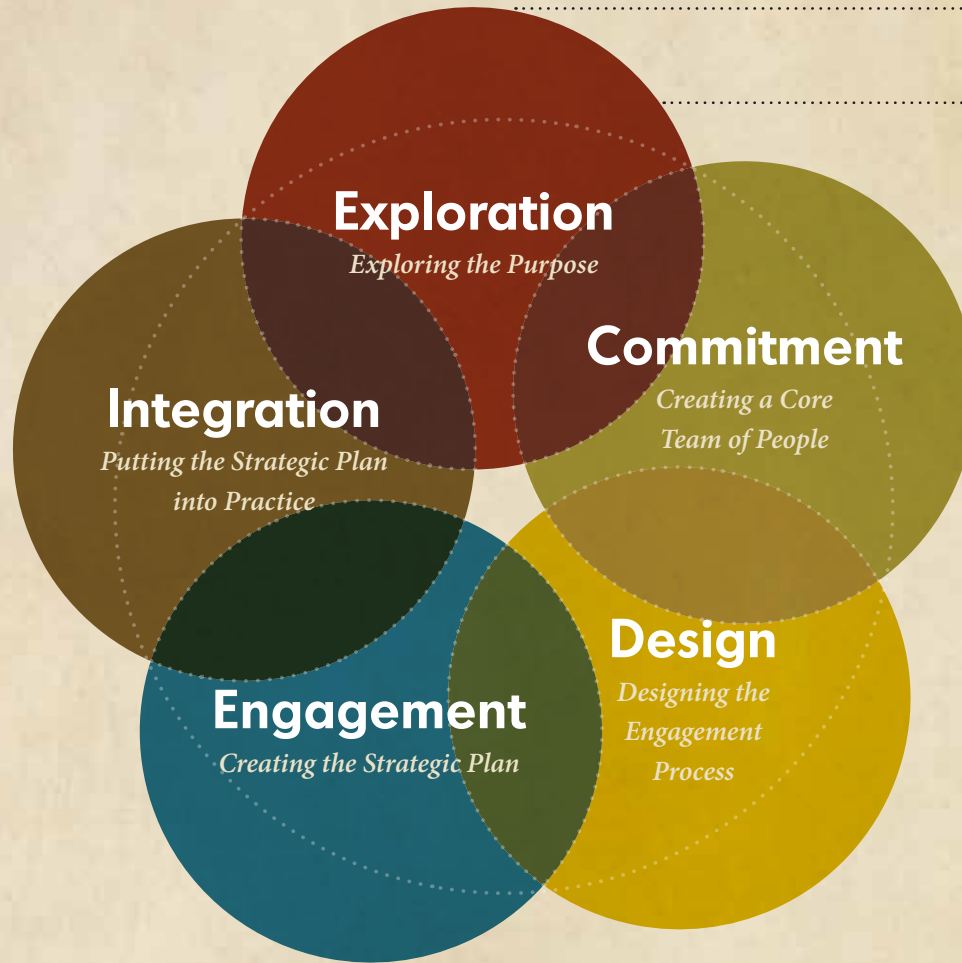
The Weave integrates the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD), also known as The Natural Step Framework, with strategic process design principles and dialogue-based methodologies. The FSSD is the skeleton that provides the structure of planning for sustainability, while the ABCD process provides a high-level approach for moving through the strategic planning stages in a step-wise manner.

So, how can sustainability practitioners engage people in this process to create transformative change that lasts? Using dialogue-based methodologies is one approach because they were specifically designed to bring about meaningful conversations to engage groups of people. Any model of organizational transformation should have dialogue as a central element. Dialogue can create relationships of trust and transparency, leading to the emergence of new knowledge and shared meaning.

“It can take more time and patience to work with [dialogue-based methodologies], but ultimately, it results in less work due to stronger commitment and better strategy. The sustainability plan does not have to be sold later; it leads to more movement and change toward sustainability.” – Pong Leung, TNS Canada

Participatory processes included in *The Weave* are used by the Art of Hosting network, a global community of practitioners using methodologies to engage groups in conversations that matter. The methodologies in *The Weave* are World Café, Open Space Technology, The Circle, and Pro Action Café, Appreciative Inquiry and Theory U. Expansion of this list is anticipated with ongoing development of this guide.

The Weave provides systematic guidance for designing participatory strategic planning engagements for sustainable development.



The practitioner-client relationship broadly encompasses five overlapping phases, representing an ideal planning process.

Five Phases

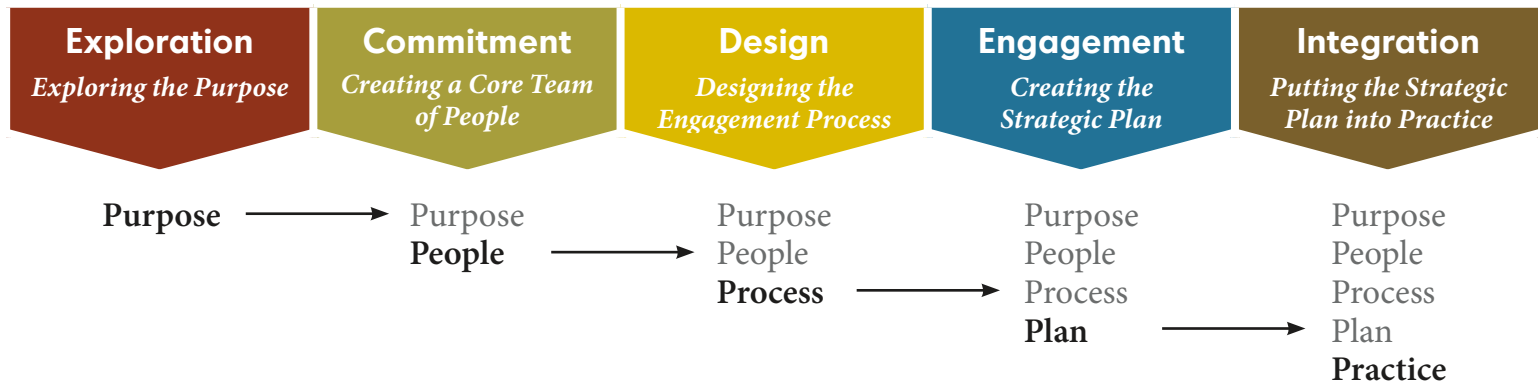
The practitioner-client relationship broadly encompasses five overlapping phases: Exploration, Commitment, Design, Engagement and Integration. As the graphic on the previous page suggests, strategic planning for sustainability is an inherently iterative process that spirals through each phase as development towards sustainability progresses.

A focus is carried forward through each successive phase: Purpose, People, Process, Plan and Practice. In the Exploration phase, the focus is on clarifying the purpose. During the Commitment phase, the focus is on developing a core team of people willing to steward that purpose and building the capacity to do so. The core team then designs the engagement process in the Design phase, to carry the purpose forward. The focus of the Engagement phase is on creating the strategic plan, using a process designed with the purpose and people in mind. In Integration, the focus shifts to putting that plan into practice. The phases occur sequentially, building on each previous phase.

Through each phase, aspects of the ABCD strategic planning process are explored on a deeper level, beginning with a high-level assessment of readiness for sustainability planning during the Exploration phase. Subsequent iterations of the ABCD process expand awareness of the sustainability challenge during the Commitment and Design phases. The ABCD process then becomes the primary focus in the Engagement phase.

When the strategic plan is put into practice in the Integration phase, those actions generate change which brings with it new information and new questions. The iterative nature of strategic planning for sustainability spirals back to the Exploration phase again, seeking a mandate to continue moving forward, to continue using participatory processes, and to revisit the purpose. With each iteration, clarity and focus for the sustainability initiative is continually sharpened.

These five phases and focus areas create the foundation of the Template for Process Design, shown on page 18.



Structuring the Five Phases

The Template for Process Design (page 18) summarizes guidance for developing a participatory process for strategic planning for sustainability. Its structure is explained here.

As shown in the table below, the column headings are the five phases. The rows are built from seven strategic design elements that emerged from synthesizing practitioner input. These seven are embedded throughout the Template and are described as Guiding Principles for Process Design on the next page. Four are specifically included to be used strategically at each phase. They are: involving the right

people at the right time, planning for the harvest, asking powerful questions and reflecting at every step. They appear again in the Design phase, where they can be used strategically to design the ABCD planning engagement.

The other three are used as higher-level design principles. These include knowing the boundaries, defining the context before choosing a methodology, and weaving the methodologies.

The structure of the Template for Process Design includes the five phases as column headings while the row headings are four of the Guiding Principles for Process Design

Phase:	Exploration <i>Exploring the Purpose</i>	Commitment <i>Creating a Core Team of People</i>	Design <i>Designing the Engagement Process</i>	Engagement <i>Creating the Strategic Plan</i>	Integration <i>Putting the Strategic Plan into Practice</i>
Participants:	<i>Involve the right people at the right time</i>				
Harvesting Outcomes:	<i>Plan for the harvest</i>				
Root Question:	<i>Ask powerful questions</i>				
Reflection:	<i>Reflect at every step</i>				

Guiding Principles for Process Design

In interviews with practitioners, patterns and critical elements emerged around process design. These were synthesized into seven Guiding Principles for Process Design.

Involve the Right People at the Right Time

Being intentional in identifying those with the expertise, passion or skills is one strategic way to use people's time wisely and make the planning process efficient and effective. Time is the biggest barrier to doing this work. By inviting the right people, there will be no need to 'sell' the plan because they will have been involved in creating it. The extra time invested in the beginning will pay off in the end.

Plan for the Harvest

Just as a farmer plans for the harvest before planting the seeds, planning for the capturing of outcomes from participatory processes can also be approached strategically. Outcome harvests must be communicated in a format that suits the organization. It can be strategic to invite the person receiving the information to help design the output format. Planning the harvest is as important as planning the engagement. Backcast from the required outcome for every stage, keeping in mind the form in which the information needs to be communicated.

Give attention and energy to harvesting the non-tangible outcomes: relationships, trust and energy. These are often the drivers of lasting change; consider ways to carry them forward.

Ask Powerful Questions

Powerful questions invite inquiry and new possibilities. There is strategy and logic in designing a powerful question. Take time to design the questions that need to be asked – a good question will be specific and clear, get to the heart of the matter and make the work easier. The wrong question will make the work useless. Two threads, personal and professional, can be addressed throughout the entire process. If we only address the professional, the personal may not be committed and the work may lack the heart it needs to be done well.

Reflect at Every Step

Stay in alignment with the need and purpose by building in reflection and learning loops at every phase. Build reflection into every stage of the ABCD strategic planning process as well. Slowing down to reflect on the shifts in learning allows the important lessons to be recognized and incorporated. Before moving on, check in with the purpose, and reflect on progress, learning and remaining questions. Invite a learning attitude in one another. How are we doing? Are we on track with our purpose? With our principles? What questions are we sitting with? What new questions are arising? What have we learned? What are we bringing forward to inform the next stage?

Know the Boundaries

Boundaries create the safe container in which creativity can emerge. Just as the sustainability principles are the boundary conditions for all strategic planning, the boundary conditions for a successful engagement must be defined. Set yourself and your client up for success by knowing when to say no. Lack of a mandate can lead to disempowerment; lack of time or resources can limit the effectiveness of the work and therefore the outcome. Agree to work within your own parameters of success and be clear what can successfully be accomplished within the parameters offered by the client. This principle is the critical element in the Exploration phase and again in the Design phase.

Weave the Methodologies

The methodologies are the vessels that hold the conversations that matter. No one methodology serves all purposes, and every engagement design is unique. It is in the weaving of the methodologies that the ‘magic’ arises. Weaving the methodologies primarily occurs in the Design phase.

Define Context before Choosing Methodology

Identify the context of the organizational challenge before selecting the planning framework and specific methodologies or tools. Complex adaptive systems need a planning framework and tools suited for complexity, adaptability, resilience, flexibility and responsiveness because outcomes are not predictable or linear. A tool designed for a linear problem will not serve a complex one. For problems that are predictable, tools informed through analysis and by expert knowledge may be needed. Participatory processes are designed for complex situations, allowing people to be in learning together. The Cynefin framework (page 11) can help inform these decisions.

“It is not so much about the methodologies as it is about the contexts in which we’re using them, the [outcome] harvests, and the implementation that comes after that. When people do not understand the context they can misapply the methodologies and can create hard feelings, bad meetings, or people not really noticing the power of the methodology. If you get stuck in using these methodologies as ‘tools’, then you’re a mechanic. If we approach planning as a mechanistic process, we’re not going to get anywhere different, and this is especially true for sustainability.”

– Chris Corrigan, Art of Hosting Practitioner, Canada

Cynefin Framework

Complex <i>cause and effect relationship apparent in hindsight</i>	Complicated <i>cause and effect relationship requires expert knowledge or analysis</i>
Chaotic <i>cause and effect relationship impossible to determine</i>	Simple <i>cause and effect relationship is obvious</i>

Adapted from Snowden and Boone, 2007.

Every challenge has certain characteristics that help identify the most appropriate approach to finding a solution. An understanding of the Cynefin Framework can help guide selection of appropriate approaches to suit the inherent level of simplicity or complexity. For a simple problem, the relationship between cause and effect is obvious and predictable where, for example, Standard Operating Procedures apply. For a complicated problem the cause and effect relationship is less obvious, requiring expert knowledge or analysis to discern between a range of possible outcomes. Approaches for these analytical problems might include SWOT and PESTLE analyses, reporting to the Global Reporting Initiative guidelines or carbon footprinting.

In complex problems, common to the sustainability challenge, the relationship between cause and effect can only become apparent in hindsight. Since outcomes are unpredictable, due to the vast number of interconnected variables or long time frames required for changes to be seen, the focus must be on creating an environment supportive of emergence and sensing patterns, rather than trying to force predetermined results and possibly missing unexpected opportunities that arise. For complex sustainability challenges, solutions that suit problems of a simple or complicated nature do not suffice. It is paramount that the approaches taken are designed for complex situations. Both the FSSD and dialogue-based methodologies were specifically designed for working with emergence in complex contexts.

Guidance per Phase



Exploration: *Exploring the Purpose*

In the first phase, the practitioner and client explore the possibility of working together toward sustainability. The overarching purpose of the work is defined through the root question, ‘Why do I/does this organization care about moving toward sustainability?’ Design questions to bring the person into the conversation, not only the professional.

This phase can be framed with Appreciative Inquiry (AI) by exploring what is currently working and what dreams are held for a sustainable future by the people in the organization. It can also be the first step of the Theory U journey of co-initiating, where the

practitioner-client relationship is initiated and personal-professional agendas are clarified.

The outcome harvest from this phase needs to include a mandate from the senior executive level, both for allocating the resources for working in a participatory way and for implementing the strategic plan. Ideally, others will be involved in this phase. Often someone within the organization, the ‘sustainability champion’, has recognized the need and called for action.

Take the time to ensure that there is a shared language and understanding of sustainability and participatory processes before moving forward. Intentions set in this phase will establish the integrity of this collaborative work.



Root Question: Why does this organization care about moving toward sustainability?

These are high-level questions to explore the purpose for wanting to work more sustainably:

Personal

- Why do you care personally about sustainability?
- What is motivating you to be willing to work to make the changes necessary for a sustainable future?

Professional

- Why are you (senior executive) willing to commit this organization to work toward sustainability?
- Why do you care professionally, about becoming a sustainable organization?

- What could look different if your organization were operating in the world from a place of full sustainability?
- How might working toward sustainability make your organization even more effective in serving your clients/stakeholders?

These questions explore the shared understanding:

- What is our shared understanding of the sustainability challenge, our sustainability definition and how we want to work together?
- What is going on in the world/in this organization that requires us to get together and find new creative, innovative approaches to the work we do?
- What is our definition of sustainability?
- Why should we consider a participatory approach to this work?



Commitment: *Creating a Core Team of People*

This phase is about creating a core team, willing to commit to steward the planning process. It is strategic to intentionally design this team to include the sustainability champion(s), those with expertise in both sustainability and organizational content, those familiar with the organizational culture and possible leverage points for change, and external process experts. Creating a core team and building its capacity can help balance the multiple roles a sustainability practitioner is often expected to play (sustainability expert, business consultant, process facilitator).

In this phase, relationships of trust and transparency begin, agreements for working collectively as a core team can be made, and the intention of the strategic planning engagement can be clarified. Capacity building begins here, with the core team taking a deeper look into both the sustainability imperative and participatory processes. The intention is to build the internal capacity of the organization to continue this work after the sustainability practitioner leaves. This phase can also use AI and Theory U (co-sensing), and is often the first introduction of The Circle methodology (see Framing and Methodologies).



Root Question: Who has the passion, will and expertise to steward this?

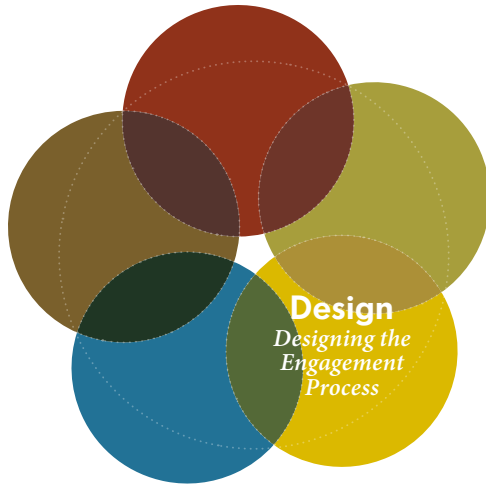
Questions to consider when establishing the core team:

- Why do I believe this work is important enough to make a commitment to steward it?
- Personal: What do I need in order to bring my highest potential to this purpose?
- Professional: What will it take to do our best work together to steward our shared purpose?
- Who needs to be on this team?
- What are the essential things we might need in order to effectively steward this process?
- What help do we need?
- What are the conditions that we need to thrive here as a team?
- What will it take for me/us to stay healthy and whole, as we commit in this work of creating a sustainable organization?

- What do we need to let go of?
- What do we not know?
- When you think of your kids/grandkids and their world, what do you really care about?
- What inspires you to learn how to live sustainably in the world as a citizen and as a professional?

Questions the core team can ask themselves to clarify the intention of the engagement:

- Personal: What would inspire me to participate in this conversation? (assuming it is my choice to do so)
- Professional: What is the purpose of the conversation we are inviting people to?
- What do we want to achieve with this Engagement?



Design: *Designing the Engagement Process*

When the core team has committed, they begin to design the strategic planning engagement. The Five Level Framework is suggested as a guide to assure a systems perspective, not only in the final strategic plan, but in the process of getting there. Dialogue-based methodologies can be woven into a strategic, participatory process to achieve the desired harvest outcomes from the Engagement.

The Guiding Principles for Process Design can be used strategically, by backcasting to design the outcome harvesting methods, the participant selection, and the

development of key questions for each step in the planning process. The Circle methodology is often central to this work, and the presencing step of the Theory U journey can come into focus when envisioning and backcasting from success.

When the engagement process is designed, the participants have been strategically identified, the engagement invitation has been clarified, and the logistics are coordinated, the preparation phases are complete. Then the Engagement phase, where the actual strategic planning occurs, begins.



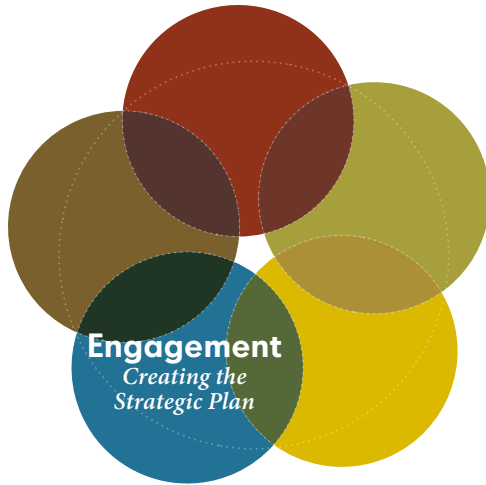
Root Question: How will we invite creativity and co-creation from participants to move us to action?

Questions to ask when designing the Engagement:

- Process Design: Have we mindfully considered the overarching purpose of the engagement, the process design principles, roles of the core team members, and the needs of our participants in this design?
- Boundary Conditions: What frames this engagement?
- Outcome Goals: When we walk out of the workshop, what do we most hope to have achieved?
- Participants: Who needs to be in the room for this engagement?
- Harvesting Outcomes: At the end, what do we need to have in our hands to clearly communicate the outcome in actionable ways?
- Designing questions: What are the key questions we need answers to in each stage of the ABCD process that will serve our shared purpose?

Questions to consider for the Engagement invitation:

- What do we need to be mindful of? (who is needed, relationships, worldviews, dreams about the future, investment in the organization's success)
- What are we not considering?
- What limiting beliefs may be influencing how we have framed this conversation (relative to who is invited, the goals, our personal agendas)?
- Who needs to be in the room (at this stage), both internal and external to this organization?
- Where do we need to begin the conversation?



Engagement: *Creating the Strategic Plan*

The fourth phase brings together the key internal and external stakeholders to begin the process of collectively and strategically creating the plan for the organization's sustainable future. Because every engagement is unique to the context of the organization, there is no prescriptive process. The core team considers the organization-specific information during the Design phase, which guides the ABCD strategic planning process during the Engagement phase. This phase may include the entire ABCD planning process in one session or a series of sessions over a long period of time.

The outcome of this phase is a draft strategic plan for sustainability, which includes: prototype actions for immediate piloting, longer term actions, key goals, strategies, timelines, accountability and progress indicators. This work is always framed by the sustainability principles, and is the phase where co-creation of the actual strategic plan begins. Co-creation, the next step in the Theory U journey, can frame this phase.

The Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (page 36) can support practitioners facilitating this emergent, participatory process. This phase is explained in detail in the Engagement Phase Expanded section on page 21.



Root Question: What strategic approaches arise from our collective intelligence that we can make actionable?

Questions for this phase are included in **Examples per Strategic Planning Stage** (page 24).



Integration: *Putting the Strategic Plan into Practice*

This final phase is when the strategic plan for sustainability is put into practice. Integration may involve the entire organization, and the practitioner is more likely in a support role, if involved at all. For this phase it is important to have advised the client to be transparent in communicating with stakeholders. For integration to be successful, it is critical to have built the internal capacity around sustainability and leading participatory processes. If capacity is established, the core team takes leadership to reconvene the group to assess progress on the strategic plan. This can be guided by the next step in the Theory U journey, as prototyping of actions begin.

The planning process then begins again based on the new questions and opportunities that have emerged from the outcome harvest of the progress evaluation. Ideally, the sustainability practitioner has established an on-going relationship with the organization and is again part of the core team for the next iteration of strategic planning. The inclusive nature of a participatory planning process, ideally, helps to create the buy-in and ownership needed for successful integration. Putting new actions into practice immediately creates new stories of meaning and reason to celebrate. This is the most critical harvest of the entire process!



Root Question: When do we start practicing each of these actions to live and work more sustainably?

Questions to ask when putting the strategic plan into practice:

- When do we start practicing each of these actions to live and work more sustainably?
- What decisions need to be made to enable us to begin taking action?
- What are specific personal/professional/organizational practices we can do to continue this learning?
- How will we come back and share our learning with one another?

Evaluating Progress and Revisiting the Plan

- What have we learned about our strategic plan, about ourselves, about how we work together?
- What new questions have emerged since we began practicing our sustainability goals?

- What is needed now to keep us moving strategically forward toward sustainability?
- What is going well? What needs attention?
- What has emerged since the engagement? Is it time for the next participatory engagement?
- How have we grown in our ability to learn together?
- What are we not talking about?

Stakeholder Feedback

- Who needs to be informed of our decisions, progress and next steps?
- How will we keep them in the conversation?

The Threads of the Weave

Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development

Five Level Framework

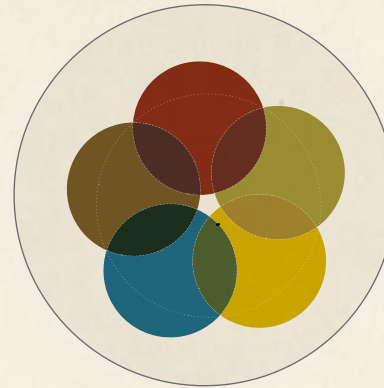
ABCD strategic planning process

6 'Breaths' of Process Architecture

Chaordic Stepping Stones

Theory U

Appreciative Inquiry



The Template for Process Design weaves together theories and methodologies used within the Art of Hosting community with elements from the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development. The phases explained in the previous section follow the Five Level Framework and the 6 'Breaths' of Process Architecture, an emergent pattern of process design discovered by the AoH community of practitioners. The Chaordic Stepping Stones of Design, Theory U, and the ABCD strategic planning process were integrated to create the focus areas of each phase (purpose, people, process, plan and practice).

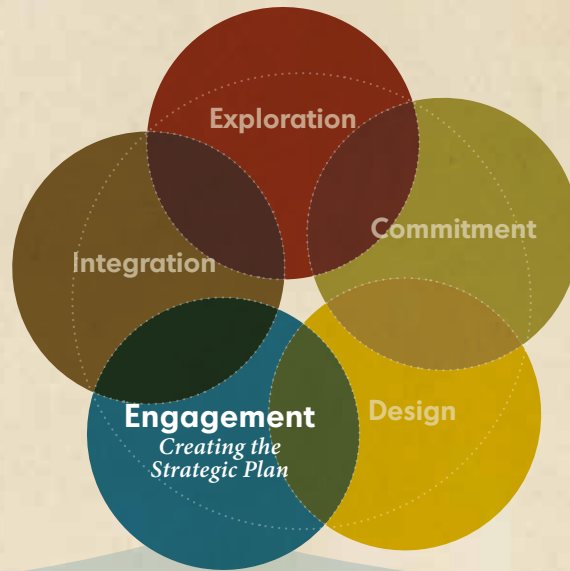
The design principles represented by the rows of the template, were identified as strategic elements, and are integrated with Appreciative Inquiry, backcasting and the strategic prioritization questions of the FSSD. The generic Five Level Framework is used to structure the design phase to ensure a systems perspective not only in the final strategic plan, but in the process of getting there. More information on each theory, methodology and framework can be found at www.artofhosting.org and www.naturalstep.org.

Template for Process Design

This Template is a summary of all guidance in *The Weave*, designed for combining participatory process with sustainability planning.

Phase:	Exploration <i>Exploring the Purpose</i>	Commitment <i>Creating a Core Team of People</i>	Design <i>Designing the Engagement Process</i>	Engagement <i>Creating the Strategic Plan</i>	Integration <i>Putting the Strategic Plan into Practice</i>
Participants: <i>Involve the right people at the right time</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Practitioners Senior Management Sustainability Champions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Practitioners Core Team (may include senior mngmt, sustainability champions and others) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Practitioners Core Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Practitioners Core Team Invited Stakeholders (may/may not be whole org) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core Team Whole Organization Sustainability Practitioner (support role)
Focus:	Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify the purpose for working toward sustainability Mandate from senior executive Create shared understanding of sustainability and participatory processes 	People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core team commitment to steward the purpose Core team Agreements for working collectively Clarify the intention of the Engagement Begin core team capacity building (in participatory leadership, dialogue, co-learning, FSSD, SPs, shared language) 	Process <p>Framed by the 5LF:</p> <p>System: define boundary conditions for the engagement (time, space, budget, content, etc)</p> <p>Success: define a successful outcome of the engagement (backcast from purpose)</p> <p>Strategic: backcast to plan the participant list, outcome harvest, questions, and learning reflections. The Cynefin Framework and Guiding Principles for Process Design can help to select methodologies and design the Engagement. See the Engagement Phase Expanded section for more detail.</p> <p>Action: process design, logistics, research, communication</p> <p>Tools: methodologies, facilitation tools, supplies, etc</p>	Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host the Engagement, the full ABCD process (Every engagement is unique to the context of the org. – there is no recipe. This may be the only strategic planning engagement, or the first in a series. See the Engagement Phase Expanded section for more details on this phase.) Harvest the outcome from each stage of the ABCD process sharply (to build the strategic plan) Commitment to put the strategic plan into practice Commitment to reconvene to assess progress 	Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice new actions, guided by Strategic Plan Communicate outcome to stakeholders (internal, external, participants, decision makers) Reconvene to assess progress (practicing participatory methodology, hosted by core team) Plan the next engagement based on the outcome harvest from the progress assessment
Harvesting Outcomes: <i>Plan for the harvest</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Purpose Mandate Shared understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreements Intention of the Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process design with harvest output format determined per stage Engagement invitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared vision Current reality analysis Key strategic goals Strategic plan (prototype actions for piloting, goals, strategies, timeline, responsibility, metrics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of progress Stakeholder feedback on new practices (internal/ external) Intention for next Engagement

Phase:	Exploration	Commitment	Design	Engagement	Integration
<p>Root Question: (for developing customized questions)</p> <p>Root Questions per Outcome</p> <p><i>Ask powerful questions</i></p>	<p>Why does this org care about moving toward sustainability?</p> <hr/> <p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal: Why do you care personally about sustainability? Professional: Why are you (senior exec.) willing to commit this organization to work toward sustainability? <p>Mandate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is our mandate for working together towards sustainability? <p>Shared Understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is our shared understanding of the sustainability challenge, our sustainability definition and how we want to work together? 	<p>Who has the passion, will and expertise to steward this?</p> <hr/> <p>Agreements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal: What do I need in order to bring my highest potential to this purpose? Professional: What will it take to do our best work together to steward our shared purpose? <p>Engagement intention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal: What would inspire me to participate in this Engagement? (assuming it is my choice to do so) Professional: What is the purpose of the Engagement we are inviting people to? 	<p>How will we invite creativity and co-creation from participants to move us to action?</p> <hr/> <p>Process design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have we mindfully considered the overarching intention of the engagement, the process design principles, roles of the core team members, and the needs of our participants in this design? <p>(For questions specific to each strategic planning stage, see the Engagement Phase Expanded section)</p> <p>Engagement invitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do we need to be mindful of? (who is needed, relationships, worldviews, dreams about the future, investment in the organization's success) 	<p>What strategic approaches arise from our collective intelligence that we can make actionable?</p> <hr/> <p>(See the Engagement Phase Expanded section for more details)</p>	<p>When do we start practicing each of these actions to live and work more sustainably?</p> <hr/> <p>Assessment of progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What have we learned about our strategic plan, about ourselves, about how we work together? <p>Stakeholder feedback</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who needs to be informed of our decisions, progress and next steps How will keep them in the conversation?
<p>Reflection: <i>Reflect at every step</i></p>	<p>Reflect on learnings about organization, working together, sustainability</p>	<p>Reflect on learnings about relationships, trust, agreements, needs of team members, clarity of purpose, next steps</p>	<p>Reflect on learnings about clarity of purpose for the engagement, strategic elements of planning, working in participatory ways, how the core team is doing relative to energy/confidence/needs/agreements</p>	<p>Reflection to be planned into the ABCD engagement. This phase ends with the core team reflecting on learnings about the engagement process itself (design, flow, harvesting, etc), about hosting participatory processes, new questions/information, etc.</p>	<p>Reflect on learnings about organization, working together, sustainability.</p>
Principles:	Sustainability Principles, Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes for SSD (page 36)				



ABCD Strategic Planning Process					
Building Shared Awareness & Understanding	Creating Shared Vision	Current Reality Assessment	Brainstorming Actions	Strategic Prioritization	Action Planning

The six generic strategic planning stages of the ABCD Process that occur within the Engagement phase.

Engagement Phase Expanded

The Engagement phase (Creating the Strategic Plan), is where key internal and external stakeholders begin the process of collectively creating the strategic plan. In this section, detailed guidance is offered to assist the core team in designing the Engagement. It considers each stage of the ABCD strategic planning process, including methodologies and root questions.

During the Engagement phase, an entire ABCD planning process may occur in a single session, or through a series of sessions over a longer period of time. Many dialogue-based methodologies will be woven into this process, along with additional facilitation tools and analysis tools, such as SWOT or PESTLE. The Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes are foundational during this phase (see page 36).

The core team takes on the role of hosting this engagement with the larger group of invited participants. Intentionally designing this team to include the needed skill sets and building their capacity to work with participatory processes can help balance the multiple roles a sustainability practitioner is often expected to play (sustainability expert, business consultant, process facilitator).

On the previous page, the figure shows the strategic planning stages that occur within the Engagement phase. Note that the ABCD process has been translated into six generic strategic planning stages to avoid confusion between various interpretations of the ABCD. These stages are: Building Shared Awareness and Understanding, Creating Shared Vision, Current Reality Assessment, Brainstorming Actions, Strategic Prioritization, and Action Planning.

The same key considerations introduced per phase in the Template must also be considered in designing the Engagement for each strategic planning stage: participants, harvesting outcomes, powerful questions, reflecting on learning and guiding principles. An additional consideration during the Design phase is the selection of appropriate methodologies for each strategic planning stage.

Selecting Methodologies

Every engagement is unique to the context of the organization, and there is no prescription for which methodology should be used for each strategic planning stage. Deciding which methodology to use depends on several factors including time, logistics, required outcomes, familiarity with methodologies and the context of the issue. Certain situations are suited to collaboration (complex), while others may benefit from hierarchical leadership (predictable or linear). It is not helpful to fall into the divisiveness of judgment, seeing one form as best in all situations. With this in mind, and given that the sustainability challenge is a complex situation, collaboration with a diverse group across silos is generally necessary to find solutions, as no single person – no matter how expert – has the answers.

The following page includes suggestions based on pairing the necessary outcome of each stage with the intended purpose of the methodologies. Keep in mind these methodologies are adaptable and could be used in other stages as well. Root questions for each stage are also included. The specific framing or form of the question will change based on context.

Dialogue-based Methodologies per Strategic Planning Stage, with Root Questions

ABCD Strategic Planning Process						
Stage:	Building Shared Awareness & Understanding	Creating Shared Vision	Current Reality Assessment	Brainstorming Actions	Strategic Prioritization	Action Planning
Framing	Theory U AI	Theory U AI	Theory U AI	Theory U AI	Theory U AI	Theory U AI
Methodologies	The Circle World Café	The Circle World Café	World Café	Open Space	Open Space Pro Action Café	Open Space Pro Action Café
Root Question:	What is happening in the world/this organization that requires us to get together to do this work?	What do you dream possible if you were operating in the world from a place of full sustainability?	What are your strengths and your challenges, relative to the four sustainability principles?	What can we begin to practice that will make the work we do together and the way we deliver our products and services in the world more sustainable?	What actions are strategic moves towards full sustainability?	What planning is required to implement the actions we have selected?

Two methodologies, Theory U and Appreciative Inquiry, can be valuable concepts with which the practitioner can frame an entire engagement, similar to how this process design template is framed.

Both methodologies also offer action-oriented guidance that can be useful at various stages. The other four methodologies are well suited for different stages of the planning process.

“More importantly than what methodologies to use where, is what are the questions you need to ask in each of the stages?”

- Toke Paludan Møller, Art of Hosting, Denmark

Divergence, Emergence and Convergence



A pattern common to this work begins with **divergence**, when a conversation opens into exploration with a diversity of worldviews and perspectives. Maintaining this state long enough for new ideas to emerge, mental models to shift, and new possibilities to be seen is crucial to working with complexity. Well-crafted questions that keep the inquiry open, not allowing it to close down too soon, are key. When this shift begins to occur, the conversation moves into **emergence**. Practitioners say this is where ‘the magic happens’, when perspectives stretch to include other worldviews and new mental models, initiating the process of real change and innovation on an individual and collective level. Holding **emergence** (fondly known as the ‘groan zone’) long

enough for this shift to happen will save time later on, as the next steps can happen rapidly once the shared goal is collectively seen.

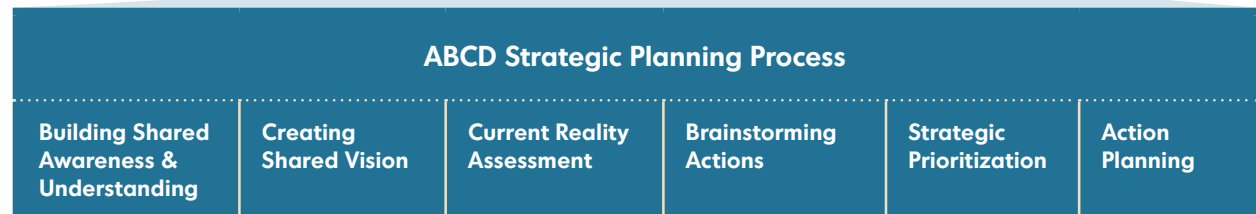
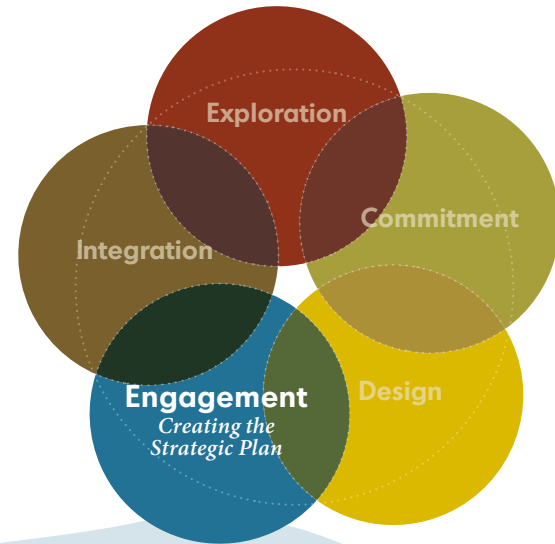
Convergence begins at the point of collective understanding, and is goal-oriented, focused and structured. This is when the group is ready to analyze their situation, assess their options and make decisions for action. If the divergent phase is closed down too quickly, before the clarity of a shared goal emerges, convergence can become stuck in debate, indecision or apathy, derailing the entire process or rendering it ineffective. Analytical tools such as SWOT and PESTLE, are more useful in convergence than in divergence, where creativity and expansive thinking serve best.

“I see [these methodologies] more like ‘running drills’ or ‘building skills’ for the real game of engaging in real world transformative systems change. That is, there are no process prescriptions. It is much more about releasing human energy, creating a positive, trusting, even an adventurous ‘can do’ tone. Practicing and knowing the foundational ‘drills’ of facilitation is what allows you to play the game that emerges.”

– Dave Waldron, Sustainability Practitioner, Canada

Examples per Strategic Planning Stage

The following section is simply a set of examples for how a practitioner might go about using participatory methodologies in each strategic planning stage of the Engagement. They are not intended to be prescriptive or proven as effective, rather suggestions to stimulate creative thinking to apply to any planning process. Suggestions are provided for methodologies and questions at each stage. The intention is that these will provide inspiration for creating powerful questions for your specific context. The importance of good questions can not be overstated.



Building Shared Awareness and Understanding

Building shared awareness and understanding of the organization, those involved, the sustainability challenge and the FSSD is the first strategic planning stage. This stage will likely include some input around the current scientific data, the sustainability principles and creating a shared language for sustainability. Be aware of the different roles expected of a practitioner (expert/presenter, host/facilitator) and help participants by clarifying the difference. Be mindful of the Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (page 36), in particular, meeting people where they are.

Two lines of questioning are important throughout: personal and professional. From the very beginning, invite the humanity of the participants to be present in the conversation so that engagement and meaning can come from a deeper level. The ‘professional’ won’t leave when the ‘personal’ is invited, but the ‘personal’ may not arrive without an invitation.

A World Café could be used in this stage, around a question that explores sustainability in the context of participants’ personal and professional lives. In a small group, Circle could also effectively achieve this objective. During this stage, deep-dialogue interviews from Theory U can be useful with various stakeholders.

Inviting participants to a dialogue about what matters most to them (around sustainability) demonstrates respect for the intelligence in the group and creates openness for deeper learning. This approach helps remind people what they already know. It may then be appropriate to supplement their knowledge and experience with ‘teaching’ around current scientific data, which may not require a participatory approach.



Building Shared Awareness and Understanding

Root question: What is happening in the world/this organization that requires us to get together to do this work?

Sustainability Challenge:

- What are we noticing in the world that is/is not sustainable? How do we feel it is influencing our lives and our work as citizens and as professionals?
- What is happening in the world right now - what trends are we seeing that are part of the solution/ part of the problem?
- What would it take to make the world fully sustainable? What would it take to make our region fully sustainable?

Organizational Awareness:

- What is going on in this organization that requires us to get together and be creative and imaginative?
- Why do we care to be an organization that is operating in a sustainable way?

Personal:

- Why do you care to live sustainably?
- What might be better in your life if you could live in a fully sustainable way?
- What do you wish for (your) children when they are your age?

Creating Shared Vision

Creating a shared vision includes exploring core values, core purpose and a vision for a sustainable future. Identifying the core values underlying an organizational vision, and the personal connection stakeholders have with those values, can be important prior to beginning the visioning session. A World Café can be used to explore shared values, core purpose and key strategic goals.



Root Question: What do you dream possible if you were operating in the world from a place of full sustainability?

Invite silent reflection on the following personal questions:

- What is the possibility you are cultivating?
- What do you dream possible if you were living in the world from a place of full sustainability?

Questions for leading a visioning exercise

- What year will it be when (your) children are your age today, and if you could create a sustainable world for them, what would it look like then?
- As you write your acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize for Sustainability in 2050, what have you achieved and what are your stakeholders saying about you?

Visioning Questions

- How might your organization look if you were able to move it toward sustainability?
- Assuming society becomes sustainable, what do you feel is the role of your organization in that society?
- What do you wish for your organization, for your community?
- How does your organization reach the world?
- What does the world expect from you?

Example (1½ -2 hours): Core Values

Begin by discussing in pairs (4 minutes): What made me decide to work with [organization]? Switch partners and repeat.

Move into a World Café with these questions (15 minutes per round):

1st round: What are the values that you hold dear (personal level)?

2nd round: What are the values you believe this organization stands for?

3rd round: As we move forward, what 3 values do you want to be sure to keep?

In the 3rd round, harvest the three values found to be most common onto individual sheets of paper (10 minutes).

Have a harvest space prepared on the wall called, 'Shared Values.' Invite each table to share their three values and post them on the wall. As themes emerge, invite them to cluster similar themes.

During a change process, assuring people that the things they value most can remain the same will help to create the security needed to explore new ideas. Close by explaining that these values will be the foundation of the visioning session you will be moving into.

The second step in developing a shared vision is finding clarity around the core purpose of the organization. If 'purpose is the invisible leader' then what purpose does this organization serve in the world? What is our reason for being? Building on the purpose identified in the Exploration and Commitment Phases, explore how the purpose aligns with sustainability. What key words arise? Combine them with the values harvest to write a sample vision. World Café and The Circle can be used for creating a common vision amongst participants.

Realize that articulating a single organizational vision is rarely accomplished in one session, and often takes many months of gathering diverse perspectives, refining and reflecting. Do not feel the need to force words to the page; time and reflection will bring it forward. Collect all the written visions, make them available to everyone, and revisit them as the process evolves.

Current Reality Assessment

A World Café can be used to surface current strengths and challenges, both internal and external to the organization. A sharp harvest from the Word Café can then be summarized in a SWOT, PESTLE, or similar model. A high-level sustainability principle analysis can be done in a World Café, with the outcome harvest feeding into an individual assignment of creating the detailed baseline assessment. Much of the current reality assessment, especially collection of baseline data, may best be accomplished by smaller groups or individuals, and not necessarily in a participatory way. This stage is likely a combination of both.



Root Question: What are your strengths and your challenges, relative to the four sustainability principles?

- What are you already doing well? (in line with the sustainability principles)
- Where are you not in alignment with the sustainability principles?
- What services do those actions (not in alignment) give you?
- Are there other ways to serve our purpose/meet the need we have not yet considered that are in alignment (e.g. leasing instead of selling furniture)?
- What are the key challenges you are facing based on this assessment (assuming the actions not in alignment are critical to the functioning of our organization)?
- Based upon your values and your vision, what currently is in place to support that vision, and what challenges are you currently facing that could get in the way of moving towards that vision?

Example (1½ -2 hours): Current Reality Café

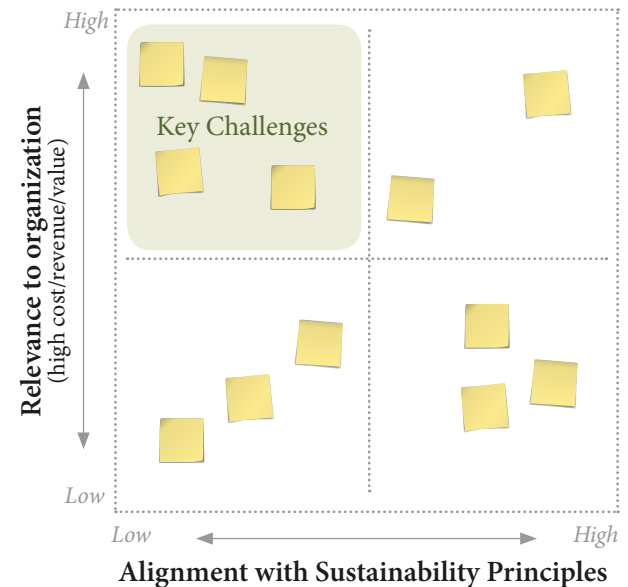
For example, World Café could be used to create a sustainability principles analysis. Using a question such as: how does our work align with the conditions for a sustainable society? On each café table, have a large piece of paper divided into four sections with each representing one of the 4 sustainability principles.

1st round: What are we already doing well (in alignment with the sustainability principles)? Have them harvest onto the paper.

2nd round: Where are we not in alignment?

3rd round: What is missing (review both round 1 and 2). Harvest by inviting each table to post their key findings onto a quadrant diagram on wall or floor (see example below).

After a break, a Café could be used to reframe the key challenges into key strategic goals, perhaps in two rounds (e.g. from 'we rely on gasoline for our vehicle fleet' to 'we create only benign emissions, or net-zero GHG emissions'.



Brainstorming Actions

Open Space Technology (OST) is often used in the Brainstorming Actions stage to generate ideas that people are passionate about and willing to take responsibility for. Be pointed in asking the right question, to focus the OST on developing a list of compelling actions for moving the organization toward its vision. Be more focused than just requesting ideas, the question is vital to the outcome.

Prior to the OST, other facilitation tools for brainstorming could be used to generate a long list of creative ideas. This list could then feed into the OST agenda with those ideas where people feel the most passion, energy and possibility.

Strategic Prioritization

Open Space Technology can also be used to more deeply develop action plans for those ideas which inspire passion and commitment within the organization. World Café could be an effective process for collecting diverse insights into the three strategic prioritization questions.



Root Question: What actions are strategic moves towards full sustainability?

The three FSSD prioritization questions:

- Does this action lead in the right direction?
- Can it serve as a flexible platform for future improvements?
- Does it provide sufficient return on investment?



Root Question: What can we begin to practice that will make the work we do together and the way we deliver our products and services in the world more sustainable?

Potential questions to guide the process include:

- What are the issues and opportunities for us to become more in alignment with the four sustainability principles?
- What ideas will make the way we work together and the way we deliver our services and products in the world more sustainable?
- What ideas and practices do we want to further explore in order for us to begin to live in alignment with the four sustainability principles?
- What do we need to practice as individuals, and as a collective, to make our vision come alive?
- How can I personally begin to live my life more in line with the four sustainability principles?

The following story describes how Open Space Technology was used by TNS Canada practitioners Sarah Brooks and Pong Leung at this stage:

We ran an Open Space where we were looking for quick, early moves so we needed specific information - who is the lead, what steps will be taken, who's on the team, what resources are needed, timeline, under whose purview will this ultimately sit? We provided a template with the project title, description of the project and on the back side we asked them to scrutinize the initiatives through the lens of the three strategic prioritization questions (of the FSSD). The information was useful, easy to transcribe, and helpful. All that was fed back to the sustainability champions and they began to create a company-wide timeline. We used a modified Open Space and got the needed output. It was an absolutely fantastic session. (Brooks 2011)

In general, depending on the depth of analysis required for each action, strategic prioritization may not be best suited to participatory process.

Action Planning

Both Open Space Technology and Pro Action Café could be used in action planning. The key here is to harvest the outcome in a format that is actionable within the organization. Planning templates can guide the harvest, so that details can be captured in the moment either on paper, a laptop or online forum (e.g. Google Docs, wiki). Templates may include the action, strategy and goal, those responsible, timeline, resources required or available, and metrics. This stage of planning, in particular, is of no use if the outcome is not clearly communicated. Those actions identified as high priority (needing to begin immediately) and those identified as quickly implementable could be taken into either PC or OST for detailed planning.



Root Question: What planning is required to implement the actions we have selected?

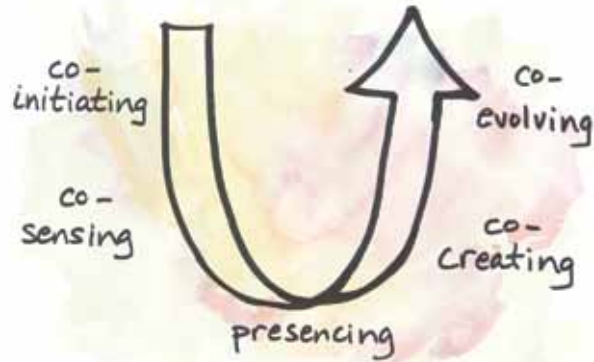
- What recommendations do we need to agree upon to begin practicing sustainability in our organization?
- What planning is required to implement actions we have selected?
- What is the decision we would like to see considered and what are we ready to do to make this happen?
- What (personal/ professional/ organizational) practices would make these goals become real in our daily lives?
- What commitments must we agree to, in order for this to become a sustainable practice in our organization?
- What are we willing to let go of to open the space for these new practices in our organization?
- What do we need to maintain to support these practices and the people involved in the change?
- Who is ready to take responsibility for this?
- What are the core factors that would support this shift?

Concluding the Engagement

Potential Questions for Closing Circle:

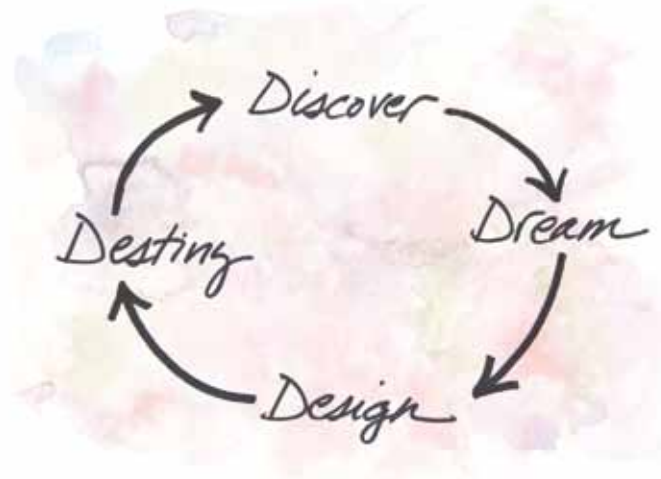
- What wishes do you have for this organization? (for its future?)
- What are you walking away with?
- What has changed/awakened/been stirred up in you for this new work?
- What are we being called to become?
- What could our organization also be?

Dialogue-Based Methodologies



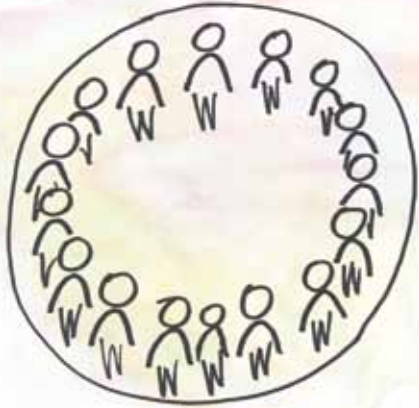
Theory U

The “U”-process describes a personal and collective 5-step journey that leads from “letting go” of past models and ways of thinking, to co-creating and implementing models for a desired emerging future. The five steps are co-initiating, co-sensing, presencing, co-creating and co-evolving. The goal is to break out of past unproductive patterns of behavior that are ineffective for decision making. Additionally, there are numerous action-oriented approaches in Theory U. For example, deep dialogue interviews are useful for building shared awareness and understanding, creating a shared vision, and current reality assessment, while prototyping is useful in the action planning stage. The theory advises that rushing into action is not effective, that each step must be taken in sequence for real change to occur, otherwise critical steps are skipped over and the intended change stalls. Developed by Otto Scharmer.



Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

In every organization, something is working. Building on those elements, as well as recognizing what people value about the organization, can provide more security when talking about change. In a troubled organization, the simple act of identifying what is working can shift attitudes from negativity and fatalism, to possibility and hope. Appreciative Inquiry can be integrated throughout the strategic planning process. For example, it informs the structure of the root questions in this guide. The general flow of an AI process is to identify organizational strengths (Discover), envision how these strengths will work in the future (Dream), plan with, and prioritize for, these strengths (Design) and implement the proposed design (Deliver). AI can frame an entire engagement or be used to offer specific action-oriented guidance such as framing stakeholder interviews. Developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva.



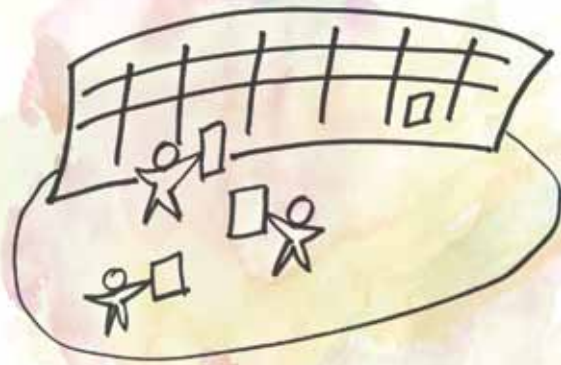
The Circle (TC)

The Circle is an ancient form of meeting used to invite people into shared leadership and participation through thoughtful speaking and deep listening. Participants sit in a circle and use agreements, practices and principles designed to care for the well-being of all. It is regularly used to open and close an engagement, and at times during the process. In opening the engagement, it brings focus to the purpose, invites each person into an equal role, brings the participants' attention to the present moment and their intention to the well-being of the whole group. To close the engagement, the circle provides a way to 'check out' by allowing each person to speak to the center. The question for inviting people into any opening circle stems from the simple query, 'why are you here?' It can be expanded in many ways to invite participants to share why they care about the purpose from a personal and/or professional level. Closing questions center around 'what am I taking with me from our shared work?'



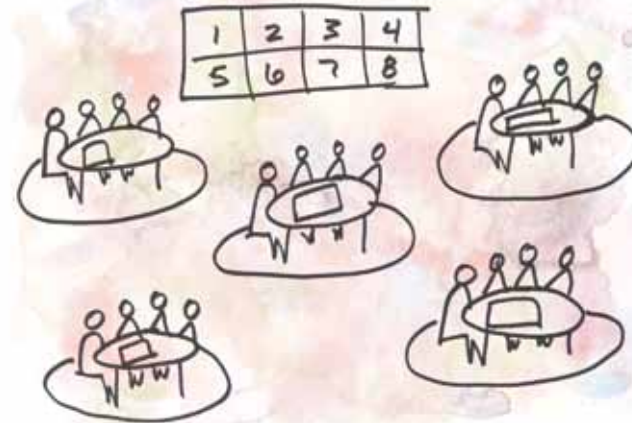
World Café (WC)

The World Café is a collective conversation with an overarching theme. Participants move between conversation clusters (café-style tables) in successive rounds (usually three), sharing ideas and insights. A "host" remains at each table to share key insights and questions with new participants in each round, and harvest the final results. Often used early in a process, World Café creates the space for individual relationships of trust and transparency to form. Within a very short time, every person in the room will have had deep conversation with as many as twelve others. There are many times throughout an engagement where the benefits of dialogue in a 'Café' setting can bring clarity to the collective intelligence of the group. It can be useful at the earlier stages of the engagement, for example, to explore sustainability in the context of the participants' personal and professional lives, to surface current strengths and challenges, or for a high level sustainability principles analysis. This methodology is also suggested as appropriate for reconvening to assess progress on the strategic action plan. Co-founded by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs.



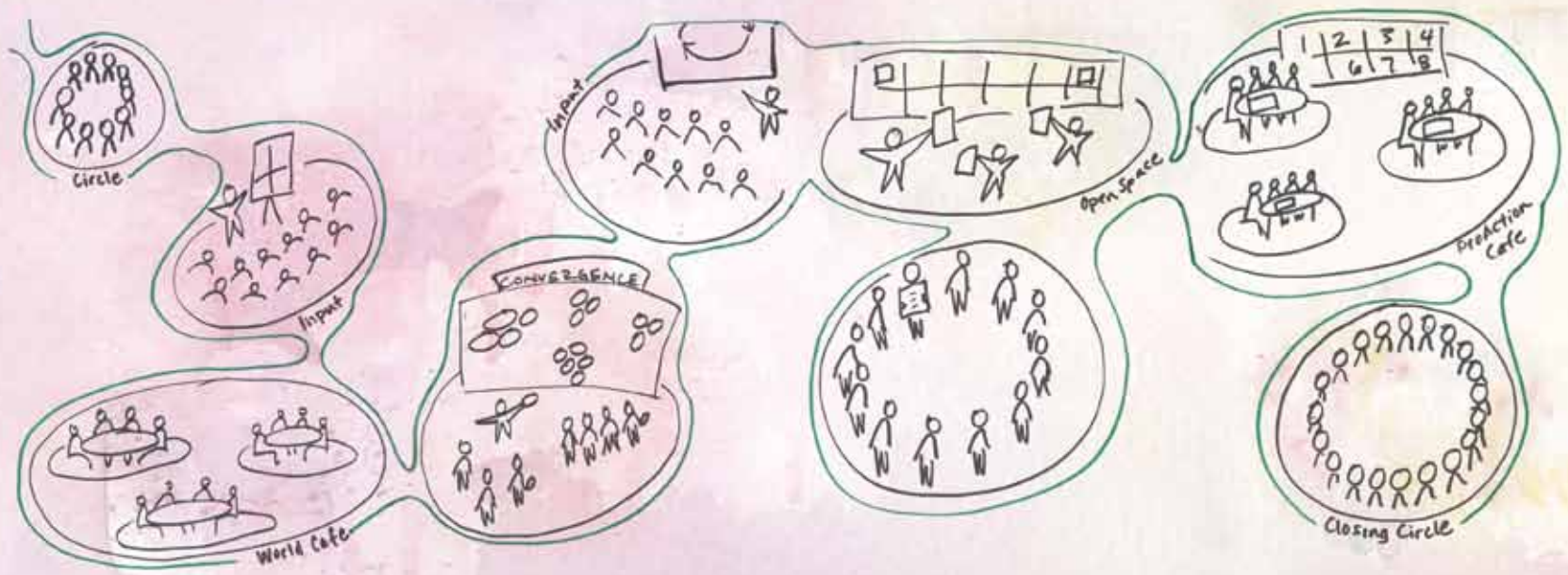
Open Space Technology (OST)

Open Space Technology is a process designed to facilitate parallel working/dialogue sessions around a central theme of strategic importance. Participants create and manage their own agenda by convening and engaging around issues of concern to them. This dynamic process invites people to boldly speak to their passion and take the lead in stewarding its development toward the collective vision. The outcome of each conversation is reported back to the whole group to bring everyone up to speed with possibilities and opportunities for collaboration. It can be used for strategic direction-setting, envisioning the future, morale building, stakeholder consultation, and collaboration. OST may be less suited as an opening methodology, prior to the group getting more comfortable with working together and in participatory ways. 'Discovered' by Harrison Owen.



Pro Action Café (PC)

This process was developed to deepen the level of inquiry into specific projects, leading to wiser and more collectively informed actions. It is a relatively new methodology that combines the conversation clusters and rounds of World Café with the participant created agenda of Open Space Technology. Participants bring their specific projects to three rounds of deep and focused conversation to discuss the 'quest' behind the question, what might be missing and the next steps toward action. It is well-suited for the strategic prioritization and action planning stages, bringing the added benefit of cross-pollinating projects with insights and ideas from different departments within an organization, or different viewpoints within a community. Its strength lies in the deep level of inquiry into a specific project, the opportunity to access a diverse range of perspectives to strengthen the outcome, and the resulting awareness of the scope of projects within the group. This methodology was originally developed by Art of Hosting practitioners Rainer von Leoprechting and Ria Beck for use in policy making within the European Commission.



“I like to use The Circle to help people arrive well, then move into World Café to deepen into important issues. Then move into Open Space, where they roll up their sleeves around projects they want to begin thinking about together.”

– Tenneson Woolf, Art of Hosting Practitioner, United States



Photos: Tamar Harel, Martin Vinder, Lauren Mitchell, Simone Rivers, Steven Cretney



Harvesting Outcomes

Capturing tangible outcomes from participatory processes is critical and should be approached strategically. The process design must include ways to both capture and share outcomes. Depending on the engagement process, there may be a number of harvest steps before the final sustainability strategic plan is complete. Backcast from the required outcome for every stage, keeping in mind the format in which the information needs to be communicated.

There are a myriad of ways that the harvest can be captured, the choice of which will depend on the ultimate outcome, process methodology used, organizational context, needs of the client, and any additional goals. Below are a few harvest examples:

- Capturing ideas on a wall, clustering similar ideas
- Assigning table hosts to capture ideas on flip charts and share them in plenary
- Providing a template for each table host or subject lead to fill in during allocated reflection time. This can be a paper template or with laptops captured on a memory stick or an online form (e.g. Google Docs, online mindmapping, wiki, etc). Categories might include goal, strategies, actions, next steps, lead, responsibilities, timeline, required resources. Subject leads can then speak the highlights back to the circle in closing.
- Collectively mind mapping ideas using an online tool and projector
- Prototyping actions or structural ideas using clay or other materials

- Incorporating a graphic facilitator/recorder to visually capture content in real time, highlighting insights and patterns to provide participants with an immediate reflection of what is being accomplished
- Using audio or video recording, and transcribing after Engagement
- Written newsletter for stakeholders
- Written strategic reports

Harvesting is more than strictly capturing outcomes. It includes making sense of all the various inputs, noticing emerging patterns, and identifying questions to bring forward to the rest of the process. It is equally important to harvest the relationships and energy created with this way of working as well as the information. Never enter any conversation without harvesting something from it. Just as a farmer plans for the harvest before planting the seeds, plan for the harvest of outcomes before hosting the engagement.

Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes

This collection of Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes can help a practitioner stay grounded and aligned with the practices considered foundational to participatory leadership. They are essential to any practitioner's ability to guide an emergent, participatory process.

Know Yourself First

Personal practice (for example meditation, journaling) allows access to a deeper level of consciousness necessary to be present and hold the space for others to work in a participatory way. Incorporating reflection and listening time into daily routines facilitates deeper knowing. Pursue your own development to serve the greater good.

The Learning is in the Practice

Embodiment of relevant frameworks/models, facilitation/hosting skills, and participatory processes are fundamentals that underlie the ability to adapt to emergence and uncertainty. Since neither participatory processes nor sustainable development can ever be predicted, knowledge, skill, intuition and fluidity are required and can only be gained through practicing the fundamentals and harvesting their lessons over time.

Be on a Learning Journey

Working in a participatory way creates a shared learning journey for everyone in the room. Practitioners do not deliver “the answers”. Instead, they allow their learning journey to intersect with others.

Hold Space

Practitioners of participatory processes must be present and create the container, hold that space, and let go of personal expectations for others to show up fully. Put full trust in the group and the process – collective intelligence will emerge if we feel comfortable in the unknowing while holding the group in a space of possibility and safety.

Quality of Work is Dependent on Quality of Relationships

The strategic plan for sustainability is only as good as the relationships between the people who created it and the relationship with the vision it hopes to achieve. Are these relationships built of trust, reverence and respect? If so, the resulting work will hold the integrity worthy of the commitment.

Faster Alone, Further Together

Understand and share the value of working in a participatory way. The gift of collective intelligence and co-learning is that everyone leaves the room with something nobody came in with. “I don't know, but WE do”. This does not mean everyone must agree, but that we can be courageous enough to disagree and not walk away. Complex challenges require collective input and collaboration across silos if non-incremental, transformational change is to occur.

Practice Authenticity

Bring real, authentic, vulnerable stories into the room. If practitioners can be honest about who they are and what they believe up front, relationships of integrity will follow. Authenticity is the best leadership tool.

Meet People Where They Are

Change begins from where the client is, not from where the practitioner is. When open to new perspectives and letting go of limiting beliefs, common ground and shared meaning can be found. Be present, be curious, suspend judgement and cynicism, respect the intelligence in the room – and invite others to do the same. Communicate to the world views of the people you are working with.

Make Meaning

Dialogue is ‘meaning flowing through’ by deep listening, suspending judgement and being present. Practice using dialogue, teach it and build capacity in others so meaning can be created collectively. Recognize the differences between dialogue and discussion, so that the journey is one of shared discovery not individual opinion, and the conversation is one with a center instead of sides.

Create a Shared Language

A common and relevant language for sustainability and for working together is essential to this work. When our definitions match, our purpose and goals are in alignment and confusion cannot derail our progress.

Connect with Stories

Deeper understanding and connection are gained through stories and metaphors that are within the context of our own experience. By framing dialogue and content with stories and metaphors, our connections to sustainability and to each other deepen.

Build Capacity

For lasting change to happen, the work must continue after the practitioner leaves. Building capacity around both sustainability content and participatory process is essential. The gift of good process is that it allows people to be in learning together. The gift of content is that it gives definition and focus to the work. By building capacity in both, transformational change toward sustainability can happen.

“How do we move from ‘rules and tools’ to ‘principles and practices’? I want to invite practitioners into a life of practice, and for that it can be very helpful to have a framework of principles to operate from. Principles like ‘participation whenever possible’ rather than rules like ‘you always have to involve this many stakeholders and here are the tools for doing that at every level.’”

– Chris Corrigan, Art of Hosting Practitioner, Canada

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In Conclusion

The possibilities for change using dialogue-based methodologies are inspiring. With transformation occurring in a variety of organizations working in participatory ways, what is the potential for weaving participatory processes with the FSSD? How can this weave support the work of sustainability leaders?

Recognizing the intimate linkage between content and process, as well as the important leadership role of sustainability practitioners, the Masters in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability (MSLS) programme was founded on the clear need to train and support leaders to address the sustainability challenge.

“The question of reaching sustainability is not about if we will have enough energy, enough food, or other tangible resources - those we have. The question is: will there be enough leaders in time?”

- Dr. Göran Broman and Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt, MSLS Programme founders

This guide (a product of MSLS research) is intended to facilitate deeper engagement of people in creating their sustainable future. It offers support for sustainability practitioners wishing to use a participatory approach in leading their clients toward transformational change that lasts.

Is there a possibility that a Community of Practice will evolve around this way of responding to the sustainability challenge? Are there others who share a passion for deep engagement and seeking solutions through collective intelligence?

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“Senior levels are really noticing the difference [these dialogue-based methodologies] make, both in terms of the improved quality of results these methodologies help create, but also the quality of relationships they help create both inside and outside of the [European] Commission. And the level of trust...we’re no longer in meeting after meeting where people aren’t even listening to each other...it’s something about the way people are working together on a daily basis that changes. And that then grows and accelerates implementation of the strategic plan.”

- Matthieu Kleinschmager, European Commission, Belgium

Glossary

Art of Hosting: global community of practitioners using participative processes and planning tools to engage groups in meaningful conversation, deliberate collaboration, and group-supported action around complex topics.

Authenticity: a personal process in which one is consciously reintegrating all the dimensions of self (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions) while being true, open and honest.

Backcasting: A planning method in which planners first build a vision of success in the future, then steps are planned and taken to work towards that future.

Chaordic Stepping Stones: a planning method to take advantage of both the chaos and order of complex challenges, group dialogues and planning.

Collective Intelligence: a shared ability to learn, understand and apply knowledge that emerges from the collaboration of many individuals. The sum of the group is more intelligent than any individual.

Complexity: a state in which the outcomes are unpredictable due to the vast number of interconnected variables or long time frames required for changes to be seen. Relationships between cause and effect only become apparent in hindsight.

Convergent phases: the 'breath' in the 6 Breaths of Design that is the coming together, where alternatives are evaluated, key points are summarized, decisions are made and general conclusions are arrived at.

Core Team: the small team with the passion, willingness and expertise needed to commit to steward the planning process. Ideally this team includes the sustainability champion(s), those with expertise in both sustainability and organizational content, those familiar with the organizational culture and external process experts.

Cynefin framework: a model developed by David Snowden outlining the states a system can be in (simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic) as well as the relationship between cause and effect in each state.

Deep Listening: a receptive state where the goal is to hear beyond the words of the other person and yourself, to the essence of what the words and feelings are pointing to. It is not about struggling to analyze or interpret, nor is it defensive, argumentative, or intrusive. It occurs when your mind is open, curious and interested, free from interpretations, judgments, conclusions, or assumptions.

Dialogue: A way of conversing focused on shared inquiry, not on opinions or personal agendas. Dialogue is an intentional practice of deep listening, suspending judgement and seeking emergent or new knowledge.

Dialogue-Based Methodology: a structured activity to bring about meaningful conversations to engage groups of people (large or small), centered on a question of importance to the participants. These methodologies are specifically designed for working with complex situations.

Divergent Phase: the 'breath' in the 6 Breaths of Design that is the moving apart, where alternatives are generated, open conversations exist, diverse points of view are gathered and predetermination is loosened.

Emergence: the means by which complex systems and patterns arise out of informal individual interactions or collaborative processes connected around a common purpose. The system that emerges contains features not previously observed and holds greater power than could ever be predicted by examining the individual parts.

Engagement: broadly, 'engagement' is a meaningful interaction between a broad range of people which can include information delivery, involvement and collaboration in decision-making. For our purposes, 'engagement' is also used to describe the phase of the participatory process that involves key internal and external stakeholders beginning the process of collectively and strategically creating the plan for the organization's sustainable future.

Five Level Framework (for Planning in Complex Systems): a model that provides a structured understanding for analysis, planning and decision-making in complex systems. It consists of five distinct, interrelated levels – Systems, Success, Strategic, Actions, Tools.

Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD): A systems-based framework that identifies the ecological and societal conditions necessary for human survival within the finite limits of the biosphere. The FSSD is structured with the Five Level Framework and a key aspect is the strategic use of backcasting from the four sustainability principles.

Harvest: The term used by Art of Hosting practitioners for capturing the outcome of the work, making meaning out of it, and reporting results in a meaningful, usable form for the organizational context.

Holding Space: the act of a practitioner to provide a safe space for a group to undergo a process of exploration and co-learning.

Masters in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability (MSLS): An international programme focused on the premise that a “whole-system” and trans-disciplinary approach is needed to address the sustainability challenge. MSLS integrates two streams: a framework for strategic sustainable development with organizational learning and leadership.

Methodology: in *The Weave*, the term refers to dialogue-based methodologies.

Participatory Process: a series of methodologies woven together in sequence that collectively create a process for addressing complex issues. It is assumed that the majority of methodologies in a participatory process are dialogue-based.

Phase(s): in *The Weave*, the term refers to the different sequential parts of the practitioner-client relationship that appear in the Template for Process Design.

Practitioner-client relationship: the relationship established between a sustainability practitioner and an organization (the client), which may or may not be defined within a formal contractual agreement. Throughout *The Weave*, the term will also represent everything that takes place from the first meeting through to putting the strategic plan into practice.

6 ‘Breaths’ of Process Architecture: a process design map used by the Art of Hosting network that moves through six phases of divergence and convergence (the breaths): The Call, Clarify, Invite, Meet, Act, and Holding the Whole.

Stage(s): in *The Weave*, the term refers to the steps in a generic strategic planning process.

Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD): planning and decision making to actively transition the current, globally unsustainable society towards a sustainable society based on first-order sustainability principles.

Sustainability: A state in which the socio-ecological system is not systematically undermined by society. The four basic sustainability principles must be met in order to have a sustainable society.

Sustainability Principles: In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing...

1. concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust;
 2. concentrations of substances produced by society;
 3. degradation by physical means;
- and in that society...
4. people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.

Additional Resources

Art of Hosting

Online community of practitioners:

www.artofhosting.org

- Explanatory video:
www.vimeo.com/19188779
- InterChange, website of Toke Paludan Møller and Monica Nissén:
www.interchange.dk/resources
- Chris Corrigan, Art of Hosting practitioner offering numerous resources:
www.chriscorrigan.com
- Art of Harvesting PDF download:
www.artofhosting.org/download/Artofharvesting26_221.pdf
- Harvesting resources:
www.interchange.dk/practices/artofharvesting/
- Harvesting explanatory video:
<http://vimeo.com/23211721>

Dialogue-based Methodologies

Open Space Technology:

www.openspaceworld.org

- Explanatory video:
<http://vimeo.com/19196749>
- *Open Space Technology: A User's Guide*, 3rd edition. Harrison Owen. 2008
- *Wave Rider: Leadership for High Performance in a Self-Organizing World*. Harrison Owen. 2008

World Cafe:

www.theworldcafe.com

- Explanatory video: <http://vimeo.com/23045061>
- *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter*. Juanita Brown and David Isaacs. 2005

Appreciative Inquiry:

<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu>

- *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: For Leaders of Change*. David Cooperrider, Diana Whitney and Jacqueline Stavros. 2008

Theory U:

www.presencing.com/presencing-theoryu

- Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges. Otto Scharmer. 2007

Pro Action Café:

<https://sites.google.com/a/pro-action.eu/pro-action-caf/>

- Explanatory video: <http://vimeo.com/19189696>

The Circle:

www.peerspirit.com

- Explanatory video: <http://vimeo.com/23492389>
- *The Circle Way: A Leader in Every Chair*. Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea. 2010

Other:

- *The Change Handbook: The Definitive Resource on Today's Best Methods for Engaging Whole Systems*. Peggy Holman, Tom Devane and Steven Cady. 2009
- Cynefin Framework, a simple explanatory video:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5mqNcs8mp74>

FSSD (TNS Framework)


The Natural Step:

www.naturalstep.org/en/resources

- The Natural Step Toolkits:
www.thenaturalstep.org/en/toolkits-around-world

Master's In Strategic Leadership Towards Sustainability programme:

www.bth.se/msls



“[Participatory processes] are about having the opportunity for people to make a heart connection – to connect personally to why this is important. There needs to be a strong ‘why’ for people to truly engage and commit to the process in a meaningful way.”

– Heather Worosz, Leadership Consultant, former TNS International, Canada

“It is not about changing the structures, it is about changing the practices”

– Phil Cass, CEO Columbus Medical Association, United States



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