

## Group and Organizational Learning Processes

### The World Café

The World Café refers to both a vision and a method of dialogue. It evolved out of conversations and experimentation one day at the home of consultants Juanita Brown and David Isaacs. World Café Conversations are an intentional way to create a living network of conversation **around questions that matter**. A Café Conversation is a creative process for leading collaborative dialogue, sharing knowledge and creating possibilities for action in groups of all sizes.

The methodology of the World Café is simple: The environment is set up like a café, with tables for four, tablecloths covered by paper tablecloths, flowers, some colored pens and, if possible, candles, quiet music and refreshments. People sit four to a table and have a series of conversational rounds lasting from 20 to 45 minutes about one or more questions which are personally meaningful to them. At the end of each round, one person remains at each table as the host, while each of the other three travel to separate tables. Table hosts welcome newcomers to their tables and share the essence of that table's conversation so far. The newcomers relate any conversational threads which they are carrying -- and then the conversation continues, deepening as the round progresses.

At the end of the second round, participants return to their original table - or move on to other tables for one or more additional rounds - depending on the design of the Café. In subsequent rounds they may explore a new question or go deeper into the original one. After three or more rounds, the whole group gathers to share and explore emerging themes, insights, and learnings, which are captured on flipcharts or other means for making the collective intelligence of the whole group visible to everyone so they can reflect on what is emerging in the room. At this point the Café may end or it may begin further rounds of conversational exploration and inquiry.

In World Café, the formulation of powerful questions is a fundamental art and skill. Questions such as 'What's important to you about this situation, and why do you care?' or 'What are we not seeing (or talking about) that is vital to our progress?' can open up new possibilities and energy. If you (as planner or host) don't know which question(s) are right for a particular Café, you can ask as a first round question, 'What question, if answered, could make the greatest difference to the future of the situation we're exploring here?' and then continue the process from there.

There are seven simple design principles behind a successful World Café process. They are;

- set the context
- create a hospitable space
- explore questions that matter
- encourage everyone's contribution
- cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives
- listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions
- harvest and share collective discoveries

For more information on these principles get hold of the book; **The World Café: Shaping Our Futures through Conversations That Matter** by Juanita Brown with David Isaacs and the World Café Community (Berrett-Koehler, 2005) or go to the 'official' website, [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com).