

Participatory process & transformational change

A report from NDS workshop, 15 April 2014

QUEENSLAND

What skills, tools and knowledge do I need to engage people in conversations that matter?

Around 35 people from across the disability and community sectors, and from government, came together for a workshop to learn skills in participatory leadership — hosted by NDS Queensland State Manager, Jane Geltch.

CIRCLE

We were introduced to the Circle, a basic form underlying all other forms of participatory process. It can be helpful when getting to know each other and the issue at hand, or as a means for deep reflection or consensus making. We often begin and end our meetings in circle, it helps if participants can “check in” at the start about why they are participating.

To check-in, we asked ourselves:

What brings me here today?

- How to have difficult conversations
- Give voice to others
- New ways to engage
- Shift negativity
- Better communities
- Enabling choice
- Meet people and make connections
- Serendipity
- Learn from wisdom of group
- Design a better user experience
- Tools for better communication
- User's perspective
- Collective decision making
- Connect back to purpose
- Future proofing
- Ways to embrace change
- Learn to listen and understand others
- How do I host conversations?
- Learn to ask the right questions
- Curiosity



WORKSHOP FLOW

Welcome and introduction

What is participatory process? Why is it so relevant now? A little about the history, internationally and in Queensland.

Opening circle

An introduction to Circle practice: *What brings me here today?*

Crafting powerful questions

Teaching and develop the calling question for the next three hours together: *How do we engage in conversations for change?*

Open Space

Marketplace: *How do we engage in conversations for change?*

World Café

Round 1: *What will support collaboration in ... (your context)?*

Round 2: *What are my next wise steps?*

Check out

What's one thing that has shifted for me today?

PRACTICES OF CIRCLE

- Speak with intention
 - Listen with attention
 - Pay attention to the group
 - What happens in circle, stays in circle (a safe space)
- [Learn more](#) about Circle practice

CRAFTING POWERFUL QUESTIONS

Each of the methodologies used in participatory process has a **powerful question at its core**. Crafting a good question is a challenge and creating a great one is an art. It's worth spending time on our questions because they open the door to meaningful conversations and wise action.

A powerful question:

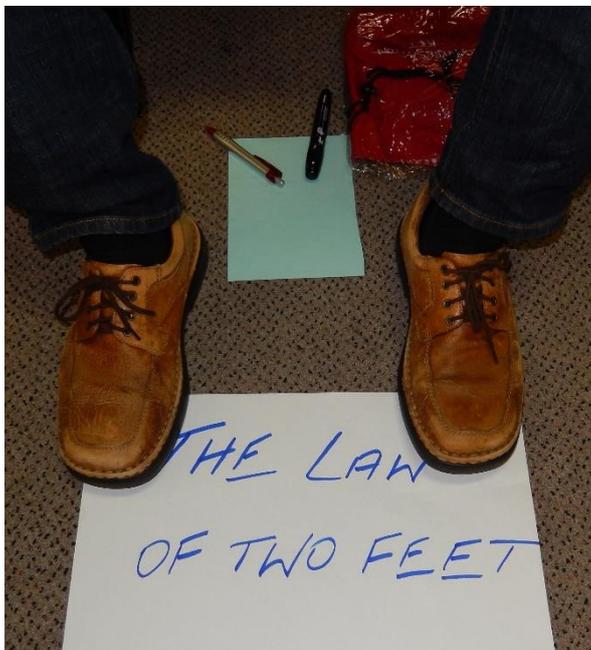
- Is thought provoking
- Stays with participants
- Surfaces underlying assumptions
- Touches a deep meaning
- Stimulates reflective conversation
- Evokes more questions

[Learn more](#) about the Art of Powerful Questions

As a group, considering all of the reasons we came along, we developed a new calling question for the workshop together:



How do we engage in conversations for change?



OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY

After morning tea, we were introduced to Open Space Technology, a method or tool to harness the power of a group – especially a diverse one with many interests and skills – to meet a present challenge. It is based around the idea of self-organisation. Often with a core calling question, the space is opened for anyone to pose a session topic. Over the course of the meeting, people are free to choose which session(s) they most want to attend, bringing maximum enthusiasm and commitment for conversation and action. Personal buy-in and committed action can be achieved in a remarkably short time.

[Learn more](#) about Open Space Technology.

The one law of Open Space is **The Law of Two Feet**. It simply says that, if at any time, you find that you are not learning or contributing, you have the right and the responsibility to move to another session. It invites you to engage both **passion and responsibility** for making the most of the time you have.

PRINCIPLES OF OPEN SPACE

- Whoever comes are the right people
- Whenever it starts is the right time
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have
- When it's over, it's over

THE KEY ROLES

- Caller – the person who poses the question or topic for a session
- Participant – who attends and contributes to a session
- Bumblebee – buzzing from session to session, cross-pollinating and connecting pieces of work
- Butterfly – may not join any formal session, choosing instead to float at the edges. Sometimes the most amazing solutions seem to come out of nowhere - so that's where butterflies tend to look for them.





Here are the questions and topics posed by workshop participants during our Open Space session. Groups spent 45 minutes delving into these topics, and came back together to share their key learnings with the whole group.

How do we ensure the most marginalised don't fall through the cracks?

- Equality
- Working party with other service providers
- Assessment tool – will it create gaps?
- A place for Partners in Recovery?

How do we consider everyone's story?

- We're all in this together
- Bumblebees to pollinate different groups

Is money part of our wellbeing and a healthy community?

- Importance of financial literacy
- Organisations focus on social enterprise

How do we engage non-verbal people to embrace change?

- Investment in development of tools
- Don't make assumptions
- Adapting resources

How will service providers survive?

- Clients will be our bosses – how do we communicate and collaborate?
- We need to get better at what we do
- Collaboration with other small services

How do we embed participatory processes in organisations for benefit?

- Need for a paradigm shift – connection to purpose and heart
- Conscious of jargon
- Tailor to needs

Why is it necessary to understand life experiences of people with a disability?

- How can we respond to their needs if we don't
- Unique to every person and their families
- Understanding removes barriers and leads to good work

How will the NDIS affect community? and; Is the NDIS a realisation of human rights or a response to a need?

- New organisations emerging
- Agencies emerging > the shadow side
- Increase in local employment
- People contributing to communities.



WORLD CAFE

World Café is another methodology to help harness the collective wisdom of a group of people. After lunch, we held a 'mini World Café', with two rounds, organised by Jane with the help of some of the workshop participants who developed the questions over lunch. (Usually there are three rounds of conversation of a minimum of 20-30 minutes each, around questions that matter to the group.)

World Café imitates a café setting where small groups (4 or 5 people) are in conversation about an issue that matters to them or some work they are trying to do together. This method works for groups of people from 10 to 1000 and is an ideal way to find out what a community is thinking and feeling about a topic. After the first conversation, someone stays at the table as 'host', while the others move to a new table, taking their previous conversations with them. In this way, the threads of the various conversations are woven together and all of us get a sense of what is being discovered and developed between us.

[Learn more](#) about World Café

Round 1: What will support collaboration in ... (your context)?

Round 2: What are my next wise steps?

These were the responses from the tables to this question, in the context of the first round conversations:

- Get people to the table with a powerful question
- Host event – taking care of stories and hurt
- Research mental health and living space
- Develop a shared common language
- Focus on shared values – and call people back to them
- Closing the supply chain ■ Buying 'the box' ■ Enabling sustainable supports
- Negotiating relationships driven by user ■ Where are the Elders in these conversations?
- Collaborative partnerships with those working with vulnerability ■ Collaborate for great service for recipients
- Focus on individual strengths ■ Peer paradigm shift ■ Support plans for clinicians



KEEP IN TOUCH

If you want to keep in touch with participatory leadership activities, events and opportunities to practice, learn and share with others in Queensland and Australia, you can sign up to the Community of practitioners email list.

Just send an email to [James at NDS](mailto:James@NDS) and he will add your name.

Do you want to know more?

Take a look at:

- a digital harvest of the workshop on the Australian participatory leadership community of practice website: [The Harvest Hub](#)
- the International [Art of Hosting](#) and Participatory Leadership website
- join the International Art of Hosting [Facebook group](#)

CHECK-OUT

Another key part of [Circle](#), is closing the meeting with a “check out”, and reflecting on what has been accomplished. The question we asked was:

What’s one thing that has shifted for me today?

- hope
- space and beauty
- people want to be heard
- a shared question works
- simplicity
- life changing wisdom
- power of the collective
- how little I knew ☺
- power of powerful questions
- diversity
- difference + inclusion = innovation
- diversity of questions
- bravery
- inviting with a question
- trust the process and people

