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Introducing the Host Leadership Field Book

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The publication of the book *Host: Six new roles of engagement for teams, organisations, communities and movements* (McKergow & Bailey, 2014) has led to a growing community engaging in practising and exploring Host Leadership. Gatherings in London (2016) and Paris (2018) helped to develop links and connections within this community. When plans for the next gathering in Oberschleissheim near Munich, Germany began to emerge, Pierluigi Pugliese and his team at Connexxo GmbH proposed that the purpose of the gathering should be to write a Field Book: a compilation of experiences, developments, learnings and applications of Host Leadership around the world.

The gathering itself comprised three days: an introductory workshop led by Pierluigi, a conference day with workshops and presentations, and finally an Open Space day to start writing the Field Book. Pierluigi was keen to adapt ‘mob programming’ methods from the Agile world into ‘mob writing’; many different conversations were convened and work commenced! We are delighted to say that eleven of the chapters here result directly from work commenced on that day.

What we were not really prepared for was the response from people who could not, for one reason or another, join us in Germany. We received proposals, ideas and even draft chapters from around the world, many of which have subsequently been developed into full chapters for this book. The resulting collection is 30 chapters of international experience and inspiration including contributors from Australia, the Pacific shores of Canada, the Great Lakes region of Africa, Bulgaria, the German alps and Scandinavia. The book has been produced to preserve something of the original voices of the authors, so you may find different ways of writing and expressing ideas here – it’s all part of the worldwide movement of Host Leadership.

The settings described in the book are equally diverse. We have contributions from organisational leadership, education, social services, agile project management, coaching, support groups, virtual teams and community leadership. There are sections on how to introduce Host Leadership into organisations and how to develop yourself and your colleagues and clients as host leaders. There are also some provocative thoughts about where the Host Leadership movement might develop in the years to come.

Mark McKergow and Helen Bailey's original book *Host* presented for the first time their models of six roles and four positions for a host leader. While their book is not the first to look at hosting as a key aspect of being with people, it was the first to explore in depth and in detail, through history and in different cultures, what great hosts actually do, and how this can transfer directly into leading. The metaphor of a host is instantly apparent to almost everyone. These roles and positions add a wealth of detail and possibility. It's worth briefly outlining the roles and positions here, as many of the following chapters draw on and expand them in different contexts.

Step forward or step back?

The key question for leaders: are you going to step forward or step back next? Both of these moves, and combining them into a dance, are at the heart of Host Leadership. Are you going to step forward to make something happen, or step back and allow others space and time to respond and make their own contributions?

Six roles for a host leader

These six roles are different ways for a host leader to step forward when they need to. They are ways to bring people together in a useful fashion, to create engagement which in turn leads to performance and results.

Initiator

We rarely initiate entirely on our own, from nothing or out of thin air. There is usually a call to action of some kind. This may take the form of an interest, dissatisfaction, a passion, a rage, or just wanting to see something done better or differently; it may be big, for example, ending child exploitation, or it may be smaller, for example, organising the team's documents so people can find what they need more quickly. Whatever, leaders step forward and make the first move.

Inviter

Thinking invitationally is at the heart of Host Leadership. When we invite, and people accept, they show up being involved, open, engaged, part of the process. When we invite, and people don't accept, well, that's a message that what we're offering isn't exactly what is wanted. Thinking invitationally is about reaching out and engaging with those around us in a way which invites – rather than insists – that they join us in working on some project, purpose or endeavour. It's about seeing the participation of others as a valuable gift, rather than the result of a contract of employment.

Space Creator

The role of host involves creating a suitable space – physical and interactional/psychological – for events to emerge and unfold. Much of the new literature on leadership speaks of the importance of the space and of allowing and nurturing emergence within the space. The host plays a vital role upfront in deciding on the space and how it is to be decorated, laid out and used. This is another example of the flexibility of the host role – one minute making brave and influential decisions and the next clearing up a spilled drink to keep the space refreshed and useful.

Gatekeeper

A host leader knows the importance (and the creative possibilities) of defining boundaries. A boundary can serve the host header well by making clear what expectations and norms apply. In the same way as a host can have a “leave your shoes in the hall” norm, the host leader will take care to choose boundaries that can help people understand where they are and what they are committing to do in a certain place or role.

Connector

Host leaders build connections between people, link people and ideas AND know when to leave them to get on with it. The connector joins people together and creates the possibility of something emerging. If we've initiated something, invited people and created a space, we clearly want to create something that wouldn't happen without people getting together. As connectors, we understand that, having brought people together, at some point we need to get out of the way, let the magic work and allow possibilities to emerge.

Co-participator

Co-participators initiate, provide AND join in along with everyone else. It is no surprise: for example, when we are invited for dinner, we expect the host not to only serve us with food, but eat the same food with us. Not only that: hosting etiquette the world over demands that the host serve their guests first. In hosting terms, this is a clear expectation. In leadership terms, it's not so clear. When the news is full of stories about bank CEOs who appear to have eaten heartily in terms of massive bonuses, we might think that the ancient values of relationship and hospitality have well and truly been abandoned.

Four positions for a host leader

It's good to think about how we spend our valuable time at work. When was the last time, however, you thought about *where* you spend your time? The answer to this is not just 'in the office', 'in the car' or whatever – it's about the kind of positions we take up in relation to others. It turns out that host leaders are very good at moving from one position to another, alternating close contact with their 'guests' and more detached and reflective standpoints. We can all use these lessons to spread our attention and build relationships quickly and effectively.

In the spotlight

Being in the spotlight is very much the public-facing part of the leader's role. It is where the action is, in full view of everyone – and everything about you gives off messages. Being comfortable taking the spotlight from time to time is a key part of everyone's job these days.

Spotlight moments are the times when everyone's eyes are on you – the team briefing, the pitch meeting, the presentation to potential customers. These are of course key times. However, there is much more to building successful engagement than simply being a confident presenter.

With the guests

Taking the metaphor of hosting, a good host knows the value of spending time with their guests. This is also time spent in public, although the focus will be different. Rather than being in the spotlight, with all eyes on you, you can take time to go around and meet people individually.

This is a much less formal process, and often involves spending time with people individually or in very small groups. It's time for catching up, asking how the person is getting on, and connecting with others. This is time for discovering and remembering people's strengths, interests, particular concerns and so on. Lots of key information can be discovered and stored away for future use. Think of how good it is when someone takes enough interest to remember your football team, children's names or dream holiday plans.

In the gallery

The gallery is a place high above the action. From there, the room can be surveyed from a position above the hubbub and interaction down where the party is happening. From a spot such as this, it's possible to take an overview, to see what's happening without (for a moment) the distraction of being in the hubbub.

Time in the gallery is time observing from above. In our normal work life, this might include:

- Taking a break from everyday business and distraction
- Taking a pause to look at the big picture
- Taking a 'helicopter view' – looking from above at wider issues, progress and challenges ahead

In the kitchen

As a host, we will invariably sometimes retreat to the kitchen. This is a more private place – where preparation is done, where family members may come and go, but which the guests are normally steered away from. The kitchen will be the place in which we work in private, out of view of most of the guests.

This can be the most challenging place to find time – after all, life is so busy getting out there! Effective leaders and managers know the value of private time in the kitchen – to reflect and review, to discuss things with trusted colleagues and confidants, to take time to learn with a coach. Even a focused and scheduled hour per week in the kitchen can make a huge difference.

Using this Field Book

As you embark on this international tour of experience and wisdom, here are a few tips to help you get the most from the rich mixture of resources, ideas and possibilities presented here.

Have a question in mind

If you have an idea about what you are looking for, it will help you to find it. This is true in many fields, and in particular in reading and observing. As the 19th century French scientist Louis Pasteur observed, “in the field of observation, chance favours only the prepared mind”. So if you are facing a particular challenge or are in search of inspiration on a certain topic, take a moment to focus on it. Write it down. Maybe even give it a name, to help you bring it back to mind quickly. Think about the benefits of moving forward to you and others. Is it worth proceeding? Yes – then dive in.

Of course you can also read the book without a question in mind and have a very interesting time. Having a question in mind will help different parts of the book jump out at you.

Look at the contents and the index

Mark always used to start reading books in the middle, by opening them and seeing what happened. While this is a fun and intuitive way to start engaging with a book, he has now found that many people actually prefer the more logical approach of starting by looking at the Contents page, to see what’s actually in the book and going from there.

A less usual, but still highly effective, way to approach a book is via the Index. We have taken a lot of trouble to ensure that the Index for this book is comprehensive and useful. Why not open the book at the back and take a skim through it? If you have a question in mind you might find your attention grabbed by a particular term – and there will be an immediate page number for you to follow up.

Dip into the book

This is a collection of 30 chapters written by different people in different places describing different situations. It is not intended to be read cover-to-cover as a

piece, but rather as a rich buffet of field-tested ideas. Just as you won't want to eat everything at the buffet in one sitting, so you probably won't want to just plough through the book in detail. See what draws your attention and then follow up on that. Then come back another time for something else – a sneaky top-up, or something complementary (a dessert to follow your main course). The book will still be there tomorrow, when you want another meal!

Try things out

One of the great advantages of the Host Leadership metaphor and model is that you don't have to commit very much at first. Think of yourself as a host. Who are your guests? What do you hope to encourage them to do? How can you support them in that? Now take a small step to try it out and see what happens. Organisation Development champion Gervase Bushe mentions in his chapter the value of 'probes', small experiments to get feedback from the real world (rather than toying endlessly with an idea in your mind and wondering whether it will work). It's a great way to make progress, particularly when things are confusing or stuck.

Connect with other host leaders

There is no better way to expand your world of possibilities and know-how than to connect with others with shared interests. There are currently several ways to do this: we have LinkedIn and Facebook groups (search 'Host Leadership') where you can connect with others, get news of updates and so on. The Host Leadership website (hostleadership.com) hosts new blogs and news updates, and you can sign up there for occasional emails. Rolf Katzenberger has started a German language site at hostleadership.de. We hope there will soon be more portals, connecting points and other places to share news, successes, learnings and developments.

Now ... it's time to get into the book. Guten appetit, as they say in Germany.

Reference

McKergow, M., & Bailey, H. (2014). *Host: Six new roles of engagement for teams, organisations, communities and movements*. London: Solutions Books.

