# The Chaordic Stepping Stones

Planning just the right amount of form for invitation, gathering, harvest and wise action

The chaordic path is the path that walks between chaos and order. When we don't know where we are going, or what the future needs for us, we can bring a little bit of form to our work by working with clear steps. These steps are intended to create generative structures, structures that allow us to create together, without stifling creativity and the emergence of new ideas and new ways of doing things.
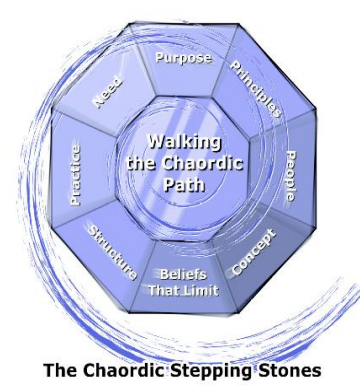
There are clear strategic steps we take when walking the Chaordic path. These steps allow us to create steps rooted in real need that are sustainable for the community they serve and the people working within them. These steps can be used both as a planning tool and to help understand what you are discovering about an organization, community or initiative

In designing an initiative like this, we use these stepping stones in order. Think of them nested one within the other. You cannot build the next one until the previous one is in place.

The Stepping Stones

Each of these stepping stones is activated by asking key questions. As we design our work together we will select from these questions (or design others) to help us explore each stone as we lay it in place.

Need

The need is the compelling reason for doing anything. Sensing the need is the first step to designing a meeting, organizational structure or change initiative that is relevant. The need is outside of our work: it is the thing that is served by the work you are doing.

- What time is it in the world now?
- What time is it for our initiative now?
- What are the challenges and opportunities we are facing?
- What do I really need to be able to understand and work on in the world?
- What is the need that this project can uniquely meet?
- What does the world need this project to be?

Purpose

From the need flows the purpose. Purpose statements are clear and compelling and the guide us in doing our best possible work.

- If this work should live up to its fullest potential, what do you dream (or vision) is possible?
- What is the purpose we can adopt that will best meet the need?
- What could this work do/create/inspire?
- What is the next level for our work? Where should we be heading?
- What is the simplest and most powerful question we could keep at the core of our work?

Principles

Principles of cooperation help us to know how we will work together. It is very important that these principles be simple, co-owned and well understood. These are not principles that are platitudes or that lie on a page somewhere. They are crisp statements of how we agree to operate together so that over the long term we can sustain the relationships that make this work possible.

- What are the principles we want to enact at for our learning networks?
- What is it important to remember about how we want to work with the participants in our initiative?
- What do we think is most important to remember as we design to meet the need and purpose?
- What unique ways of doing work and being together can we bring to this work?
- If our team should live up to its fullest potential - what do you dream (or vision) possible for this team?

People

Once the need and the purpose are in the place and we have agreed on our principles of co-operation, we can begin to identify the people that are involved in our work. Mapping the network helps us to see who is in this work for us and who will have an interest in what we are doing.

- Who is in the room?
- Who is not in the room and how do we bring them in?
- How do we leverage relationships to propagate the ideas generated by our work together?
- Who will be interested in the results of our work?

Concept

As we move to a more concrete idea of what our structures are, we begin to explore the concepts that will be useful. This is a high level look at the shape of our endeavour. For example, if our need was to design a way to cross a body of water, we could choose a bridge, a causeway or a ferry. The concept is important, because it gives form to very different structures for doing our work.

In our work together we might explore here the different kinds of structures including circles and networks and really understand what these are, how the operate, how they are embedded with various contexts and cultures and what implications each has for our work.

- What are the shapes that we might choose for our work?
- What is the deeper pattern of our work and what organizational forms are in alignment with that?
- How might we activate our principles to best do our work?

Limiting beliefs

So much of what we do when we organize ourselves is based on unquestioned models of behaviour. These patterns can be helpful but they can also limit us in fulfilling our true potential. We cannot create innovation in the world using old models and approaches. It pays to examine ways in which we assume work gets done in order to discover the new ways that might serve work with new results. Engaging in this work together brings us into a co-creative working relationship, where we can help each other into new and powerful ways of working together, alleviating the fear and anxiety of the unknown.

- What makes us tremble, and what do we fear about new ways of working together?
- Who would we be without our stories of old ways of working?
- What will it take for us to fully enter into working in new and unfamiliar ways?
- What is our own learning edge in working together?
- What do you need from our core team to feel supported in the places that make you anxious?

Structure

Once the concept has been chosen, it is time to create the structure that will channel our resources. It is in these conversations that we make decisions about the resources of the group: time, money, energy, commitment, and attention.

- Who are we becoming when we meet and work together this way?
- How do we support the aspirations of the group?
- What is the lightest structure that will serve our purpose and need?

- What role might the Core team play when the project is over?
- How do we wisely combine the various organizational concepts to support our work and sustain the results?

When we get to the point of designing structure, we can chart our meeting out using a simple table to ensure that the integrity of the design is fully incorporated:

Time/Day	Need/Purpose	Activity	Harvest	Notes

Practice

The ongoing practice within the structures we build is important. This is the world of to do lists, conference calls and email exchanges. The invitation here is to practice working with one another in alignment with the designs we have created.

- What do we need to do to sustain our work together?
- What is our own practice of working in networks?
- How do we extend the spirit of the gathering into future asynchronous environments where we can't be face to face?
- How do we leverage relationships and support the work that arises from them?
- How do we sustain and nourish our relationships and collective aspirations?
- What commitments are we willing to make to contribute to the success of our endeavour?

Harvest

There is no point in doing work in the world unless we plan to harvest the fruits of our labours. Harvesting includes making meaning of our work, telling the story and feeding forward our results so that they have the desired impacts in the world.

- What are the forms of harvest from our work that best serves the need?
- What intentional harvest will serve our purpose?
- What are the artefacts that will be the most powerful representations of what we have created?
- How will we carry the DNA of our work forward?
- What are the feedback loops that we need to design to ensure that learning and change accelerates itself?

- How will we stay open to emergent learning?
- What are the questions we need to carry about what we are learning by meeting this way?

It is very important to note that harvesting is an activity that needs to be planned up front, in the spirit of "we are not planning a meeting, we are planning a harvest."