

SuccessWorks

Evaluation of the Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter

Success Works Conferences 2009-2011

Executive Summary

October 2011

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Success Works has undertaken an evaluation of the five Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that Matter (AoH) conferences that it has organised in Australia. The purpose of this evaluation is to contribute to the evidence base of AoH by determining the conferences' effectiveness, and exploring how participants can be further supported in their learning. A literature review, surveys, interviews and a live evaluation have been undertaken.

The evaluation has found that nearly all AoH participants changed their intent and approach to communicating with others as a result of attending the conferences. Participants reported that this enabled them to explore issues more deeply through having noticeably different conversations.

Almost nine in ten participants reported having used at least one of the methodologies in their organisation one month after the completion of the conference. Almost all (97%) reported a positive impact on their work and more than nine in ten (92%) reported a positive impact on their organisation. Participants also reported using the methodologies in their personal lives, with almost nine in ten (88%) reporting a positive impact on their life, and more than seven in ten (72%) on their community.

There are also early indications that some participants' organisations are adopting the tools and methodologies into their processes and structures, while some are also incorporating the AoH teachings into their professional culture.

This evaluation confirms that the design and delivery of the three day residential conference successfully provides AoH learning and development. The evaluation also confirms that there are strengths in residential delivery; the length of the conference; the mix between experiencing the methodologies and the teachings; the opportunities to co-host; morning practice; and a non-metropolitan venue. There are also advantages in cohort diversity and participants suggest a cohort size of between 30 to 45 participants. The materials provided and the pre-conference preparation also supported participants.

Areas for further focus and investigation include further support for participants in transferring their new knowledge and skills into application, through post-conference support and strategies for improving organisational support for participants to experiment professionally with the methodologies. In relation to the pedagogy, being explicit about experiential learning appears important, as does explaining which methodology to use when and on what basis to make that decision. Scaffolded learning could be further investigated to further support participants who need it and extend those who are ready. Allowing participant questioning, feedback and encouraging the voice of dissent may also assist. Pre-conference preparation could also be further emphasised, and further caution could be given in regard to the depth of experience of hosts when organising AoH conferences.

Further investigation could also be made into how to continue to support participants through the paradigm shift being advocated by AoH, and the extent to which this is achieved by both them and their organisations.

Based on the findings and analysis, the following eleven recommendations are made for consideration by Success Works and the AoH hosting community.

Recommendation 1: That post-conference support be prioritised and that further consideration be made into what could provide participants such support.

Recommendation 2: That further consideration be given regarding what could provide participants, or assist participants in gaining, organisational support.

Recommendation 3: That framing be explicit for participants that they are undertaking experiential learning.

Recommendation 4: That the “which methodology when and why” teaching be provided as a full group teaching during conferences.

Recommendation 5: That further priority be given to pre-conference preparation for participants.

Recommendation 6: That consideration be made to further scaffold the learning for participants, such that some participants are further supported in their learning, and others are further extended.

Recommendation 7: That further consideration be given to allowing participant questions to be heard and answered, and encouraging the voice of dissent.

Recommendation 8: That further consideration be given to supporting participants through the paradigm shift being advocated, especially in relation to how they can relate this back to their professional organisation in their current position.

Recommendation 9: That particular care be given to considering the depth of experience on the hosting team when organising an AoH conference.

Recommendation 10: That framing be explicit that everyone is on an AoH spectrum of learning (the Four Fold Practice).

Recommendation 11: That consideration be made to creating more materials regarding stories of application as a method to assist transferring a depth of hosting experience to new hosts.

Success Works intends to continue this evaluation, to further contribute to the evidence base to support and influence a broader and deeper acceptance of AoH. The following are suggested next steps in relation to this evaluation.

- Inviting feedback from the international host community in relation to this evaluation, its findings and analysis.
- Using the AoH methodologies to have conversations about the findings and analysis of this evaluation.

- Conducting an evaluation of the Stewardship group facilitated by Success Works, which will focus on the medium term outcomes for participants and their organisations, and the nature and context of successful post-conference support. This could be enhanced by incorporating the upcoming work in Nova Scotia, as well as investigation into the types of post-conference support possible, including online support.
- Further consideration of other opportunities for evaluation of medium term outcomes for participants and organisations.
- Investigating further frameworks which may be used for evaluative purposes, to be used in conjunction with the learning and development frameworks used in this evaluation. Examples may include frameworks or rubrics related to cognitive development for assessing the personal and organisational paradigm shifts occurring with particular interest in technical and adaptive learning and leadership frameworks.
- Inviting others to coordinate and conduct more interviews of participants nationally and internationally across the AoH community.
- Revisiting the project logic and evaluation questions in light of the current findings.
- Conducting further evaluations of upcoming AoH conferences.

Success Works wishes to thank the international hosting community for their guidance, wisdom and support, our partner organisations for participating and making the Australian conferences possible, and finally the participants for taking part in the conferences and willingly sharing their views with the evaluation team.