



The purpose of Harvesting

The purpose of harvesting is to support the individual and collective meaning making.

The fruits of our most important conversations need to be harvested if they are to have an impact in the world.

The harvest of a meaningful conversation can take many forms. It can be **tangible** (documentation, newsletter, audio or video, etc.) or **intangible** (new insights, a change of perspective or mindset, a shared clarity, new relationships and contacts). Both are valuable and needed, as both can enhance our collective intelligence and wisdom.

Ultimately the harvest can support wise decisions and wise action.

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Hosting & Harvesting, two sides of the same thing



Graphics: George Pór

“The stakes are too high: our era is too complex, its challenges too significant, its promises too great, and its velocity too fast for us simply to react. Rather we must amplify the power of our brains, individually and collectively, to match our new circumstances.”

Eamonn Kelly – Powerful Times

Two sides of one thing

The art of hosting meaningful conversations and the art of harvesting them are two sides of the same effort: namely to “amplify” our brains and our hearts, to engage our collective intelligence and wisdom in the search for emergent and sustainable paths through complex landscapes.

There is a popular quote by Oliver Wendell Holmes...

“I would not give a fig for simplicity on this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.”

The Art of Hosting and Harvesting Meaningful Conversations offers a gateway to the simplicity on the other side of complexity, even if the path goes through chaos.

“Chaos is creativity in search of form.”
John Welwood

Two different qualities

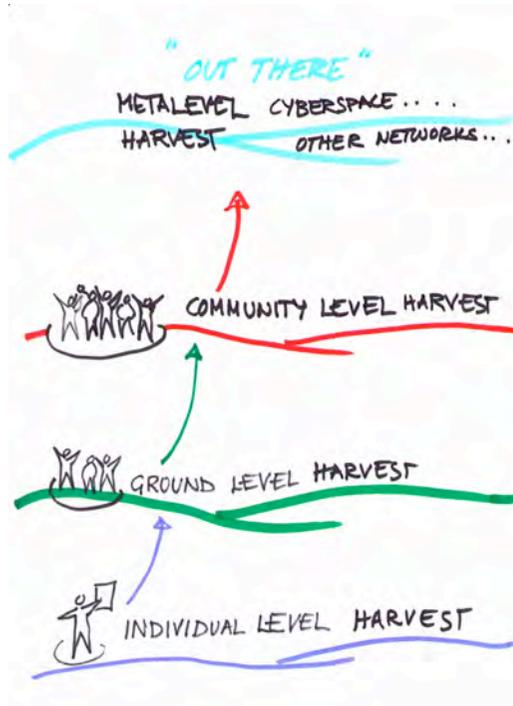
While hosting and harvesting meaningful conversations are aspects of the same thing, the nature of these two “activities” differs.

The work of the host is to invite everyone to speak their truth, listen openly, seek to understand differing views and bring their best to the table and work at hand. The harvesters' focus is on capturing the essence, remembering, seeing patterns and making meaning – and then making this meaning visible and accessible to others in the relevant context.

At first sight, hosting is predominantly *divergent* in nature, teasing out the different strands present in the collective, while harvesting is more *convergent*, weaving different strands together. Although, of course, neither is solely one or the other.

We could also say that hosting is about animating the discovery and learning process, whereas harvesting is about sense-making, embedding insights and learning back into their context, making them as relevant and useful as possible.

Levels Artifacts Feed-back loops



Levels

Broadly speaking, we see four different levels of harvesting:

- **Personal level harvest**
How can we enhance our personal learning (using time for reflection, journaling, etc)?
- **“Ground level” harvest**
After each meeting or process how can we harvest what happened? How can we create a collective memory and make collective meaning right now?
- **Community level harvest**
What is useful for us as a community to remember? What do we need to share / feed back? With whom and how is it best done?
- **Meta-level harvest**
What is useful for our longer-term learning? What could usefully be shared with others, similar networks, etc? How widely could this harvest serve? Cyberspace may be the limit?

Artifacts

Harvest can be captured in different forms.

We tend to think in terms of “artifacts” - memos, newsletters, drawings, videos, etc. The challenge is to find which form best communicates for the purpose at hand.

Creating an intentional artifact gives the harvest the attention and form it deserves so that it will be taken seriously by others.

Feedback loops

Having captured the harvest in an artifact, the next question to ponder is how and where will it be fed back into the system (the organization, the conversation, etc.) in order to help us build on what we have already understood and get to the next level of our conversation and our understanding.

Intentional & emergent harvest



What color are your lenses?

“We do not understand what we see – but we see what we understand.”

Peter Senge

Holding an intent

Most strategic or meaningful conversations have a stated purpose – a reason to happen, and consequently the harvesting will serve this purpose.

Holding an intent for harvest will give a conscious and sharp focus for your inquiry. In practice, this often simplifies the design of the process and provides a more seamless experience for participants, as well as producing a rich and relevant harvest.

One can harvest both **content** and **process** – **output** and **outcome**.

Harvesting can serve to create a **record or memory**, and to illuminate emerging patterns and meaning.

The process of **making meaning** – or collective meaning – can be served by reflecting together around questions like: What did we just notice? What did we learn? What is emerging?

Both memory and meaning are valuable.

Seeing what emerges

The downside of holding an intent – having a strong set of lenses or a clear mental map - is that this may blind you to anything that is outside the map.

“Mental models are powerful filters. They help us make sense and meaning but filter out anything that does not belong.”

Eamonn Kelly – Powerful Times

The alternative to holding a strong intent is to consciously step outside the mental map – or set it aside in order see what emerges.

Holding our mental models lightly – in a spirit of inquiry may prevent us from being blinded by them.

Better still, have a strong harvesting team with members all primed to filter through different lenses!

“Put your arms around as big an intent as you can hold!”

George Pór

Harvesting collectively for emergence



“Who we are together will always be different and more, than who we are alone.”

Margaret Wheatley

When a group of people has a collective purpose that they pursue together, then delegating the harvest to someone or doing it alone does not make sense.

Principles of a collective harvest for a collective purpose, pursuing emergence

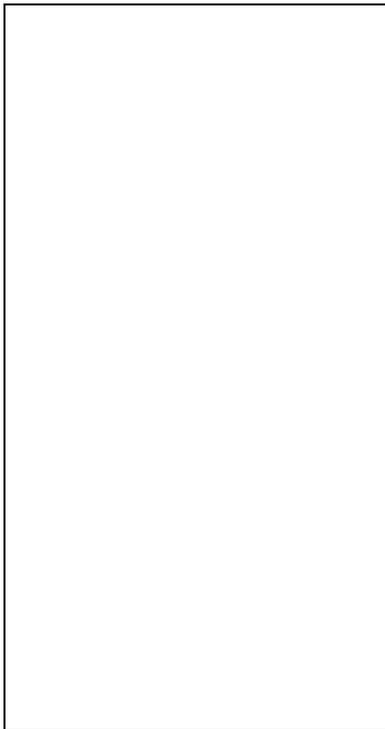
(Courtesy of Chris Corrigan)

1. Agree collectively on the purpose of the joint inquiry (uncover a government plan, build a new community-based approach to child and youth mental health, etc.)
2. Conduct gatherings to collect a lot of diverse wisdom and thinking about the inquiry.
3. Harvest detailed notes from initial conversations, but don't make meaning from them right away.
4. Invite everyone to read whatever they want of the documents and select the pieces that seem to have the most relevance and benefit to the inquiry at hand. The larger and more diverse the group doing this, the better, especially if you have a substantial and complex inquiry and body of thought.

5. Make this second-level harvest visible and begin identifying patterns within what is emerging, all the while feeding that back into the system to both show progress and help people go back to and find additional meaning and wisdom to support what is emerging.

6. Have a further inquiry to tap creativity to fill the gaps that are being noticed.

Tangible and intangible harvest



“Talking together is a way of thinking together, and thinking together creates these new possibilities that could not emerge from just one alone!”

Harvesting insights and learning is a prerequisite to renewal and new insight.

Harvesting the “soft” is much more subtle and subjective than dealing with the “cognitive” or more hard-core parts.

Tangible results are measurable, in the way we traditionally understand the term.

Intangible results are harder to see, more difficult to agree on. Results may not be immediate, but may in fact be more powerful in the long run.

I remember a case where we had facilitated a day for a department in a bank. The purpose of the day was to work with ideas for creating an even better workplace for everyone.

Twelve concrete suggestions for further improvement came out of the day.

Three months later the CEO was still pleased with the good atmosphere the day had created – but he was a bit concerned that it seemed as if only three of the projects were still “alive”. One month after that, we met with the CEO and a representative from each of the project groups to “evaluate”.

We brought three simple questions to the meeting and mind-mapped our conversations

around them:

1. *Where do we notice or see evidence that something has changed as a result of the day?*
2. *What is the situation / status of the various projects and what might be the reason?*
3. *How do we want to move on from here?*

I think we were all amazed at how much had resulted from that one day.

It seemed that the original projects had been just the first stepping-stones. Some projects had not manifested because the group had already moved on and were taking other initiatives. Others because the actual conversation about the “problem” had already shifted it towards a solution, and so on.

Furthermore, the relationships and open atmosphere that had resulted from the conversations had changed the climate and prepared the ground for other initiatives, some that the CEO did not even know about.

A qualitative inquiry into what we have noticed, what has shifted or changed in our relationships, in the culture or atmosphere may give us information about the intangible part of the harvest.

The Cycle of Harvesting



The Art of Harvesting is a way to bring the Art of Hosting into its fruition.

Eight phases of harvesting:

1. ***Sensing the need***
2. ***Preparing the field***
3. ***Planning the harvest***
4. ***Planting the seeds***
5. ***Tending the crop***
6. ***Picking the fruits: Recording – or creating a collective memory.***
7. ***Preparing and processing the fruits: Creating collective meaning***
8. ***Planning the next harvest: Feeding forward***

1. Sensing the need

Something shifts in the way things are, causing a need to shift or change something – to take action.

The first step is to become clear about what the need or call is.

Picture a field in which someone has planted wheat.

When we imagine that field being harvested, we probably see a farmer using equipment to cut down the wheat, thresh it, and separate the seeds from the stalks.

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

They all have different needs and will harvest differently from the field. The results of their work go to different places and are put to different uses.

But they all have a few things in common: they have a **purpose** for being in the field and a set of **questions** about that purpose; they have a pre-determined **place** to use the results of the harvest, and they have specific **tools** to help them do their work.

It's useful to note that despite the field being the same, the tools and results are specific to the purpose and the inquiry.

Sensing the need may at first be intuitive or very basic – like sensing hunger. But once the sensed need becomes conscious it can be acted upon.

The need is not complicated; it is real and clear; it speaks deeply and inspires invitation and action. Everything springs from this need. The way we hold it and invite others into it will inform the harvest that we take at the end of the day.

The need translates into a clear purpose and some defined outcomes. These two fix points can offer the coordinates for a good harvest.



“The quality of the field determines the quality of the yield.”

Otto Scharmer

“The quality of the intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener!”

Bill O’ Brien

2. Preparing the field

“The quality of the field determines the quality of the yield.” This quote by Otto Scharmer talks about the importance of preparing the field – making it ready to nurture the seeds.

In some cases the caller creates the readiness of the field by creating awareness around the need. Others with a similar need will recognize the call.

In preparing the field – sending out the call, giving the context, inviting others in, etc., you set the tone for the whole process. The seriousness and quality of this work will determine the quality of what you reap.

In other words – you start to think about the harvest from the very beginning – not as an afterthought.

Preparing a field for planting involves paying careful attention to environmental conditions, the condition of the soil, the quality of the tools and the seeds before even anything is planted. This work can take a whole year, during which you build wind-breaks, condition the soil, clear the

rocks and prepare things. What you are doing here is actually harvesting a field so that the seeds can be planted.

The quality of the field is set with the invitation that arises from the need. The quality of the invitation springs from the presence and awareness of the initial conversation. There is a seriousness and a depth that is communicated in the process from the beginning.

This work looks like preparing ourselves and inquiring into the capacity of the system to actually do the work we are asking it to do.

Preparing ourselves as hosts is part of preparing the field.



3. Planning the harvest

Planning the harvest starts with and follows the design process.

What is your intention with the harvest? A clear purpose and some success criteria for both process and the harvest will add clarity and direction.

What you harvest is determined by what you sow.

3 principles for planning the harvest

(Provided by Ivan Webb at the actKM discussion list and harvested and shared by Chris Corrigan)

Three simple principles will change the culture of most organizations and lead naturally to knowledge management being embedded in the organization's activity.

It is everyone's job to:

- **know what is happening**
- **work with others to improve what is happening**
- **make it easier for the next person to do their work well**

A checklist for planning the harvest

A good question to ask is:

What would be useful and add value - and in which form would it serve best?

Translated into a simple check-list:

- *What intent are you holding?*
- *Who is going to benefit from or use the harvest?*
- *How can you add most value to the work at hand – how will the harvest serve best?*
- *What form or what media will be most effective?*
- *Who should host or do the harvesting?*
- *What is the right timing?*

In other words, part of planning the harvest is also to know *for whom, when and how* you need to use it.

Which harvest formats will serve you best? Are there templates, sheets, colors, drawings, audio or video recordings, etc. that can be used as harvesting aids?



In his book *Out of Control*, Kevin Kelly describes how, the seeds or plants that enter an empty ecosystem in the early phases after a desert fire determine what the ecosystem will be like, and what kind of plant habitat you will end up with.

... “In all beginnings – and all endings, be careful!”

Tao Te Ching

4. Planting the seeds

The questions around which we structure the process we will host become the seeds for harvesting.

In many cultures and places the sowing of seeds is accompanied by ritual. All gardeners and farmers know that sowing seeds depends on the time and the conditions. One does not simply plant when one feels like it. One plants once the conditions are right to maximize the yield.

In hosting practice this means asking the right questions and being sensitive to the timing.

In sowing the seeds that will drive the inquiry – *identifying and asking strategic and meaningful questions* – you determine the output. So in planning the harvest, ask yourself what this process needs to yield. What information, ideas, output or outcome will benefit you here and now, and what might take you to the next level of inquiry?

Even though the process of harvesting starts with preparing the field and the planning – the process itself is an on-going one.

With each part of the process, you harvest something. Some of it you need to use right away, to help lead you into the next process. Some of the harvest you will need later.

The most powerful seeds are powerful questions. A powerful question:

- is simple and clear
- is thought-provoking
- generates energy
- focuses inquiry
- challenges assumptions
- opens up to new possibilities
- evokes more questions.

A powerful question focuses attention, intention and energy.



What if harvest is the bridge from conversation to action?

5. Tending the crop

Protect the integrity of the crop. Nurture it as it grows, weed it and thin it to keep the strong plants growing. Remove all that will not nourish or serve.

Gardeners scrutinize their plants - call it scouting. They look for pests and signs of under-nutrition, and see what they can learn about the crops as they grow. This involves a combination of feeding the field and letting it grow. But part of it just sitting in the field, holding space for what is emerging and enjoying it.

As the process unfolds, take enjoyment in seeing your work unfold in all its complexity. The degree to which you can welcome the growth you are witnessing will translate into the quality of the harvest. Now you is the time for noticing both the quality of the field and the quality of the crops.

This is where we engage in conversation and exploration – where the richness of the harvest is born.

The richer the exchange, the richer the harvest!

6. Picking the fruits

Picking the fruits corresponds to **recording or creating a collective memory**. The simplest way to harvest is to record what is being said and done, the output of the conversations, etc.

Recording can be done in words.

- your notes, which will be subjective
- or transcripts of out-put produced in conversations
- or the participants themselves documenting key insights, which will be objective.

Recording can also be done with pictures / photographs / videos / films.

- Pictures capture and recall feelings, atmospheres, situations.
- Or you can video the conversation - record both verbally and visually

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



”
“A thought which does not result in an action is nothing much, and an action which does not proceed from a thought is nothing at all.”

George Bernanos

7. Preparing and processing the fruits

Creating a memory is the first step. As we pick the fruits or seeds for processing, some will be used right away, some will be processed further and some will be used as seed for the next season.

Preparing and processing the fruits corresponds to creating collective meaning and value.

The second step is ***making collective sense and meaning***. This is where we add value and make the data useful.

There are many ways of making sense and meaning. The general idea is to go from loads of bits of information to chunks of meaning.

There are several ways to help this process along:

- Be systematic. Ask collectively: What did you notice? What gave sense and meaning to you? Notice the patterns - they indicate what is emerging.
- Look for ways of reducing complexity through: metaphors,

mental models, stories and graphic renderings

- Clustering, voting etc. can add clarity and reduce noise

Meaning-making can also happen in a conversation at the next level.

Harvesting from the past:

You may look back and ask: What did we learn? What made sense? Where are we now in the journey? What are the next steps?

Harvesting in the present:

What are we sensing? What are we noticing now? What patterns are emerging? etc.

Harvesting for the future:

You may also look forward: look for the issues or questions that you know will feed the next inquiry and feed those back into the system.

Harvesting for emergence:

“What question could shift us to the next level?”



**The first people had questions
and they were free..
The second people had answers
and they became enslaved**

Wind Eagle
American Indian Chief

8. Planning the next harvest: feeding forward

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

These are the fruits of the harvest.

From Chris Corrigan:

“Once in a conversation with a client, I stumbled upon one of these hobbit tools of harvesting: have somewhere to take the harvest.

My client's vision was to convene a conference, produce a report and hope that the report inspired action. When we spoke about the real impact of the conference, it turned out she wasn't confident that the report would come to life on it's own. I challenged her to do more than that and to find a way to bring the conference proceedings to life. So we began to craft a strategy for the harvest of this event.

The plan became to harvest the results of the conference as both a record of the

event and as an inquiry in itself. We shared the report but we also crafted a series of questions - the questions we are left with after three days of deliberations - and these questions would be put to five different and specific forums. My client spent the month leading up to the conference talking to influential groups, organizations and forums to find five places that would commit to co-inquiring with her on the conference proceedings during the year following the conference. This plan was shared with the conference delegates in a pre-conference note that gave them confidence and inspiration that the conference would have an impact.

In the months following the conference, the report was taken from one gathering to another, and many eyes and hands worked through the ideas that were raised in the gathering. Harvesting into inquiry spreads the results and is a powerful way to create sustainable learning and engagement.”

Who should do the harvesting?



Whoever does the harvest will enjoy the fruits of it

Who should do the harvesting?

*We need a harvester!!
Where is our secretary??*

I have heard this comment many times!

Having harvesting as an afterthought is like the farmer who is so focused on preparing the field and growing the crop, that he forgets about the harvest.

Going through all the trouble of preparing the field and tending the crops without harvesting is insane!

Picking the fruits - recording and transcribing - can be done by most people and can easily be delegated.

But making sense of the multitude of input, noticing the emerging patterns, finding the seeds/questions to feed forward, is where the fruits of the harvesting really lie.

This meaning making is best done with the stakeholders, those who own the project, know the content and need to act on it.

Individual and collective harvest

Individual harvest can be done through reflection, journaling etc. The individual harvest enhances individual learning and the individuals' contribution to the collective inquiry.

My best experiences of harvesting have been when the stakeholders themselves have done it together, collectively.

Harvesting collectively seems to have a greater potential for emergence and yields more than harvesting alone. It becomes the next level of conversation, a meta-level, where we make sense together.

If the stakeholders cannot do the harvest, gather a good, inspired and diverse harvesting team and plan a way to feed the harvest back into the system.

If you cannot get a team but you are inspired to do it, give it your best shot. Feed it back into the system and see if it stirs.

Tools and Practices



Clustering



Collective mind-mapping

Clustering

A simple way of dealing with data and input, reducing noise and adding meaning, is clustering. Clustering related issues allows us to see a bigger picture

This can be done using post-it notes or small sheets of paper.

In small groups, the participants themselves can do the clustering. In bigger groups you will have to delegate the clustering to a few people.

Mind-mapping

An effective way of creating clarity and meaning in real time is mind-mapping. Collective mind-mapping can be done either electronically or “manually” on large sheets of paper.

In collective mind-mapping we usually apply the following four rules (adapted from the Future Search process):

- 1) *All suggestions are valuable!*
- 2) *Whoever suggests a theme, issue or initiative says where it goes on the mind-map*

- 3) *Opposite or “conflicting” suggestions are welcome!*
- 4) *Give concrete examples when and where relevant.*

Voting

Voting is a way of revealing priorities. It is often used in combination with mind-mapping but can be used in other contexts as well.

Voting can happen electronically if you have the equipment, or just by using sticky dots. In this case participants get a number of sticky dots (e.g. 3-5) to place on what they see as leverage areas to move a specific theme or initiative forward.

Usually voting shows clear clusters of priorities that the “system” sees as important.

Voting is based on the assumption that a group of people who know a little about a topic and vote independently (the average) tends to get it more right than a small group of experts.

(Based on “The wisdom of Crowds” by James Surowiecki)

Visual harvesting

“Listening, as I said, is the most important aspect of the harvesting process for me as a graphic recorder, and it is a special kind of listening. For me, it is meditative, attaining a kind of flow, an emptying and a cleansing. Then whatever comes of the moment, comes, and I record it. It is being present (and not allowing any internal critics or voices to get in the way of the listening) and attending to every moment and everything that emerges in the room. Every recorder has their own style, emphasis, etc. What is truly important is that the work produced enables the participants to anchor their experience and relive it in a meaningful way.”

Conrad Tiu

(from the World Cafe Community)

Visual recording

Just as a written record, audio or video documentary creates a memory, a visual record can create a visual memory. Since most people are visually-oriented, a visual memory can be powerful and, like in a mind-map, a lot of information is available at one glance.

Graphic recording, also called Strategic Illustration, happens in real time and illuminates the key insights or patterns discovered.

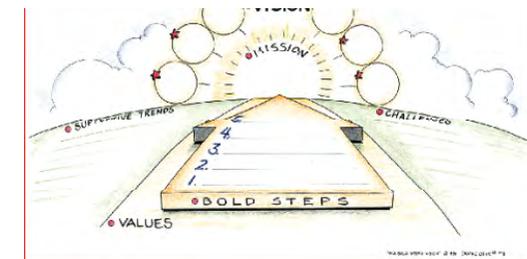
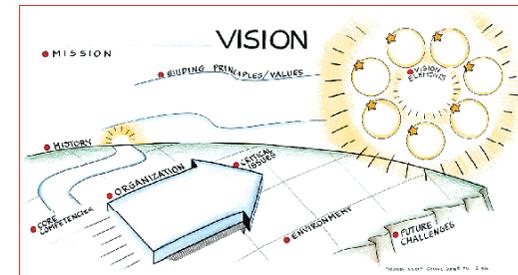
<http://www.theworldcafe.com/graphics.htm>

Visual facilitation

Visual means can be used as an aid or key element to facilitating the process itself. Here the visual map is a process tool used by a facilitator.

These maps can converge different in-put into a comprehensive overview and they can also be used as a support for the conversations

<http://www.grove.com>



Visual maps from Grove



Visual or Graphic Recording

Landscapes or Learnsapes



Visual storytelling or Visual landscape

I use visual recording as kind of visual storytelling where I visualize the process and harvest key insights on the drawing as we proceed in the process. It is called a “Landscape” or “Learnscape”.

A Landscape is a visual representation of a participatory process. It includes both what we are going to do during the process and how we are going to work together.

To many practitioners, this is 'the signature' of the participatory leadership approach.

In the preparation phase by the hosting team, drawing a landscape is an effective way of illuminating the red thread of a process, and how each step will build on the previous ones. Several iterations may be needed.

An effective landscape does not need to be very graphically advanced. Simple 'clouds' already help to have a more visual representation of the inner logic of the

process. In any case, the graphics should not hide the content but support it.

During the participatory process itself, a Landscape is a good way to pique people's curiosity about the process as soon as they enter the room, to present the process at the start, and to have a dedicated and visible space in which to harvest the key results of conversations.

Sometimes, this is enough as a memory or even a report of an event. It also helps to easily bring any late-comers into the process.

It can also be used at the end of the process as a way of checking out, by inviting participants to add their key learnings or 'A-ha' moments with post-its or markers.

After the process has ended, many people enjoy hanging the landscape on the wall of their offices or corridor - again piquing the curiosity of anyone passing by.

Using a landscape in this way can create a coherent visual memory based on key insights, at the same time as offering an overview.

Story-telling



Harvesters listening to a story

“All stories are full of bias and uniqueness; they mix fact with meaning. This is the root of their power. Stories allow us to see something familiar through new eyes. We become in that moment a guest in someone else's life, and together with them sit at the feet of their teacher. The meaning we may draw from someone's story may be different from the meaning they themselves have drawn. No matter. Facts bring us to knowledge, but stories bring us to wisdom.”

From “Kitchen Table Wisdom” by Rachel Naomi Tremem

The following text (by Mary-Alice Arthur) describes how storytelling is used by the community of Art of Hosting practitioners to harvest their own learning.

“Storytelling is one of the most powerful knowledge management tools of the Art of Hosting community. Contained in our stories is both the experience and learning that will grow our capacities to use the Art of Hosting practice in ever more complex spaces. As the depth and scale of our work increases, our practice stories offer us guideposts for innovation, process development and how to create robust containers for conversations that really matter.

During August and September 2010 we began to experiment in Art of Hosting trainings with combining storytelling and harvesting to build our capacity in both these mediums; **we were hosting the harvest.**

Group harvesting enables us to track many arcs of a single story simultaneously, meaning we can practice targeted listening and group learning, while offering a gift to the story holders, as well as the group as a whole in the form of collective meaning making.

Group harvesting is an ideal way to surface the many insights, innovations and a-ha's that exist beneath the surface of our stories and to take learning around our practice to a deeper level.”

Group Story Harvest Process:

Approx. 30-40 minutes is given for sharing the story. While the story is being told, the listeners / participants have chosen a particular “thread” to listen to e.g. “pivotal points”, “possibilities of application”, “synchronicity & magic” etc., which they harvest during the story.

Once the storyteller is finished, each harvester in turn reflects back their harvest as a gift to the storyteller and to illuminate what they heard.

The storyteller can then reflect back what he/she takes with him/her.

The storytelling can happen in smaller groups with parallel, simultaneous stories being told and harvested.

A further convergence or meta-harvest can then be done by convening everyone and together surfacing relevant learning points from the stories.

Harvesting through arts & music



Musical harvest from a Group Story Session

Arts and music are ways of harvesting that capture and express emotions and other parts of knowing than our cognitive mind.

Harvests can be made as poems, as a piece of music or art or as a rap.

Like stories and visuals, these expressions help us make sense and remember.

The following is a poem of harvest:

HARVEST

*Come back from the fields
let them rest.*

*Wipe the blades clean,
untie the knots.
Let the heart be full at last.*

*Let the wind loose in the field
Let the ground settle
and sigh.*

*There have been many harvests
some visible, some unknown*

*a word, a face, the touch of a hand
a walk across the room
together.*

Many harvests.

*Some for all, some for me alone
some for those who come after*

*Some will feed us now
Some will simmer, some will keep
some will be given away
gratefully.*

*Some, ungathered, will lie in the ground
the long winter over*

*waiting for the sun's coming
waiting for fire to split the seed
waiting for rain,
to grow again*

*unless the rabbits get there first
and the mice give thanks,
the sparrows blessing.*

*There have been many harvests.
More will come.*

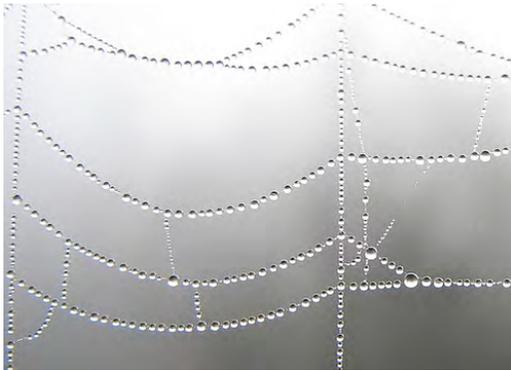
*Rick Livingston
Art of Hosting December 2010*

Reflecting back

Some cultures use the tradition of “witness” or “rapporteur” - a person who can be present and listen and at certain moments in the process reflect back what she / he has heard, seen, noticed or understood, offering a kind of meta-perspective.

This can provide a mirror that can help create clarity for the group.

Web-based tools and possibilities



Web-based tools open up a whole world of possibilities for connecting and sharing ideas, nurturing collective memory, creating new relationships and processing enormous quantities of data.

Tools for harvest

The web offers numerous tools for harvesting both individually and collectively. There are many online applications that make collaboration and participation simple and affordable. These applications can also work with “folksonomies”, user-driven ways of categorizing and labeling information. Here are a few that are free and easy to use.

Weblogs (“blogs”) can be used as learning journals, records of projects and action, places to track individual and group learning, spaces to host conversations. These are among the most versatile web tools available. Visit wordpress.com or blogger.com to learn more.

Photo sharing sites such as flickr.com allow people to post photographs and invite comments and conversation.

Podcasting is a way of sharing audio files by subscription. Many sites offer free hosting for mp3 files, which will store files for you and stream them on demand. Visit podcasting.com for more.

Voice-over-internet applications such as Skype and Gizmo allow high-quality conversations which can also be recorded. They are excellent for connecting and harvesting conversations between people working at a distance.

Wikis are collaborative spaces in which conference participants can co-create proceedings, and others can help edit, shape and make meaning. Wikipedia is perhaps the most famous of these applications.

Del.icio.us is a service for posting and annotating bookmarks.

Tools like these change almost daily. So keep exploring what is out there!

A few examples of harvesting during a process



Matthieu Kleinschmager has collected the following examples based on his practice:

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

Harvesting a check-in circle using dedicated harvesters:

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

Cards Harvest after a World Café or in Circle:

After a Café session, you may invite each person in the room to identify their key insights or questions inspired by the

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

Sharing results collected on flipchart sheets:

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



Poster presentation



Clustering

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

With large groups it is more difficult to apply the flipchart technique above because of the time it takes. You can organize an exhibition-style harvest in one or two rounds where you invite each session host to very briefly (30 seconds to a minute max.) share their key insights, more as a way of pitching their session to invite people to join the more in-depth sharing moment that follows. Once each session host has spoken, you apply Open Space principles again and people can go to learn from and contribute to the session(s) of their choice. This enables the host to enrich his/her harvest with new perspectives.

Collective mind-mapping

Collective mind-mapping (described earlier) is an excellent tool for creating order when dealing with a lot of data or input. When done collectively and in real time, it can surface patterns and clusters for all to see. Combined with a voting process this shows how the “system” prioritizes

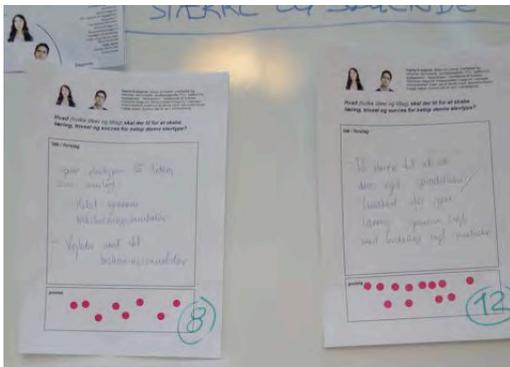
Live clustering of individual key items:

Imagine for example that you invited a group to share in Appreciative Inquiry mode the success stories they are most proud of in their work and you want to distill out of those stories the strengths demonstrated. At the end of the interview phase, invite each person to write on a card the key strength from his/her story. You then invite people to circulate in the room, displaying their strength, to find others who have the same or a similar strength. In a very short time, people will self-organize in very lively and completely unpredictable way into groups of different sizes. It is fun and effective with groups of any size. A group of 100 people will organize themselves in 2 to 3 minutes. Once the groups are stabilized, go from one group to another (use a mike if necessary) and ask each to speak its key concept to everyone and maybe add some comments from the groups. You may want to invite the groups to stick their key concept and all their cards on a board. This can also lead to a next step, where you invite people to reflect in their groups about what can be done in this area e.g. surface key challenges, improvements or development.

Using templates, harvest sheets etc.



Harvesting into a template on the computer



Examples of templates (hard copy)

Harvesting individual interviews in an Appreciative Inquiry:

It usually is good to distribute individual harvesting sheets to all participants of an interview process. Each individual story will be harvested on a separate sheet. When participants come back you may invite them to display all the sheets on a wall, so that everyone gets a chance to read them during the day and get some additional inspiration.

Harvesting templates for Open Space or Pro Action Café sessions:

Pre-defined templates can be suggested for session hosts to collect the key results of Open Space or Pro Action Café sessions. It can be made available on a sheet of flipchart or - ideally - on an electronic template when laptops are available to type in the results in real time. The results may then be presented by the hosts to the plenary, projected on screen and / or included in the report of the process.

The templates are design specifically for each context. The following templates may inspire you to create your own.

Template 1:

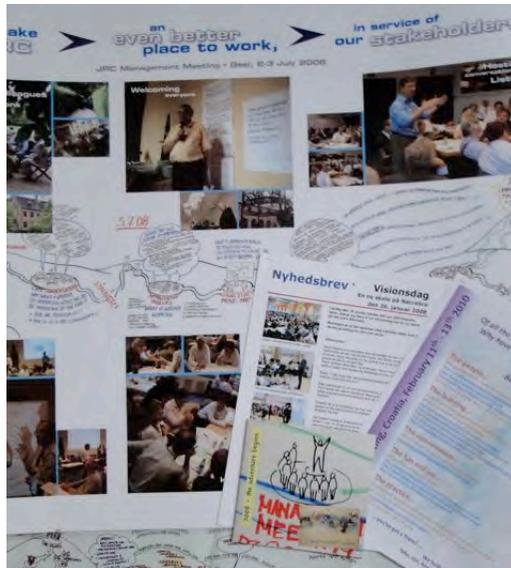
Title: What is the issue, question or project?

1. Give a short summary of our key points and insights
2. What actions / next steps do we recommend?
3. What will we do ourselves within our sphere of influence?
4. What help do you need and from whom?
5. Who participated in the session?
6. Who is the contact person?
7. Who is willing to help move this forward?

Template 2:

Title: What is the issue, question or project?

1. Problem statement
2. Why the problem exists
3. What happens if the problem is not fixed
 - in the short term
 - in the long term
4. Recommended solutions
5. Expected benefits
6. Who participated in the session?
7. Who is the contact person?
8. Who is willing to help move this forward?



Having a check-out circle harvested by the participants themselves:

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

Taking pictures during a participatory process:

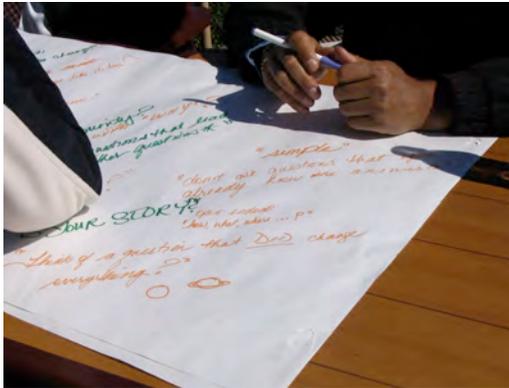
As a host, taking pictures helps to focus one's attention on the process and better sense what is happening as it is unfolding. It also helps to memorize people's faces. It is strongly recommended to systematically photograph all pieces of harvesting, in case they get lost. If you photograph people in conversation, always ask everyone for permission and specify how you intend to use the pictures.

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

Such a harvest letter contains all results of the process. It serves as a living memory of the process, especially when it can be illustrated with pictures. This always has a very positive impact on the participants, especially if it can be delivered swiftly after the event. It can also inform those who could not be there. Above all it can be a valuable source of information for the follow-up. Depending on the context and the needs, you may produce a shorter version with the key insights (sort of executive summary) and an extensive version with all detailed results.

Ideally you should plan for a dedicated harvesting team during the process, and aim to have the newsletter ready the day after. If that is not possible, always schedule the time needed to create it, otherwise it will become a burden and may never see the light of day - this creates a poor impression! Develop your own template and enjoy yourselves while doing it!





A final reflection

"I have walked away from these conversations with a deep and lively question: What if the Art of Hosting was actually the Art of Harvesting? What if we weren't planning meetings, but harvests? How would that change our practice?"

"Why is this important? I think it matters that harvest, good harvest, moves organizations and communities forward, links leadership and action to conversation and makes the best use of the wisdom that is gathered from meetings. If you have ever wondered about meetings that seem not to go anywhere, this inquiry into harvesting, sense-making and iterative action holds the key to avoiding such situations. It's not enough just to have good process and a good facilitator - the results of the work must also be alive in the organization. That's where we are going with this."

Chris Corrigan

"If we are serious about wanting to become collectively wiser and working with the full potential in the room, we need to become skilful at collectively making sense and meaning i.e. harvesting."

"My belief is that harvesting should be a completely integrated part of the process. We should actually design the process in such a way that the harvest is fully built into it."

"In other words: how do we host the harvest as part of hosting a process or conversation?"

"If we need to act collectively it is not good enough that the insights are in the heads of a few people."

"When content is important, the stakeholders themselves are the best harvesters."

Monica Nissén