Refle\n\ncions

The SoL Journal
on Knowledge, Learning, and Change

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The Evolution and Practice of Structural Dynamics
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Putting Theory into Action: The Evolution and Practice of Structural Dynamics
David Kantor with Deborah Wallace; Sarah Hill and Tony Melville

This article gives a unique glimpse into both the development and the application of a key body of work by one of today’s most important organizational theorists and practitioners. In Part One, David Kantor explains the evolution of his theory of Structural Dynamics, a model of how communication works—or doesn’t work—in human systems. He also details how what he calls “communicative competency” can lead to more effective conversations—a key to creating healthy family and organizational systems. In Part Two, Sarah Hill and Tony Melville describe the application of Structural Dynamics to a client situation. These two complementary perspectives provide a window into the profound possibilities offered by translating Kantor’s theory into practice.

Learning to Learn: Knowledge As a System of Questions
Michael Ballé, Jacques Chaize, and Daniel Jones

What is it about the Toyota Production System (TPS) that has allowed Toyota to achieve high levels of performance over time, despite occasional setbacks? The authors have found that instead of being a system of best practices, the TPS is a system of interconnected questions. As such, in TPS, knowledge does not involve applying a cookie-cutter method to get a desired result but rather posing the right questions to ultimately improve the system as a whole. The authors examine Toyota’s five-step cycle for problem finding, framing, and solving. They show that as employees develop their problem-finding capabilities and problem-solving skills, they individually and then collectively enhance the organization’s judgment in the long run.

Is Your Town in Transition?
Jessica Stites

Over the past decade, more than 1,000 municipalities in 43 countries have chosen to define themselves as “Transition Towns.” Frustrated by the slow pace of change in response to challenges such as peak oil, climate change, and economic instability, people in these places have undertaken grassroots initiatives to build the resilience of their communities to survive sudden shortfalls of necessities such as food, oil, water, or money. These preparations take many forms, some infrastructural—such as establishing solar energy programs—and others interpersonal—like creating groups that encourage people to help each other in times of need. At its core, the Transition Movement seeks to build the “social technologies” required to achieve long-term sustainability.

The Triple Focus: Rethinking Mainstream Education
Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge

In The Triple Focus: A New Approach to Education, Peter Senge and Daniel Goleman examine the cognitive and emotional tools that young children need to navigate and thrive in today’s environment. The authors identify three skill sets essential for navigating this world of increasing distractions and decreasing face-to-face communications: focusing on self, tuning in to other people, and understanding the larger world and how systems interact. This excerpt focuses on the third skill set and makes a strong case for capitalizing on the connections and synergies between Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and systems thinking. The notion of transforming and replacing the traditional pedagogy that anchors our current curriculum with systems-based learning has already taken hold with impressive results that have surprised even the authors.
Reflections on the 2014 SoL Global Forum

Gitte Larsen and Vicky Schubert

On May 21–23, 2014, 450 participants from around the world gathered in Paris, France, to take part in the SoL Global Forum: “Investing in Emerging Futures: New Players, New Games—Welcoming Metamorphosis.” Organized by SoL France, the event invited change leaders and organizational leaders to explore an urgent question together: “How can we facilitate and accelerate the metamorphosis of our organizations, firms, and society?” In this two-part article, Gitte Larsen, a newcomer to the Global SoL community, and Vicky Schubert, a long-time SoL contributor, share highlights from—and personal reflections on—the event. Their insightful commentary paints a picture of a community of people who are making the internal shifts necessary to lead profound changes in all those external systems that connect us.
Is Your Town in Transition?

JESSICA STITES

Over the past decade, more than 1,000 municipalities in 43 countries have chosen to define themselves as “Transition Towns.” Frustrated by the slow pace of change in response to challenges such as peak oil, climate change, and economic instability, people in these places have undertaken grassroots initiatives to build the resilience of their communities to survive sudden shortfalls of necessities such as food, oil, water, or money. These preparations take many forms, some infrastructural—such as establishing solar energy programs—and others interpersonal—like creating groups that encourage people to help each other in times of need. At its core, the Transition Movement seeks to build the “social technologies” required to achieve long-term sustainability.

When I set out to investigate the appeal of Transition, a sustainability movement that has spread to 1,105 towns in 43 countries over the past eight years, I started with what I thought was a basic question: What are “Transition Towns” transitioning to?

“Resilience,” I was told. “What does that mean?” I asked, thinking vaguely of steel. “The ability to absorb shocks to a system!” was the reply. Well, yes, but …? Pressed for details, Nina Winn, who runs a Transition initiative at the Institute of Cultural Affairs in Chicago, said, “I don’t think there’s a conclusion. Like when a person’s trying to self improve, it’s a constant growth. Our communities would grow to be a lot more intimate. We wouldn’t be hesitant to ask for that cup of sugar or tomato. The streets would be narrower instead of expanding; there would be fresh produce on every corner that was grown just down the street. You would see people on the street because of that because where there’s food, there’s people.”

Such bucolic but fuzzy visions are typical of Transition, which is more about shifting paradigms than prescribing solutions. With an it’ll-take-shape-as-we-go ethos, most Transition Town websites sport a “cheerful disclaimer:” “Just in case you were under the impression that Transition is a process defined by people who have all the answers, you need to be aware of a key fact…. Transition is a social experiment on a massive scale.”

Transition seeks to address a source of frustration in the environmental movement: Personal action feels like a drop in the bucket, while governments often move at a glacial pace.

On a basic level, however, the experiment seeks to address what founder Rob Hopkins sees as a source of frustration in the environmental movement: Personal action feels like a drop in the bucket, while governments often move at a glacial pace.

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“Until now, there’s been the things you can do at home on your own—changing your lightbulbs and sharing your lofts and things—and then there’s everything else that someone else is meant to do: the sort of mythical ‘they,’” says Hopkins. “Transition is what’s in the middle, what you can do with the people on your street.”

If the Transition movement has a sine qua non, it is the belief that communities must become more resilient in the face of three catastrophic threats: peak oil, global warming and economic instability.

The seed for Transition came in 2004 when Hopkins, a young teacher with a degree in environmental quality and resource management, encountered the concept of peak oil: the theory that easy-to-reach oil will run out at a specific date—some say 2020 precipitating a rapid decline in oil availability followed by the collapse of civilization as we know it. At the time, Hopkins was teaching a permaculture course at the Kinsale College of Further Education, an alternative school on Ireland’s southern coast. Permaculture is another one of these concepts that, as Hopkins notes, is “notoriously difficult to explain in two minutes in the pub,” but it’s most commonly described as an ecological design movement that sees nature in terms of interlocking systems. Alarmed by peak oil, Hopkins assigned his students to apply the principles of permaculture to the problem.

The result was a concrete plan to make Kinsale dramatically less fossil-fuel dependent, with recommendations such as a green buildings officer and a horse-and-cart taxi. The Kinsale Town Council enthusiastically adopted the plan, and the principles underlying it became the precepts of Transition, as outlined in Hopkins’ 2008 Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience and as adopted by Transition Towns worldwide.
But it would be a mistake to think that becoming a Transition Town means setting off on a clear-cut path to energy independence. From permaculture, the movement has inherited a non-linear, bottom-up approach—even the original 12 “steps” outlined in Hopkins’ handbook have been renamed “ingredients.” If the Transition movement has a sine qua non, however, it is the belief that communities must become more resilient in the face of three catastrophic threats: peak oil, global warming and economic instability. Whether the movement means to avert or adapt to future disasters is ambiguous; when I ask, Transition members tend to respond, “Both!” as though I have just recited their favorite koan.

Practically, this means preparing towns to better survive sudden shortfalls of such necessities as food, oil, water or money. These preparations take many forms, some infrastructural—such as solar energy programs and local economic initiatives—others interpersonal, like the “heart and soul” groups that encourage people to help each other in times of need and open their minds to new solutions.

Totnes, England, declared the first official Transition Town in 2006, offers perhaps the most fully realized example. The town, with a population of 7,400, boasts nearly 30 Transition projects and sub-projects. Some are small-scale, like nut-tree planting and a free “bike doctor,” while others are more ambitious, like an incubator for sustainable businesses and a 305-page Energy Descent Action Plan to cut the town’s energy usage in half by 2030. The movement is enthusiastically backed by the city mayor and the town councilors, one of whom attests that “the [Energy Descent Action Plan] has filtered into everyone’s plans for everything, so that’s had a major impact.” A much-heralded neighborhood-level project has been Transition Streets, which brought residents together, block by block, to support each other in decreasing their home energy use through improvements like insulation and solar panels. On average, each of the 550 participating households cut its annual carbon use by 1.3 tons and its annual energy bill by £570 (about $883).

Hopkins stresses, however, that the Transition movement is not in the business of stamping out cookie-cutter copies of Totnes. Transition spreads primarily through serendipity. One member likens it to a mycelium network, a fungus with underground roots that can sprout new shoots miles away. In effect, this means that someone—often with a background in sustainability—stumbles across Transition online or in print and decides to start a local chapter.

While guidance is available from umbrella support groups such as Transition U.S. and the U.K.-based Transition Network, the movement is intended to mutate as it grows. “We designed it with a simple set of principles and tools and sort of set it off, and it keeps popping up in the most incredible, surprising places, in the most incredible, surprising ways,” says Hopkins. “When there’s Transition
happening in Brazil, it feels like a Brazilian thing, it doesn’t feel like an English imported thing.”

Indeed, the organizers of Brazil’s Transition movement say that two of the three core principles—peak oil and climate change—don’t resonate strongly with the Brazilian public, so Transition trainings focus more on “assuring education and health for all, protecting biodiversity and enhancing autonomy of traditional (indigenous or not) local communities.” In Brasilândia, one of the slums of São Paulo, Transition primarily fosters social enterprise projects; it has given birth to a community bakery and a business turning old advertising banners into bags.

In parts of Europe, Transition has had to respond to the pressing needs of communities decimated by the ongoing Eurozone crisis. When the city of Coin, Spain, went bankrupt and decided to privatize the water, Coin En Transicion gathered 3,000 signatures to convince the city to squash the plan. Now the movement is working with the city government to design a regional water plan grounded in principles of sustainability and resilience.

In Portugal, where unemployment is at 16.9 percent and climbing, the Transition Town of Portalegre has drawn inspiration from ajujeda, an ancient rural practice of trading chores in the fields. This month, Portalegre em Transição will meet to figure out how to translate the principle of ajujeda into a functioning gift economy, allowing those whose skills are not being used (for instance, the unemployed) to share them with those whose needs are not being met.

Across the Pond

In making the leap across the Atlantic to the United States, where more than 139 Transition Towns and 200 unofficial “mullers” have sprouted, Transition has also taken its own, distinct path. Most of the Transition towns in the United States have popped up in places one might expect: relatively moneyed, green, hippie enclaves like Boulder, Colo. (the first official U.S. Transition Town); Sebastopol, Calif.; Northampton, Mass.; and Woodstock, N.Y. None have taken root so far in any conservative strongholds, although there are a number of urban initiatives, in Boston, Houston, Los Angeles and Cleveland, to name a few.

As in the United Kingdom, members of the U.S. Transition movement tend to split up into working groups around specific projects. A common one is an “emergency preparedness” group, which devises things like phone trees and alternative heating sources for use in the event of disaster. “Yard share” working groups match would-be gardeners to landowners willing to lend a patch of fertile ground. “Heart and soul” or “inner transition” working groups stress psychological and spiritual transformation, drawing on the teachings of thinkers such as Buddhist deep ecologist Joanna Macy. “Reskilling” working groups offer trainings in all manner of practical pre-industrial skills, from cheesemaking to animal husbandry to knot-tying to knitting.

Of course, Transition is not the only sustainability game in town. Wherever it goes, and especially in cities, it enters a terrain thick with environmental non-profits and local government initiatives. More than 1,060 mayors have signed the U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, a pledge to meet the goal of the Kyoto Protocol (the United States was one of only four countries not to join) to reduce carbon emissions below 1990 levels. Some cities have gone beyond that: Last year, Chicago drafted a sustainability plan for the year 2015 that reads something like Totnes’s Energy Descent Action Plan—a laundry list of goals such as improving citywide energy efficiency by 5 percent and decreasing water use by 2 percent (14 million gallons a day). To get there, the city has launched numerous projects, such as eco-friendly overhauls of city buses, a “rails-to-trails conversion” of a disused train line into a park (modeled on New York City’s High Line), and a Sustainable Backyards Program that urges residents to install compost bins and rainwater collectors.

Given this abundance of initiatives, many Transition movements, especially in cities, take on a network-
ing role to connect existing sustainability projects. Transition Pittsburgh’s mission is to offer “resources—such as educators, movie screenings and licenses, and a library of shared knowledge—to various local initiatives, as well as a city-wide community and some of our own projects.” Chicago’s Transition chapter—called Accelerate 77 after the division of the city into 77 unofficial communities by social scientists at the University of Chicago—set out by creating a dense map of the more than 800 sustainability projects underway in Chicago, which are remarkably evenly spaced throughout the areas of poverty and wealth that stratify the city. It hosted a “Share Fair” in September for the various groups to connect with each other, followed by three neighborhood gatherings on Chicago’s South, West and North Sides to connect with residents.

I asked Ryan Wilson of the nonprofit Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), a sustainability “think-and-do tank” that participated in the Share Fair, whether he thinks Transition has anything to add to Chicago’s wealth of sustainability initiatives. “It was helpful to learn what other projects are out there—maybe more helpful for some of the smaller groups,” he says. “The Transition folks—I like the people. I like their energy.”

“We have all the technologies to [achieve sustainability], but we don’t have the social technologies to make it happen.” — Rob Hopkins

This jives with Hopkins’ thinking on Transition, which has progressed from seeing “resilience” as a strictly environmental process to a more social one: “We have all the technologies to [achieve sustainability],” he says, “but we don’t have the social technologies to make it happen.”

The Art of Hosting

Transition’s freewheeling structure, however, does mean that certain problems—or “challenges”—seem to crop up frequently. As with any volunteer-driven movement, members describe burnout and lack of accountability. After a stage of initial enthusiasm, projects can fall dormant. More successful Transition Towns often have paid staff. After observing that most initiatives “were struggling with an all-volunteer leadership team,” Transition Sarasota founder Don Hall decided to raise the money to pay himself as a full-time organizer, cobbling together his salary from “a mix of event
and workshop fees, donations, local business sponsorships and grants.” In many cities, Transition has been adopted by non-profits that provide paid staff, like Chicago’s Institute of Cultural Affairs, a 50-year-old organization dedicated to sustainability and social change, and Jamaica Plain’s Institute for Policy Studies, the Boston branch of a progressive, multi-issue D.C. think tank.

The Transition movement grapples with the challenges of non-hierarchical, collective leadership.

The Transition movement also grapples with the challenges of non-hierarchical, collective leadership. When I contacted Transition Sebastopol, in California, a longstanding, apparently thriving Transition town with a busy events calendar, I was surprised to learn that all was not well. A dispute in September had put the central Working Group Council on hold, although several working groups—an elders salon, the “heart and soul” group—are chugging along independently. Former working group member Julia Bystrova ascribes the blow-up to a lack of conflict-resolution mechanisms. She hopes that a fresh team will take over and resuscitate the group.

Hopkins is quick to cop to these pitfalls, and Transition is good at tapping into existing knowledge bases to fix problems. Transition U.S. has partnered with an organization called The Art of Hosting to offer facilitation trainings and will begin hosting regional courses on “effective groups” starting in September. Transition U.K. offers Thrive workshops for the same purpose, and ecofeminist and spiritual activist Starhawk gave a workshop in Totnes last month about clear communication and constructive critique in collective decision-making.

Another common concern about Transition, levied from both within and without, is that it is a movement of “white hippies.” While the definition of “hippie” is open to debate, each of the half dozen Transition towns I surveyed in the U.S. indeed lamented a lack of diversity. In addition to being predominantly white, participants in several towns mentioned that their initiative was made up primarily of older women.

While many in the Transition movement said they were working to increase diversity, by far the most impressive effort I encountered is being staged by the Boston branch of IPS’ Jamaica Plain New Economy Transition (JP NET), which has hired an organizer to help meet this challenge. Carlos Espinoza-Toro, a Peruvian immigrant with a master’s in city planning from MIT, aims to identify spaces where different demographics intersect—farmers’ markets, festivals—as well as to find people like himself who enjoy serving as cross-cultural bridges. But he’s going beyond mixed-race spaces to foster Transition in the heart of Jamaica Plain’s Latino community. A series of IPA-hosted meetings in Spanish (with simultaneous English translation) encourages residents to talk about how they are weathering environmental and economic crises. Espinoza-Toro’s bilingual fliers for the first meeting read:

Us Latinos have adapted to economic crises in our countries and in the US for many years. And we have always prevailed! We are creative, resourceful and entrepreneurial. Currently in the US, MA and JP we are experiencing a crisis that challenges our capacity of adaptation. Work opportunities are scarce, rent keeps going up, it becomes more difficult to afford a healthy diet and take the T, the quality of education in our public schools diminishes. … We invite you to share how you are adapting to this crisis or how you have adapted to previous crises. Tell us your stories of adaptation. We could transform your effort into a neighborhood effort with great impact in JP.

Espinoza-Toro anticipates that the needs of Jamaica Plain’s Latino immigrant community may be very different from the white, middle-class needs that have prompted JP NET’s existing programs, such as garden shares and urban orchards. “Folks in the
Latino community may say, ‘Well, we cannot do our own gardening if we are getting evicted from our homes,’ ” he says. JP NET has one program underway to address housing issues, a community land trust called Pueblo, but Espinoza-Toro estimates that it is years from fruition thanks to high property costs in the rapidly gentrifying neighborhood. He hopes other ideas will emerge from the meetings.

Outside of urban areas, the barriers that limit the reach of Transition can be subtler than ethnicity. In New York state’s Hudson Valley and other agricultural areas around the United States, Transition is one of many sustainability initiatives to run up against a cultural divide between traditional farmers and those who practice newer, more sustainable methods like organic, permacultural and biodynamic farming.

“You have organic farmers who are pretty disdainful and smug, and traditional farmers who are kind of threatened,” says Maria Reidelbach, an artist and member of Transition Marbletown, N.Y., who found herself spanning both sides when she partnered with a 177-year-old local farm to create a mini-golf course featuring entirely edible plants (along with the world’s third-largest garden gnome, “Gnome Chomsky”). “When the traditional farmers adopted machinery and pesticides in the 20th century, the yield increased incredibly, and all of a sudden they were able to feed so many more people with the same amount of land and less help,” says Reidelbach. “To them, that’s great. And then we come along 30 years later and start telling them that they are feeding people poison.”

Reidelbach thinks Transition Marbletown has gone some way toward bridging this divide. The movement, she says, managed to “rope in” the local...
growers’ association to cosponsor a “Common Ground Celebration” last fall. At a farmers’ market, growers mingled and tasted each other’s crops, and farmers of all stripes were recognized with “Signs of Sustainability Awards.”

“There’s a value to the farmers listening to each other, humanizing each other,” says Reidelbach. “Then they are much less likely to dis each others’ methods, modus operandi and motives. I think everybody’s got to get down off their high horses. That’s one of the things that Transition enables.”

“I don’t know if we’re going to solve the world’s problems. [But] the underlying ethos is that the process needs to be fun enough to be worth doing anyway.” —Maria Reidelbach

Modest Expectations, High Spirits

Asked if he eventually envisions Transition scaling up and being adopted by regional or national governments, Hopkins assents cautiously, explaining that the goal would be for government to better enable local projects (for instance, by making laws more friendly to small-scale farming). He also hopes that Transition will hit a tipping point at which new solutions seem possible—where, for instance, local governments don’t feel that the only solution to economic hardship is to try to attract large corporations in a deregulatory race to the bottom.

Espinoza-Toro says that he chooses Transition over other forms of organizing because he is inspired by the movement’s tangibility. “What I find most fruitful and rewarding about my work here is that I’m dealing with folks face-to-face in order to tackle some of these issues,” he says.

Again and again, for Transitioners, it seems to come back to that social aspect. “Between you and me, I don’t know if we’re going to solve the world’s problems,” says Reidelbach. “[But] the underlying ethos is that the process needs to be fun enough to be worth doing anyway. I love that about it. There’s a bit of anarchy, which is wonderful. People who are attracted to it tend to be upbeat, optimistic, joyous people.

“I don’t see anything meaningful happening at the top, with governments and multinational corporations,” Reidelbach continues. “Whether or not we win, Transition is the only group offering a model where I can deal with fossil fuel depletion and climate change myself.”

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Our world needs innovative approaches created and supported by people everywhere. As we see from Jessica Stites’s stories of Transition initiatives from around the world, what’s essential now is a social architecture to support passionate citizen activists in their efforts.

To support the development of that kind of cohesion and participatory framework, we served as members of two teams that offered three-day Art of Hosting trainings for 160 Transition leaders and people from other like-minded organizations. The first two took place near Petaluma, CA, in June 2013 and March 2014, and the third near Portland, ME, in April 2014. Our experience in these trainings as well as our other work have lead us to several reflections important to the Transition Movement and other local and trans-local undertakings.

The Art of Hosting

Whether in response to peak oil, climate change, environmental racism, or other crises, this is an age that requires participation.

As practitioners, social change facilitators, and participative leadership professionals, we are inspired by the qualities inherent in the Transition Movement:

- The belief that communities must become more resilient in the face of global threats
- The efforts to shift paradigms rather than prescribe cookie-cutter solutions
- The willingness to engage in local experiments with global relevance

As such, AoH is a kind of operating system for networks of impassioned, experimenting people. By connecting individuals working on things that matter in constructive ways, it helps them to be smart, thoughtful, and heart-full together.

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Through the Art of Hosting, people:
1. Learn and sense together
2. Build and strengthen lasting relationships
3. Roll their sleeves up to work with the experiments, offerings, and practices needed now

**Essential Frameworks**

**Two Loops of Change**

One essential framework we use—which we learned through association with our colleagues Meg Wheatley and Deborah Frieze at The Berkana Institute—is called “Two Loops of Change.” This model proves helpful to citizen activists in two ways. First, it helps them locate their current work and strategy in the context of what others in the movement are doing. It invites a systemic view, to make possible more collaboration among people with different roles and in different phases of networked change. Second, “Two Loops” invites people to see their work from a living systems perspective, to witness the decline of old systems and the birth and emergence of new ones, and to notice what leadership acts help in working with the natural dynamics of emerging systems.

According to Saira Austin, a participant in one of the Transition trainings, “The biggest spark of learning was the life cycles of systems—physically placing myself in the two loops map, and then viewing and listening to others around me, all of us simultaneously interrelated but in very different places along the path of emerging and dying.”

**Dynamics of Chaos, Order, and Control**

A second key framework in the Art of Hosting is exploring the dynamics of chaos, order, and control. Most Transition leaders are familiar with chaotic environments. What is less familiar is how to orient ourselves with the dynamic energy or inherent order found within chaos. When a messy, complex situation disrupts our sense of order—when funding doesn't come through, when policy thwarts an intended innovation, or when people aren’t listening to our well-crafted plans—many of us habitually attempt to regain control.

An alternative is to shift toward a skillful dance with chaos—for example, by inviting even more diverse voices and perspectives into the conversation. When

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**Two Loops of Change**

As one system culminates and starts to collapse, isolated alternatives slowly begin to arise and give way to the new. Large-scale change emerges when local actions get connected globally while preserving their deeply local culture, flavor, and form.
well hosted, this can lead to a new, emergent sense of order that is more robust and resilient. Learning to trust these dynamics, to welcome emergence, takes practice and is a core competency in Transition leadership.

Jesse Watson, a participant from Midcoast Permaculture Design, comments, “When an organization gets stuck in a rut, the thing that might help is to introduce chaos into the situation. This chaos may take the shape of a participatory meeting with no set agenda beforehand.”

**Development of Core Teams**

A third key framework in these trainings is the development of core teams. Movements don’t begin as movements; they begin with small groups of individuals that begin to name the work and connect with others. If well tended, core teams may grow into networks and begin to connect with allied networks. And then they may grow into communities of practice—in the case of Transition and allies, cultivating the emergence of new approaches to energy, food, economy, community, and resilience.

Transition US Communications Manager Marissa Mommaerts reflects, “Strong core teams, built on trust, are vital to the success of our work. Strong, dynamic core teams can alleviate burnout, build a more robust and diverse vision, and are a much more resilient model than having a single leader.”

Core teams have a hidden role; they are not just for hands-on action projects like gray water systems and education campaigns. They are also a practice ground for developing essential personal and interpersonal capacities.

In AoH, we speak of a four-fold practice:

- Engaging in self care to be more fully present for the work
- Practicing generative conversation by cultivating curiosity rather than judgment
- Hosting conversations among others, at varying scales
- Co-creating a community of practice and learning

Social change is thus rooted in fundamental practices of democracy—good conversation and learning together inside core teams, among core teams, in allied and diverse networks, and in broader public conversations around our shared future in our communities.

**Added Capacity**

Participant Angelo Silva noted that the Art of Hosting trainings reflected the permaculture principle of “stacking functions,” in that people could simultaneously have deep conversations about issues, learn a new meeting method, practice their own capacities of hosting, and deepen their connections with one another for ongoing work.

Movements don’t begin as movements; they begin with small groups of individuals that begin to name the work and connect with others.

Through experiential learning, participants left with several portable principles. In her blog, participant Beth Tener eloquently summarizes some of them:

- **Circle.** We began the event sitting in a circle and returned to this circle multiple times. The emphasis was that the learning is in the center, and we all have something to contribute to that learning.
- **Story.** “The shortest distance between two people is a story.” This quote from Meg Wheatley kept resonating with me through the weekend as I saw how the opportunity for people to share stories created a growing sense of trust and camaraderie among the group.
- **Hosting.** Participants were invited to help “host” various parts of the gathering—an opportunity for people to share their skills and creativity, embodying the idea that we all have something to offer, we can all contribute to the gathering, and we can show up in various roles in a group at various times.
• **Space.** When meetings are tight on time and strictly wedded to a fixed agenda, there is little space for the serendipity that enables new things to emerge. We used a variety of engagement processes, including Open Space. By the afternoon of the second day, it felt like all of our interweaving had created a quality of space that was humming with good will, appreciation, inspiration, ideas and deeper understanding, and a sense of possibility.

• **Wisdom.** People had profound insights, powerful stories, and so much wisdom. In most gatherings, this is latent, yet with this format, so much more of this could be accessed, by creating the space to have real conversations and listen to each other.

**Thriving Movements Through Simple Practices**

We are learning that, as our friend Meg Wheatley shares, three practices are key to the emergence of movements like Transition:

• **Stay awake.** Fortunately, by definition, most people involved in movements like Transition are people who are awake. They are not asleep or numb to the frightening trends and frailties of our current world. They are willing to face facts and fears together, and to stay present and curious to what is unfolding.

• **Dwell in complexity.** It’s not always easy to lean into uncertainty or dwell in complexity. The job for most of us is to resist our tendencies to oversimplify—to impose solutions that satisfy our need to reduce anxiety but don’t create lasting solutions.

• **Pay exquisite attention to relations.** It is not our blaming and judging of one another that will pull us through uncertainty. When situations are complex, many stories are true. To be able to be in a multiplicity of truths, a plurality inherent in democracy, we must continue to develop our relationships together.

**It’s Time to Be Inspired Together**

“I am inspired to reach out to non-like-minded individuals, build connections, and support a resilient, earth-friendly future with ‘unlikely candidates.”

—Lesley Heyl, participant

Like Transition, The Art of Hosting is a commitment to working individually and together at scale on behalf of a world in significant change. It is a participative process to catalyze shared perspective and action. It is large- and small-group methodologies that bring people into deeper relationship and commitment together. It is a set of models and worldviews to reclaim democratic process and action. Emergence, self-organization, and living systems inspire the work. Passionate local and trans-local responses—like that of the Transition movement—can only help us respond to the key issues of our times.

More can be found at [www.transitionus.org](http://www.transitionus.org) and [www.artofhosting.org](http://www.artofhosting.org).