Abstract: This thesis examines how dialogue-based methodologies can be integrated into a participatory planning process for strategic sustainable development. Evidence of the complex nature of the sustainability challenge is cited as necessitating tools and methodologies suited for dealing with complexity. The methodologies in this study were designed to use dialogue to address complex problems in which outcomes are unpredictable. Within the sustainability practitioner community, we identified a need for research on systematic guidance for pairing engagement processes with use of the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD). This research focuses on how a specific set of dialogue-based methodologies within the Art of Hosting network can be integrated with the FSSD to strengthen the linkage between content and process. As the culmination of our research, we have developed The Weave: Participatory Process Design Guide for Strategic Sustainable Development. It includes a Template for process design, suggestions and examples for use, and guiding principles. It is the first prototype of participatory process design guidance to be offered for pilot testing in the field of strategic sustainable development.

Keywords: Participatory Process Design, Dialogue, Art of Hosting, Engagement, Strategic Planning, Sustainable Development
Statement of Collaboration

This research project was a collaborative effort between our three team members, Alison Cretney, Steven Cretney and Tracy Meisterheim. We were drawn together by a shared understanding of the need for meaningful engagement in creating long-term change towards sustainability. Our professional backgrounds (corporate sustainability consultant, graphic designer and communication consultant, process facilitator and TNS-US associate) were the source of this passion and served us well throughout the entire research process.

This experience was richly rewarding and a truly co-creative process. While each research area was started by one or two of us, the continual contributions and edits by team members throughout the entire writing process resulted in information that was emerging in such a dynamic way that no one thesis section could be attributed to any one individual. We equally participated in the research design, data collection, analysis, writing, presentation of results, project management and decision-making. Due to the truly collaborative nature of this project, we feel that attempting to name specific roles does not appropriately honor our work or value this emergent knowledge. We were able to work from our skills and personal passions, with intention and deep commitment to the quality of the outcome and to each other.

Alison Cretney
Steven Cretney
Tracy Meisterheim
Acknowledgements

We would like to express our deep appreciation to the Art of Hosting community, with special thanks to Toke Paludan Møller and Monica Nissén. The openness, authenticity and inspiration we received throughout the course of our research will stay with us in our continued journeys of learning and practice. We are grateful for the support, deep insights and feedback from the sustainability practitioners associated with The Natural Step and the MSLS programme, who shared their time and experiences. We are encouraged by your work and energized by our sense of shared purpose. Thank you to ALIA Institute and Art of Hosting for supporting our participation in seminars and trainings with scholarships and welcoming hearts.

Tamara Connell and Merlina Missimer have been the ideal thesis advisers; always offering clarity, insightful critique and just enough structure to allow us the freedom for creative inquiry into this project. We are especially grateful for our classmates and our thesis counterparts Dana Pearlman, Christopher Baan and Phil Long, with whom we shared deep dialogue and learning adventures.

This thesis is dedicated to Elliot. Because of her flexibility and sense for adventure, we have been able to enjoy the entire process. While we learned the ABCD, she learned the whole alphabet.
Executive Summary

This thesis examines how participatory processes can be integrated with planning for strategic sustainable development. We focus on how a specific set of dialogue-based methodologies within the Art of Hosting network can be integrated with the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) to strengthen the connection of content with process.

Introduction

The highly complex and pressing nature of the sustainability challenge requires both behavioural and organizational change. Given this complexity, it is paramount that the approaches taken are designed for complex situations, those where the relationship between cause and effect only become apparent in hindsight and no expert has the answer. Although there are numerous responses to the sustainability challenge, most interpretations of sustainability focus on detailed and often fragmented, reductionist issues without appropriate consideration given to the high level of complexity of the whole system perspective.

The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD)\(^1\) was specifically designed to address the complexities of the sustainability challenge, and in this arena, sustainability practitioners using the FSSD play a dual role. Their calling is to shed light on scientific knowledge and provide expertise in the realm of sustainability planning, while at the same time, they must skillfully host the co-creative group processes necessary for actual systemic change. To date however, this topic of developing systematic guidance for weaving sustainability content with participatory processes has never been researched in the context of strategic sustainable development. This “intimate linkage between intellectual content and structure on one hand, and process and engagement on the other” (Robèrt 2011) is the focus of this research.

Dialogue-based methodologies are designed to address complex issues by engaging groups of people (large or small) in meaningful conversations. The Art of Hosting is a global network of trained process facilitators working with

\(^1\) The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development is also known as The Natural Step Framework. It includes the ABCD strategic planning process referred to in this study.
dialogue-based methodologies and participatory processes in many contexts worldwide, including the European Commission to transform its communications and operating systems, and in Columbus, Ohio to transform the health care system.

Our hypothesis was that synergies exist between the methodologies used within the Art of Hosting network and the ABCD strategic planning process that might strengthen facilitation of strategic sustainable development approaches. To begin exploring the value of this hypothesis, we posed the following question:

How can dialogue-based methodologies be effectively integrated with planning for strategic sustainable development?

In order to answer this question, we posed three sub-questions:
1. How are sustainability practitioners using dialogue-based methodologies in planning for strategic sustainable development?
2. How are Art of Hosting practitioners using dialogue-based methodologies in strategic planning in other contexts?
3. What guidance can be offered for integration of dialogue-based methodologies with planning for strategic sustainable development?

Methods
Our primary source for collecting data was through surveys, interviews and expert feedback from two key audiences; sustainability practitioners using the FSSD and Art of Hosting practitioners. Through analysis of survey data and the 22 interviews we conducted, we created a draft version of a Participatory Process Design Guide that attempts to strengthen the connection between content and process, specifically for strategic sustainable development. Ten experts provided feedback, which helped shape our final version, The Weave: Participatory Process Design Guide for Strategic Sustainable Development, Prototype Version 1.
Results and Discussion

Initially, our data collection focused on how practitioners incorporate dialogue-based methodologies in the stages of strategic planning. We found that since every engagement is unique, use of specific methodologies per stage cannot be prescribed. However, we did identify a pattern indicating where the methodologies are most appropriately used and thus make broad suggestions based on that data.

Our primary findings from the first two research sub-questions included the critical importance of pre-work, and the necessity of strategic process design which pointed to ‘weaving the methodologies’ as key to the work. Within these findings, a collection of Guiding Principles for Process Design were identified (Appendix H), as well as a collection of Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (Appendix G).

It became clear that developing guidance on overall process design was far more valuable than suggesting which methodologies might work best in each strategic planning stage. These findings shaped our response to the third research sub-question.

In further analyzing the pre-work data from the first two research sub-questions, a pattern emerged pointing to separate, sequential phases in the overall practitioner-client relationship, which begins with the first meeting and carries on until the strategic plan is put into practice. These phases became the outline of the Template for process design, which we created in response to the third research sub-question. The first three phases relate to pre-work, while the fourth phase encompasses the ABCD strategic planning process. The fifth and final phase is when the strategic plan is put into practice. As seen in the figure, five phases of the practitioner-client relationship, each phase has a focus that creates the conditions necessary for the next sequential phase.

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2 In our research we translated the ABCD strategic planning process into eight generic ‘stages’: pre-work, building shared awareness and understanding, creating shared vision, current reality assessment, brainstorming actions, strategic prioritization, action planning, and evaluation of progress.

3 Pre-work refers to the relationship building, planning and preparation that occur prior to the actual strategic planning engagement.

4 The relationship established between a sustainability practitioner and an organization (the client), which may or may not be defined within a formal contractual agreement.
The five phases of the Template created a pathway through the practitioner-client relationship, beginning in the Exploration phase by exploring the purpose, creating a shared language and establishing a mandate to act. In the Commitment phase, the focus is on developing a core team of people willing to steward that purpose and building the capacity to do so. The core team then designs the engagement process in the Design phase, to carry the purpose forward. The focus of the Engagement phase is guiding the ABCD strategic planning process to create the plan, using a participatory process designed with the purpose and people in mind. In the final phase, Integration, the focus shifts to putting that plan into practice. The focus of each phase carries forward, bringing the core purpose consistently through to action.

Through each phase, aspects of the ABCD strategic planning process are explored on a deeper level, beginning with a high-level assessment of readiness for sustainability planning during the Exploration phase. Subsequent iterations of the ABCD strategic planning process expand awareness of the sustainability challenge during the Commitment and Design phases. It then becomes the primary focus in the Engagement phase. When the strategic plan is put into practice in the Integration phase, those actions generate change which brings with it new information and new questions. The iterative nature of strategic planning for sustainability spirals back, bringing the new questions to the Exploration phase again, in seeking a mandate to continue moving forward, to
continue using participatory processes, and to revisit the purpose. In this manner, clarity and focus for the sustainability initiative is continually sharpened.

These research findings bring new insights to the field of strategic sustainable development in the form of strategic guidance for sustainability practitioners wishing to use a participatory approach with the ABCD strategic planning process. In its final form, *The Weave: Participatory Process Design Guide for Strategic Sustainable Development*, represents the culmination of this research, and includes the Template, suggestions, examples and guiding principles. It is the first prototype of participatory process design guidance to be offered for pilot testing in the field of strategic sustainable development.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

Data from our first two research questions showed that use of these methodologies per strategic planning stage cannot be specifically prescribed. We have made broad suggestions for appropriate use based on patterns identified in the research and the intended design of each methodology.

The first of the eight planning stages for strategic sustainable development, pre-work, proved to be of extreme importance prior to the ABCD strategic planning process. The first three of the five phases in the Template specifically address this vital work. Within pre-work, strategic process design emerged as an element of critical importance. This was evidenced by the Guiding Principles of Process Design, which we synthesized from our data and used to develop the Template in *The Weave*.

We identified clear synergies between the unpredictable realm of sustainability and the dialogue-based methodologies designed for dealing with complex issues. We are confident that the data and rationale put forth in this research provides strong evidence for the appropriate pairing of sustainability content with participatory processes.

We recommend that sustainability practitioners pursue training prior to using these methodologies and that *The Weave* be used in the development of a community of practice, where learning from the field can be shared amongst practitioners to build our collective capacity for working in participatory ways in strategic sustainable development. We heard feedback from practitioners interested in testing and refining *The Weave* who recognize its usefulness for designing processes to address the complex sustainability issues their clients are facing.
Glossary

**ABCD Process**: four-step process that provides a step-wise way of guiding the implementation of the FSSD using backcasting from the four sustainability principles in a real world, organizational context.

**Art of Hosting**: global community of practitioners using participatory processes and planning tools to engage groups in meaningful conversation, deliberate collaboration, and group-supported action around complex topics.

**Authentic Leadership In Action Institute (ALIA)**: nonprofit organization based in Halifax, Canada, offering leadership programs that integrate mindfulness, creative process, dialogue, and intensive skill-building for working in complex and challenging environments.

**Authenticity**: a personal process in which one is consciously reintegrating all the dimensions of self (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual dimensions) while being true, open and honest.

**Backcasting**: A planning method in which planners first build a vision of success in the future, and then steps are planned and taken to work towards that future.

**Practitioner-client relationship**: the relationship established between a sustainability practitioner and an organization (the client), which may or may not be defined within a formal contractual agreement. Throughout this paper, the term will also represent everything that takes place from the first meeting through to putting the strategic plan into practice.

**Collective Intelligence**: a shared ability to learn, understand and apply knowledge that emerges from the collaboration of many individuals. The sum of the group is more intelligent than the contributions of any one individual.

**Collaboration**: the act of more than one individual or a group working with a deep, collective, determination to achieve a shared goal.

**Community of Practice**: a group of people engaged in a process of collective learning that share knowledge and experience about a passion, profession or concern that unites them.
Complexity: a state in which the outcomes are unpredictable due to the vast number of interconnected variables or long time frames required for changes to be seen. Relationships between cause and effect only become apparent in hindsight.

Convergent phases: the ‘breath’ in the 6 Breaths of Design that is the coming together, where alternatives are evaluated, key points are summarized, decisions are made and general conclusions are arrived at.

Core Team: the small team with the passion, willingness and expertise needed to commit to steward the planning process. Ideally this team includes the sustainability champion(s), those with expertise in both sustainability and organizational content, those familiar with the organizational culture and external process experts.

Cynefin framework: a model developed by David Snowden outlining the states a system can be in (simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic) as well as the relationship between cause and effect in each state.

Deep Listening: a receptive state of mind where the goal is to hear beyond the words of the other person and yourself, to the essence of what the words and feelings are pointing to. It is not about struggling to analyze or interpret, nor is it defensive, argumentative, or intrusive. Deep listening occurs when your mind is open, curious and interested, free from interpretations, judgments, conclusions, or assumptions.

Dialogue: A way of conversing focused on shared inquiry, not on opinions or personal agendas. Dialogue is an intentional practice of deep listening, suspending judgment and seeking emergent or new knowledge.

Dialogue-Based Methodology: a structured activity to bring about meaningful conversations to engage groups of people (large or small), centered on a question of importance to the participants. These methodologies are specifically designed for working with complex situations.

Divergent Phase: the ‘breath’ in the 6 Breaths of Design that is the moving apart, where alternatives are generated, open conversations exist, diverse points of view are gathered and predetermination is loosened.
**Emergence:** the means by which complex systems and patterns arise out of informal individual interactions or collaborative processes connected around a common purpose. The system that emerges contains features not previously observed and holds greater power than could ever be predicted by examining the individual parts.

**Engagement:** broadly, ‘engagement’ is a meaningful interaction between a broad range of people, which can include information delivery, involvement, and collaboration in decision-making. For our purposes, 'engagement' is also used to describe the phase of the participatory process that involves key internal and external stakeholders beginning the process of collectively and strategically creating the plan for the organization’s sustainable future.

**Five Level Framework (for Planning in Complex Systems):** a model that provides a structured understanding for analysis, planning and decision-making in complex systems. It consists of five distinct, interrelated levels – Systems, Success, Strategic, Actions, Tools.

**Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD):** A systems-based framework that identifies the ecological and societal conditions necessary for human survival within the finite limits of the biosphere. The FSSD is structured with the Five Level Framework and a key aspect is the strategic use of backcasting from the four sustainability principles.

**Harvest:** The term used by Art of Hosting practitioners for capturing the outcome of the work, making meaning out of it, and reporting results in a meaningful, usable form for the organizational context.

**Holding Space:** A practitioner’s ability and responsibility to create the conditions necessary for a group to feel physically, emotionally, spiritually, and energetically ‘safe’ while they undergo a process of exploration and co-learning.

**Limiting beliefs:** Thoughts and/or stories that limit one’s sense of reality and inhibit exploration of a wider cognitive space than would otherwise be the case.
Masters in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability (MSLS): An international programme focused on the premise that a “whole-system” and trans-disciplinary approach is needed to address the sustainability challenge. MSLS integrates two streams: a framework for strategic sustainable development with organizational learning and leadership.

**Methodology:** for our purposes, methodologies refer to dialogue-based methodologies.

**Participatory Process:** a series of methodologies woven together in sequence that collectively create a process for addressing complex issues. It is assumed that the majority of methodologies in a participatory process are dialogue-based.

**Phase(s):** for the purpose of this thesis, we use the term phase to refer to the different sequential parts of the practitioner-client relationship that appear in the Template for process design (Appendix J).

**Stage(s):** for the purpose of this thesis, we use the term stage to refer to the steps in a generic strategic planning process.

**Strategic Sustainable Development (SSD):** planning and decision making to actively transition the current, globally unsustainable society towards a sustainable society based on first-order sustainability principles.

**Sustainability:** A state in which the socio-ecological system is not systematically undermined by society. The four basic sustainability principles must be met in order to have a sustainable society.

**Sustainability Principles:** In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing...
1. concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust;
2. concentrations of substances produced by society;
3. degradation by physical means;
and in that society...
4. people are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.
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1 Introduction

1.1 Sustainability Challenge

Since the 1970s, scientists have been attempting to direct global attention to the reality of the finite limits of our planet and its resources. Multiple studies have concluded that in the past 50 years alone, in our attempts to meet growing demand for food, fresh water, timber, fiber and fuel, humans have altered the ecosystems of the planet faster and more drastically than in any other time in human history (MEA 2005; Bernstein et al. 2007; Crompton 2008; Hartman et al. 1999).

In one 30-year longitudinal study, Meadows and her colleagues have shown concrete evidence that indeed, society has reached ecological overshoot\(^5\) (Meadows et al. 1992). Her insights nearly 20 years ago still remain relevant today (Meadows et al. 2004; Rees 2008, 293-302).

The transition to a sustainable society requires a careful balance between long-term and short-term goals and an emphasis on sufficiency, equity, and quality of life rather than on quantity of output. It requires more than productivity and more than technology; it also requires maturity, compassion, and wisdom. (Meadows et al. 1992, 10)

Multiple variables contribute to the exponentially accelerating trends in ecosystem change, making prediction of future realities nearly impossible (Walker and Steffen 1997; MEA 2005). This creates a state that is by definition complex, making traditional approaches to planning, such as forecasting from the trends of the past, ineffective or even dangerous (Snowden and Boone 2007). From the mounting evidence of continued degradation of our ecosystems (Grubb 2004; Houghton 1997; Oreskes 2004), it is clear that the complex and pressing nature of the sustainability challenge will require both behavioural and organizational change (Reid et al. 2005; Holmberg and Karlsson 1992).

\(^5\) To overshoot means to go too far, to grow so large so quickly that limits are exceeded (Meadows et al. 1992).
1.1.1 Complexity - Cynefin Framework

An understanding of the nature of complexity can help guide selection of appropriate approaches for working with the complexity of the sustainability challenge. The Cynefin framework, Figure 1.1, outlines the states a system can be in: simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic (Kurtz and Snowden 2003). Developed by David Snowden, this model helps to define these different characteristics and offers guidance for decision makers when selecting the best approach to finding solutions.

![Complexity - Cynefin Framework](image)

Figure 1.1. Cynefin Framework describes the relationship between cause and effect in contexts that are simple, complicated, complex and chaotic. (adapted from Snowden and Boone 2007)

Problems can be categorized by identifying the relationship between cause and effect. For a simple problem, the relationship between cause and effect is obvious and predictable. For a complicated problem this relationship is less obvious, requiring expert knowledge or analysis. However, both these states “assume an ordered universe… where the right answers can be determined based on the facts” (Snowden and Boone 2007, 4).

In complex problems however, such as the sustainability challenge, the relationship between cause and effect only becomes apparent in hindsight. Due to the vast number of interconnected variables or long time frames required for changes to be seen, the concept of ‘best practices’ does not apply because no expert has the answer. As explained by Snowden and Boone, “because outcomes are unpredictable in a complex context, leaders need to focus on creating an environment from which good things can emerge, rather than trying to bring about predetermined results and possibly missing opportunities that arise unexpectedly” (Snowden and Boone 2007, 6). In a
chaotic context, cause and effect relationships are impossible to determine, continuously changing with no understandable patterns.

Given that the sustainability challenge exists in the complex context, solutions that suit problems of a simple, complicated or chaotic nature do not suffice. It is paramount that the approaches taken are designed for complex situations. Although there are numerous responses to the sustainability challenge, most interpretations of sustainability focus on detailed and often fragmented, reductionist issues without appropriate consideration given to the high level of complexity of the whole system perspective (Mebratu 1998).

1.2 FSSD

Pioneered in 1989 by Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt, in collaboration with a wide cross-section of international scientists, a Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) was specifically designed to address the complexities of the sustainability challenge (Holmberg et al. 1994) and has been continually tested and refined since its introduction. The FSSD is a systems-based framework that identifies the ecological and societal conditions necessary for human survival within the finite limits of the biosphere.

Four basic principles frame the conditions for achieving sustainability within the limits of our biosphere (Holmberg 1995; Broman et al. 2000; Ny et al. 2006):

In a sustainable society, nature is not subject to systematically increasing:

I. Concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust;
II. Concentrations of substances produced by society;
III. Degradation by physical means;
and, in that society . . .
IV. People are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.

---

6 The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development is also known as The Natural Step Framework.
These principles bring the definition of sustainability down to a fundamental level, where time and social change do not affect their integrity. A key aspect of the FSSD is the strategic use of backcasting (see Robinson 1990 and Dreborg 1996) from the four sustainability principles (Robèrt 1994; Holmberg 1998; Holmberg and Robèrt 2000; Broman et al. 2000). Backcasting from an envisioned sustainable future through the lens of the sustainability principles (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000) is concerned with “how desirable futures can be attained” (Robinson 1990). Forecasting, on the other hand, attempts to predict what will happen in the future based on past trends, actions and planning that are generally part of the problem (Holmberg and Robèrt 2000; Robèrt 2002; Dreborg 1996). Backcasting from a successful outcome framed by the four sustainability principles, it is possible to strategically determine a step-wise path to achieve success.

The FSSD is structured with the Five Level Framework, which delineates five categorical levels. The five levels include the boundary conditions of the system in which the planning occurs, the overall goal that defines success, the guidelines that are used to ensure a strategic approach, the actions chosen to move towards success and tools that support planning and implementation.

The FSSD embraces a four-step strategic planning process designed to help organizations\(^7\) plan from a vision of full sustainability. This ‘ABCD’ strategic planning process begins with building shared awareness and understanding of the science and global issues around sustainability. With this understanding, a shared vision of success that complies with the four sustainability principles is created. This process is the ‘A step’. In the B step, a current reality analysis is created to highlight areas where the organization is and is not aligned with the vision of success. Considering the gap between the vision of sustainability and the current reality, a list of compelling actions is generated during the C step that could address these issues. Finally, in the D step, a strategic prioritization process initiates the development of the strategic plan for moving the organization in the direction of the sustainable vision (Ny et al. 2006). As in all strategic planning, there are preparatory steps with the organization prior to this ABCD strategic planning process, as well as evaluation and revision of the strategic plan in an ongoing, iterative process. This research uses the four sustainability principles to define sustainability and the FSSD as a structured approach to planning and decision-making.

\(^7\) An organization is any group of people with a shared purpose, including, but not limited to, businesses, governments and communities.
1.2.1 Sustainability Practitioners

Sustainability practitioners using the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) with organizations across the world have a daunting challenge in dealing with the complexities of sustainability. Their calling is to shed light on the scientifically relevant data pointing to the decline in global natural resources and ecosystems, the increasing societal barriers to people meeting their basic human needs, and the socio-political-economic paradigms in which these issues have arisen. In addition, these practitioners must facilitate group processes for creating new visions and innovative solutions, while helping to translate ideas into strategic actions.

These distinctly different roles rely on different skill sets — scientific knowledge and expertise in the realm of sustainability planning, and the ability to host the co-creative group processes necessary for actual systemic change. “There is an intimate linkage between intellectual content and structure on one hand, and process and engagement on the other” (Robèrt 2011). This linkage between content and processes for engagement is a crucial focus for sustainability practitioners. We will argue that skilled hosting of dialogue around these challenges is critical for building the relationships and trust which enable organizations to achieve successful outcomes and ultimately, lasting change toward sustainability.

To clearly define the audience for this research, we have selected to focus on sustainability practitioners associated with two organizations: The Natural Step, and graduates of the Master’s in Strategic Leadership toward Sustainability programme at Blekinge Institute of Technology (BTH) in Karlskrona, Sweden. The Natural Step (TNS) is an international non-profit organization committed to researching the science of sustainability and linking it to real world applications using the FSSD (The Natural Step 2011). Blekinge Institute of Technology (BTH) houses a graduate degree programme teaching the FSSD in depth – the Master’s in Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability (MSLS). Graduates emerge from the MSLS programme as sustainability practitioners, and work in a wide variety of capacities globally.

8 Throughout this report, the term sustainability practitioner refers to practitioners using the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD).
1.2.2 Need for Process Tools

In a conversation with TNS Senior Advisor Richard Blume, he pointed out that, “there has never really been systematic guidance on best practice techniques to apply the framework [FSSD]” (Blume 2011). Similar sentiments were shared by TNS offices in Canada and the United States (Baxter 2011; Speight 2010).

We’re really trying to understand what we need to be doing in addition to teaching people how to use the framework [FSSD] to create transformative change that lasts. The great sophistication of the framework [FSSD] comes in application – how do we do that in a way that is relevant, accessible, and flexible? What would the ideal engagement look like? (Baxter 2011)

The TNS leaders and advisors we spoke with in our preliminary research expressed strong interest in and support for more research into the development of a shared resource for facilitating an engagement around the FSSD (Blume 2011; Baxter 2011; Speight 2010).

There are numerous methods and tools available to aid organizational engagement (Rees 2005; Aslin and Brown 2004; Holman et al. 2009; Snowden and Boone 2007). From the societal, human level, solving complex issues necessitates an engaging, participatory approach for planning that is both strategic and systems-focused (Haudan and MacLean 2001; Kahane 2004). An organizational development specialist from Harvard explains,

...one of the most effective ways of engaging and motivating people to change their mindset and behavior is to engage them in well coordinated peer-to-peer programs that foster social interaction and group-driven learning amongst populations of individuals that have common daily functions and experiences. (Sharp 2005)

Our research interest is on methods or tools suited for accomplishing this level of engagement, with similar emphasis on complexity and strategy, which could work synergistically with the FSSD.

1.3 Dialogue-Based Methodologies

When working with complex situations, many suggest using dialogue, which incorporates principles of deep listening, suspending judgment and seeking emergent knowledge (Bojer et al. 2006; Brown et al. 1999; Møller 2010; Senge 1990). Edgar Schein, a former MIT Sloan School of Management professor, suggests that any model of organizational
transformation should have dialogue as a central element (Schein 1993). Dialogue can be defined from its root as ‘meaning flowing through’. It is a process that allows groups to build “a shared set of meanings that make much higher levels of mutual understanding and creative thinking possible” (Schein 1993, 34).

Dialogue differs from most conversations, which use discussion or debate. The root of the word ‘discussion’, in contrast with the meaning of dialogue, means ‘to break apart’. The point is to prevail over others with ideas and opinions one thinks are more knowledgeable or right. Ideas and opinions are presented and countered until someone ‘wins’. This widespread form of communication seems best applied to complicated problems that require facts and knowledge to determine the right answer, not to complex challenges that require emergent knowledge and ideas to ‘surface’ (Isaacs 2001).

Dialogue is collaborative, building a learning relationship between people discovering new and shared ideas. “[People] do not convince each other, but build a common experience base that allows [them] to learn collectively” (Schein 1993, 34). This common inquiry around a topic leads to emergent knowledge or ideas from which everyone benefits (Schein 1993). William Isaacs, Senior Lecturer at MIT, explains that in addition to being a philosophical concept, dialogue is an actionable skill available to individuals and teams (Isaacs 2001). Isaacs characterizes the value of dialogue this way: “I believe we are living in an age when combining rigorous reflection about and passionate practice of dialogue could greatly serve the many needs human beings face, personally and in their institutions” (Isaacs 2001, 3).

Dialogue-based methodologies are designed to bring about meaningful conversations to engage groups of people (large or small). These methodologies are specifically designed for working with complex situations in service of finding the best solutions for a common purpose (Holman et al. 2009; Brown et al. 1999; Møller 2011). While there is a growing body of literature, only a small fraction has been peer-reviewed and academic papers tend to focus on case studies of application of these methodologies (Hallcom 2007). With initial publishing on these topics beginning in the early 1990s, their adoption and use appear to have grown rapidly in the past decade.
1.3.1 Art of Hosting

The Art of Hosting is a global network and ‘community of practice’ of trained process facilitators working with dialogue-based methodologies in many contexts worldwide. Their focus is on designing and guiding (or ‘hosting’) group engagements around complex topics needing decisive action for change (Nissén 2011A). With recognition that solving complex issues requires approaching strategic planning from a holistic worldview (Ballard 2005; Bradbury 2001; Carley and Christie 2000; Dunphy et al. 2003; Jackson and Michaelis 2003), the network has assembled a collection of dialogue-based methodologies designed for this. They include Appreciative Inquiry, Open Space Technology, World Café, Theory U, The Circle and Pro Action Café (see Appendix A for descriptions). These methodologies can create a safe space that supports the questioning of assumptions and worldviews, builds deeper understanding, generates new ideas and supports systems-based, holistic views (Bojer et al. 2006; Brown et al. 1999).

The dialogue-based methodologies embraced by the Art of Hosting community are being utilized in senior governing bodies – for example, in the Obama administration to find solutions for homelessness (Møller 2011; Frieze and Wheatley n.d.) and the European Commission to transform the communications and operating system (Kleinschmager 2011; Møller 2011). On a more regional level, Columbus, Ohio appears to be an example of how the application of these methodologies can facilitate a dramatic shift in thinking. The methodologies were used in the entire medical community, laying the foundation for a transformation towards a health care system based on well being (Frieze and Wheatley n.d.; Hallcom 2007). It appears they are now spreading to other sectors of the community, including Ohio State University and the Mid-Ohio Food Bank (Frieze and Wheatley n.d.).

Nissén and others report that a number of Art of Hosting practitioners with extensive experience using these methodologies recognized a pattern emerging in their long-term initiatives. They named this evolving pattern the ‘6 Breaths of Process Architecture’ and it is now used as a map to guide entire engagements (Nissén 2011B; Møller 2011; Cass 2011, Corrigan 2011). This pattern is described by using the metaphor of breathing in three parts: breathing in (lungs expanding or diverging), holding, and breathing out (lungs contracting or converging). This pattern of divergence-emergence-convergence is the foundation of designing participatory processes (see Appendix B).
The Art of Hosting has also embraced the Chaordic Stepping Stones of Design (CSS) as a planning tool to deepen understanding when working through a strategic planning process with an organization to redefine their direction. A detailed outline of both ‘6 Breaths’ and Chaordic Stepping Stones can be seen in Appendix B. As we began our research, it was our feeling that both the design tools and the dialogue-based methodologies being stewarded by the Art of Hosting network held exciting potential for use with the FSSD.

1.4 Our Research

Our research is focused on how dialogue-based methodologies can be integrated with the strategic planning process for sustainable development. Our hypothesis was that synergies exist between the methodologies used within the Art of Hosting network and the ABCD strategic planning process that should be explored and incorporated into strategic sustainable development approaches. We are interested in developing strategic guidance around process design for sustainability practitioners to supplement the collective ‘toolbox’.

1.4.1 Research Questions

To begin exploring the value of dialogue-based methodologies in applications of strategic planning for sustainable development, we posed the following question:

How can dialogue-based methodologies be effectively integrated with planning for strategic sustainable development?

In order to answer this question, we posed three sub-questions:

1. How are sustainability practitioners using dialogue-based methodologies in planning for strategic sustainable development?

2. How are Art of Hosting practitioners using dialogue-based methodologies in strategic planning in other contexts?

3. What guidance can be offered for integration of dialogue-based methodologies with planning for strategic sustainable development?
1.4.2 Scope and Limitations

Our research is narrowly focused on how a specific set of dialogue-based methodologies embraced by the Art of Hosting network can be integrated with planning for strategic sustainable development. This includes the following methodologies: Appreciative Inquiry, Open Space Technology, World Café, Theory U, The Circle and Pro Action Café (see Appendix A for descriptions). We recognize that there are other methods for engaging groups in change processes that may also be effective. This set was specifically selected as appropriate for the scope of this research.

We recognize that the use of any methodology does not, in itself, promise successful outcomes. Evidence also points to the inner state and level of practice of the practitioner as a key in the effectiveness of dialogue-based methodologies (Bushe 2010; Senge 1990; Kahane 2004; Scharmer 2007). Our work will consider the aspect of ‘engagement through dialogue’, but will not address other related components including the practitioner’s level of facilitation skill or training, attunement with self and others, or personal preparation.
2 Methods

Our primary source for collecting data was through surveys, interviews and expert feedback from two key audiences:
1. Sustainability practitioners using the FSSD
2. Art of Hosting practitioners

Figure 2.1 provides an overview of our research methods, summarizing the linkage between the two audiences under study and the three research sub-questions. The methods for each research sub-question are further discussed in Sections 2.1 to 2.3.

Our research design process was iterative. As we progressed through our research, our expectations of what we would find shifted. With Maxwell’s Model for Qualitative Research Design as guidance, we recognized that continual reassessment and interplay between goals, research questions, methods and validity is expected (Maxwell 2005). We modified the parts of our research that required deeper understanding and were not bound by our initial approach and scope. The Craft of Research was used to assist with organizing our research and to assure our arguments were solidly grounded in claim, reason and evidence (Booth et al. 2008).

We divided the ABCD strategic planning process into eight generic stages so that the same language could be used with both audiences in our study. The stages are:
- Pre-work
- Building Shared Awareness and Understanding
- Creating a Shared Vision
- Current Reality Assessment
- Brainstorming Actions
• Strategic Prioritization
• Action Planning
• Evaluating Progress

These stages and language were tested with both audiences during our research to ensure they provided an accurate reflection of the strategic planning process. As this was a qualitative research study, we did not collect statistically significant numerical data.

2.1 Research Sub-Question 1

The following methods were used to answer the first research sub-question: How are sustainability practitioners using dialogue-based methodologies in planning for strategic sustainable development?

2.1.1 Sustainability Practitioner Survey

Sustainability practitioners\(^9\) were surveyed to collect cursory data on familiarity and use of the dialogue-based methodologies included in our study (see Appendix B for descriptions). The survey was created online at www.surveymonkey.com and tested with nine colleagues, incorporating their feedback prior to distribution (refer to Appendix C to view final survey questions).

The survey was sent to the MSLS Alumni network email list and all The Natural Step offices, staff and advisors. It was posted on the online community platforms of TNS-Canada and TNS-US, and posted on TNS-Canada’s blog, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn sites. The survey was open for 15 days, from March 23 through April 6, 2011. There were 36 respondents to this survey.

2.1.2 Sustainability Practitioner Interviews

Interviews were conducted to explore in depth the use of dialogue-based methodologies in planning for strategic sustainable development. We targeted

\(^{9}\) Sustainability practitioners using the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development.
practitioners with a positive reputation amongst colleagues and at least five years experience using the FSSD full time in organizational contexts. Interviewees were identified during preliminary interviews with senior leadership of TNS-Canada, TNS-US, TNS-International and through exposure to sustainability practitioners and speakers during the MSLS programme.

Interviews were between 1 and 1½ hours long and conducted over Skype or telephone. They were semi-standardized, guided by prepared questions asked in a systematic order. Interviewees were asked which dialogue-based methodologies they used in each strategic planning stage, and how they used them, including any modifications and subtleties in application (refer to Appendix D for our guiding interview questions). While our interviews followed this general structure, as encouraged by Berg, we explored more deeply into areas of intersection between our topic and the interviewees’ experience (Berg 2001, 70). This led to exploring specific stages and methodologies in more depth.

As suggested by recommendations for qualitative data collection in both Maxwell, and Coffey and Atkinson, we analyzed interviews as they were conducted so we could bring increasing focus to later interviews on areas where we still required the most input (Maxwell 2005; Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Due to time constraints, these preliminary analyses were not complete, so a full analysis of each interview was completed once the majority of interviews were finished. Our analysis focused on frequency of methodology use, modifications made by practitioners, common pitfalls, and advice for working with dialogue-based methodologies.

Each interview was assigned a primary and secondary reviewer. The primary reviewer was responsible for categorizing the responses into the appropriate strategic planning stage, while the secondary reviewer compared the completed results categorization with their notes and/or recording.

In total, we interviewed nine practitioners, including TNS senior level advisors in Canada, Sweden, United Kingdom, Switzerland and Italy (refer to Appendix E to view our list of interviewees). Interviews were conducted between March 30 and April 26, 2011.
2.2 Research Sub-Question 2

The following methods were used to answer the second research sub-question: How are Art of Hosting practitioners using dialogue-based methodologies in strategic planning in other contexts?

2.2.1 Art of Hosting Survey

Art of Hosting (AoH) practitioners were surveyed to collect cursory data on how they use the dialogue-based methodologies included in our study. As with the survey for sustainability practitioners, this survey was created online at www.surveymonkey.com and tested with nine colleagues prior to distribution (Refer to Appendix C to view survey questions).

The survey was sent to the email list of the AoH community, as well as posted on the online AoH global community platform. It was also made available on the online global community platform of the Authentic Leadership In Action Institute (ALIA), a partner organization of practitioners in the field of participatory leadership, and emailed directly to eight experienced practitioners that we met at the ALIA Europe conference in March 2011. The survey was open for 15 days, from March 23 through April 6, 2011. There were 41 respondents to this survey.

2.2.2 Art of Hosting Interviews

Interviews were conducted to explore in depth, the use of dialogue-based methodologies in a variety of contexts, including strategic planning applications. Interviewees were identified through the Art of Hosting and Authentic Leadership in Action networks, targeting those working full time with these methodologies for at least five years and positive reputations amongst their peers.

Interviews were between 1 and 1½ hours long and conducted over Skype or telephone. They were semi-standardized, guided by prepared questions asked in a systematic order. Interviewees were asked which dialogue-based methodologies they used in each strategic planning stage, and how they used them, including any modifications and subtleties in application (refer to Appendix D for our guiding interview questions). While our interviews followed this general structure, as encouraged by Berg, we explored more
deeply into areas of intersection between our topic and the interviewees experience (Berg 2001, 70). This led to exploring specific stages and methodologies in more depth.

In total, we interviewed eight practitioners, including the three practitioners that founded the Art of Hosting network (Refer to Appendix E to view the list of interviewees). Interviewees were from Belgium, Canada, Denmark and the United States. Interviews were conducted between March 27 and April 25, 2011. As with the sustainability practitioner interviews, a primary and secondary reviewer was assigned to categorize responses from each interview per relevant strategic planning stage. Our analysis was based on similar categories as the sustainability practitioner interviews.

2.3 Research Sub-Question 3

The following methods were used to answer the third research sub-question: What guidance can be offered for integration of dialogue-based methodologies with planning for strategic sustainable development?

2.3.1 Prototype Development

When developing guidance for how dialogue-based methodologies can best be integrated with planning for strategic sustainable development, we wanted to create something useful for practitioners. Based on our preliminary analysis of the results from research sub-question 1 and 2, we saw common themes emerging. These were written up as a possible outline for the prototype.

Through an initial call on the TNS network and throughout the survey and interview process, we identified an advisory panel with formal training in both the FSSD and the Art of Hosting. This group of five shared our passion for combining these two approaches. The advisory panel was convened for a two hour Skype call on April 8, 2011 to invite feedback on our prototype outline and emerging themes (refer to Appendix E for Advisory Panel participants). Feedback was requested on whether we were heading in the right direction, what we were missing and what would be most valuable for practitioners. Advisory panel feedback was considered in the creation of the draft prototype.
2.3.2 Prototype Refinement

An opportunity to provide written or verbal feedback on the draft prototype was offered to all interviewees, survey respondents (if interest was expressed), and additional identified experts (refer to Appendix E for draft prototype reviewers). Reviewers were given one week to provide responses, with all responses received by May 2, 2011. Reviewers were asked to specifically comment on the clarity of presentation, logic and flow, and any missing pieces, gaps in logic, or parts that required additional emphasis. This feedback was used to refine the prototype’s functionality and practicality in the context of sustainability and the FSSD into Prototype Version 1, the final outcome of this research.

2.4 Validity

We recognize the importance of explicitly addressing validity. At each stage of our research we have questioned how our approach, assumptions, results and conclusions might be wrong, exploring plausible alternatives to better rule out threats of inaccuracy. Because our thesis group consists of three independent individuals, multiple perspectives are offered and biases are intentionally checked.

We attempted to ensure the validity of our research design by distributing surveys widely within the two audiences under study, in order to incorporate perspectives from the broader audience and identify further interviewees. The interviews followed the survey, and explored our research area in greater depth. During the interviews, we also checked the validity of the eight generic strategic planning stages with both audiences to ensure we were adequately capturing the process they use when working with organizations.

Our survey respondents are a self-selected sample from the entire practitioner community, as those that chose to respond are presumably the ones with interest in this topic. We are aware of this bias, and are therefore careful not to assume that our results are reflective of the larger group. The surveys were not simply developed to measure frequency of methodology use; each survey encouraged additional comments for capturing details and modifications to the methodologies in use.
Interviewees were selected based on expressed interest and experience. We recognize that our interview lists include a narrow group of people within each audience and that in many cases interviewees know and even work alongside each other. To minimize the risk of collecting data from biased sources, we interviewed each person independently so they would only speak to their own experiences and opinions.

Purposefully selecting experienced practitioners as interviewees in this study is valid given our goals of learning from the best of what is currently happening in the field. Selecting audiences is appropriate for either purposefully selecting representative samples in small sample sizes, or when an experienced subset of a larger group is desired (Patton 1990; Maxwell 2005).

With regards to our interpretations of what was being said, all interviews were recorded (with permission) and one member of our thesis team led each interview, while the other two members took notes independently. Validity was assured through independent work and notes, and checked for accuracy against the recordings. In addition, at least two people independently categorized the responses per strategic planning stage for each interview.

Given the relatively short time duration of this project, we did not have an opportunity to field test our prototype within an organizational context. We acknowledge this limitation and have minimized it to the extent possible by seeking feedback and refinement on our prototype from active and experienced practitioners in the field. As these practitioners were for the most part from the target audience of our prototype, they were able to provide feedback from the perspective of what is most useful to them in their work with organizations.
3 Results

3.1 Sustainability Practitioners

This section reports results collected through surveys and interviews in response to the first sub-research question: How are sustainability practitioners using dialogue-based methodologies in planning for strategic sustainable development?

3.1.1 Sustainability Practitioner Survey

Respondents were asked to indicate which methodologies, of the six under study (Appendix A), they have used and found to be beneficial in achieving intended outcomes for each identified stage of the ABCD strategic planning process, written in generic language. The stages were as follows: Pre-work, Building Shared Awareness and Understanding, Creating a Shared Vision, Current Reality Assessment, Brainstorming Actions, Strategic Prioritization, Action Planning, and Evaluating Progress. Respondents were invited to select multiple methodologies for each stage. A summary of respondents’ answers is shown in Appendix F.

World Café (WC) was the most commonly cited methodology for pre-work, building shared awareness and understanding, creating a shared vision, and current reality assessment. WC also figured prominently in the brainstorming actions stage. Open Space Technology (OST) was the most commonly cited methodology in the brainstorming actions stage and for prioritization and action planning. Appreciative Inquiry was cited most often in the first three stages, pre-work, building shared awareness, and creating a shared vision. Few respondents cited using The Circle, Theory U, or Pro Action Café.

Modifications to several of these methodologies were mentioned in the comments, citing that use depended on the specific purpose, the context, the group, the culture of the organization and time / location constraints. One respondent commented that Theory U is used as a general framework for thinking about the overall engagement process, while several others commented that an intentional focus on questions, specifically using concepts of Appreciative Inquiry, helps shape the engagement.
Additionally, several respondents shared that their role as a sustainability expert (expected to bring sustainability content to the client) or consultant (expected to deliver recommendations and outcome) was necessary or took precedence over their role as dialogue facilitator or process host.

### 3.1.2 Sustainability Practitioner Interviews

Interview results from sustainability practitioners were captured into the eight generic stages of the strategic planning process. Interviewees were asked to explain in depth how they used the six identified methodologies in each strategic planning stage, including any modifications and any subtleties in application. Results are reported per stage below. Relevant results from the preliminary interviews with five senior level advisors and staff from TNS offices in Canada, Sweden and the U.S. are included in this section as well. Interviewees are listed in Appendix E. Citations in the following text include only the names of the respondents, as all were interviewed in 2011. Full citations are available in the reference section.

**Pre-Work.** The quantity of comments related to pre-work, which precedes the ‘A-step’ of the ABCD strategic planning process, far outweighed the other seven strategic planning stages. While our interview questions specifically focused on how dialogue-based methodologies were used in each stage of strategic planning, the answers particularly for this pre-work stage primarily focused on a more fundamental, principle level. We find this data particularly relevant and therefore report it here in the results. The key findings from pre-work are included below, and are categorized into three areas: purpose, people and process. Results per stage of the actual ABCD strategic planning process follow this section.

I. Purpose

Most practitioners reported that dialogue about ‘need and purpose’ should precede discussion about the FSSD and the sustainability challenge. (Waldron; Baxter; Ezechiel; Nyoni; Worosz; Hunt; Cook; Brooks; Leung; Stenborg). In the words of one practitioner:

This is about having the opportunity for people to make a heart connection - to connect personally to why this is important. There needs to be a strong ‘why’ for people to truly engage and commit to the process in a meaningful way. (Worosz 2011)
Some practitioners clarified that building a shared, meaningful purpose is foundational to any invitation to change (Waldron; Nyoni; Robèrt). In addition, getting a mandate for focusing on sustainability from the executive level was cited as an important consideration during pre-work, as well as building buy-in within the organization (Brooks; Leung; Stenborg). Waldron explains it this way:

To engage people in a major change movement like sustainability, we must create a shared and personally meaningful purpose that begins to illustrate a ‘creative tension’ between what is, and what could be. This is a foundational consideration for the invitation to change. (Waldron 2011)

II. People

Most practitioners stated that trust, respect, and credibility must be generated first (Waldron; Baxter; Ezechieli; Nyoni; Worosz; Hunt; Cook; Brooks; Leung; Stenborg). It was suggested to begin from where the organization is, with both sustainability and how they work together, and to understand their context, language, logic and culture (Leung; Waldron; Hunt; Stenborg; Baxter; Nyoni; Robèrt; Brooks; Cook). Regarding relationship building, Hunt suggested trying to engage people on an emotional level, using role-play to help create empathy for seeing different perspectives from “other people’s shoes” (Hunt 2011). Waldron points strongly to the value of relationships here:

This is something I learned in Whistler [BC Canada], [that] going through the process of writing a strategic plan is really just an exercise to bring people together to common understanding and build relationships between those people that prepared the plan – and that’s as good as the plan is. You can write the perfect plan in isolation - a genius in a corner can write it – but if no one ever reads it, what good is it? Even if it gets adopted and becomes the law of the land, the people may or may not embrace it. So in my experience, it’s all about the planning process you invite people into and you create a common sense of what is, what should be and how you might collectively move in that direction. So the strategic plan is important, but it’s not even the main thing. (Waldron 2011)

Dialogue was reported as foundational for learning together, building trust and shared understanding (Waldron; Leung; Cook; Spinella; Nyoni). Practitioners who reported using dialogue-based methodologies regularly said that exposure to a variety of methodologies is
fundamental, and they placed a strong emphasis on practice: modeling the behavior, modeling dialogue, and using the methods in daily life (Waldron; Ezechieli; Nyoni; Brooks; Worosz). “Whatever methodology is used, ‘holding space’ is the key. The practitioner’s job is to hold space for meaningful conversations, so these are not just intellectual exercises” (Nyoni 2011).

III. Process
As every engagement is unique, practitioners point out that the process design must change with the context (Brooks; Waldron; Leung; Stenborg; Cook). Leung explains that when deciding to use participatory methodologies, considerations include the size of the group, desire for participation, intended outcome and output, and when buy-in is desired (Leung).

Most practitioners expressed the importance of asking the right questions at each stage of the ABCD strategic planning process. It was commonly reported that the right questions produce answers that serve the purpose, while the entire process can be lost using the wrong questions (Brooks; Leung; Nyoni; Stenborg; Hunt; Cook; Ezechieli; Waldron). In the words of one practitioner, “It’s really the questions that people stay up around the fire at night to talk about. It’s not usually the answers, it’s the questions and the stories” (Brooks 2011).

Two practitioners expressed the importance of producing an output – the key information for decision making later on (Stenborg; Brooks). One practitioner expressed the importance of ensuring that everything that is delivered in a workshop has a receiver, someone to take responsibility for it (Stenborg). Five practitioners expressed concerns regarding a lack of tangible outcomes when using these methodologies (Leung; Spinella; Brooks; Hunt; Stenborg).

There were a few comments specific to methodology preferences in pre-work. A few practitioners discussed using Theory U as an overarching framework for process design, more as an internal map for designing steps in a change process (Worosz; Nyoni; Ezechieli; Leung). Two practitioners reported drawing from Appreciative Inquiry to frame questions around the sustainability narrative of the organization (Brooks; Leung).
In the next section, results are reported per stage and refer to the generic stage descriptions used in this study, which are based on the ABCD strategic planning process.

**Building Shared Awareness and Understanding.** Examples of use of dialogue-based methodologies were common for this stage of the strategic planning process. World Café was reported as useful for building relationships, sharing different interpretations of sustainability, building common language and discussing key challenges related to the sustainability principles (Leung; Brooks; Stenborg; Waldron). Brooks reported that Appreciative Inquiry provides good framing for this stage. Theory U deep dialogue interviews were referenced as a good tool for interviewing stakeholders (Leung; Brooks; Nyoni). The value of these interviews is explained this way: “It’s best if they hear [encouragement to act] from their stakeholders – it is a much more powerful message coming directly from their competitors, partners and value chain members” (Brooks 2011).

**Creating a Shared Vision.** Sustainability practitioners consistently reported the FSSD technique of ‘backcasting’ as key to creating a shared vision (Cook; Ezechieli; Brooks; Stenborg; Leung; Waldron). Three practitioners have used World Café for visioning (Waldron; Brooks; Leung).

**Current Reality Assessment.** Fewer reflections were recorded for current reality assessment. Two practitioners reported that using the Appreciative Inquiry perspective to frame various stages (visioning, current reality baseline, etc.), helps people to envision success. They mentioned the importance of shifting perspectives from issues and scarcity, to focusing positively on what can be created and built, which is more generative and engaging (Worosz; Nyoni). Reflecting back what the organization has already done well, using the AI approach, was emphasized for this stage (Stenborg). Two practitioners have found World Café to be useful for looking at assets and challenges (Leung; Brooks).

**Brainstorming Actions.** Open Space Technology was suggested as good for idea generation and action planning (Leung; Brooks). World Café was reported as useful, using a more generic question: What could we do around this to make progress toward our strategic goals? (Brooks). It was also reported useful for deciding what action ideas are ready for moving forward

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10 See Appendix A for further information on Theory U.
(Leung). Nyoni suggested an empathy approach related to Theory U of having people switch functions and asking them to look at the list of ideas generated by another department, to see their perspective from an empathetic viewpoint and give input (Nyoni).

Strategic Prioritization. Of the methodologies under study, Open Space Technology (OST) was the only one reported as being used for strategic prioritization (Leung; Brooks). The following story describes how OST was used by TNS Canada practitioners at this stage:

We ran an Open Space where we were looking for quick, early moves so we needed specific information - who is the lead, what steps will be taken, who’s on the team, what resources are needed, timeline, under whose purview will this ultimately sit? We provided a template with the project title, description of the project and on the back side we asked them to scrutinize the initiatives through the lens of the three strategic prioritization questions (of the FSSD). The information was useful, easy to transcribe, and helpful. All that was fed back to the sustainability champions and they began to create a company-wide timeline. We used a modified Open Space and got the needed output. It was an absolutely fantastic session. (Brooks 2011)

Action Planning. With exception of the Open Space Technology example from TNS Canada practitioners in strategic prioritization above, there were no comments specifically related to using dialogue-based methodologies in action planning.

Evaluating Progress. The only practitioner citing use of dialogue-based methodologies in this stage was Brooks, who reported World Café as useful.

3.2 Art of Hosting Practitioners

This section reports results collected through surveys and interviews in response to the second research sub-question: How are Art of Hosting practitioners using dialogue-based methodologies in strategic planning in other contexts?
3.2.1 Art of Hosting Practitioner Survey

Respondents were asked to indicate which methodologies, of the six under study, they have used and found to be beneficial in achieving intended outcomes for each generic stage of the strategic planning process. They were invited to select multiple methodologies for each stage and open-ended comments were also encouraged. A summary of respondents’ answers is displayed in Appendix F.

In the building awareness, shared vision, current reality, idea generation, and evaluating progress stages, World Café was reported as the most commonly used methodology. During the prioritization and action planning stages, Open Space Technology (OST) was the most commonly cited methodology. For the pre-work stage, The Circle and Appreciative Inquiry were indicated as the most commonly used methodologies.

In the comments, Appreciative Inquiry was cited as a framework for guiding dialogue and creating questions throughout the entire process. Theory U was mentioned multiple times as being used as a mental framework for thinking through the design of a strategic planning process as opposed to a methodology.

3.2.2 Art of Hosting Practitioner Interviews

Interview results from Art of Hosting practitioners were captured into nine categories including the eight generic stages of the strategic planning process and one additional category to report cautions on use of participatory processes. Interviewees were asked to explain in depth how they used the six identified methodologies in each strategic planning stage, including any modifications and any subtleties in application. Interviewees are listed in Appendix E. Citations include only the names of the respondents, as all were interviewed in 2011. Full citations are available in the reference section.

Pre-Work. Pre-work was reported as the most critical element in any strategic planning engagement. More than half of the information gathered in these interviews focused on various aspects of pre-work. While our research question was specifically about how dialogue-based methodologies were used in each stage of strategic planning, the answers particularly for this pre-work stage focused on a more fundamental, principle level. We find this data particularly relevant and therefore report it here in the results. The key findings from pre-work are included below, and are categorized into three
areas: purpose, people and process. Results per stage of the actual ABCD strategic planning process follow this section.

I. Purpose
Møller states that purpose is the invisible leader. Others add that bringing the core team into focus on the purpose helps them stay aligned with the basic need they are trying to serve (Woolf; Cass; Nissén; Møller; Corrigan). Cass explains the necessity of purpose, “change brings pain, so there needs to be purpose” (Cass 2011). The majority of practitioners stressed that there must be a mandate from the senior executive level that includes a commitment to act on the strategic plan, as well as for using a participatory approach. They recommend clarifying the boundary conditions for the engagement, being transparent about how to work together in participatory ways and being clear on expectations for inclusiveness and engagement (Nissén; Møller; Kleinschmager; Weisel; Cass).

II. People
The primary work in the early stages, as emphasized by the majority of practitioners, is building relationships based on trust and transparency. They assert that this happens through conversations, which evoke not only the minds but also the hearts of team members (Nissén; Møller; Nielsen; Woolf; Cass; Corrigan; Kleinschmager). Corrigan explains that the quality of the relationships will determine the quality of work produced. A hosting practitioner in the European Commission describes it this way, “maybe the way to achieve quality results is to invest in the creation of relationships” (Kleinschmager 2011).

Art of Hosting practitioners differentiate between two teams that are needed throughout the process - a core team and the ‘assembly of the whole’. They emphasize creating a committed core team to steward the planning process, and caution against working alone. They cite creating a core team strategically so that all roles are filled, including content, process, design, harvesting and holding space (Nielsen; Weisel; Nissén; Corrigan; Møller; Woolf; Cass).

All practitioners spoke about the importance of capacity building in participatory ways of interacting and working within organizations. This can include training in the methodologies in this study, as well as possibly offering training in various communication and collaboration
tools. Emphasis was given to building capacity for working this way in daily operations (Nissén; Cass; Møller; Weisel; Corrigan; Woolf; Nielsen; Kleinschmager). Woolf describes it this way, “Often the work we are doing is trying to create learning cultures, inviting a learning attitude with one another” (Woolf 2011). Weisel further emphasizes:

I’m not just interested in the outcome of the plan; I’m shifting individuals using these human technologies in the process. It’s not just about knowledge and content, but also new ways of thinking and working together. When I walk out of an organization, I want them to have learned and be changed on a cellular level. I am counting on these people when I leave to maintain this, and if they don’t have the tools and if I haven’t changed the way they are working together and their mindsets, it goes right back to where it was. (Weisel 2011)

Practitioners cite practice, both personal and collective, as a foundational aspect necessary for doing this change work (Møller; Nielsen; Woolf; Corrigan; Cass). Møller suggests that it does not matter what implementation plans are in place or what structure exists, nothing will change unless the people within the organization begin to change their personal practices. Cass, an Art of Hosting client and now practitioner, concurs, adding “It is not about changing the structures, it is about changing the practices” (Cass 2011).

A number of practitioners further discussed the importance of fostering skillful adaptability and fluidity of facilitation through practice, rather than abiding by set rules and relying on specific tools (Møller; Corrigan; Cass; Nielsen; Nissén). Corrigan explains:

How do we move from ‘rules and tools’ to ‘principles and practices’? I want to invite practitioners into a life of practice, and for that, it can be very helpful to have a framework of principles to operate from. Principles like ‘participation whenever possible’ rather than rules like ‘you always have to involve this many stakeholders and here are the tools for doing that at every level’. (Corrigan 2011)

III. Process
Most practitioners discussed the need to determine when participatory process is appropriate. Participation is a good choice when diverse input would be helpful and when buy-in is needed to take action forward. Defining the context (referring to the Cynefin definition) of the situation before selecting the methodology is cited as essential (Nissén; Nielsen;
Møller; Cass; Corrigan; Weisel). AoH practitioners suggest that participatory strategic planning is very engaging, co-creative and holistic, which leads to much greater buy-in and ownership of the plan by the whole group than a strategic plan that has been created without the participation of those who have to implement it (Weisel; Nissén; Corrigan; Nielsen). One practitioner specifically pointed out that the more time given to the building awareness, vision, and brainstorming stages (the more divergent phases), the quicker a group can do prioritization and action planning (the more convergent phases) (Nielsen).

Nielsen explains that there is a ‘magic in the middle’ from weaving the methodologies together (Nielsen). Most practitioners agreed that the methodologies themselves are good, but the real power and magic happens when you put them together into a process - then something revolutionary happens. There is no recipe for this; it is always a mixture of methodologies and almost always unique, depending on the context (Nielsen; Cass; Nissén; Møller; Weisel; Corrigan).

Nearly all practitioners emphasized that asking the right questions absolutely matters. Møller states, “More importantly than what methodologies to use where, is – what are the questions you need to ask in each of the stages?” Questions need to be specific and well crafted so they get to the heart of the matter. Both levels - personal and professional - should be invited in with questions throughout the entire process (Nissén; Woolf; Møller; Cass; Weisel; Corrigan; Nielsen). As explained by Møller:

> Always bring the human being into the possibility first. We are all human beings before we are professionals. We will have sets of questions that will invite us in as citizens of the world and others where we look through our professional lens. Work those two levels; build a case for why it is important to care and to work with our personal inspiration to learn how to live sustainably in the world as people and as people who do work professionally. (Møller 2011)

‘Harvesting’ is the term used by Art of Hosting practitioners for capturing the outcome of the work and making meaning out of it. Most practitioners spoke specifically about the need for harvest methods to be designed so information is passed on and people are not left wondering where their input went. They point out that people will want to be kept
in the loop if they have been invited into the process early on (Cass; Corrigan; Nissén; Møller; Nielsen; Weisel; Kleinschmager). Corrigan explains that, “the ‘mantra’ for planning anything is that we’re not planning a meeting, we are planning a harvest” (Corrigan 2011). Many suggest building in the structural feedback and learning loops that use the outcome harvest to make meaning of the work (Corrigan; Nissén; Møller; Nielsen; Weisel; Kleinschmager). “Continually bring [the harvest] back into the ever-evolving emergent process so that we can find our way, which is how strategic planning looks in the complex domain” (Corrigan 2011). Reflect at every step to stay in alignment with the need and purpose. Invite a learning attitude in one another and expect multiple learning loops (Møller; Woolf; Weisel; Corrigan).

Practitioners pointed to the importance of involving a cross section of the organization as a way to help bring a systems perspective to those engaged in strategic planning, as well as building buy-in for implementation. It was cautioned to use people’s time and talents mindfully, where it is of most value for them and for achieving the purpose. Time was reported as the biggest barrier for doing this work so it is important to invite the right people at the right time (Nielsen; Nissén; Cass; Weisel). Defined boundaries can create the safe container in which creativity can emerge; therefore agreement on the boundary conditions for both the organization and the engagement is recommended (Nissén; Møller).

This emphasis on pre-work points to the process aspect of working with human dynamics, in addition to the scientific content and structure necessary in strategic planning for sustainability. Hosting practitioners strongly felt that both content and process need to be equally recognized.

   The gift of good process is that it allows people to be in learning together.

   The gift of content is that it gets work done. When you have these two together, you get good results. (Møller 2011)

In the next section, results are reported per stage and refer to the generic stage descriptions used in this study, which are based on the ABCD strategic planning process.

*Building Shared Awareness and Understanding.* Many of the methodologies were reported as appropriate for building shared awareness and understanding (Nissén; Cass; Nielsen). World Café was preferred for this stage, often in
combination with Appreciative Inquiry as a way to build deeper relationships and explore issues that matter (Nielsen; Møller; Nissén; Woolf). Appreciative Inquiry interviews were suggested as a way to establish awareness of what is happening in the world, in the organization and in the community and to include personal stories, even with a large group (Møller). A few practitioners suggested that Open Space Technology is less suited for this early stage (Nielsen; Møller). One practitioner describes the following process design:

I like to use The Circle to help people arrive well, then move into World Café to deepen into important issues, then move into Open Space, where they roll up their sleeves around projects they want to begin thinking about together. (Woolf 2011)

Creating a Shared Vision. The methodology most commonly mentioned for visioning is World Café (Weisel; Nissén; Møller; Corrigan), with Appreciative Inquiry integrated into the approach (Nissén; Nielsen). “World Café can make collective intelligence visible very quickly” (Corrigan).

One example of a modification to World Café for developing a shared vision was to instruct the Café tables to draw the vision they see, and collect the words they use in describing their picture to be developed into a preliminary vision statement (Weisel). Stakeholder dialogue interviews using exercises from Theory U were mentioned as valuable for uncovering highest aspirations (Cass; Corrigan).

Current Reality Assessment. For assessing current reality, Theory U and World Café were the most common methodologies cited (Weisel; Corrigan; Cass). Stakeholder interviews using Theory U’s deep dialogue interview technique were reported as being a valuable way to bring diverse perspectives, both internal and external, of an organization’s current reality to the table. These interviews were reported to make the issues more real and bring a broader view (Weisel; Corrigan; Cass).

World Café was cited as useful for understanding the collective reality of participants (Corrigan). Other suggested methodologies were Open Space Technology and Appreciative Inquiry (Corrigan; Nielsen). Nielsen suggested that the current reality assessment does not necessarily need to be participatory, pointing to determining the context prior to selecting the methodology (Nielsen).
**Brainstorming Actions.** The most common dialogue-based methodology suggested for brainstorming actions was Open Space Technology, using it to invite participants into exploration of important issues and projects for which they feel passion and responsibility (Møller; Nielsen; Corrigan; Woolf). Møller advised that the question be very sharp and focus on the essence of the matter. Additional comments at this stage were that brainstorming can be iterative, particularly if it is challenging to convene a large group (Nissén) and that collection of ideas can also be part of external stakeholder interviews during current reality assessment (Weisel).

**Strategic Prioritization.** Few responses were collected specific to prioritization. One interviewee suggested using Open Space Technology (Nielsen).

**Action Planning.** A number of methodologies were suggested for action planning, including Open Space Technology (Corrigan; Weisel; Nielsen; Møller), World Café (Weisel), Pro Action Café (Weisel; Kleinschmager) and Theory U (Weisel; Corrigan; Cass). Open Space is also useful when more information is needed prior to action planning (Weisel). This is further emphasized by Nielsen:

> In my opinion, Open Space has been made for the sole purpose of moving from shared vision into action planning. Harrison Owen (OST founder) sees this as well. What is the thing that comes from your heart, that you’re so excited about, you’ll run to the center, write it down, scream it onto the wall, because it MUST get done? That thing you’re willing to work on to make this dream come true? (Nielsen 2011)

Møller explained that the outcome harvest must be sharp from Open Space, using rigorous questions to converge it. He suggests designing an outcome harvesting question sheet for each convener to fill out, either on paper or digitally (Møller).

Kleinschmager reports that Pro Action Café is critical in his work with the European Commission, where the methodology was originally developed. It is often used in policy-making workshops in the Commission, when strategic recommendations are needed in policy areas (Kleinschmager). He explains:

> People who have contributed to a specific action in Pro Action Café are willing to commit to it. It’s amazing what happens – the level of commitment, readiness to act and move forward together. (Kleinschmager 2011)
Evaluating Progress. Few responses were offered related to evaluating progress. The Circle was suggested as the best way to reflect on how things are going (Nielsen). Weisel points out that it is necessary to think about a spiral where there is constant re-evaluation and thinking about the whole system. As a practitioner internal to the organization, Kleinschmager shares this insight; “Trust comes back again and again [as an outcome of working in a participatory way], as one of the key elements that allows vision and implementation of actions [to happen]” (Kleinschmager 2011).

Cautions on Use. AoH practitioners shared cautions and limitations of working with dialogue-based methodologies. Kleinschmager pointed to the use of jargon as one issue when bringing this way of working into an organization. The methodologies themselves have limitations to be aware of, such as the possibility of World Café feeling like a lot of talk without leading anywhere (Kleinschmager). Weisel cautions that people can get ‘Café fatigue’ if these methodologies are overused. Open Space Technology can lead to fragmentation if there is no common ground on the topic (Kleinschmager). Corrigan summarizes the overall use of participatory methodology in this way:

This is not just about methodologies, and that is very important. The methodologies are nested within a coherent set of contexts and it is very important to understand those contexts. When people do not understand those contexts they can misapply the methodologies and can create hard feelings, bad meetings, or people not really noticing the power of the methodology. It is not so much about the methods as it is about the contexts in which we’re using them, the [outcome] harvests, and the architecture of implementation that comes after that. If you get stuck in using these methodologies as ‘tools’, then you’re a mechanic. If we approach planning as a mechanistic process, we’re not going to get anywhere different, and this is especially true for sustainability. (Corrigan 2011)

3.3 Guidance for Sustainability Practitioners

In this section, we will report our analysis of results from research sub-questions one and two, in order to answer the third research sub-question: What guidance can be offered for integration of dialogue-based methodologies with planning for strategic sustainable development?
We divide this analysis into three sub-sections: analysis of findings from the first two research sub-questions, development of the prototype, and presentation of the prototype.

3.3.1 Analysis of Findings - FSSD and AoH

In analyzing the data from research sub-questions one and two, the critical importance of pre-work, and in particular process design, were key findings. A pattern emerged pointing to three focus areas within the pre-work stage: purpose, people and process. These three focus areas formed the beginning of our answer to research sub-question three. They seem to point to separate, sequential phases in the overall practitioner-client relationship, which begins with the first meeting and carries through until the strategic plan is put into practice. These three phases, which we have labeled as Phase 1: Exploration, Phase 2: Commitment, and Phase 3: Design, all lead up to the actual ABCD strategic planning engagement, Phase 4: Engagement. Finally in Phase 5: Integration, the strategic plan is put into practice. These phases are described below. Note that these ‘phases’ are the five broad aspects of the practitioner-client relationship from beginning to end.

Phase 1: Exploration, Exploring the Purpose. Sustainability practitioners were of one voice in stating the importance of building a shared, meaningful purpose before even discussing the FSSD. They emphasized the need for creating shared understanding of sustainability, specifically referencing the definition of sustainability using the four sustainability principles, as well as working strategically from a systems perspective. Art of Hosting (AoH) practitioners emphasized the importance at this phase of clarifying expectation around inclusion and engagement for using a participatory approach. Finally, both audiences agreed that to be successful, a mandate must be obtained from the senior executive level, agreeing to use a participatory approach and to implement the strategic plan.

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11 Practitioner-client relationship refers to the relationship established between a sustainability practitioner and an organization (the client), which may or may not be defined within a formal contractual agreement.

12 We intentionally use the synonym of ‘practice’ in place of ‘implementation’ because the on-going nature of change towards sustainability requires continual improvement and prototyping of new ideas, which we feel is better represented by the word practice.
Phase 2: Commitment, Creating a Core Team of People. Many sustainability practitioners pointed to the challenge of balancing the multiple roles they are expected to play (sustainability expert, business consultant, process facilitator), as they often work alone. Most AoH practitioners emphasized that this work should never be done alone, always with a committed core team, designed strategically to include experts in content, process design, holding space and harvesting outcomes. They also emphasized including people from the organization on this core team who have the passion and will to steward the entire strategic planning process (the ‘sustainability champions’ in FSSD terminology). This core team then collectively agrees on how they will work together. Creating the committed core team was reported as necessary before beginning to define the focus of the strategic planning engagement. AoH practitioners explain that the core team then becomes the focal point for building internal capacity for both participatory processes as well as sustainability content, and already includes the sustainability champions who have made a commitment to stewardship. Both audiences reported the essential nature of building relationships based on trust and transparency in the pre-work phase. AoH practitioners see the core team and the commitment made as the beginning of that process.

Practitioners from both audiences repeatedly spoke of the leadership capacities necessary for working in a participatory way. Based on their combined input, a practitioner’s ability to work successfully with participatory processes seems to be dependent on personal mastery of these capacities. Although leadership capacities are outside the scope of this research study, we felt their emphasis on this topic warranted recognition and therefore have synthesized their insights into a list of Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (See Appendix G). They include: know yourself first; the learning is in the practice; be on a learning journey; hold space; the quality of work is dependent on quality of relationships; move faster alone yet further together; practice authenticity; meet people where they are; make meaning; create a shared language; connect with stories; and build capacity.

Phase 3: Design, Designing the Engagement Process. The high level of input we received on the subject of process design was unanticipated, and became a critical finding of our research. Every AoH practitioner made clear to us that, while the methodologies are valuable, designing the process or ‘weaving the methodologies’ is the key to the work. Many sustainability practitioners agreed, pointing also to the skill and experience of the practitioner in adapting
to the flow of the process rather than using the methodologies like tools. Waldron explained it this way:

I see [these methodologies] more like ‘running drills’ or ‘building skills’ for the real game of engaging in real world transformative systems change. That is, there are no process prescriptions. It is much more about releasing human energy, creating a positive, trusting, even an adventurous, ‘can do’ tone. Practicing and knowing the foundational ‘drills’ of facilitation is what allows you to play the game that emerges. (Waldron 2011)

In analyzing the input from both audiences on this topic, several process design considerations seemed to be of vital importance to the work of strategic planning. We have synthesized these considerations into seven Guiding Principles for Process Design (included in full in Appendix H). Three guiding principles appear to be higher-level design elements, while four seem to be actionable principles that can be used strategically at every stage of both the strategic planning engagement and the overall practitioner-client relationship. The seven Guiding Principles for Process Design are:

I. Know the Boundaries: Boundaries create the safe container in which creativity can emerge. Sustainability practitioners are familiar with the generic Five Level Frameworks’ ‘systems level’, in which the boundary conditions are defined in order to work from a systems perspective. Similarly, according to our findings, practitioners also need to identify the boundary conditions of the overall practitioner-client relationship (in Phase 1: Engagement) and when designing the strategic planning engagement.

II. Define Context before Choosing Methodology: This principle is reportedly addressed multiple times during the practitioner-client relationship, most often by the core team. First, it is part of the initial conversation in Phase 1: Exploration, when deciding whether or not to use a participatory approach. Then, this guiding principle becomes critical when designing the strategic planning engagement with the core team. As discussed in the introduction, the context of the issue being addressed must be identified prior to selecting the methodologies (referring to the Cynefin framework in Section 1.1.1). A methodology designed for complexity will not work to solve a simple problem and one designed for a simple or complicated problem will not serve a complex one.
III. Weave the Methodologies: As reported in both research sub-questions one and two, dialogue-based methodologies can be used in many different stages of strategic planning. Practitioners agreed that weaving together methodologies to serve the purpose at hand creates the conversational flow necessary for good results. This is especially true when combined with use of the ‘backcasting from success’ approach of the FSSD. The methodologies are the vessels that support focused, productive conversations. It is in weaving the methodologies that the ‘magic’ arises.

Actionable design principles to use strategically at every stage:

IV. Involve the Right People at the Right Time: Sustainability practitioners in particular, reported that the limited time for strategic planning allowed by their clients is an issue. AoH practitioners recognize that working in participatory ways takes more time but offer some insights. One suggestion is to strategically invite the right people at the right time, using people’s time and talents mindfully, where it is of most value for them and for achieving the purpose. Using a participatory approach does not necessarily mean everyone should be included in everything. By inviting the right people, there will be no need to ‘sell’ the plan because they will have been involved in creating it. The extra time invested in the beginning will pay off in the end, making the organization’s overall time investment the same (or possibly less in the long run). TNS senior advisor, Pong Leung describes it this way:

It can take more time and patience to work with dialogue-based methodologies, but ultimately, it results in less work due to stronger commitment and better strategy. The sustainability plan does not have to be sold later; it leads to more movement and change toward sustainability. (Leung 2011)

V. Ask Powerful Questions: Practitioners consistently stated that the question asked is more important than the methodology used to host the conversation. The clear message was that asking the right question makes action planning easier, while asking the wrong question can lose the entire process. We also gathered from both audiences, the importance of engaging both the personal and professional through questions. Møller points out that, if we only address the professional, the personal will not be committed and the work will lack the heart it needs to be done well (Moller 2011).
VI. Reflect at Every Step: It was commonly reported by AoH practitioners and a few sustainability practitioners that by building in reflection and learning loops at every stage, the process stays in alignment with the purpose. Strategic planning is an iterative process and reflection allows time to slow down, recognize the shifts in learning that are taking place, and embrace the change as it emerges.

VII. Plan for the Harvest: AoH practitioners consistently point to the necessity of planning ways to capture meaningful outcomes while designing the process itself. In some processes, this may necessitate planning for multiple harvest steps before reaching the final outcome. This involves not only gathering what was written on flip charts, but analyzing those results, making meaning from them, and communicating those outcomes back to the larger group in an appropriate format. An AoH practitioner states, “You can’t do good work if you’re not focusing as much on the quality of harvesting as you are on the quality of hosting” (Corrigan 2011).

Phase 4: Engagement, Creating the Strategic Plan. Here, the focus is on creating the strategic plan, which encompasses the entire ABCD strategic planning process (building shared awareness and understanding, creating a shared vision, current reality assessment, brainstorming actions, strategic prioritization, and action planning, which we will refer to as ‘stages’\(^\text{13}\)).

In addition to hosting the strategic planning engagement, which may be a one-time workshop or a series of separate engagements, AoH practitioners emphasized the necessity of a sharp harvest of outcomes from which to build the strategic plan. Getting a commitment to both act on the strategic plan and to evaluate progress for continuation of the ongoing change process were also cited by sustainability and AoH practitioners as important elements of this phase. This phase, the primary work of the sustainability practitioner, is explained in greater depth in Section 3.3.3.

Phase 5: Integration, Putting the Strategic Plan into Practice. In this phase, there is a focus on putting the strategic plan into practice. Although both

\(^{13}\) Of the eight strategic planning stages we had defined in this research (Section 2), the first and last stage now appear in other phases of the practitioner-client relationship. The prework stage comprises the first three phases (Exploration, Commitment, Design) while the evaluating progress stage is part of the fifth phase, Integration.
sustainability and AoH practitioners stressed that strategic plans are iterative with constant re-evaluation, there was limited input about specific methodologies used. AoH practitioners pointed out that as the plan is put into practice, new questions arise which call for another iteration of the planning process. Weisel explains:

The worst thing we can do is to define ourselves in a box. A box doesn’t work. We need to think about a spiral where we are constantly re-evaluating and thinking about a system. So if an outcome isn’t what we’d like, we go back to the system. (Weisel 2011)

AoH practitioners and some sustainability practitioners emphasized the need for practicing participatory ways of working together in order to build internal capacity to continue on this path. The internal core team is, ideally, prepared to host the progress review sessions to continue the iterative strategic planning process. Practice, as referred to in the Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (the Learning is in the Practice), includes practice in both sustainability and participatory leadership (See Appendix G).

### 3.3.2 Development of Prototype

Because of the critical importance of pre-work, and in particular process design, it has become clear to us that developing guidance on overall process design is far more valuable than suggesting which methodologies might work best in each strategic planning stage. This is evident in that the first three of the five phases identified in 3.3.1 are pre-work, and it is not until the fourth of five phases when the actual ABCD strategic planning process occurs.

We heard repeatedly from both sustainability and AoH practitioners of the essential connection between content and process. Unprompted, some sustainability practitioners pointed to the gap that exists between technical sustainability knowledge and the facilitation and engagement skills necessary for effectively working with groups (Baxter; Ezechieli; Brooks; Spinella). Ezechieli suggested that it is easy to find people with a strong technical background in sustainability, and it is easy to find people with a very robust hosting and facilitation background, but it is very difficult to find people with both skill sets. He added that this work of bringing the two together “could be very, very important in order to provide those who have a technical background with the other kind of background” (Ezechieli 2011).
Waldron, the founding director of the MSLS programme, emphasized it this way:

Take the strengths of these two things and try to get them to dance together – science and structure, on one hand and the dialogue-based engagement approaches on the other hand, where you have people coming together in co-learning to co-create the future. Neither should dominate the other and it shouldn’t be a compromise either – it should be a synergy. (Waldron 2011)

While we clearly heard of its importance, it appears that this link between content (sustainability and the FSSD) and process (facilitation/hosting of co-creative, participatory processes) has never been strategically researched in the context of strategic sustainable development. In this research we have engaged with experts in participatory process and, as the outcome, we have developed *The Weave: Participatory Process Design Guide for Strategic Sustainable Development (The Weave)* (see Appendix I) in answer to the third research sub-question. In this section, we will introduce *The Weave*, which includes a Template for process design, in order to explain how we have translated our research findings into guidance for sustainability practitioners.

The Template includes the five phases of the practitioner-client relationship, as introduced in Section 3.3.1: Exploration, Commitment, Design, Engagement and Integration. These phases were created through a synthesis of our research findings with guidance from Art of Hosting’s 6 Breaths of Process Architecture (explanation in Appendix B) and Theory U (see Appendix A). They are displayed here in Figure 3.1.
Figure 3.1. Phases of the Practitioner-Client Relationship

The phases occur sequentially, building on each previous phase in a continual spiral. When the strategic plan is put into practice in the Integration phase, those actions generate change which brings with it new information and new questions. The iterative nature of strategic planning for sustainability spirals back to the Exploration phase again, seeking a mandate to continue moving forward, to continue using participatory processes, and to revisit the purpose. With each iteration, clarity and focus for the sustainability initiative is continually sharpened.

Each phase has a focus (as seen in the subtitles in Figure 3.2) that creates the conditions necessary for the next sequential phase. The practitioner-client relationship begins in the Exploration phase, exploring and clarifying the purpose. In the Commitment phase, the focus is on developing a core team of people willing to steward that purpose and building the capacity to do so. The core team then designs the engagement process in the Design phase, to carry the purpose forward. The focus of the Engagement phase is on creating the strategic plan, using a process designed with the purpose and people in mind. In the final phase, Integration, the focus shifts to putting that plan into practice. The focus of each phase carries forward, bringing the core purpose consistently through to action.
Figure 3.2. **Focus for each phase of the practitioner-client relationship:** Purpose, People, Process, Plan and Practice. Note: lining up the phases horizontally is not meant to reflect a completely linear process. Laying it out in this format simply allows the flexibility to display information for each phase within a table.

These focus areas for each phase were clarified over the course of our research through analysis of our findings with guidance from the Chaordic Stepping Stones of Design (explanation in Appendix B) and the ABCD strategic planning process.

The Template (Appendix J) was developed in accordance with the seven Guiding Principles for Process Design, introduced in Section 3.3.1 and as seen in Appendix H. All seven of these design principles are embedded in the Template. Four of these design principles seem to be actionable principles to consider at every phase throughout the design process: involving the right people at the right time, planning for the harvest, asking powerful questions, and reflecting at every step. Therefore, these four design principles create the rows in the Template, as shown in Table 3.1: participants, harvesting outcomes, root questions and reflection.
Table 3.1 The Template skeleton, including the five phases as column headings and four Design Principles as row headings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase:</th>
<th>1 Exploration</th>
<th>2 Commitment</th>
<th>3 Design</th>
<th>4 Engagement</th>
<th>5 Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exploring the Purpose</td>
<td>Creating the Core Team of People</td>
<td>Designing the Engagement Process</td>
<td>Creating the Strategic Plan</td>
<td>Putting the Strategic Plan into Practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus:</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Plan</th>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

We have embedded these four design principles into the Template to serve as strategic guidance for each phase. The strategic elements of each are introduced here, and discussed per phase in Section 3.3.3.

**Participants.** AoH Practitioners recommended being strategic when identifying internal and external stakeholders for the core team, the planning engagement, and for communicating progress. Being intentional in identifying those with the expertise, information, will, passion, skill sets, etc., is one strategic way to use people’s time wisely and make the planning process most efficient and effective. We have included basic recommendations for participants per phase in the Template (Appendix J).

**Harvesting Outcomes.** Planning how to capture outcomes from participatory processes and communicate them back to the organization and their stakeholders can be a strategic approach. Both sustainability and AoH practitioners explained that the outcome harvest must be communicated in a format that suits the organization. It might be strategic to ask the person receiving the information to help design the output format. Using this approach, it becomes possible to backcast from the identified format when planning how to incorporate it into the process. The essential elements to be harvested at each
Root Questions. Almost all practitioners we interviewed explained that the question asked is more important than the methodology used to address it. They also agreed that asking the right question will yield good results while asking the wrong question could make the process useless. This points to strategy and backcasting from success in selecting powerful questions for each phase. By analyzing the questions offered during our interviews, we have attempted to identify the ‘root’ question for each phase, from which a customized question can be designed. These root questions are listed in Section 3.3.3, where the Template is described in more detail. We have also recommended that two threads of questions be addressed throughout the process, personal and professional. A list of example questions can be viewed in The Weave, see Appendix I.

Reflection. Because the organization is going through a change process, practitioners advise slowing down to reflect on the learning along the way, allowing the important lessons to be recognized and incorporated. They explain that reflection on progress, learning and remaining questions should occur at every phase of the planning process. This also supports staying in alignment with the purpose throughout the process.

3.3.3 Template for process design

As stated previously, we have assembled our research findings into a document titled, The Weave: Participatory Process Design Guide for Strategic Sustainable Development (The Weave) (Appendix I). Note that The Weave offers guidance, but assumes that practitioners using it are already trained and experienced with both the FSSD and dialogue-based methodologies. In this section, we present the main content of the Template for process design, contained within The Weave, per phase.

Phase 1: Exploration. A summary of our findings shows that the Exploration phase is about clarifying the purpose, creating shared understanding of both sustainability and participatory processes amongst participants of this phase, and getting the mandate to act, as introduced in section 3.3.1. Our analysis suggests the following design principles be considered as strategic elements, as shown in Table 3.2:
• Participants. Suggested participants to consider at this stage are the sustainability practitioner, senior management and any internal sustainability champions who have recognized the need and called for action. This can be guided by the first step of the Theory U journey of co-initiating\(^\text{14}\), where the practitioner-client relationship is initiated and personal-professional agendas are clarified.

• Harvesting Outcomes. It is recommended that the outcome harvest include a clearly defined purpose and a mandate from the senior executive level to act.

• Root Question. The root question to be considered centers around ‘Why’. ‘Why does this organization care about moving toward sustainability?’ It is also suggested that this phase be framed with the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology, exploring what is currently working and what dreams are held for a sustainable future from the perspective of the senior executive level. These questions align with the first, high-level iteration of the ABCD strategic planning process (shared awareness, current reality and visioning). Root questions are also suggested per outcome, with additional example questions in *The Weave* (see Appendix I).

• Reflection. Reflection for this stage centers on creating a shared language and understanding of sustainability and participatory processes. Taking the time to check in and see if everyone in the room has a shared understanding was emphasized as critical for moving forward.

In addition to the four design principles, Table 3.2 shows Principles as an additional strategic element. The sustainability principles (Section 1.2), the Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (introduced in Section 3.3.1; included in full in Appendix G) and Guiding Principles for Process Design (Appendix H) underlie every phase, as foundational for success. They are introduced here, where they first appear, but will not be mentioned in subsequent phases.

\(^{14}\) See Appendix A for more information on Theory U.
Table 3.2. Phase 1: Exploration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>1 Exploration: Exploring the Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1 Exploration: Exploring the Purpose</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Sustainability Practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability Champion(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Clarify the purpose for working toward sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mandate from senior executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Create shared understanding of sustainability and participatory processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvesting Outcomes</td>
<td>Clear purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Question</td>
<td>Why do I/does this organization care about moving toward sustainability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Questions per Outcome</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal: Why do you care personally about sustainability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional: Why are you (senior exec.) willing to commit this organization to work toward sustainability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mandate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What is our mandate for working together towards sustainability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shared Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What is our shared understanding of the sustainability challenge, our sustainability definition and how we want to work together?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Reflect on learnings about organization, working together, sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles</td>
<td>Sustainability Principles, Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (Appendix G), Guiding Principles for Process Design (Appendix H)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase 2: Commitment. A summary of our findings, as presented in section 3.3.1, shows that the Commitment phase is where relationships of trust and transparency begin, agreements for working collectively as a core team should be considered, and the focus of the strategic planning engagement is clarified. It is recommended that core team capacity building begin in this phase, with a deeper look into both the sustainability imperative and participatory processes. This phase could benefit from an AI approach and could also use
the second step of the Theory U journey of co-sensing. Practitioners report that this phase is often the first introduction of The Circle methodology. Our analysis suggests the following design principles be considered as strategic elements, as displayed in Table 3.3:

- **Participants.** Practitioners suggest that it is strategic to intentionally design a core team that collectively possesses skills in both content and process, and includes the sustainability champion(s), those with expertise in both sustainability and organizational content, those familiar with the organizational culture who recognize possible leverage points for change, and external process and content experts, namely the sustainability practitioner.

- **Harvesting Outcomes.** The recommendation for this phase is to gain commitment from the core team to steward the entire process and to create written agreements for working collectively. The intention of the engagement can be clarified during this phase, perhaps identifying the central question for the engagement invitation.

- **Root Question.** As this phase is all about people, the suggested root question is ‘Who?’ ‘Who has the passion, will and expertise to steward this purpose?’ In Table 3.3, root questions are suggested for exploring the outcomes from this phase. Additional example questions are listed in *The Weave* (see Appendix I).

- **Reflection.** In this phase, new relationships of trust and transparency are established. Reflect on the agreements made for working together to be sure everyone understands them to mean the same thing. Ask questions such as: What are we not talking about? Is there anything I still need in order to feel 100% committed? Do we share the same definition of success for the work of this core team? Have we clearly identified our roles and boundaries? What is driving our motivation to move forward from here?
**Table 3.3. Phase 2: Commitment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2 Commitment: Creating a Core Team of People</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Sustainability Practitioners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Core Team (may include senior management, sustainability champions and others)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>People</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Core team commitment to steward the purpose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Core team agreements for working collectively</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Clarify the intention of the Engagement</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Begin core team capacity building (in participatory leadership, dialogue, co-learning, FSSD, sustainability principles, shared language)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvesting Outcomes</td>
<td>Agreements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intention of the Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Questions</td>
<td>Who has the passion, will and expertise to steward this?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Questions per Outcome</td>
<td>Agreements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal: What do I need in order to bring my highest potential to this purpose?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional: What will it take to do our best work together to steward our shared purpose?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement Intention</td>
<td>• Personal: What would inspire me to participate in this Engagement? (assuming it is my choice to do so)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional: What is the purpose of the Engagement we are inviting people to?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Reflect on learnings about relationships, trust, agreements, needs of team members, clarity of purpose, next steps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles</td>
<td>Sustainability Principles, Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (Appendix G), Guiding Principles for Process Design (Appendix H)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phase 3: Design.** A summary of our findings shows that the Design phase is where the critical strategy of weaving sustainability content with participatory process happens. Practitioners explain that during this stage the engagement process is designed, the participants are strategically identified, the engagement invitation is clarified, and the logistics are coordinated. Our analysis suggests the following design principles be considered as strategic elements:
- Participants. This design work is done by the core team, which was deliberately created in Phase 2.
- Harvesting Outcomes. The outcome harvests suggested for this phase are the engagement agenda, the invitation to be sent to participants and the engagement process design including questions and desired harvest outputs.
- Root Question. As participants will be invited to work collectively to co-create a future plan for their organization, the question is one of ‘How’. ‘How will we invite creativity and co-creation from participants to move this organization to action?’
- Reflection. Much learning will likely have taken place during this stage, suggesting that a thorough check in may be needed on how people are doing, if the planning is still in alignment with the purpose, how the core team has grown in its ability to learn together and work in participatory ways, and many other potential questions.

The Design phase is when the Guiding Principles for Process Design (Appendix H) become most actionable. As displayed in the row titled ‘Focus’ in Table 3.4, we have incorporated the generic Five Level Framework as a way to structure this design process to ensure a strategic, systems perspective. Weaving this process design approach with the Five Level Framework captures the synergies between the two, to the benefit of sustainability practitioners and their clients. Table 3.4 shows how our research findings, relative to the design elements, theories, and methodologies, are structured with the generic Five Level Framework.
## Table 3.4. Phase 3: Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3 <strong>Design: Designing the Engagement Process</strong></th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability Practitioners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Core Team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Process</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Framed by the 5LF System: Define boundary conditions for the engagement (time, space, budget, content, etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SUCCESS: Define a successful outcome of the engagement (backcasting from the purpose)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>STRATEGIC: Backcast to plan the participant list, the outcome harvest, the questions, and the learning reflections</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Cynefin Framework and Guiding Principles for Process Design can help with selecting methodologies and designing the Engagement.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ACTION: Process design, logistics, research, communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tools: Methodologies, facilitation tools, supplies, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvesting Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Process design (with harvest output format determined per stage)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement invitation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HOW will we invite creativity and co-creation from participants to move us to action?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Questions per Outcome</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Process Design:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Have we mindfully considered the overarching intention of the engagement, the Guiding Principles for Process Design, roles of the core team members, and the needs of our participants in this design? (For additional specific process design questions, see The Weave, Appendix I.)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Engagement invitation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What do we need to be mindful of? (who is needed, relationships, worldviews, dreams about the future, investment in the organization’s success)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflect on learnings about clarity of purpose for the engagement, strategic elements of planning, working in participatory ways, how the core team is doing relative to energy/confidence/needs/agreements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability Principles, Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (Appendix G), Guiding Principles for Process Design (Appendix H)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Phase 4: Engagement.** The Engagement phase is where key stakeholders come together to begin the process of collectively and strategically creating the organization’s strategic plan. This phase includes the entire ABCD strategic planning process. As displayed in Table 3.5, our analysis suggests the following design principles be considered as strategic elements:

- **Participants.** The participants for this phase were strategically identified in the Design phase and may include both internal and external stakeholders. This is often a large group, possibly an entire organization, however the context for strategic planning can take many forms. This phase could refer to a one-time engagement or a series of engagements with the same or different participants.

- **Harvesting Outcomes.** Harvesting outcomes through each stage of the ABCD strategic planning process is reported to be critical. Again, this will vary with the context of the engagement, and should be intentionally planned during the Design phase. The final harvest could include the shared vision, current reality analysis, key strategic goals and identified actions.

- **Root Question.** The central question to be answered during this phase is ‘What’. ‘What strategic approaches arise from our collective intelligence that we can make actionable?’ Many questions will be posed throughout the ABCD strategic planning process, which collectively should answer this root question.

- **Reflection.** The core team will gather after this phase to reflect on their learning, how the organization has progressed, how the overall process has progressed, what new questions have emerged, and many other queries. This may or may not be the culmination of the practitioner-client relationship, which will inform the reflection as well.

This phase, in relation to selecting dialogue-based methodologies, is explained in greater detail following Table 3.5.
### Table 3.5. Phase 4: Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th><strong>4 Engagement: Creating the Strategic Plan</strong></th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Participants** | | | | Sustainability Practitioners  
| | | | Core Team  
| | | | Invited Stakeholders  
| | | | (may/may not be entire organization) |
| **Focus** | | | | Plan  
| | | | • Host the Engagement  
| | | | (Every engagement is unique to the context of the organization – there is no recipe. This may be the only strategic planning engagement, or the first in a series.  
| | | | See below this table for dialogue-based methodology suggestions per phase and the Engagement Phase Expanded (Appendix K) for more details.)  
| | | | • Harvest the outcome from each stage of the ABCD process sharply (to build the strategic plan)  
| | | | • Commitment to put the strategic plan into practice  
| | | | • Commitment to reconvene to assess progress |
| **Harvesting Outcomes** | | | | Shared vision  
| | | | Current reality analysis  
| | | | Key strategic goals  
| | | | Strategic plan (draft with prototype actions for piloting, longer term actions, goals, strategies, timeline, responsibility, metrics)  
| | | | Next steps (related to commitment to put plan into practice and to reconvene, as above) |
| **Root Questions** | | | | What strategic approaches arise from our collective intelligence that we can make actionable?  
| | | | Root questions per strategic planning stage in Engagement Phase Expanded in Appendix K (also in The Weave) |
| **Reflection** | | | | Reflection will be planned into the ABCD engagement. Following this phase, the core team can reflect on learnings about the engagement process itself (design, flow, harvesting, etc), about hosting participatory processes, new questions/information, etc. |
| **Principles** | | | | Sustainability Principles, Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (Appendix G), Guiding Principles for Process Design (Appendix H) |
As the entire ABCD strategic planning process occurs in the Engagement phase, much of the detailed guidance for this phase is included in the Engagement Phase Expanded section in Appendix K (also in *The Weave*). Within this phase, there are six strategic planning stages\(^\text{15}\), as depicted in Figure 3.3.

![Figure 3.3: Phase 4: Engagement Expanded.](image)

These six stages follow a step-wise path through creating a strategic sustainable development plan; the primary work of sustainability practitioners. Initially, our research was focused on how practitioners incorporate dialogue-based methodologies in the strategic planning stages. As explained in the Design phase in Section 3.3.1, our results indicate that the methodologies themselves do not necessarily align with any particular stage. However, there does appear to be a pattern where the methodologies are most appropriately used, as depicted in Figure 3.4. This may sound contradictory, but speaks to the reality of each engagement being unique and methodologies being developed (and modified) to suit purpose. Therefore, use of methodologies per stage cannot be specifically prescribed, but broad suggestions can be made.

---

\(^{15}\)Of the eight strategic planning stages we had defined in this research (Section 2), the first and last now appear in other phases of the Template. Prework comprises the first three phases (Exploration, Commitment, Design) while evaluating progress is part of the fifth phase, Action.
Both Theory U and Appreciative Inquiry are methodologies that can underlie the entire ABCD strategic planning process. As such, they are valuable concepts from which to frame an entire engagement, the details of which did not surface in our data collection. Both methodologies also offer action-oriented guidance that can be useful at various stages. For example, deep dialogue interviews from Theory U were cited as useful for building shared awareness and understanding, creating a shared vision, and current reality assessment, while Theory U prototyping is useful in the action planning stage. Similarly, Appreciative Inquiry can be used in the current reality and shared visioning stages to build from what is already working in the organization.

The other four methodologies under study appear to be best suited for different stages of the planning process.

- The Circle is regularly used to open and close an engagement, and at times during the process. Especially important at the beginning, practitioners say using The Circle invites people into shared leadership and participation and brings everyone immediately into relationship, which is critical to this work.
- Often used early in a process, World Café is said to create the space for individual relationships of trust and transparency to form. It was cited as useful at the earlier stages of the engagement, for example, to explore sustainability in the context of the participants’ personal and professional lives, to surface current strengths and challenges, or for a high level sustainability principles analysis.
- As Figure 3.4 suggests, Open Space Technology (OST) is suited for moving from brainstorming actions into action planning. Ideas and actions can be explored more deeply in small groups formed around interest and passion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Shared Awareness</th>
<th>Shared Vision</th>
<th>Current Reality</th>
<th>Brainstorming Actions</th>
<th>Prioritization</th>
<th>Action Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Circle</td>
<td>The Circle</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Café</td>
<td>World Café</td>
<td>World Café</td>
<td></td>
<td>Open Space Technology</td>
<td></td>
<td>Open Space Technology</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Open Space Technology</td>
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<td>Open Space Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pro Action Café</td>
<td>Pro Action Café</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.4. Suggested Dialogue-based Methodologies per Strategic Planning Stage**
for the topic, then moving from exploration into action planning. OST may be less suited as an opening methodology, prior to the group getting more comfortable with working together and in participatory ways.

- Pro Action Café is reported as well-suited for the strategic prioritization and action planning stages, bringing a deep level of focused inquiry to specific projects, the opportunity to access a diverse range of perspectives to strengthen the outcome, and resulting awareness of the scope of projects within the group. PC brings the added benefit of cross-pollinating projects with insights and ideas from different departments within an organization, or different viewpoints within a community.

Reference the Engagement Phase Expanded section in Appendix K (also in *The Weave*) for examples per strategic planning stage. The same four design principles that guide the phases of the Template (participants, root questions, harvesting outcomes and reflection, as described at the end of Section 3.3.2) are also in sharp focus at each strategic planning stage. Root questions per strategic planning stage and additional guidance on harvesting outcomes are included in the Engagement Phase Expanded section, Appendix K.

**Phase 5: Integration.** A summary of our findings shows that the Integration phase is about putting the strategic plan into practice, communicating with stakeholders, reconvening to evaluate progress, and planning for the next strategic planning engagement based on the outcome harvest from the progress evaluation. Our analysis suggests the following design principles be considered as strategic elements, as shown in Table 3.6:

- Participants. This phase may involve the entire organization as the strategic plan is put into practice, and the practitioner is more likely in a support role, if involved at all. This is where having successfully built the internal capacity to continue working in participatory ways as well as a thorough understanding of the sustainability principles and the FSSD becomes important. If capacity is established, the core team takes leadership to reconvene the group to assess progress on the strategic plan. The planning process then begins again based on the new questions and opportunities that have emerged as a result of the strategic plan manifesting into practice. Ideally the sustainability practitioner has established an on-going relationship with the organization and may again be part of the core team for the next iteration of planning for strategic sustainable development. We heard from practitioners that the inclusive nature of a participatory planning process should support the buy-in and ownership necessary for successful implementation.
• Harvesting Outcomes. By this phase there should be a written strategic plan, appropriate elements of which can be communicated to stakeholders. Ongoing harvesting of progress and new actions to build communication and learning loops can be a strategic approach to maintaining the relationships built throughout this process.

• Root Question. As this phase is all about putting the plan into practice, the root question seems to be around ‘When’. ‘When do we start practicing each of these actions to live and work more sustainably?’ The question can then be answered in many ways, through the timeline and performance indicators developed by the group. It can be strategic to ask this question regularly and communicate progress throughout the organization. A number of detailed project management questions will obviously also need to be considered at this phase, including who is responsible, how actions will be put into practice, and allocating budget and resources.

• Reflection. Assessment of progress is inherently a reflective journey, based on the question, ‘What have we learned about our strategic plan, about sustainability, about our organization, about ourselves, and about how we work together?’
Table 3.6. Phase 5: Integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Harvesting Outcomes</th>
<th>Root Questions</th>
<th>Root Questions per Outcome</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Principles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Core Team</td>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Assessment of progress</td>
<td>When do we start practicing each of these actions to live and work more sustainably?</td>
<td>When we start practicing each of these actions to live and work more sustainably?</td>
<td>Reflection on learnings about organization, working together, sustainability. Many questions are appropriate for reflection at this phase (see examples in <em>The Weave</em>, Appendix I)</td>
<td>Sustainability Principles, Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (Appendix G), Guiding Principles for Process Design (Appendix H)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole Organization</td>
<td>Practice - New actions, guided by the Strategic Plan</td>
<td>Stakeholder feedback on new practices (internal/external)</td>
<td>Assessment of Progress:</td>
<td>Stakeholder Feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability Practitioner (support role)</td>
<td>• Communicate outcome to stakeholders (internal, external, participants, decision makers)</td>
<td>Intention for next engagement</td>
<td>• When have we learned about our strategic plan, about ourselves, about how we work together?</td>
<td>• Who needs to be informed of our decisions, progress and next steps?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Re-convene to assess progress (practicing participatory methodology, hosted by core team)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• How will we keep them in the conversation?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Plan the next engagement based on the outcome harvest from the progress assessment</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through each phase, aspects of the ABCD strategic planning process reiterate on a deeper level, beginning with a high-level assessment of readiness for sustainability planning during the Exploration phase. Subsequent iterations of the ABCD planning process expand awareness of the sustainability challenge during the Commitment and Design phases. The ABCD strategic planning process then becomes the primary focus in the Engagement phase. Finally, as indicated in Figure 3.1, the iterative nature of planning for strategic sustainable
development spirals back to exploring purpose with the new questions and opportunities arising out of the Integration phase.

In this section (3.3.3), we have introduced the Template for designing participatory processes, which is included in *The Weave* (see Appendix I). *The Weave* also includes suggestions, examples, guiding principles and a description per phase for a sustainability practitioner audience. Strengths and limitations of *The Weave* are discussed in Section 4.1.

### 3.3.4 Feedback on Draft Prototype

An opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Participatory Process Design Guide prototype was offered to all interviewees and interested survey respondents. Feedback was considered and taken into account in preparing *The Weave: Participatory Process Design Guide for SSD, Prototype Version 1*, which is the final outcome of this research (Appendix I). We received feedback from ten practitioners, as listed in Appendix E. All feedback brought value in that it facilitated a deeper look into our prototype, allowing us to see it from new perspectives. Feedback was extremely positive and was primarily focused on presenting *The Weave* more clearly so practitioners can use it with greater efficiency and effectiveness (Blume; Nissén; Leinaweaver; Makihara; Willard; Ezechieli; Mayer; Villoch). It was suggested that we more clearly articulate the stages at which teaching around the FSSD occurs, and that we clarify the expected roles of practitioners (as sustainability experts and process hosts) (Blume; Cuginotti). It was also suggested that we reinforce the linkage between content and process throughout to ensure its importance is communicated with greater impact (Robèrt).
4 Discussion

In this section we discuss the strengths and limitations of both our Prototype Version 1 and our research design.

4.1 Strengths of The Weave, Prototype Version 1

The Weave: Participatory Process Design Guide for Strategic Sustainable Development is both timely and relevant to sustainability practitioners. It responds to the explicitly stated need for shared resources that provide sustainability practitioners systematic guidance for facilitating an engagement around the FSSD. Off the shelf, it can assist practitioners in determining how an ideal engagement process might look and what they need to be aware of to help make it happen. Much in the way that the FSSD and the methodologies themselves were designed to be flexible and adaptable to the context, The Weave carries forward these strengths. It is suitable for use by practitioners designing engagements in a variety of contexts – for organizations of various sizes, types and structures, whether companies or communities, and is specifically designed to be non-prescriptive and adaptable to engagements of various lengths.

Most sustainability practitioners interviewed expressed support for the importance of pairing the scientific content and structure of the FSSD with participatory processes designed for complexity and co-creation (Robèrt; Baxter; Brooks; Leung; Waldron; Ezechieli; Nyoni; Spinella). The Weave strengthens the connection between content and process specifically for strategic sustainable development. The FSSD provides the structure and scientific rigor (content) for sustainability practitioners, while The Weave provides them with process guidance for hosting co-creative group processes. A systems perspective is a foundational element of the FSSD, and The Weave helps expand that system to process as well; providing another access point to engaging both the personal and professional in this work. Developed with the wisdom and contributions from process experts, in parallel with deep insight and expertise from sustainability practitioners, The Weave is intended to make process design accessible to sustainability practitioners.
4.2 Limitations of The Weave, Prototype Version 1

The scope and timeline for this research did not allow The Weave to be tested within a real world setting. We suspect that taking The Weave into active application for a second learning loop will result in valuable refinements. While we have attempted to mitigate this limitation by seeking feedback on The Weave from active practitioners, it will need to be put into practice by a number of practitioners in various types of engagements to move it beyond prototype. We recognize that for a guide to bring true value to the sustainability practitioner community, it must be in use.

We also recognize that working with participatory leadership is not something that can be learned on paper, but requires real-life practice with skilled hosting practitioners. The Weave offers guidance, but assumes that practitioners using it have already received training and experience in both the FSSD and the dialogue-based methodologies it includes. This reduces its accessibility to many sustainability practitioners until they have participated in these trainings.

4.3 Strengths of our Research

We have been both pleasantly surprised and encouraged by the high level of interest in participatory leadership and dialogue-based methodologies expressed by the majority of sustainability practitioners we contacted over the course of this research. Some sustainability practitioners are already experimenting with these methodologies and reporting good results. Furthermore, Art of Hosting practitioners generously shared their experience using these methodologies, and saw value in increasing the capacity of sustainability practitioners for using participatory processes. It appears that this is both a timely and relevant topic, and we see this interest and support as a key strength of our research. It allowed us access to many of the most experienced practitioners within both audiences for our interviews, which undoubtedly strengthened the quality of our data on which our findings are based.

We feel that our research is based on some of the best and most current information in the field of participatory processes and planning for strategic sustainable development. The three levels of data collection in our research design allowed us to bring increasing focus over the course of our research.
Through the surveys we developed a broad sense of the field and identified additional experienced practitioners that we otherwise may not have come in contact with. As described above, we are confident in our selection of interviewees, incorporating input from top practitioners with strong reputations in both strategic sustainable development and participatory process design. Finally, the feedback and refinement process for the draft prototype involving active and experienced practitioners in the field, leads us to believe that our end result is strong. We are confident that it can provide valuable guidance for sustainability practitioners wishing to integrate participatory processes with use of the FSSD. We feel it represents a valuable contribution to the field of SSD and are encouraged that TNS International has expressed interest in exploring the application of *The Weave* to capacity building within its new networked organizational structure (Blume 2011; Robèrt 2011).

### 4.4 Limitations of our Research

Geographic differences amongst practitioners were not accounted for in the surveys and interviews. The surveys were distributed on global networks but responses were not analyzed separately based on location. All interviewees were from North America and Europe and no attempt was made to assess the applicability of this approach in other regions. Cultural differences amongst respondents were not specifically considered or noted in this research.

There is a potential limitation in our research related to design of our interview questions. As we began to see trends arise from our interview data, we had to shift our line of questioning in subsequent interviews, bringing it out of sync with our interview questions. While we recognize that this is acceptable and even encouraged by Berg (2001, 70), we question whether the collection and analysis of data for ‘methodology use per strategic planning stage’ was thorough enough. Had our interview questions focused on the broader topic of process design there is a possibility we would have strengthened our results.

The relative lack of answers in the later strategic planning stages may be a result of time management on the interview calls. We may have permitted too much time on earlier stages, reducing the time available for the later questions. This lack of data might also point to the fact that most interviewees were external consultants and not commonly on-site for the evaluation and
review stages. The two practitioners that were internal to organizations did offer more feedback on these areas.

A possible limitation of our results is that we were unable to find empirical evidence of the effectiveness of these methodologies in long-term change. Our rationale for selecting them is based on alignment with the complexity of the sustainability challenge and their specific design and application in complex situations.

The limited time frame for the overall thesis research project created limitations on the breadth of our study, especially in the area of methodology selection. It would have been interesting to include more methodologies in the study, however this can be a source of continued exploration.

4.5 Next Steps and Recommendations for Further Research

The next step needed for The Weave is testing and refining in real world applications. Ideally this will be carried out by a variety of practitioners in different contexts. Following on that, the learning needs to be shared and integrated into an updated version of the guide so it can continually offer guidance to interested sustainability practitioners.

Based on our findings and dialogue over the course of this research, we recommend the following five topics for further research:

1. Effectiveness of Dialogue-based Methodologies in Creating Change. As alluded to above, there is a need for studying the effectiveness of these methodologies with long-term projects to assess the degree to which change can be attributed to their use. These findings would be of direct relevance to strategic sustainable development by providing sustainability practitioners and their clients alike, the ‘proof’ and ‘business case’ often requested when working in participatory ways is recommended.

During this research we were often asked if we could prove that these methodologies were effective in producing lasting change. Identifying the catalyst for change is complex and therefore can only be measured in hindsight. A long-term participant-based study after change has been clearly established would be necessary to determine if the change could be attributed
to use of a participatory approach. In support of this further research recommendation, we offer some initial evidence that suggests transformational change is occurring within organizations as a result of working in these ways. Two interviewees have been using dialogue-based methodologies internally in their organizations for a number of years, the European Commission and the Columbus Medical Association.

The impacts of using these methodologies over the past four years in the European Commission are described by Kleinschmager:

Senior levels are really noticing the difference [these dialogue-based methodologies] make, both in terms of the improved quality of results these methodologies help create, but also the quality of relationships they help create both inside and outside of the [European] Commission. And the level of trust...we’re no longer in meeting after meeting where people aren’t even listening to each other…it’s something about the way people are working together on a daily basis that changes. And that then grows and accelerates implementation of the plan. (Kleinschmager 2011)

As CEO of the Columbus Medical Association, Phil Cass reports that he has been diligently practicing these ways of working with his colleagues for almost a decade. Working in participatory ways has fundamentally changed the way that physicians, nurses and even patients in an entire county are all working together around the question, “What should be the purpose of the healthcare system you want and need for this city and its future?” (Cass 2011). The result has been a new conversation, structure, and collective action that has shifted the focus from treating sickness to a focus on optimizing health, transcending entrenched views on healthcare (Cass 2011).

2. Effective Methods for Harvesting Outcomes. Many sustainability practitioners raised the concern that participatory processes do not always offer the outcomes expected from clients. Although both sustainability and AoH practitioners spoke to the critical importance of harvesting outcomes, further research into the specifics of capturing and sharing these outcomes for sustainability practitioners (examples, case studies, techniques) will further strengthen the use of participatory processes in strategic sustainable development.

3. Future Search and the FSSD. During our research, we encountered sustainability practitioners incorporating Future Search, a participatory planning process designed to guide an entire engagement. We recommend
replicating the methods of our study with a focus specifically on how Future Search is being integrated with the FSSD, including case study evidence of its effectiveness. Torbjörn Lahti and Sarah James, co-authors of The Natural Step for Communities, were cited as having used this methodology with the Institute for Ecomunicipality Education & Assistance, as were other sustainability practitioners (www.instituteforecomunicipalities.org).

4. Sustainability Principle Four and Engagement. Another insight surfaced in dialogue around why these methodologies seem to create a heightened sense of engagement. Considering Max-Neef’s nine human needs (Max-Neef 1991) that help articulate individual-based ‘needs’ as part of understanding the social system within the systems level, it seems that all nine are being met (to some degree) for participants ‘engaged’ in participatory processes. Is this true? Does this provide insight into the effectiveness of participatory processes? Does this provide any insight into how society can better comply with sustainability principle four?

5. Development of a FSSD Community of Practice. A core value held by the Art of Hosting network is that they exist, not as an organization, but as a community of practice. This allows everyone to participate equally and at their level of choice, in the learning community. The topic of a sustainability practitioner community of practice was raised multiple times, as it is one of the core goals of the new TNS network organizational structure. “The new design for the TNS organization will be based on creating a global learning community of professionals and practitioners, not only TNS or FSSD, but anyone interested in a like-minded approach to strategic sustainable development” (Baxter 2011). We recommend further research be offered to TNS to support development of this FSSD community of practice, possibly through study of what can be learned from the Art of Hosting network.
5 Conclusion

Our original hypothesis examined how dialogue-based methodologies could be integrated with planning for strategic sustainable development. We focused on how a specific set of dialogue-based methodologies within the Art of Hosting network could be integrated with the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) to strengthen the linkage between content and process.

We found evidence of the critical importance of pre-work in preparing for an ABCD strategic planning engagement. Clarifying the purpose for the work, creating shared understanding of both sustainability and participatory processes, getting a mandate to act, strategically creating a committed core team, building relationships of trust and transparency, and designing the ABCD strategic planning process proved to be essential elements in laying the foundation for successful strategic planning work.

In researching how practitioners use dialogue-based methodologies in strategic planning, we found that use of these methodologies per strategic planning stage cannot be specifically prescribed due to the unique nature of each engagement. We were able to make broad suggestions for patterns in appropriate use. It became clear that developing guidance on overall process design was far more valuable than suggesting which methodologies might work best in each strategic planning stage.

We identified clear synergies between the unpredictable realm of sustainability and the dialogue-based methodologies designed for dealing with complex issues. We are confident that the data and rationale put forth in this research provides strong evidence for the appropriate pairing of sustainability content with participatory processes.

During this study, we heard feedback from practitioners interested in testing and refining The Weave. They recognize its potential for guiding selection of methodologies and designing the processes appropriate for addressing the complex sustainability issues their clients are facing. For this reason, we hope that this Participatory Process Design Guide can serve as rich material for the development of a community of practice, where learning from the field can be shared amongst practitioners to build our collective capacity for working in participatory ways.
References


Frieze, Deborah and Margaret Wheatley. n.d. From Hero to host: A story of citizenship in Columbus, Ohio. Spokane: Berkana Institute
Haudan, James, and Donald MacLean. 2001. 'E' is for engagement: Transforming your business by transforming your people. *Journal of Change Management* 2, 3: 255-265.


Appendix A: Dialogue-Based Methodology Descriptions

This research paper is focused on the following set of dialogue-based methodologies, all of which are used by the Art of Hosting network. For more detailed descriptions of these methodologies, visit www.artofhosting.org.

**Appreciative Inquiry (AI):** an organizational development method designed around what is working, rather than trying to fix what is not. It identifies the best of ‘what is’ to pursue possibilities of ‘what could be’. The general flow of an AI process is to identify organizational strengths (Discover), envision how these strengths will work in the future (Dream), plan and prioritize with and for these strengths (Design) and implement the proposed design (Deliver). AI can frame an entire engagement or be used to offer specific action-oriented guidance. Used when a different perspective is needed, to help move a group that is stuck in ‘what is’ toward ‘what could be’, to frame stakeholder interviews, open meetings or conversations, and assist in determining what you value most about your self/work/organization. Developed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva. [http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/](http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/)

**The Circle (TC):** an ancient form of meeting that promotes focus, connection and participation from all. It is an intentional form of dialogue based on shared leadership, thoughtful speaking and deep listening. Participants sit in a circle and use agreements, practices and principles designed to care for the well being of all. Used to create the identity of the group and brings everyone immediately into relationship. The Circle is regularly used to open and close an engagement, and at times during the process.

**Open Space Technology (OST):** a process designed to facilitate parallel working/dialogue sessions around a central theme of strategic importance. Participants create and manage their own agenda by convening and engaging around issues of concern to them. Each conversation’s outcome is reported back to the whole group to bring everyone up to speed with possibilities and opportunities for collaboration. Used for strategic direction setting, envisioning the future, morale building, stakeholder consultation, and collaboration. ‘Discovered’ by Harrison Owen. [www.openspaceworld.org](http://www.openspaceworld.org)
**Pro Action Café (PC):** a process developed to deepen the level of inquiry into specific projects, leading to wiser and more collectively informed actions. It is a relatively new methodology that combines the conversation clusters and rounds of World Café with the participant created agenda of Open Space Technology. Participants bring their specific projects to the other attendees to go through three rounds of deep and focused conversation. The goal is to help move the project into action by increasing the level of commitment and readiness to act and move forward together. Developed by Rainer von Leoprechting.

**Theory U:** a change management method and theory of learning for generating ‘profound innovation’. The process describes a personal and collective 5-step journey that lead from ‘letting go’ of past models and ways of thinking, to co-creating and implementing models for a desired emerging future. The five steps are co-initiating, co-sensing, presencing, co-creating and co-evolving. The goal is to break out of past unproductive patterns of behavior that are ineffective for decision making. The theory advises that rushing into action is not effective, that each step must be taken in sequence for real change to occur, otherwise critical steps are skipped over and the intended change stalls. Developed by Otto Scharmer. www.presencing.com

**World Café (WC):** a process designed to foster interaction and dialogue around a specific topic or challenge. The session has an overarching theme and some sub-themes and participants move between conversation clusters (café-style tables) in successive rounds (usually three), sharing ideas and insights. A ‘host’ remains at each table to share key insights and questions with new table members and harvest the final results. Used for many different purposes, including information sharing, relationship building, reflection and action planning, WC is particularly effective in surfacing the collective intelligence in groups of diverse people. Co-founded by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs. www.theworldcafe.com
Appendix B: 6 ‘Breaths’ and Chaordic Stepping Stones

6 ‘Breaths’ of Process Architecture
The 6 ‘Breaths’ of Process Architecture is an emergent pattern of process design discovered by the Art of Hosting community of practitioners. It moves through six phases of divergence and convergence (the breaths), which are The Call, Clarify, Invite, Meet, Act, and Holding the Whole (Nissén 2011A).

![Diagram of 6 'Breaths' of Process Architecture]

Figure A.1. Simplified map showing the flow of the 6 ‘Breaths’ of Process Architecture. The five phases – The Call, Clarify, Invite, Meet and Act – are within the 6th, which is Holding the Whole. Each breath starts with divergence and ends with convergence. (Nissén 2011A)

The Call: when the issue, problem or challenge is named and a host has been called in.
Clarify: The callers and hosts work to create collective clarity of purpose and the first articulation of principles for working together.
Invite: in this breath, the engagement in which people will be invited to is designed to match the purpose. Stakeholders are invited.
Meet: the engagement takes place, allowing the collective wisdom to emerge and meaning to be made together. Harvesting is important to capture key messages and insights and decide on actions.
Act: the actions are put into practice with continuous follow-up and learning, never losing sight of the purpose.
Divergence, Emergence and Convergence

A pattern common to this work begins with divergence, when a conversation opens into exploration with a diversity of worldviews and perspectives. Maintaining this state long enough for new ideas to emerge, mental models to shift, and new possibilities to be seen is crucial to working with complexity. Well-crafted questions that keep the inquiry open, not allowing it to close down too soon, are key. When this shift begins to occur, the conversation moves into emergence. Practitioners say this is where ‘the magic happens’, when perspectives stretch to include other worldviews and new mental models, initiating the process of real change and innovation on an individual and collective level. Holding emergence (fondly known as the ‘groan zone’) long enough for this shift to happen will save time later on, as the next steps can happen rapidly once the shared goal is collectively seen.

Convergence begins at the point of collective understanding, and is goal-oriented, focused and structured. This is when the group is ready to analyze their situation, assess their options and make decisions for action. If the divergent phase is closed down too quickly, before the clarity of a shared goal emerges, convergence can become stuck in debate, indecision or apathy, derailing the entire process or rendering it ineffective. Analytical tools such as SWOT and PESTLE, are more useful in convergence than in divergence, where creativity and expansive thinking serve best.
Chaordic Stepping Stones of Design
This is a set of clear, strategic steps for the development of organizations to take advantage of both the chaos and order of complex challenges, group dialogues and planning. These steps can be used as a planning method to bring just enough structure (order) into the chaos and to assist the understanding of what is being discovered about an organization or initiative. They include identifying the need, formulating a clear purpose, defining principles to guide movement towards the goal, defining a concept, letting go of limiting beliefs, and eventually developing a structure and moving into practice. This process is iterative, continually checking back for integration with previous steps.

Figure A.2. The Chaordic Stepping Stones. Eight iterative steps: Need, Purpose, Principles, People, Concept, Limiting Beliefs, Structure and Practice (Nissén 2011A)
Appendix C: Survey Questions

Two surveys were created, one for sustainability practitioners and one for Art of Hosting practitioners. Differences in the surveys are noted below.

1. (Asked of sustainability practitioners)
   Please select the statement that best describes you:
   o TNS Practitioner, staff or associate
   o Trained in FSSD/TNS Framework and currently practicing
   o Trained in FSSD/TNS Framework, not currently practicing
   o None of the above (description box?)

   (Asked of Art of Hosting practitioners)
   Please provide a few sentences that describes your experience using dialogue-based methodologies.

2. In the table below, please select the statement that best describes your familiarity, training and use for each dialogue-based methodologies. (training = either as part of a formal Art of Hosting training or a 1+ day workshop/training on this specific methodology)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>never heard of it</th>
<th>heard of it, but have never used it</th>
<th>TRIED it in my work, have NO formal training in it</th>
<th>TRIED it in my work, HAVE formal training in it</th>
<th>USE it in my work, have NO formal training in it</th>
<th>USE it in my work, HAVE formal training in it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>World Café</td>
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<td>Open Space</td>
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<td>The Circle</td>
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<td>Appreciative Inquiry</td>
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<td>Pro Action Café</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. Below are the key strategic planning stages that we use in our work. For each stage listed, check the box to indicate which of the six dialogue-based methodologies you use, if any (you can select multiple methodologies for each stage). Please use the comment box to describe any details or modifications you make to this methodology. If none
apply, please check the 'Other' box and write the name and/or description of the process you use in the comment box.

(survey contained matrix with six dialogue-based methodologies and the eight strategic planning stages)

Strategic planning stages of the ABCD process:

i. Pre-work: defining the Need/Issues/Purpose of engagement
ii. Building Shared Awareness & Understanding of issue being addressed
iii. Creating a Shared Vision, Developing Strategic Goals/BHAGS
iv. Current Reality Assessment, Gap Analysis
v. Idea Generation/Brainstorming, Backcasting from Success
vi. Strategic Prioritization, Decision-making
vii. Action Planning
viii. Evaluating Progress, Re-evaluating Plans

4. (Asked of sustainability practitioners)
   Are you:
   o a Practitioner of the FSSD/TNS Framework
   AND
   o Formally trained in Art of Hosting techniques
   AND
   o Able to commit to a 2-hour Skype meeting in April?

   If so, are you interested in participating on our panel to provide feedback on our prototype for integration of dialogue-based methodologies with planning for strategic sustainable development? (Comment box)

5. If you would like to be further involved in this research (for example, to participate in an interview or see the outcomes) please provide your contact information below. Name, email, country you are working in. (Comment box)

Thank you for your participation. Your input is appreciated. Our final thesis will contain an anonymous summary of results and will be archived and accessible from the BTH website.
Appendix D: Interview Questions

These interview questions were asked of both sustainability practitioners and Art of Hosting practitioners. All were emailed the list of dialogue-based methodologies under study.

1. Have you completed our online survey?

2. For each strategic planning stage of the ABCD process (i through viii):
   i. Pre-work: defining the Need/Issues/Purpose of engagement
   ii. Building Shared Awareness & Understanding of issue being addressed
   iii. Creating a Shared Vision, Developing Strategic Goals/BHAGS
   iv. Current Reality Assessment, Gap Analysis
   v. Idea Generation/Brainstorming, Backcasting from Success
   vi. Strategic Prioritization, Decision-making
   vii. Action Planning
   viii. Evaluating Progress, Re-evaluating Plans

   a. What dialogue-based methodology/ies do you use for this stage of strategic planning, and why?
   b. Are you using these methodology/ies ‘by the book’? If not, how are you adapting it to suit your purpose, and why?
   c. What are the right questions to ask participants when using this methodology?
   d. What have you learned from applying this methodology (e.g. subtleties in application)?
   e. What is the essence of this methodology that must be incorporated?
   f. Have you experienced a time when this methodology really did not suit the intended purpose? In what circumstances would you avoid using this methodology?
   g. Anything else to add about this strategic planning stage?

3. What are we missing? (eg. additional strategic planning pieces or processes)

4. What other resources might help us in our research?

5. Who else should we be connecting with?

6. Do you have any further comments?
Appendix E: External Input

Preliminary Interviews – sustainability practitioners
Kelly Hawke Baxter (TNS-Canada)
Richard Blume (TNS-International)
Heidi Speight (TNS-US)
Heidi Spinella (TNS-US)
Heather Worosz (former TNS-International, MSLS alumna, AoH trained)

Sustainability Practitioner Interviewee List
Sarah Brooks (TNS-Canada)
Dave Cook (TNS-International Board)
Eric Ezechieli (TNS-Italy)
Martin Hunt (Forum for the Future - UK)
Pong Leung (TNS-Canada, former MSLS Programme Director)
Stanley Nyoni (TNS-Switzerland)
Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt (TNS Founder/MSLS Programme Founder)
Ása Stenborg (TNS-International)
Dave Waldron (former MSLS Programme Director)

Art of Hosting Interviewee List
Dr. Phil Cass (Columbia Medical Association, USA)
Chris Corrigan (Harvest Moon Consultants, Canada)
Matthieu Kleinschmager (European Commission, Belgium)
Toke Paludan Møller (AoH Co-founder, Denmark)
Jan Hein Nielsen (AoH Co-founder, Denmark)
Monica Nissén (AoH Co-founder, Denmark)
Dr. Laura Weisel (TLP Group, USA)
Tenneson Woolf (Berkana Institute, USA)

Advisory Panel Participants
Maura Dilley (MSLS alumna)
Matt Mayer (MSLS alumnus)
Karin Miller (TNS-Canada/MSLS alumna)
Kara Stonehouse (TNS-Canada/MSLS alumna)
Freek Van der Pluijm (TNS-Netherlands/MSLS alumnus)
Prototype Reviewers
Richard Blume (TNS-International)
Augusto Cuginotti (MSLS alumnus)
Eric Ezechiel (TNS-Italy)
Jeff Leinaweaver (TNS-US Associate)
Yurie Makihara (MSLS alumna)
Matt Mayer (MSLS alumnus)
Monica Nissén (Art of Hosting, Denmark)
Karl-Henrik Robèrt (TNS Founder, MSLS Programme Founder)
Pablo Villoch (MSLS alumnus)
Bob Willard (TNS-Canada Board, Sustainability Advantage)
Appendix F: Survey Summary Results

Figure F.1. Sustainability Practitioner Survey Results

Figure F.2. Art of Hosting Practitioner Survey Results
Appendix G: Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes for SSD

This collection of Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes for Strategic Sustainable Development can help a practitioner stay grounded and aligned with the practices considered foundational to participatory leadership. They are essential to any practitioner’s ability to guide an emergent, participatory process.

Know Yourself First
Personal practice (for example meditation, journaling) allows access to a deeper level of consciousness necessary to be present and hold the space for others to work in a participatory way. Incorporating reflection and listening time into daily routines facilitates deeper knowing. Pursue your own development to serve the greater good.

The Learning is in the Practice
Embodiment of relevant frameworks/models, facilitation/hosting skills, and participatory processes are fundamentals that underlie the ability to adapt to emergence and uncertainty. Since neither participatory processes nor sustainable development can ever be predicted, knowledge, skill, intuition and fluidity are required and can only be gained through practicing the fundamentals and harvesting their lessons over time.

Be on a Learning Journey
Working in a participatory way creates a shared learning journey for everyone in the room. Practitioners do not deliver ‘the answers’. Instead, they allow their learning journey to intersect with others.

Hold Space
Practitioners of participatory processes must be present and create the container, hold that space, and let go of personal expectations, allowing others to show up fully. Put full trust in the group and the process – collective intelligence will emerge if we feel comfortable in the unknowing while holding the group in a space of possibility and safety.
Quality of Work is Dependent on Quality of Relationships
The strategic plan for sustainability is only as good as the relationships between the people who created it and the relationship with the vision it hopes to achieve. Are these relationships built of trust, reverence and respect? If so, the resulting work will hold the integrity worthy of the commitment.

Faster Alone, Further Together
Understand and share the value of working in a participatory way. The gift of collective intelligence and co-learning is that everyone leaves the room with something nobody came in with. “I don’t know, but WE do”. This does not mean everyone must agree, but that we can be courageous enough to disagree and not walk away. Complex challenges require collective input and collaboration across silos if non-incremental, transformational change is to occur.

Practice Authenticity
Bring real, authentic, vulnerable stories into the room. If practitioners can be honest about who they are and what they believe up front, relationships of integrity will follow. Authenticity is the best leadership tool.

Meet People Where They Are
Change begins from where the client is, not from where the practitioner is. When open to new perspectives and letting go of limiting beliefs, common ground and shared meaning can be found. Be present, be curious, suspend judgment and cynicism, respect the intelligence in the room - and invite others to do the same. Communicate to the worldviews of the people you are working with.

Make Meaning
Dialogue is ‘meaning flowing through’ by deep listening, suspending judgment and being present. Practice using dialogue, teach it and build capacity in others so meaning can be created collectively. Recognize the differences between dialogue and discussion, so that the journey is one of shared discovery not individual opinion, and the conversation is one with a center instead of sides.

Create a Shared Language
A common and relevant language for sustainability and for working together is essential to this work. When our definitions match, our purpose and goals are in alignment and confusion cannot derail our progress.
Connect with Stories
Deeper understanding and connection are gained through stories and metaphors that are within the context of our own experience. By framing dialogue and content with stories and metaphors, our connections to sustainability and to each other deepen.

Build Capacity
For lasting change to happen, the work must continue after the practitioner leaves. Building capacity around both sustainability content and participatory process is essential. The gift of good process is that it allows people to be in learning together. The gift of content is that it gives definition and focus to the work. By building capacity in both, transformational change toward sustainability can happen.
Appendix H: Guiding Principles for Process Design

The Guiding Principles for Process Design are embedded throughout the Template for process design (Appendix J) and are useful as strategic tools for practitioners when designing an engagement. Intentional pre-work is critical to good planning.

Involve the Right People at the Right Time
Use people’s time and talents mindfully, where it is of most value for them and for achieving the purpose. Time is the biggest barrier to doing this work. Being intentional in identifying those with the expertise, passion or skills is one strategic way to use people’s time wisely and make the planning process efficient and effective. By inviting the right people, there will be no need to ‘sell’ the plan because they will have been involved in creating it. The extra time invested in the beginning will pay off in the end.

Plan for the Harvest
Just as a farmer plans for the harvest before planting the seeds, the practitioner needs to plan for the harvest of outcomes before hosting the engagement. Take time to notice new questions and emerging patterns from the conversations and harvest the meaning from them. Then communicate this meaning in a format that serves the needs of the organization. Backcast from the required outcome for every stage, keeping in mind the form in which the information needs to be communicated. Give attention and energy to harvesting the non-tangible outcomes: relationships, trust and energy. These are often the drivers of lasting change; consider ways to carry them forward.

Ask Powerful Questions
Powerful questions invite inquiry and new possibilities. There is strategy and logic behind designing powerful questions for each stage of strategic planning. Take time to design the questions that need to be asked – the right question will be specific and clear, get to the heart of the matter and make the work easier. The wrong question can make the work useless. Two threads, personal and professional, can be addressed throughout the entire process. If we only address the professional, the personal may not be committed and the work may lack the heart it needs to be done well.
Reflect at Every Step
Stay in alignment with the need and purpose by building in reflection and learning loops at every step. Slowing down to reflect on the shifts in learning that are taking place, allows the important lessons to be recognized and incorporated. Before moving on to the next phase or strategic planning stage, check in with the purpose, and reflect on progress, learning and remaining questions. Invite a learning attitude in one another.

Know the Boundaries
Boundaries create the safe container in which creativity can emerge. Just as the sustainability principles are the boundary conditions for all action planning, the boundary conditions for a successful engagement must be defined. Set yourself and your client up for success by knowing when to say no. Lack of a mandate can lead to disempowerment; lack of time or resources can limit the effectiveness of the work and therefore the outcome. Agree to work within your own parameters of success and be clear what can successfully be accomplished within the parameters offered by the client.

Define Context before Choosing Methodology
Identify the context of the problem before selecting the planning framework and specific methodologies or tools. Complex adaptive systems need a planning framework suited for complexity, adaptability, resilience, flexibility and responsiveness because outcomes are not predictable or linear. For problems that are predictable, tools informed through analysis and by expert knowledge may be needed. A tool designed for complexity will not work to solve a linear problem and a tool designed for a linear problem will not serve a complex one. Participatory processes are designed for complex situations, allowing people to be in learning together.

Weave the Methodologies
The methodologies are the vessels that hold the conversations that matter. No one methodology serves all purposes, and every engagement design is unique. It is in the weaving of the methodologies that the ‘magic’ arises.

*The Weave* includes a Template for process design, guidance for sustainability practitioners, suggestions, examples, guiding principles and additional resources.

The full version of *The Weave* is downloadable at www.theweave.info.
### Appendix J: Template for Process Design

#### Exploration Exploring the Purpose
- Sustainability Practitioners
- Senior Management
- Sustainability Champion(s)

#### Commitment Creating a Core Team of People
- Sustainability Practitioners
- Core Team (may include senior management, sustainability champions and others)

#### Design Designing the Engagement Process
- Sustainability Practitioners
- Core Team

#### Engagement Creating the Strategic Plan
- Sustainability Practitioners
- Core Team
- Invited Stakeholders (may/may not be entire organization)

#### Integration Putting the Strategic Plan into Practice
- Core Team
- Whole Organization
- Sustainability Practitioner (support role)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Process Design</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploration Exploring the Purpose</td>
<td>Sustainability Practitioners, Senior Management, Sustainability Champion(s)</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Core team commitment to steward the purpose, Core team agreements for working collectively, Clarify the intention of the Engagement, Begin core team capacity building (in participatory leadership, dialogue, co-learning, FSSD, sustainability principles, shared language)</td>
<td>Framed by the 5LF: System: Define boundary conditions for the engagement (time, space, budget, content, etc) Success: Define a successful outcome of the engagement (backcast from purpose) Strategic: Backcast to plan the participant list, the outcome harvest, the questions, and the learning reflections. The Cynefin Framework and Guiding Principles for Process Design can help with selecting methodologies and designing the Engagement. Action: Process design, logistics, research, communication Tools: Methodologies, facilitation tools, supplies, etc.</td>
<td>Host the Engagement, the full ABCD process (Every engagement is unique to the context of the organization – there is no recipe. This may be the only strategic planning engagement, or the first in a series. See below this table for dialogue-based methodology suggestions per phase and the Engagement Phase Expanded (Appendix K) for more details.) Harvest the outcome from each stage of the ABCD process sharply (to build the strategic plan) Commitment to put the strategic plan into practice Commitment to reconvene to assess progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment Creating a Core Team of People</td>
<td>Sustainability Practitioners</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>Core team commitment to steward the purpose, Core team agreements for working collectively, Clarify the intention of the Engagement, Begin core team capacity building (in participatory leadership, dialogue, co-learning, FSSD, sustainability principles, shared language)</td>
<td>Process design (with harvest output format determined per stage) Engagement invitation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Designing the Engagement Process</td>
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<td>Process</td>
<td>Process design, logistics, research, communication Tools: Methodologies, facilitation tools, supplies, etc.</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement Creating the Strategic Plan</td>
<td>Engagement Creating the Strategic Plan</td>
<td>Plan</td>
<td>Host the Engagement, the full ABCD process (Every engagement is unique to the context of the organization – there is no recipe. This may be the only strategic planning engagement, or the first in a series. See below this table for dialogue-based methodology suggestions per phase and the Engagement Phase Expanded (Appendix K) for more details.) Harvest the outcome from each stage of the ABCD process sharply (to build the strategic plan) Commitment to put the strategic plan into practice Commitment to reconvene to assess progress</td>
<td>Practice new actions, guided by the Strategic Plan Communicate outcome to stakeholders (internal, external, participants, decision makers) Reconvene to assess progress (practicing participatory methodology, hosted by core team) Plan the next engagement based on the outcome harvest from the progress assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration Putting the Strategic Plan into Practice</td>
<td>Integration Putting the Strategic Plan into Practice</td>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Practice new actions, guided by the Strategic Plan Communicate outcome to stakeholders (internal, external, participants, decision makers) Reconvene to assess progress (practicing participatory methodology, hosted by core team) Plan the next engagement based on the outcome harvest from the progress assessment</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### commitments
- Sustainability Practitioners
- Core Team
- Invited Stakeholders (may/may not be entire organization)

#### Engagements
- Host the Engagement, the full ABCD process (Every engagement is unique to the context of the organization – there is no recipe. This may be the only strategic planning engagement, or the first in a series. See below this table for dialogue-based methodology suggestions per phase and the Engagement Phase Expanded (Appendix K) for more details.)
- Harvest the outcome from each stage of the ABCD process sharply (to build the strategic plan)
- Commitment to put the strategic plan into practice
- Commitment to reconvene to assess progress

#### Participants
- Sustainability Practitioners
- Senior Management
- Sustainability Champion(s)

#### Focus
- Purpose: Clarify the purpose for working toward sustainability, Mandate from senior executive, Create shared understanding of sustainability and participatory processes
- People: Core team commitment to steward the purpose, Core team agreements for working collectively, Clarify the intention of the Engagement, Begin core team capacity building (in participatory leadership, dialogue, co-learning, FSSD, sustainability principles, shared language)
- Process: Framed by the 5LF: System: Define boundary conditions for the engagement (time, space, budget, content, etc) Success: Define a successful outcome of the engagement (backcast from purpose) Strategic: Backcast to plan the participant list, the outcome harvest, the questions, and the learning reflections. The Cynefin Framework and Guiding Principles for Process Design can help with selecting methodologies and designing the Engagement. Action: Process design, logistics, research, communication Tools: Methodologies, facilitation tools, supplies, etc.
- Plan: Host the Engagement, the full ABCD process (Every engagement is unique to the context of the organization – there is no recipe. This may be the only strategic planning engagement, or the first in a series. See below this table for dialogue-based methodology suggestions per phase and the Engagement Phase Expanded (Appendix K) for more details.)
- Harvesting Outcomes: Clear purpose, Mandate, Shared understanding
- Agreements: Intention of the Engagement
- Engage: Process design (with harvest output format determined per stage) Engagement invitation
- Shared vision, Current reality analysis, Key strategic goals, Strategic plan (draft with prototype actions for piloting, longer term actions, goals, strategies, timeline, responsibility, metrics)
- Next steps (related to commitment to put plan into practice and to reconvene, as above)

#### Agreement
- Shared vision
- Current reality analysis
- Key strategic goals
- Strategic plan (draft with prototype actions for piloting, longer term actions, goals, strategies, timeline, responsibility, metrics)
- Next steps (related to commitment to put plan into practice and to reconvene, as above)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Exploration</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
<th>Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Root Question</td>
<td><strong>Why do I/do this organization care about moving toward sustainability?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Who has the passion, will and expertise to steward this?</strong></td>
<td><strong>How will we invite creativity and co-creation from participants to move us to action?</strong></td>
<td><strong>What strategic approaches arise from our collective intelligence that we can make actionable?</strong></td>
<td><strong>When do we start practicing each of these actions to live and work more sustainably?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Root Questions per Outcome | **Purpose**  
- Personal: Why do you care personally about sustainability?  
- Professional: Why are you willing to commit this organization to work toward sustainability?  
- Shared Understanding  
  - What is our shared understanding of the sustainability challenge, our sustainability definition and how we want to work together?  
| **Agreements**  
- Personal: What do I need in order to bring my highest potential to this purpose?  
- Professional: What will it take to do our best work together to steward our shared purpose?  
| **Process Design**  
- Have we mindfully considered the overarching intention of the engagement, the Guiding Principles for Process Design, roles of the core team members, and the needs of our participants in this design?  
- Engagement Intention  
  - Personal: What would inspire me to participate in this Engagement? (assuming it is my choice to do so)  
  - Professional: What is the purpose of the Engagement we are inviting people to?  
| **Root questions per strategic planning stage in Engagement Phase Expanded in Appendix K (also in The Weave)** | **Assessment of Progress:**  
- What have we learned about our strategic plan, about ourselves, about how we work together?  
- Stakeholder Feedback  
- Who needs to be informed of our decisions, progress and next steps?  
- How will we keep them in the conversation? |
| Reflection | **Reflect on learnings about organization, working together, sustainability** | **Reflect on learnings about relationships, trust, agreements, needs of team members, clarity of purpose, next steps** | **Reflect on learnings about clarity of purpose for the engagement, strategic elements of planning, working in participatory ways, how the core team is doing relative to energy/confidence/needs/agreements** | **Reflection will be planned into the ABCD engagement. Following this phase, the core team can reflect on learnings about the engagement process itself (design, flow, harvesting, etc), about hosting participatory processes, new questions/information, etc.** | **Reflect on learnings about organization, working together, sustainability.** |
| Principles | **Sustainability Principles, Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (Appendix G)** | | | | |
Appendix K: Engagement Phase
Expanded (excerpted from The Weave)

The Engagement phase (Creating the Strategic Plan) is where key internal and external stakeholders begin the process of collectively creating the strategic plan. In this section, detailed guidance is offered to assist the core team in designing the Engagement. It considers each stage of the ABCD strategic planning process, including methodologies and root questions.

During the Engagement phase, an entire ABCD planning process may occur in a single session, or through a series of sessions over a longer period of time. Many dialogue-based methodologies will be woven into this process, along with additional facilitation tools and analysis tools, such as SWOT or PESTLE. The Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes are foundational during this phase (Appendix G).

The core team takes on the role of hosting this engagement with the larger group of invited participants. Intentionally designing this team to include the needed skill sets and building their capacity to work with participatory processes can help balance the multiple roles a sustainability practitioner is often expected to play (sustainability expert, business consultant, process facilitator).

Figure K.4 shows the strategic planning stages that occur within the Engagement phase. Note that the ABCD process has been translated into six generic strategic planning stages to avoid confusion between various interpretations of the ABCD. These stages are: Building Shared Awareness and Understanding, Creating Shared Vision, Current Reality Assessment, Brainstorming Actions, Strategic Prioritization, and Action Planning.

Figure K.4 The six strategic planning stages within the Engagement Phase
The same key considerations introduced per phase in the Template must also be considered in designing the Engagement for each strategic planning stage: participants, harvesting outcomes, powerful questions, reflecting on learning and guiding principles. An additional consideration during the Design phase is the selection of appropriate methodologies for each strategic planning stage.

**Selecting Methodologies**

Every engagement is unique to the context of the organization, and there is no prescription for which methodology should be used for each strategic planning stage. Deciding which methodology to use depends on several factors including time, logistics, required outcomes, familiarity with methodologies and the context of the issue. Certain situations are suited to collaboration (complex), while others may benefit from hierarchical leadership (predictable or linear). It is not helpful to fall into the divisiveness of judgment, seeing one form as best in all situations. With this in mind, and given that the sustainability challenge is a complex situation, collaboration with a diverse group across silos is generally necessary to find solutions, as no single person – no matter how expert – has the answers.

Table K.1 displays suggestions based on pairing the necessary outcome of each stage with the intended purpose of the methodologies. Keep in mind these methodologies are adaptable and could be used in other stages as well. Root questions for each stage are also included. The specific framing or form of the question will change based on context and examples are included per stage below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage: Building Shared Awareness and Understanding</th>
<th>Creating Shared Vision</th>
<th>Current Reality Assessment</th>
<th>Brainstorming Actions</th>
<th>Strategic Prioritization</th>
<th>Action Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Framing</td>
<td>Theory U</td>
<td>Theory U</td>
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<tr>
<td>Methodologies</td>
<td>The Circle</td>
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<td></td>
<td>World Café</td>
<td>World Café</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Open Space</td>
<td>Open Space</td>
<td>Open Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Question:</td>
<td>What is happening in the world/this organization that requires us to get together to do this work?</td>
<td>What do you dream possible if you were operating in the world from a place of full sustainability?</td>
<td>What are your strengths and your challenges, relative to the four sustainability principles?</td>
<td>What can we begin to practice that will make the work we do together and the way we deliver our products and services in the world more sustainable?</td>
<td>What actions are strategic moves towards full sustainability?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Two methodologies, Theory U and Appreciative Inquiry (A.I.), can be valuable concepts with which the practitioner can frame an entire engagement, similar to how the Template for process design is framed. Both methodologies also offer action-oriented guidance that can be useful at various stages. The other four methodologies (addressed in this research) are well suited for different stages of the planning process. See appendix A for further information on each methodology.

Example per Strategic Planning Stage

The following section is simply a set of examples for how a practitioner might go about using participatory methodologies in each stage of the ABCD process. They are not intended to be prescriptive or proven as effective, rather suggestions to stimulate creative thinking to apply to any planning process. Suggestions are provided for methodologies and questions at each stage. The intention is that these will provide inspiration for creating powerful questions for your specific context. The importance of good questions can not be overstated.

Building Shared Awareness & Understanding
Building shared awareness and understanding of the organization, those involved, the sustainability challenge and the FSSD is the first strategic planning stage. This stage will likely include some input around the current scientific data, the sustainability principles and creating a shared language for sustainability. Be aware of the different roles expected of a practitioner (expert/presenter, host/ facilitator) and help participants by clarifying the difference. Be mindful of the Guiding Principles for Leading Participatory Processes (Appendix G), in particular, meeting people where they are.

Two lines of questioning are important throughout: personal and professional. From the very beginning, invite the humanity of the participants to be present in the conversation so that engagement and meaning can come from a deeper level. The ‘professional’ won’t leave when the ‘personal’ is invited, but the ‘personal’ may not arrive without an invitation.

A World Café could be used in this stage, around a question that explores sustainability in the context of participants’ personal and professional lives. In a small group, Circle could also effectively achieve this objective.
During this stage, deep-dialogue interviews from Theory U can be useful with various stakeholders.

Inviting participants to a dialogue about what matters most to them (around sustainability) demonstrates respect for the intelligence in the group and creates openness for deeper learning. This approach helps remind people what they already know. It may then be appropriate to supplement their knowledge and experience with ‘teaching’ around current scientific data, which may not require a participatory approach.

Example Questions
Root question: What is happening in the world/this organization that requires us to get together to do this work?

Sustainability Challenge:
- What are we noticing in the world that is/is not sustainable? How do we feel it is influencing our lives and our work as citizens and as professionals?
- What is happening in the world right now - what trends are we seeing that are part of the solution/part of the problem?
- What would it take to make the world fully sustainable? What would it take to make our region fully sustainable?

Organizational Awareness:
- What is going on in this organization that requires us to get together and be creative and imaginative?
- Why do we care to be an organization that is operating in a sustainable way?

Personal:
- Why do you care to live sustainably?
- What might be better in your life if you could live in a fully sustainable way?
- What do you wish for (your) children when they are your age?

Creating Shared Vision
Creating a shared vision includes exploring core values, core purpose and a vision for a sustainable future. Identifying the core values underlying an organizational vision, and the personal connection stakeholders have with those values, can be important prior to beginning the visioning session. A World Café can be used to explore shared values, core purpose and key strategic goals.
Example (1.5-2 hours): Core Values

Begin by discussing in pairs (4 minutes):
• What made me decide to work with [organization]?
Switch partners and repeat.

Move into a World Café with these questions (15 minutes per round):
1st round: What are the values that you hold dear (personal level)?
2nd round: What are the values you believe this organization stands for?
3rd round: As we move forward, what three values do you want to be sure to keep?

In the 3rd round, harvest the 3 values found to be most common onto individual sheets of paper (10 minutes).
Have a harvest space prepared on the wall called, ‘Shared Values’. Invite each table to share their three values and post them on the wall. As themes emerge, invite them to cluster similar themes.

During a change process, assuring people that the things they value most can remain the same will help to create the security needed to explore new ideas. Close by explaining that these values will be the foundation of the visioning session you will be moving into.

The second step in developing a shared vision is finding clarity around the core purpose of the organization. If ‘purpose is the invisible leader’ then what purpose does this organization serve in the world? What is our reason for being? Building on the purpose identified in the Exploration and Commitment Phases, explore how the purpose aligns with sustainability. What key words arise? Combine them with the values harvest to write a sample vision. World Café and The Circle can be used for creating a common vision amongst participants.

Realize that articulating a single organizational vision is rarely accomplished in one session, and often takes many months of gathering diverse perspectives, refining and reflecting. Do not feel the need to force words to the page; time and reflection will bring it forward. Collect all the written visions, make them available to everyone, and revisit them as the process evolves.
Example Questions
Root Question: What do you dream possible if you were operating in the world from a place of full sustainability?
Invite silent reflection on the following personal questions:
• What is the possibility you are cultivating?
• What do you dream possible if you were living in the world from a place of full sustainability?

Questions for leading a visioning exercise:
• What year will it be when (your) children are your age today, and if you could create a sustainable world for them, what would it look like then?
• As you write your acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize for Sustainability in 2050, what have you achieved and what are your stakeholders saying about you?

Visioning Questions:
• How might your organization look if you were able to move it toward sustainability?
• Assuming society becomes sustainable, what do you feel is the role of your organization in that society?
• What do you wish for your organization, for your community?
• How does your organization reach the world?
• What does the world expect from you?

Current Reality Assessment
A World Café can be used to surface current strengths and challenges, both internal and external to the organization. A sharp harvest from the Word Café can then be summarized in a SWOT, PESTLE, or similar model. A high-level sustainability principle analysis can be done in a World Café, with the outcome harvest feeding into an individual assignment of creating the detailed baseline assessment. Much of the current reality assessment, especially collection of baseline data, may best be accomplished by smaller groups or individuals, and not necessarily in a participatory way. This stage is likely a combination of both.

Example (1.5-2 hours): Current Reality Café

World Café could be used to create a sustainability principles analysis using a question such as ‘How does our work align with the conditions for a sustainable society?’ On each café table, have a large piece of paper divided
into four sections with each representing one of the 4 sustainability principles.

1st round: What are we already doing well (in alignment with the sustainability principles)? Have them harvest onto the paper.
2nd round: Where are we not in alignment?
3rd round: What is missing (review both round 1 and 2). Harvest by inviting each table to post their key findings onto a quadrant diagram on wall or floor.

After a break, a Café could be used to reframe the key challenges into key strategic goals, perhaps in two rounds (e.g. from ‘we rely on gasoline for our vehicle fleet’ to ‘we create only benign emissions, or net-zero GHG emissions’).

---

Example Questions
Root Question: What are your strengths and your challenges, relative to the four sustainability principles?

- What are you already doing well? (in line with the sustainability principles)
- Where are you not in alignment with the sustainability principles?
- What services do those actions (not in alignment) give you?
- Are there other ways to serve our purpose/meet the need we have not yet considered that are in alignment (e.g. leasing instead of selling furniture)?
- What are the key challenges you are facing based on this assessment (assuming the actions not in alignment are critical to the functioning of our organization)?
- Based upon your values and your vision, what currently is in place to support that vision, and what challenges are you currently facing that could get in the way of moving towards that vision?

**Brainstorming Actions**
Open Space Technology (OST) is often used in the Brainstorming Actions stage to generate ideas that people are passionate about and willing to take responsibility for. Be pointed in asking the right question, to focus the OST on developing a list of compelling actions for moving the organization toward its vision. Be more focused than just requesting ideas, the question is vital to the outcome.
Prior to the OST, other facilitation tools for brainstorming could be used to generate a long list of creative ideas. This list could then feed into the OST agenda with those ideas where people feel the most passion, energy and possibility.

**Example Questions**

**Root Question:** What can we begin to practice that will make the work we do together and the way we deliver our products and services in the world more sustainable?

Potential questions to guide the process include:

- What are the issues and opportunities for us to become more in alignment with the four sustainability principles?
- What ideas will make the way we work together and the way we deliver our services and products in the world more sustainable?
- What ideas and practices do we want to further explore in order for us to begin to live in alignment with the four sustainability principles?
- What do we need to practice as individuals, and as a collective, to make our vision come alive?
- How can I personally begin to live my life more in line with the four sustainability principles?

**Strategic Prioritization**

Open Space Technology can also be used to more deeply develop action plans for those ideas that inspire passion and commitment within the organization. World Café could be an effective process for collecting diverse insights into the three strategic prioritization questions.

The following story describes how TNS Canada practitioners Sarah Brooks and Pong Leung used Open Space Technology at this stage:

We ran an Open Space where we were looking for quick, early moves so we needed specific information - who is the lead, what steps will be taken, who’s on the team, what resources are needed, timeline, under whose purview will this ultimately sit? We provided a template with the project title, description of the project and on the back side we asked them to scrutinize the initiatives through the lens of the three strategic prioritization questions (of the FSSD). The information was useful, easy to transcribe, and helpful. All that was fed back to the sustainability champions and they began to create a company-wide timeline. We used a modified Open Space and got the needed output. It was an absolutely
fantastic session. (Brooks 2011)

In general, depending on the depth of analysis required for each action, strategic prioritization might not be best suited to participatory process.

Example Questions
Root Question: What actions are strategic moves towards full sustainability?

The three FSSD prioritization questions:
• Does this action lead in the right direction?
• Can it serve as a flexible platform for future improvements?
• Does it provide sufficient return on investment?

Action Planning
Both Open Space Technology and Pro Action Café could be used in action planning. The key here is to harvest the outcome in a format that is actionable within the organization. Planning templates can guide the harvest, so that details can be captured in the moment either on paper, a laptop or online forum (e.g. Google Docs, wiki). Templates may include the action, strategy and goal, those responsible, timeline, resources required or available, and metrics. This stage of planning, in particular, is of no use if the outcome is not clearly communicated. Those actions identified as high priority (needing to begin immediately) and those identified as quickly implementable could be taken into either PC or OST for detailed planning.

Example Questions
Root Question: What planning is required to implement the actions we have selected?

• What recommendations do we need to agree upon to begin practicing sustainability in our organization?
• What planning is required to implement actions we have selected?
• What is the decision we would like to see considered and what are we ready to do to make this happen?
• What (personal/ professional/ organizational) practices would make these goals become real in our daily lives?
• What commitments must we agree to, in order for this to become a sustainable practice in our organization?
• What are we willing to let go of to open the space for these new practices in our organization?
• What do we need to maintain to support these practices and the people involved in the change?
• Who is ready to take responsibility for this?
• What are the core factors that would support this shift?

Concluding the Engagement – Potential Questions for Closing Circle
• What wishes do you have for this organization? (for its future?)
• What are you walking away with?
• What has changed/awakened/been stirred up in you for this new work?
• What are we being called to become?
• What could our organization also be?

Harvesting Outcomes
Capturing tangible outcomes from participatory processes is critical and should be approached strategically. The process design must include ways to both capture and share outcomes. Depending on the engagement process, there may be a number of harvest steps before the final sustainability strategic plan is complete. Backcast from the required outcome for every stage, keeping in mind the format in which the information needs to be communicated.

There are a myriad of ways that the harvest can be captured, the choice of which will depend on the ultimate outcome, process methodology used, organizational context, needs of the client, and any additional goals. Below are a few harvest examples:
• Capturing ideas on a wall, clustering similar ideas
• Assigning table hosts to capture ideas on flip charts and share them in plenary
• Providing a template for each table host or subject lead to fill in during allocated reflection time. This can be a paper template or with laptops captured on a memory stick or an online form (e.g. Google Docs, online mindmapping, wiki, etc). Categories might include goal, strategies, actions, next steps, lead, responsibilities, timeline, required resources. Subject leads can then speak the highlights back to the circle in closing.
• Collectively mind mapping ideas using an online tool and projector
• Prototyping actions or structural ideas using clay or other materials
• Incorporating a graphic facilitator/recorder to visually capture content in real time, highlighting insights and patterns to provide participants with an immediate reflection of what is being accomplished
• Using audio or video recording, and transcribing after Engagement
• Written newsletter for stakeholders
• Written strategic reports
Harvesting is more than strictly capturing outcomes. It includes making sense of all the various inputs, noticing emerging patterns, and identifying questions to bring forward to the rest of the process. It is equally important to harvest the relationships and energy created with this way of working as well as the information. Never enter any conversation without harvesting something from it. Just as a farmer plans for the harvest before planting the seeds, plan for the harvest of outcomes before hosting the engagement.