The World Café
Social Innovation in Action

Engaging collective intelligence and committed action through powerful conversations about questions that matter

An Overview and Invitation
The World Café

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Welcome to the World Café!

The conversation is changing and people everywhere are taking part,

In the living rooms of ordinary people and gatherings of influential global leaders,

In the poorest neighborhoods in the mega-cities of Latin America and Asia and the strategy sessions in senior executive suites of multinational corporations,

In community assemblies to promote democratic dialogue and multi-stakeholder initiatives to address critical global issues,

In the inter-tribal councils of indigenous peoples, government bureaucracies, and nonprofit organizations,

In Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North and South America, in virtually every field of human concern—

Health care, education, child and family welfare, food systems, technology, climate change, human rights, ecosystem management, business development, innovation, peace and conflict resolution—

Business leaders, government officials, nonprofit managers, social entrepreneurs, educators, and ordinary citizens are using the World Café to host conversations on the questions that matter most to the future of our families, organizations, communities, and cultures

Transforming how we work together, grow businesses and organizations, pursue emerging opportunities, resolve conflict, learn together, cooperate for the common good, and shape life-affirming futures for the generations to come.

Pull up a chair and take a seat at the table. Join the conversation.
Our Invitation

Dear Friend,

We’re pleased to share the story of the World Café, an innovative approach to awakening and engaging collective intelligence through powerful conversations about questions that matter. Cooperatively discovered in 1995, the World Café is used today by people and groups around the globe who recognize that the wisdom we need to address our most critical issues and opportunities is not held by a few but lies among all of us—and that it can be liberated when we meet and speak together about that which most truly matters to us, in open, inclusive conversations that foster authentic relationship and collaborative learning.

As we’ll see, the World Café can be understood in many different ways. It’s a simple, elegant, and highly effective dialogue process available to any group interested in awakening and engaging the collective intelligence of its participants. It’s a powerful set of design principles that can be used to inform and guide change initiatives at many different levels of system. It’s also a way of talking about the interlinking of conversations around the world as people move from one group or setting to another, carrying new insights, questions, and ideas. From one perspective, it’s a global network of inquiry and practice; from another, it’s a global learning laboratory in which people with passion for particular issues discover how to use powerful new architectures for co-creative engagement to bring everyone with a stake in those issues together to catalyze collective intelligence and wise action. It’s a tool for fostering innovation and a social innovation itself.

This report is designed to illuminate all these dimensions. Its major sections provide an overview of the World Café and its growth; present a glimpse of the many ways the World Café process and principles are being used around the world; illuminate the vision of “conversation as a co-evolutionary force” that underlies the World Café; and highlight opportunities to contribute, especially through participation in the emerging network of World Café stewards. Key ideas appear throughout so you can read the report in any order you choose.

The World Café today is at a threshold. Information about the process is readily available and a growing network of experienced practitioners on six continents offer support for World Café dialogues. Global stewards are stepping forward to host key initiatives and help grow regional communities of practice. A new partnership with Fielding Graduate University’s Institute for Social Innovation creates exciting opportunities for research and capacity development. As World Café co-founders Juanita Brown and David Isaacs explore at this stage in their lives how best to make their highest contribution to the World Café, we are working to nurture next-generation leadership and develop innovative models of resourcing that will provide continuing support for the strategic priorities that serve the World Café as a whole. In this context, we’re asking questions like those at the left.

Join us in exploring them—and make note of your own questions as you read. We invite your partnership, participation, and contributions!

Warm best wishes,

Thomas J. Hurley
On behalf of the World Café Community Foundation
The World Café

Yet they did. With their plan for a morning large-circle dialogue disrupted by rain, the two dozen participants spontaneously formed into small, intimate table conversations about the questions that had drawn them together, recording their insights on makeshift paper “tablecloths.” They periodically interrupted these conversations to switch tables so the insights and ideas that had real power might circulate, deepen, and connect. Harvesting the table conversations enabled them to notice the emerging patterns in their thinking, which then enriched subsequent rounds of conversation. Over the course of the morning, the innovative process they improvised gave birth to an experience of collective intelligence that transformed the depth, scope, and innovative quality of their collaboration.

They had discovered the World Café.

Later they asked: “What happened here that enabled such great conversation and breakthrough thinking around critical strategic issues?” Through action research and experimentation in several countries, they subsequently identified seven key World Café design principles and began to articulate the core concepts of conversational leadership that underpin the process.

The World Café Today

Since that rainy morning in Mill Valley, California, the World Café approach to strategic dialogue, multi-stakeholder engagement, multi-generational collaboration, and cooperative action has been enthusiastically embraced by people in virtually every field, and across sectors, who are committed to exploring “questions that matter” at all levels of our organizations, communities, and cultures.

- The World Café has been used by tens of thousands of groups in settings as disparate as large multinational corporations, small nonprofits, government offices, community-based organizations, and educational institutions.

- Participants live and work in dozens of countries in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and North and South America. They include business leaders, government officials, nonprofit managers, social entrepreneurs, and ordinary citizens who are stepping forward to play key roles in catalyzing positive change in their organizations and communities.

- Through their efforts, innovative approaches to critical issues in socially responsible business, health care, education, environmental protection, social welfare, conflict resolution, sustainable development, and many other fields are being discovered and implemented.

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The World Café

An Overview of the World Café, continued

- In World Cafés across the globe, youth and elders together are creating the opportunity for multi-generational collaboration that brings emerging and senior leaders together to seek innovative paths forward, drawing on all available perspectives and talents.

The key to this success lies in the simplicity and power of the World Café process and the principles that underlie it. World Café hosts and conveners are learning that the core design principles of the World Café can be applied in many different ways, and that the process resonates with traditional practices of dialogue and deliberation in many different cultures.

The World Café at a Threshold

After more than a decade of development, the World Café is at a threshold. Several exciting developments make this a pivotal moment in the evolution of this global social innovation.

- **The award-winning book** *The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations That Matter*, co-authored by Juanita Brown with David Isaacs and the World Café Community, is now available in seven languages—English, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Japanese, Chinese, and Turkish. These translations are inspiring widespread use of the process in business, government, nonprofit, and community settings as well as in health care, education, and other fields.

- **The development of new virtual tools** enables rich communication, connection, and trans-local collaboration among participants in the network. Innovative online World Cafés using Skype are making possible conversation among geographically dispersed participants.

- **An exciting new partnership** brings together Fielding Graduate University’s Institute for Social Innovation and the World Café Community Foundation to develop and disseminate the World Café as a methodology for participatory research and collective knowledge evolution, and to explore applications of the World Café in change leadership, organization development, and societal learning.

- **An international community of learning and practice** is forming, comprised of key leaders, consultants, conversation hosts, and other professionals around the world.

- **A global network of experienced practitioners** is now available to support large scale, multi-sector, multi-stakeholder, and multi-generational collaboration around critical strategic issues requiring collective intelligence across traditional boundaries.

- **The spirit and practice of stewardship** is taking root in the network as key individuals step forward to play key roles in nurturing the World Café. Dynamic networks of World Café hosts, conveners, and champions are developing in Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Stewardship groups are self-organizing to advance research and theory development, create new learning tools and materials, and develop the community of practice.

- **Increasing opportunities to illuminate the power of conversational leadership**, conversation as a “radical” act, conversation as a co-evolutionary force, and other societal change concepts at the heart of the World Café are appearing in major international forums.

- **The World Café Community Foundation** is available as a nonprofit organization through which financial and in-kind contributions to support the World Café can be received and invested in ways that increase the capacity of the World Café network as a whole. We are exploring innovative models of resourcing that will provide continuing support for the strategic priorities that serve the World Café as a whole and that reflect the spirit of generosity at its core.
The World Café: Process, Principles, and Pattern

The World Café is a conversational process based on a set of integrated design principles that reveal a deeper living network pattern through which we shape our collective futures.

As a conversational process based on living systems thinking, the World Café is a powerful way of hosting conversations about questions that matter, particularly in groups that are larger than most traditional dialogue approaches are designed to accommodate. Table conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights and emergent patterns. Simple yet powerful, the World Café can evoke and make visible the collective intelligence of any group, thus increasing people’s capacity for effective action in pursuit of common aims. It’s especially effective when people come together across organizational, social, or cultural boundaries to foster collaboration.

The integrated design principles for World Café dialogues have been distilled as a widely applicable set of guidelines for intentionally harnessing the power of conversation for business and social value. Research-based and field-tested, they provide practical guidance for leaders and conversation hosts in business, community, and multi-sector settings dedicated to enabling authentic dialogue, innovation, and learning, whether or not the World Café dialogue process is used.

As a living network pattern, the World Café refers to the web of conversations through which we are continually co-evolving our futures as we explore critical issues and our most compelling images of possibility with family, friends, colleagues, and community. The image of “world as café” highlights the fact that such catalytic conversations are taking place all the time at “tables” all over the world, at many different levels and in many different ways.

“World Café conversations enable us to notice a deeper living pattern of connections at work in our organizations and communities—the often invisible webs of conversation and meaning making through which we already collectively shape the future, often in unintended ways. Engaging the World Café pattern, process, and principles empowers leaders and others who work with groups to intentionally create dynamic networks of conversation and knowledge sharing around an organization’s real work and critical questions.

As the network of new connections increases, knowledge-sharing grows. A sense of the whole becomes increasingly visible. The collective wisdom of the group becomes more accessible, and innovative possibilities for action emerge.”

Juanita Brown, Co-Founder, The World Café
How Do You Grow a Global Dialogue Movement?

The World Café is spreading rapidly to many countries in the world, helping give birth to new cultures of dialogue. Given its origins, this raises a question: How do you grow a global dialogue movement from your living room? Here’s what we’ve learned so far.

- **Design a powerful, easy-to-use process that “travels well.”** The basic World Café process provides a simple yet elegant structure that allows collective intelligence to emerge from our conversations, using an age-old pattern in human communication – the cross-fertilization of ideas as people move from one conversation to another, together with the disciplined harvesting of insights. It stimulates healthy, life-affirming relationships while fostering real change in the world.

- **Make visible the design principles so others can adapt and innovate.** While the basic process is easy to grasp and implement, the World Café design principles create an “open platform” encompassing many different variations on the process. The World Café enables people to address the questions that matter most to them in ways that best suit their unique situation and needs.

- **Share the core ideas and fundamental process generously.** After the first World Café in 1995, Juanita Brown, David Isaacs, Leif Edvinsson, and other World Café pioneers immediately recognized that the process they had discovered should not belong to or be controlled by any single person or group. They and other friends of the World Café have guided its development and dissemination so the ideas spread freely and core materials are readily available at no charge.

- **Encourage experimentation and learning.** World Café hosts have continually adapted the process (often in conjunction with other approaches) and explored innovative applications of the design principles. By sharing stories and creative practices, World Café hosts are generating a culture of generosity, contribution, creativity, and collaborative learning across fields, sectors, and cultures. People are trusted to have the capacity to design and host good conversations.

- **Consciously weave the web of relationships.** The World Café fosters the spirit of friendship and hospitality. Introducing new people to the process is an opportunity to make new friends. Partnerships rooted in a deepening field of rich relationship are carefully nurtured, and cross-regional connections enable trans-local learning.

- **Nurture emerging leaders and multi-generational collaboration.** Welcoming new World Café hosts and supporting emerging leaders are guiding principles of the World Café. Multi-generational collaboration invites the wisdom of all ages to support collaborative learning and committed action.

- **“Presence” emerging possibilities.** Those stewarding the World Café are guided by a set of practices that illuminate what’s needed for continuing development and well-being of the whole. These include making the system visible to itself, sensing into what’s present and emerging, listening for the “magic in the middle,” and discerning the minimum elegant next steps in relation to key issues and opportunities.
Deepening Partnerships for Positive Futures

Through our partnerships, the World Café has helped deepen and enrich the dialogue at key events in leadership development, organizational learning, and other fields. The experience and tools that participants take away contribute to catalyzing social innovation, social entrepreneurship, and collective intelligence in many different organizations, fields, and sectors.

World Café hosts have also contributed to development of the Art of Hosting and an expanding circle of multi-generational dialogues. Through them, in turn, the World Café has been introduced to new groups throughout the world.

We are learning together and seeking additional partners as all of us engage the question: *What are the conditions that enable vibrant, life-affirming networks to self-organize, flourish, and sustain themselves, while simultaneously creating a truly global movement for positive futures?*

*We welcome your collaboration!*

“A life-affirming leader is one who knows how to rely on and use the intelligence that exists everywhere in the community, the school, or the organization. A leader these days needs to be a host – one who convenes people, who convenes diversity, who convenes all viewpoints in creative processes where our intelligence can come forth.”

*Margaret Wheatley, Berkana Institute*
The World Café

Illustrative Uses of the World Café

The World Café connects the intimacy of small group dialogue with the excitement of large group collaboration and learning. It’s now used the world over in increasingly innovative ways, wherever people gather to deepen relationships, share knowledge, stimulate innovative thinking, and explore possibilities for action around real life issues and questions. A growing community of practice is available to support leaders who want to introduce the World Café into their organizations or communities.

The following pages provide a small glimpse of the diverse settings in which the World Café process and principles are being applied.

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What if our best hope for creating more peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable communities and cultures is not simply more money or better technology or the next quick fix or more complete information, but the power of conversation about questions that matter?

What if the knowledge, wisdom, and creativity we need to transform our organizations, communities, and cultures is already among us, waiting to be invited forward?

What if we chose consciously to cultivate conversational leadership, bringing our creative intelligence to bear on how we convene and host conversations to bring forth the knowledge, wisdom, creativity, and care that resides in us all?

How then might our organizations and communities function? What kind of world might we co-create? Who might we discover ourselves to be?

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World Café dialogues are taking place in virtually all sectors, throughout the world.
**Illustrative Uses of the World Café**

**Enabling Strategic Dialogues in Businesses and Organizations**

Business leaders in large and small companies around the world are using the World Café to engage participants across all levels of organization in strategic planning, product innovation, customer service improvement, workplace safety, culture change, and other critical business issues.

**Engaging Employees from the Shop Floor to the CEO in Developing New Organizational Values**

In 2007, Nokia Corporation staff and World Café practitioners co-hosted sixteen separate Nokia Way Cafés in nine countries, involving factory workers, senior executives, and everyone in between. Several thousand employees attended Cafés as part of a global, company-wide initiative to renew Nokia’s values and engage participants at all levels in developing practices that link core values to business success. The process was supported by a video blog incorporating short films from each Café to stimulate continuing discussion across the whole organization.

**Transforming Strategy Development in the Association World**

Groundbreaking work using the World Café to support the development of “living strategy” with the American Society for Quality has inspired a diverse and growing number of industry and professional associations – in financial planning, health care, engineering, the building trades, computing, and other fields – to use the World Café process and principles to engage their volunteer leaders, members, and other stakeholders.

**Fostering Inter-Institutional Cooperation in the European Union**

More than 90 lawyers, linguists, and translators used the World Café to explore new approaches to collaborating across institutional and cultural boundaries to provide high-quality translations of EU legislation in 23 languages.

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**Selected Organizations Using the World Café**

This list illustrates the diversity among organizations using the World Café. It’s a small fraction of the total, which is growing all the time.

**Business Organizations**

- Agilent Technologies
- Alaska Airlines
- Alphagraphics
- Altria Group
- Banamex
- BASF
- Boeing Corporation
- Cascade Engineering
- Chevron
- Cigna Healthcare
- Cisco
- Coca-Cola
- Communispace
- Ericsson
- Glaxo Smith Kline
- Hewlett-Packard
- Intel Corporation
- Johnson & Johnson
- Kraft International
- Lufthansa
- Nokia Corporation
- Plug Power
- Sanofi-Aventis
- Saudi Aramco
- Skandia
- ScanFutura
- SEB Bank
- Shell Oil
- Tandy Corp
- TELIA
- Unocal
- Valero
- Walt Disney Studios
- Wells Fargo
- The World Bank

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“The most important work in the new economy is creating conversations.”

Alan Webber, *Harvard Business Review*

“Strategizing depends on creating a rich and complex web of conversations that cuts across previously isolated knowledge sets and creates new and unexpected sources of insight.”

Gary Hamel, *The Search for Strategy*
Selected Organizations Using the World Café

**Educational Institutions**
- Danish Ministry of Education
- Fielding Graduate Institute
- Indiana University
- Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution
- George Mason University
- The Kaos Pilots (Denmark)
- Museum of Science and Industry
- MIL Institute
- Ministry of Education (United Arab Emirates)
- MIT Organizational Learning Center
- Royal Roads University (Canada)
- Saint Mary’s College
- Shikshantar Learning Center (India)
- Singapore Education Ministry
- Society for Organizational Learning
- UK Society for Org. Learning & Research
- Sonoma State University
- University of Michigan Dept. of Engineering
- University of California at Santa Cruz
- University of Southern Florida
- University of Texas San Antonio
- University of Victoria Law School (Canada)

**Associations and NGOs**
- Alliance for Transforming the Lives of Children
- American Society for Quality
- Bay Area Org. Development Network
- Conference Board of Canada
- Commonway Institute
- Financial Planning Association
- Future of Work
- Fetzer Institute
- Girl Scouts of America
- Institute for Cultural Affairs USA
- International Corporate Learning Assn.
- Institute for the Future
- Institute of Noetic Sciences
- Kellogg Foundation
- National Congress of American Indians
- National Education Association

**Illustrative Uses of the World Café**

**Fostering Cultures of Dialogue through Civic Engagement**

In Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Germany, Mexico, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, the United States, and many other countries, citizens are using the World Café to support civic engagement, democratic empowerment, community development, city planning, public health, and many other issues.

**Revitalizing Democracy in Southeast Asia**

In southern Thailand, people visit traditional coffee shops each morning for conversation on key social and political issues. Recognizing that the World Café would resonate with this tradition, Chaiwat Thirapantu convened one of the largest World Cafés to date. He brought 3,000 people from every part of Thai society together in a People’s Assembly to begin developing a shared vision of possibility for the country. The next step – a World Café for 5,000 people in Bangkok!

**Fostering Multi-Generational Collaboration to Transform Urban Communities in Brazil**

The Boulevard Paulistano initiative aspires to beautify the Tataupe community in Sao Paulo, creating a “culture of harmony” with nature and within society. It has evolved into a multi-generational program that engages children, youth, and adults in co-creating sustainable community. Through its Warriors Without Weapons program, the Elo community is using collaborative, non-adversarial organizing processes to clean up and renew Paqueta, one of the most impoverished communities in nearby Santos.

**Creating “Learning Cities” in Europe**

In May 2007, World Café Europe helped host eight simultaneous World Cafés throughout the Dresden area, each sponsored by one or more different local organizations, on sustainable business, the arts, education, communication, and other strategic issues in the region. More than 800 people participated. Community leaders now envision Dresden as a “learning city” using the World Café to evoke the collective intelligence of citizens at all levels.

“Democracy begins in human conversation. The simplest, least threatening investment any citizen can make in democratic renewal is to begin talking with other people, asking the questions and knowing that their answers matter.”

William Greider, *Who Will Tell the People?*
Illustrative Uses of the World Café

Addressing Critical Social and Global Issues

Whether used at the scale of neighborhoods or in global initiatives, the World Café is enabling multi-sector, multi-stakeholder engagement in developing creative responses to the critical social and global issues we confront.

Revisioning Economic Development for Native Communities

With support from the Kellogg Foundation, the National Congress of American Indians used the World Café to host high-level policy dialogues at the National Native American Economic Policy Summit in 2007. The World Café transformed the dialogue among federal policymakers, tribal leaders, Native entrepreneurs, tribal economic development professionals, and leaders from the private sector, giving all participants the opportunity to challenge unspoken assumptions and work together in developing a vision for vital and healthy communities in Indian Country.

Fostering Peace and Conflict Resolution

Global Leadership Network founder Mark Gerzon brought Palestinians and Jews together in dialogue, but midway through the group seemed at an impasse. Gerzon suggested a World Café. “The theme was: ‘What story can you tell that will help the others at your table understand your perspective on the conflict in Israel between Jews and Palestinians?’” he said. “The stories were incredibly powerful and … the next morning, when ‘magic’ happened and the fundamental schisms were bridged, I knew in my heart that the fertilizing process of storytelling at the World Café was a key factor in catalyzing the shift.”

Inspiring Citizens and Communities to Take Action on Climate Change

Global Warming Cafés, a cornerstone of a rapidly spreading program initiated by David Gershon (author of The Low Carbon Diet), engage participants in exploring their hopes and fears in relation to climate change, then invite them to take personal action to reduce their carbon footprint.

Selected Organizations Using the World Café

Associations and NGOs, continued
Organization Development Network (Mexico)
Organization Development Network (USA)
National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation
People’s Association of Singapore
Pioneers of Change
Public Conversations Project
Santa Cruz Environmental Council
Shambhala Institute for Authentic Leadership
West Marin Alliance
World Assn of Opinion & Marketing Research

Government Agencies
British Health Service
Canadian Internal Revenue Service
Canadian Workers’ Compensation Board
City of San Antonio
European Union
Maori Treaty Negotiations (New Zealand)
Mexican National Legislature
Ministry of Education (Singapore)
Ministry of Information (Singapore)
Ministry of Manpower (Singapore)
National Fund for Social Enterprise (Mexico)
Redwood City, California
San Diego County
Singapore Police Force
Swedish Ministry of Labor

Other Groups
Bay Area Race Dialogues
Dharamsala Interfaith Dialogues
Dharma Drum Center (Taiwan)
Episcopal Diocese of Vermont
Jewish Interfaith Explorations
Knowledge Conference
Nine Gates Program
Parent Cafés
The Stockholm Challenge
Tallberg Forum, Sweden

“The response to our Parent Cafes has been extremely positive. Parents find the conversations valuable, affirming, and hopeful …

Parents also report that they feel more connected to each other and to their communities …

[We] have received requests from dozens of organizations, initiatives, and public agencies in Illinois and other states, all of whom are eager to bring Parent Cafés to their own communities and institutions!”

Lina Cramer, Parent Cafés
Illustrative Uses of the World Café

Promoting Multi-Generational, Multicultural Collaboration

World Café hosts have inspired multi-generational initiatives through the Bali Institute for Global Renewal, the Youth Dialogue Project, the Shambhala Institute, the Institute of Noetic Sciences, and other organizations. The way each dialogue seeds another offers a wonderful way to see how the World Café network, co-evolving through friendship, catalyzes innovative action in ever-widening circles of engagement.

"How can we talk it through?"

That question that has informed all of my life choices. It now lies at the heart of our capacity to survive as a species, and to ensure that our home, this beautiful planet, survives. For me, it is the core question that informs all our other questions. If we could converse and talk things out, we would find new ways of being together in the world.”

Anne Dosher, Elder of the World Café

Seeding multi-generational dialogues around the world

Based on an article by Lyn Hartley in Shambhala Institute’s Fieldnotes

“One thing we know for sure from the Youth Dialogue Project’s success worldwide is that the World Café is the way young people want to convene. Out of 36 YDP members, 32 are hosting World Cafés globally … I can’t tell you what meaning and joy this has brought to my life.”

– Deborah Goldblatt, Director, Youth Dialogue Project
Illustrative Uses of the World Café

Deepening the Dialogue at International Conferences

Through collaboration with organizations like the Society for Organizational Learning, Pegasus Communications, the Shambhala Institute, the Institute of Noetic Sciences, and the National Council for Dialogue and Deliberation, the World Café has become an integral element in major international conferences on organizational learning, systems thinking, authentic leadership, positive futures, and dialogue and deliberation.

World Café sessions at gatherings such as the Tällberg Forum are providing global leaders at the highest levels of business, government, and nongovernmental organizations with process technologies that powerfully support inquiry and action on critical global issues.

Through these and other events, thousands of innovators, business leaders, change agents, consultants, and professionals in a wide range of fields have experienced the power of conversation as a vehicle for co-evolutionary change in organizations and communities.

World Café Resources

- Publications like Café to Go (available for free on the World Café website) and the World Café Resource Guide provide essential “how to” information for prospective conveners or hosts.

- In The World Café: Shaping Our Futures through Conversations that Matter, Juanita Brown and David Isaacs share the conceptual foundations and research on which the World Café is based. Leaders from corporate, nonprofit, and government sectors share practical case studies and results, and readers are given an easy-to-replicate “how to” guide on World Café hosting and conversational leadership.

- The World Café website, online community space, and other virtual venues (see page 25) enable practitioners to share stories, questions, innovative practices, and other resources.

- World Café stewards welcome inquiries, provide hosting support, and help orient those just discovering the World Café to opportunities in the network.

Graphic Recording

Graphic recording plays a vital role in the World Café. Experts in listening to the key themes and patterns in a group’s conversation, graphic recorders make collective intelligence visible as it emerges. Both during and after a World Café, reflective graphics help participants make connections between insights, ideas, and questions. These graphic “harvests” also provide a framework for further meaning-making and support action planning.

The World Café website features an introduction to and resources on graphic recording, sometimes called graphic facilitation (see www.theworldcafe.com/graphics.htm). A worldwide network of graphic recorders is hosted by the International Forum of Visual Practitioners (www.ifvp.org).
The World Café

Conversation — The Heart of Whole Systems Change

For tens of thousands of years, people have met in small groups to share stories and talk about what mattered most to them. They took what arose in one conversation to another, so stories, ideas, questions, and knowledge spread. This is how we became human. This is how communities throughout history have knit themselves together and how cultures have arisen, grown, and fallen. It’s how we get to know ourselves and each another, how we learn, how we coordinate action, how we preserve what matters to us, and how we make sense of and respond to change. It’s how we share the possibilities we imagine and find partners to help us realize them. It’s how we have always shaped the worlds in which we live.

The world today is the legacy of innumerable conversations over the ages and the product of all the conversations taking place around the world every day. To change the world, we have to change the conversation — and get at the roots of current and emerging realities.

Conversation as a “Radical” Act

Conversation as a “radical” act means taking the risk to go below the surface of our lives and getting at the roots of our experience. (The word radical means of the root.) It means clarifying our most fundamental commitments, taking responsibility for what we love, and opening to co-creative engagement with others.

It also means going to the root of our human capacity to create, recognizing that we live in language and that the capacity to shape new meanings through conversation is fundamental to our nature as human beings. Conversation can be a “radical” act when we recognize that every conversation in our families, organizations, and communities is an opportunity to explore the questions that most truly matter, to connect in deeper ways, and to learn from one another.

It means inviting into the conversation those who have been excluded, bringing together people and groups that have not talked together before, and letting ourselves discover together something greater than any of us could discover or create on our own.

Conversation as a Co-Evolutionary Force

When we do this, conversation can be a co-evolutionary force in our lives and world. As we take responsibility for engaging the important questions about our organizations, communities, and institutions — questions often lost in the course of “business as usual” — we help create tipping points for change.

We have the power in our everyday interactions to participate consciously in co-creating the world, rather than just reacting to what takes place in and around us. When we come together with others passionately committed to conversations that matter, as in the World Café, our power is amplified. As those conversations link with others taking place in different parts of our organizations, the country, or the world, we begin to see how even small acts of life-affirming conversation as they multiply create possibilities for large scale systemic change.
Cultivating Conversational Leadership

This suggests that the capacity for conversational leadership is crucial today. According to Florida educator Carolyn Baldwin, conversational leadership is “the leader’s intentional use of conversation as a core process to cultivate the collective intelligence needed to create business and social value.”

Wise use of the World Café is one expression of conversational leadership, but it goes beyond a focus or reliance on any particular methodology. Conversational leadership involves designing, convening, and hosting conversations about the questions that matter in an organization or community — bringing all relevant stakeholders together, to ensure diverse perspectives, with a focus on critical issues using powerful architectures for co-creative engagement.

Many groups first use the World Café for a single event, then integrate World Café conversations into their ongoing activities. Over time, conversational leaders recognize that the principles and perspectives that underlie the World Café are potent guides to evoking collective intelligence using many different process arts and methodologies for participation. For some, it becomes a doorway to a deeper understanding of what fosters lasting change.

An Integrated Approach to Collective Intelligence and Wise Action

No one today is immune from change. We are everywhere faced with the pressing need to re-imagine and re-invent how we live, how we work, how we co-exist in an increasingly interconnected world, and how we bring our civilization into harmony with nature.

Fortunately, as our challenges have grown, so has our capacity to respond to them. Our knowledge grows exponentially every year. Digital technologies enable unprecedented communication, connection, and collaboration among people around the planet. Growing awareness of our interdependence is rapidly stimulating the search for innovative and sustainable approaches to critical issues.

"As the new business landscape continues to emerge and new forms of organization take shape, our ability to lead will be dependent upon our ability to host and convene quality conversations."

Robert Lengel,
University of Texas, San Antonio

"Our human existence is one in which we can live whatever world we bring about in our conversations, even if it is a world that finally destroys us as the kind of being that we are.

Indeed, this has been our history since our origins as language beings, namely, a history or creation of new domains of existence as different networks of conversation."

Humberto Maturana,
Evolutionary Biologist

continued on page 16
We also now have powerful conversational processes like the World Café that enable people in groups of all sizes, in any field, to free themselves from limiting patterns of communication and foster more enlivening connections that liberate their individual and collective genius. Used skillfully, these emerging tools for accessing collective intelligence call forth the unique contributions of all participants, encourage more authentic communication, support the development of healthy relationships, and foster innovative opportunities for creative action. In situations of complexity and change, they help people discover shared purpose, overcome the barriers to collaboration, and develop strategies that engage and have ownership by all.

Some of the most strategic work of our era may be integrating powerful process technologies like the World Café into the efforts of leaders, groups, and ordinary citizens working on critical issues for positive change. To transform our organizations, communities, and cultures, we have to be able to sit down together and talk things through – bringing all relevant parties to the table (knowing all have something important to contribute), focusing on critical issues, and using all we now know about catalytic process technologies that bring forward the collective intelligence, co-creativity, and wise action that we need.

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**Generative Perspectives On Conversation & Change**

- Conversation matters, for we as humans are continually bringing forth our world through the webs of conversation in which we participate. Conversation can be a co-evolutionary force for transforming ourselves, our organizations, our communities, and our cultures.

- The wisdom we need resides in the whole. The collective intelligence we seek can only be fully evoked when everyone makes their unique contributions.

- Storytelling is a powerful vehicle for sense-making in the midst of change. Sharing our stories supports transformative learning and conscious co-evolution.

- Language shapes our perception of reality. Conscious attention to our language, and the assumptions embedded in our language, is a transformational practice.

- We are continually listening and speaking the future into being. In our conversations, choosing to focus our collective intention and attention on creating the world we want rather than simply reacting to what happens enables us to participate actively in co-creating positive futures.

- The life-giving forces in us and our systems – and the assets in our organizations and communities – are a potent resource for positive change.
The Global World Café Network

Since its discovery, the World Café has been a global learning laboratory for social innovation. The World Café as a process fosters innovation and is a social innovation itself, while development of the World Café network has reflected the search for innovative ways of organizing that don’t depend on conventional forms of leadership or organizational structure.

**Fostering innovation.** World Café conversations spawn innovation in organizations and social innovation in communities around the world. We encourage experimentation and learning in relation to the process and how the design principles apply in diverse settings. World Café hosts have seeded the practice of conversational leadership in diverse fields and sectors, and the evolution of both the art of hosting and the art of harvesting is ongoing.

**Innovative network design.** The World Café network is also a learning laboratory for new approaches to organizing. During its initial phase, a small, committed team has carefully nurtured the World Café as an open, expanding system, without creating a formal organization needing substantial management. We have been guided by the question:

> What are the minimum elegant structures and processes needed to ensure the continuing development and dissemination of the core ideas, tools, and materials, the ever-deeper weaving of webs of connection, communication, and collaboration, and the preservation of the spirit and essence of the World Café?

In collaboration with World Café hosts from around the world, the core team makes its unique contribution by sensing what is present and emerging, listening for the “magic in the middle,” discerning the minimum elegant next steps in relation to key issues and opportunities, and designing for emergence. In practice this has meant:

- Disseminating the World Café broadly, ensuring the core ideas and materials are freely available
- Responding to invitations to host conversations that matter at key conferences and events
- Supporting the infrastructure that supports communication, connection, and collaboration trans-locally
- Weaving the relational web, embodying the spirit of friendship and hospitality
- Serving as a network hub for those interested in information on the process, support for hosting World Cafés, or others with whom they can connect
- Developing key partnerships and catalyzing key initiatives
- Fostering a culture of contribution through the spirit and practice of stewardship

*continued on page 18*
Guiding Principles of the World Café Network

- Engage others through invitation, offering, and inspired hosting
- Be inclusive and seek out diverse voices
- Listen deeply – to self, others, and the whole
- Design for emergence and co-evolution
- Extend the spirit of friendship and fellowship
- Be generous and give freely
- Take minimum, elegant next steps
- Create opportunities for mutual contribution
- Welcome Spirit and the wisdom of nature
- Practice the design principles of the World Café!

Our Learning Edges

Today, World Café hosts around the world are working to nurture the development of the World Café community in ways that encourage participants at all levels and in all parts of the network to be self-organizing and self-directing, while still enabling coherence through rich webs of communication and collaboration. Yet the chaordic nature of the network gives rise to several distinctive challenges that we are exploring within the World Café and with our partners:

- What are the few core elements that must be common and coherent throughout the network?
- What is the minimum elegant infrastructure needed for communication, connection, and coordination?
- How can the World Café network become ever more visible to itself, at all levels?
- How can we best support collective storytelling, reflection, and knowledge development?
- How can we create new models of resourcing, consistent with the spirit and principles of the World Café, that will fund the strategic priorities needed to support the integrity and well-being of the World Café as a whole?
- What kinds of next-generation leadership and guidance are required in our evolving global community and how are they provided?

We welcome you to contribute to these inquiries!
Opportunities to Contribute to the World Café
Living the Spirit and Practice of Stewardship

During its first ten years, the World Café co-evolved with minimal infrastructure or staff support. During that time, the World Café principles were articulated, the process was refined, and a global community of practitioners began to form. Today, the World Café network is at a threshold in its development and friends of the World Café are stepping forward to host new initiatives and participate in guiding the co-evolution of the World Café. Commitment to the spirit and practice of stewardship infuses these efforts. We invite your participation, too!

**World Café Stewardship Dialogue.** At the World Café Stewardship Dialogue in August 2006, more than 80 World Café pioneers, hosts, and friends from 16 countries met to deepen relationships, to explore the most exciting opportunities emerging for the World Café, and to determine what is needed for the World Café to thrive in the years ahead.

Since then, multiple stewardship “tables” have formed to foster dynamic, interconnected place-based and regional networks; to host initiatives to develop new learning programs and research projects; to expand global communications, including online tools for connection and collaboration; and to link those engaged in particular professions such as education or health care.

Key stewardship tables are briefly described in the pages that follow.

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**A World Café Stewardship Opportunity**

**The Global Stewards Table**

An emerging group of global stewards, representing those who are already engaged in stewarding key World Café initiatives or regional networks, are beginning to co-evolve new patterns of collective leadership and guidance on behalf of the network as a whole.

In regular conference calls designed to help the group develop a global consciousness, participants explore what’s present or emerging across the network as a whole, foster cross-regional connections and mutual support, and nurture the sense of unity at the heart of the World Café.
The World Café

A World Café Stewardship Opportunity

Global Communications

Global communications stewards are evolving tools for communication, connection, and collaboration – through writing and publishing, creatively hosting the book and its translations into the world, expanding the World Café’s online tools, and developing video and other multimedia products.

Evolving virtual infrastructure

Guided by the “GiGi’s” (or “Girl Geeks” – women pioneering the creation of hospitable online spaces), the World Café’s website, global directory, community blogs, online community space, sister websites and blogs (such as those hosted by World Café Europe), and e-newsletter Table Talk are thriving.

These and other emerging technologies help the network become more visible to itself; enable World Café practitioners to share stories about what is taking place in different countries and learn from each other; and support linkages between the World Café and those engaged in related efforts. Innovative online World Cafés using Skype are making possible conversation among geographically dispersed participants, and a World Café home on Second Life is being created!

StoryNet

The World Café has grown through the sharing of stories, for story is the currency of conversation and the lifeblood of relationship. Now StoryNet, in the online community space, provides a place for World Café hosts to share their experiences and learnings. Tools for sharing stories and creative practices are being developed.

Creating multimedia tools

Writers, storytellers, and videographers around the world are creating new tools for sharing stories, documenting case studies, and harvesting best practices. Videos from World Café gatherings in Brazil, Germany, and the United States are now available.

Visit the World Café website at www.theworldcafe.com
A World Café Stewardship Opportunity

Place-Based and Regional Stewardship

Dynamic World Café networks are developing as people meet and collaborate across sectors in different communities, countries, and regions. Friends of the World Café are stepping forward to serve as regional stewards to help knit these networks together, to convene communities of practice, and to catalyze place-based and regional initiatives. World Café hosts and conveners are learning that the core design principles of the World Café can be applied in many different ways — and that the process resonates with traditional practices of dialogue and deliberation in many different cultures.

World Café Europe

A team of World Café practitioners from across Europe hosted a pioneering World Café Europe gathering in Dresden, Germany in May, 2007 (a video on the gathering is available on the World Café website). Inspired by the power of the World Café to foster multi-generational, multi-sector dialogues, Dresden’s leaders envision using it as the core organizing process in a multi-year effort to make Dresden a city of dialogue. The 2008 World Café Europe gathering will take place in Bilbao, Spain. World Café Europe’s core stewards are also playing key roles in hosting the German translation of the World Café book into the world, in pioneering online World Cafés, and in catalyzing a community of practice in Europe.

Café Asia

Friends of the World Café in Bali, Mainland China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, and other countries are fostering regional connections through face-to-face meetings and online exchanges. Café Asia hosts have played leading roles in supporting the translation of the World Café book into Chinese, Japanese, and Thai languages. Café Asia gatherings have taken place in Singapore and Bali, and key Café Asia stewards are hosting multi-generational dialogues and cross-regional exchanges.

La Palomilla

Stewards in the World Café network in Latin America publish a periodic newsletter featuring activities throughout the region. Friends of the World Café in Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, and other countries have collaborated on United Nations Development Program initiatives, on the Warriors Without Weapons program, and on the launch of the Spanish and Portuguese translations of the World Café book. Experienced hosts collaborate on large scale change initiatives in leading companies and in regional corporate responsibility programs.

San Francisco Bay Area

In the San Francisco Bay Area, friends of the World Café are creating a vital community of practice for storytelling, collaborative learning, and mutual support. Self-organizing groups are hosting dialogues on multi-generational collaboration, strategies for whole systems change, and other topics.

“For me, the World Café is unique in its spirit.

“I use the metaphor of ancient redwood trees, native to Northern California, that cannot be blown over by strong winds because their roots are interwoven.

“The Chinese concept for this is ‘comprehensive harmony.’”

Stephen Meng, World Café Steward, Café Asia
The World Café

A World Café Stewardship Opportunity

Learning and Conversational Leadership Development

Experienced World Café hosts are now developing the “next generation” of learning tool, materials, and processes needed to introduce the World Café to new audiences and help World Café hosts deepen their practice. These include a revised set of core materials that reflect all that’s been learned about designing and hosting World Cafés during the first twelve years of its existence, and the expansion of the community’s online “cybrary” of stories, tools, and creative practices.

New World Café learning opportunities are also being developed, including in-depth World Café design seminars, workshops on core capacities like the art of formulating powerful questions, and learning journeys on “conversational leadership” and related topics.

A World Café Stewardship Opportunity

Research and Theory Development

Partnering with Fielding’s Institute for Social Innovation

An exciting new partnership brings together Fielding Graduate University’s Institute for Social Innovation and the World Café Community Foundation to develop and disseminate the World Café as a methodology for participatory research and collective knowledge evolution, and to explore applications of the World Café in key areas such as change leadership, organizational development, and societal learning.

The partnership between the Institute for Social Innovation and the World Café Community Foundation will strengthen the development of the World Café as a valid methodology for co-evolving social knowledge with a strong epistemological foundation. Faculty, students, and leading practitioners from the global World Café network will collaborate on a wide range of initiatives, including dissertations that use the World Café as a primary research methodology; monographs and peer-reviewed publications; case studies; development of the next generation of World Café process tools; meetings of theorists, researchers, and practitioners, and seminars for students, faculty, and Fielding program associates.

The partnership also recognizes that the World Café is both a process that fosters social innovation (catalyzing insights and generating new knowledge through interlinking conversations about questions that matter) and a social innovation itself, in terms of how the World Café process and principles, based on living systems thinking, have spread throughout the world and given rise to a rapidly growing, global dialogue movement. A deeper understanding of the World Café’s organizing principles and patterns can contribute to the quests for new forms of leadership, new tools for innovation, and creative approaches to positive whole systems change.

“Like action research and appreciative inquiry, the World Café is a process with deep conceptual foundations that can support new and powerful approaches to research on human and organization development. This partnership will strengthen both Fielding as an institution and the World Café as a social innovation in the global academic and social change communities.”

Bo Gyllenpalm, Fielding Graduate University Trustee
A World Café Stewardship Opportunity

Resourcing the Future of the World Café

*How can all of us play a role in resourcing the work that serves the whole?*

During the World Café’s first twelve years, we funded its core infrastructure and activities primarily through an innovative “tithing” model pioneered by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs in collaboration with their corporate consulting network – together with smaller gifts from colleagues and innumerable in-kind contributions from friends of the World Café. This model gave World Café pioneers the freedom to experiment as they introduced the process in many different settings and nurtured the global network that began to form as a result. With David and Juanita now in their 60s, now is the time to enable a much larger circle of friends to offer their support.

With friends of the World Café from diverse fields who have volunteered to serve as resourcing partners, we are discovering and developing creative models for resourcing the strategic priorities of the World Café, including the key processes and people that provide ongoing stewardship of the whole. We invite you to contribute to this process!

**The World Café Community Foundation**

The World Café Community Foundation fosters the development and dissemination of the World Café and other innovative dialogue approaches for addressing key organizational and societal issues in the service of positive futures. As a 501c3 nonprofit organization, the Foundation enables resources of all kinds to be used both to help sustain the minimum, elegant infrastructure and activities that nurture the health and development of the World Café globally and to foster innovative partnerships with businesses, nonprofit organizations, and other groups.

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**Why do friends of the World Café invest their time, money and care in the World Café?**

"Watching the faces of people engaged in conversation at a World Café event always gives me hope. Hope that through these explorations we can think together about how to address whatever challenges we face. That's why I contribute time and tithe to the World Café Community Foundation. It's my way of contributing to what I believe in most: the capacity of human beings to evolve, to learn from each other and focus our collective energies on what matters most."

— Nancy Margulies, California

“A conversation from our open heart is the only way to get over conflicts for peace, create genuine collaboration across boundaries, and make a strong step forward to our desirable future together. The World Café community for me is one of the places that can enhance my highest future possibilities by connecting those who have the same common ground all over the world. This is why I contribute my time, energy, and money.”

— Daisuke Kawaguchi, Japan

“We need a culture of dialogue that interconnects and aligns the different perspectives of religion, culture, politics and economy. World Café is one of the processes that can contribute to such a culture of dialogue. Everyone in a World Café is gifting and receiving his or her own experience and meaning, everyone is contributing and listening. The World Café in itself is a gift economy where the currency is meaning.”

— Ulrich Soeder, Germany.

“It is a gift to be affiliated with such a rich community. I have never hesitated to make a contribution back to the World Café Community Foundation, whether financial or in-kind, as I believe the gifts we all bring to the community of “caféistas” go to the right people, the right endeavor, and the right place. I know it by experience.”

— Maria de los Angeles Cinta, California and Mexico
Please Offer Your Gifts!

We invite your partnership and participation in the World Café as it moves into the next phase of its growth and development. Friends of the World Café are finding many ways to nurture and pass on the gift at the heart of the World Café through their contributions. Please consider:

- **Contributing financially to the World Café Community Foundation** to support our strategic priorities, which help nurture the global network as a whole and ensure that the World Café continues to be widely available to all. *Each contribution, however large or small, is an opportunity to make a difference!*

- **Making an in-kind contribution** by donating products, services, or your time and expertise to the World Café Community Foundation, regional hubs in the World Café global community, or a World Café stewardship circle.

- **Participating in the stewardship network**, through which you can help with our online needs, harvesting and sharing stories, regional or place-based communities of practice, and other activities.

- **Serving as a thinking partner** in our development of creative resourcing processes and stewardship practices consistent with the culture of generosity embodied in the spirit and principles of the World Café.

- **Sharing World Café ideas, tools, and materials** with those who are looking for innovative ways to host conversations about the questions that matter most! The World Café book makes a wonderful gift for friends and colleagues and all royalties are donated to the World Café.

- **Sharing your stories, questions, and expertise** with the World Café with others in the global network.

- **Hosting a World Café!**

Please contact Tom Hurley ([tom@theworldcafe.com](mailto:tom@theworldcafe.com)) to discuss funding opportunities and other potential partnerships, to explore other ways to contribute, or to offer suggestions concerning others who might be interested in supporting the World Café.
Want to know more?

For more information and additional resources on the World Café process, the World Café design principles, or the global World Café network, please visit:

**World Café website**
[www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

**World Café online community space**
[www.theworldcafecommunity.net](http://www.theworldcafecommunity.net)

**World Café community blog**

Sign up for the World Café newsletter at [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com) to stay up to date with the latest news, stories, and resources.

Acknowledgments

*Written by Thomas J. Hurley*

*Photographs by diverse World Café hosts throughout the world*

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