

# Participatory process & transformational change

A report from NDS Transformational Change Workshop  
Townsville, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2014

QUEENSLAND

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

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

### 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?

- Passion about what we do
- Give voice to others
- New ways to engage staff and families
- How to host
- New skills - change of environment
- We don't connect
- Time out to reflect
- Quality of our work increases
- Bring people with us
- How to truly engage others
- How to connect-new knowledge and skills
- New strategies for harnessing the knowledge and skills of others
- Meet people and make connections
- Curiosity-better ways to share and build
- Learn from wisdom of group
- Tools for better communication
- Need new skills and tools to manage change
- How to influence others and lead them
- Meetings or conversations?
- Conversations for change

### WORKSHOP FLOW

#### Welcome & 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 and circle practices: *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

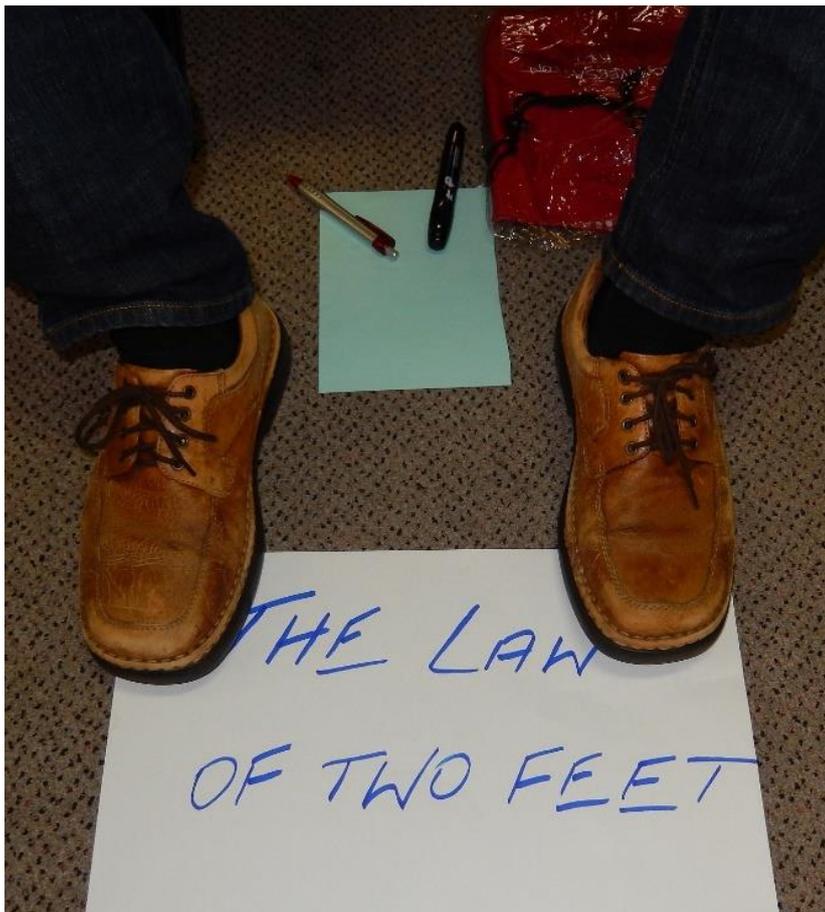
[Learn more](#) about the Art of Powerful Questions

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 happened
- 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.

**What inspires people?**

**What do I need to do to inspire people to have better lives?**

**What makes your life better?**

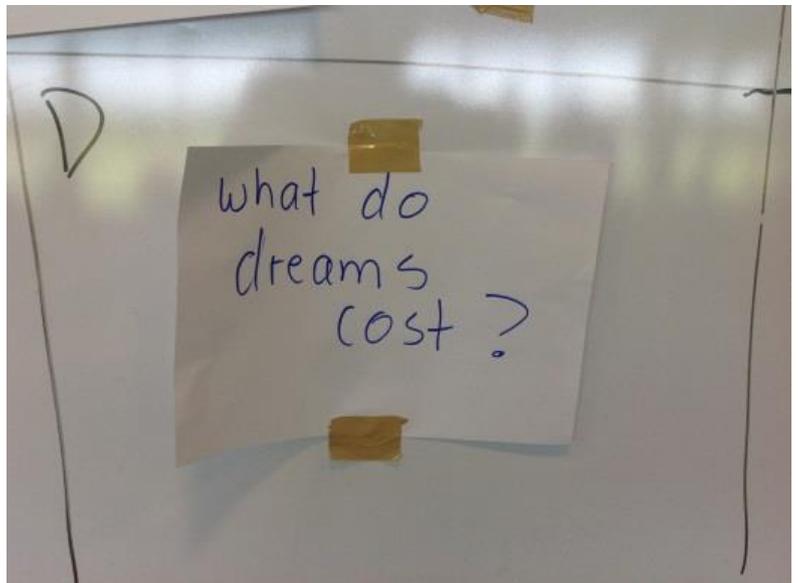
- Better life = the person
- Better life = family, community and friends, and needs met
- People belief and embracing change inspires people
- A place for Partners in Recovery?

**What might change and choice look like?**

- Not just a service but a great service
- Information
- Enhanced quality of life

**What do dreams cost?**

- Lost dreams
- Lack of awareness of what is possible
- Not always about \$\$
- \$\$ can also break dreams
- Loss
- Creativity – following a different path



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## 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)?

- What have you got? What haven't I got?
- What can be missing from clients' lives? Who can provide this?
- What inspires you? Can you identify people with the same inspiration?
- Common focus
- Sharing 'dreams' plans and goals

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

- look at why we communicate
- Humour – lighten up
- 'Expert knowledge' –v- collective wisdom
- Creative use of knowledge
- Change the dynamic of meetings; change the outcomes
- Questions; asking powerful questions brings powerful responses
- Changing the way we relate to each other can change our relationships
- Just do it

## 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](#) and he will add your name.

### Do you want to know more?

Take a look at:

- 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?

- Get the 'right' people in the conversation
- Circle practice in staff meetings
- People want to be heard
- Do what you feel comfortable with, and keep trying
- Shared learning - out of questions come more questions
- Conversations we have not had, but need to have
- Taking the time to ask questions.
- Taking the time to harvest the conversation
- Power of powerful questions
- Harnessing the power of shared experience

