The Leader As Host
A new yet ancient metaphor
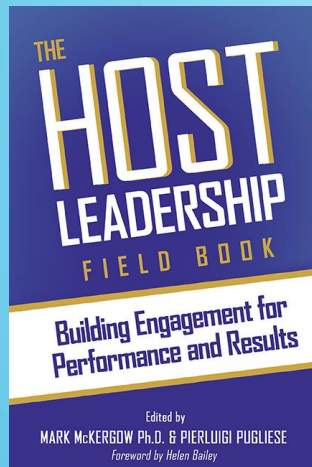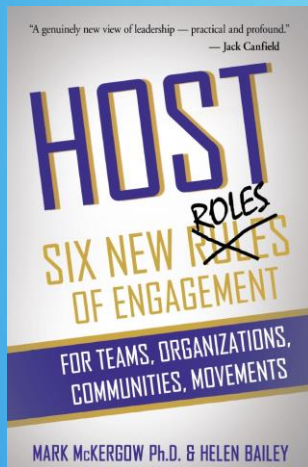
with Dr Mark McKergow

www.hostleadership.com

@thehostleader

Step forward or step back?

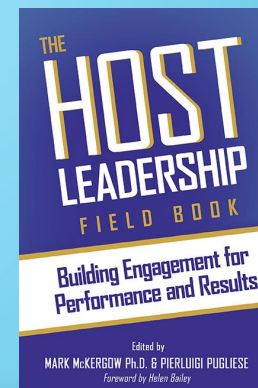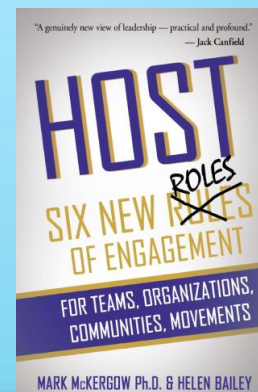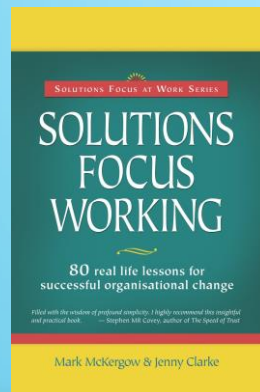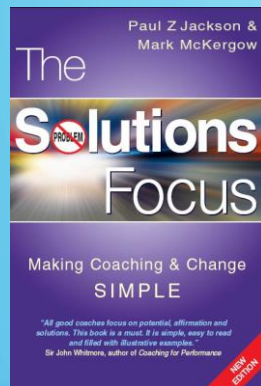host leadership

Hello from me

- Dr Mark McKergow
- 30 years in management development, OD, coaching
- International leader in Solution Focused coaching
- Developer of Host Leadership since 2003
- Practical and academic interests
- Before that a PhD nuclear physicist (really)
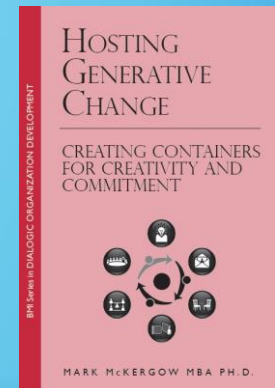
Outline for today

- Hello and welcome
- The context of Agile
- A new leadership metaphor – leading as a host
- Hero, servant, host – relationships, not roles
- What do good hosts (and host leaders) do?
- Six roles of a host leader

In the chat box please…

- What image comes to mind when you think of a 'host'?

Traditional vs Agile contexts

- Controlled
- Leaders set priorities
- Leaders control information flow
- Leaders shield team from complexity
- Direct the task

- Uncertain (VUCA)
- People develop joint priorities
- Leaders promote information sharing
- Leaders encourage engagement with complexity
- Create the environment

Control

Engagement

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Hosting is an ancient yet modern art

"ghosti" – Indo-European

Desert   Steppes   Tundra   Plains

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Lead*ing* is a relationship, not a role

Step forward: Leader as Hero
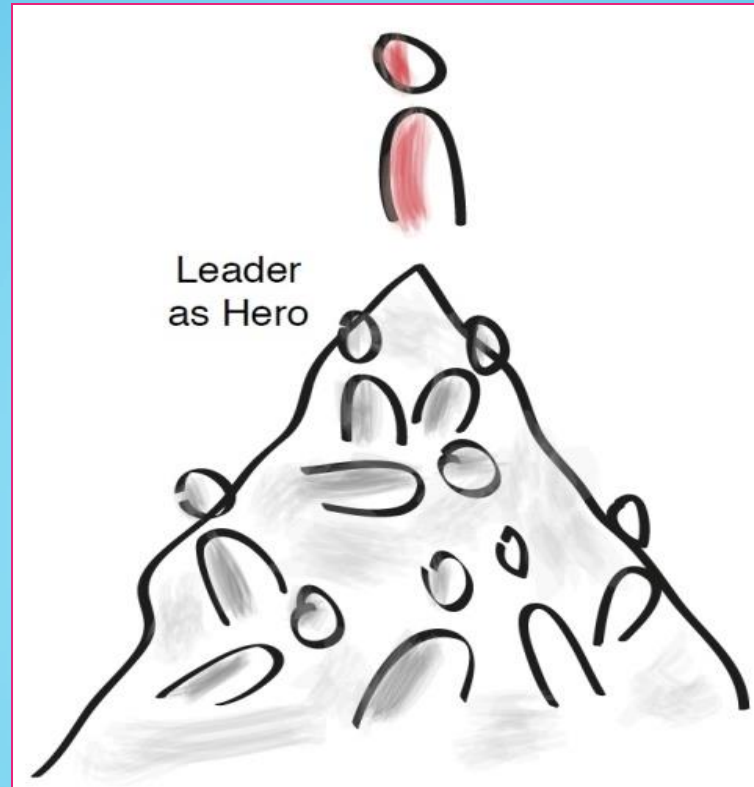
Leader as Hero

But… then the others become the 'rescued people'

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Step back: Leader as Servant
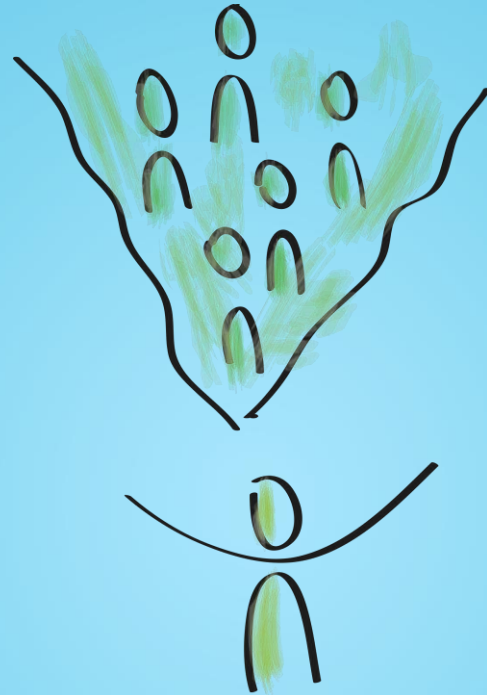
**Leader as servant
(Robert Greenleaf, 1970s)**

But… then the others become the 'masters'?

Stepping forward AND back:
Leader as Host

"The uncertainty involved in wicked problems implies that leadership, as I am defining it, is not a science but an art – the art of engaging a community in facing up to complex collective problems." Grint, 2010)

And… then the others become the 'guests'

Leader as Host

Host [hohst]

noun

1. 'A person who receives or entertains guests' – *Oxford English Dictionary*

host leadership

The host is both the first and the last

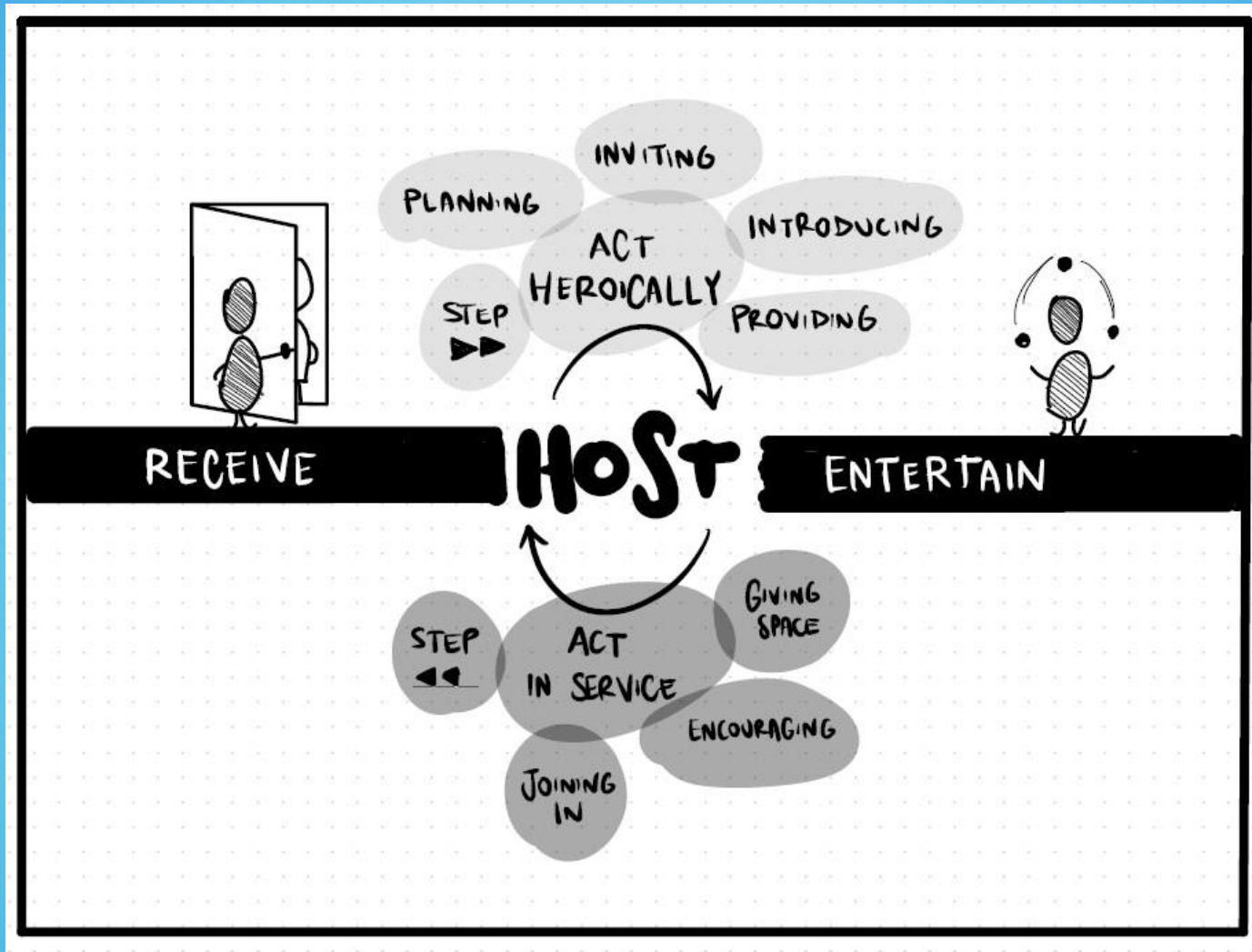Old Arabic Proverb

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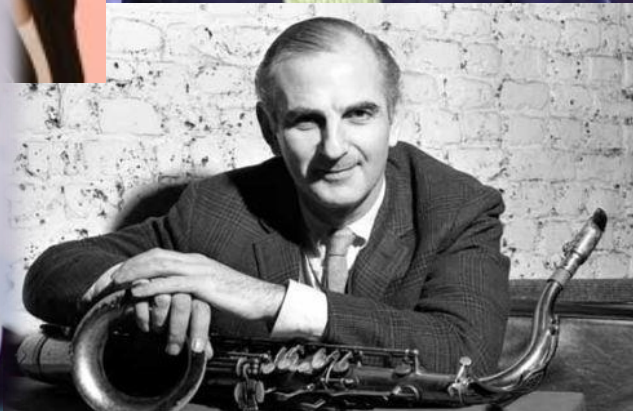# Activity: What do hosts do?

○ In three groups

○ What do GOOD hosts do – that's crucial to their role?

- Before
- During
- After

○ Write one idea per post-it note on the Miro please

Eleanora's wonderful summary

How to be a great host leader
A decade of research

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Rules – things you have to do all the time

Roles – different ways to step forward when needed

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Six new ROLES of engagement

- Initiator

- Inviter

- Space-creator

- Gatekeeper

- Connector

- Co-participator
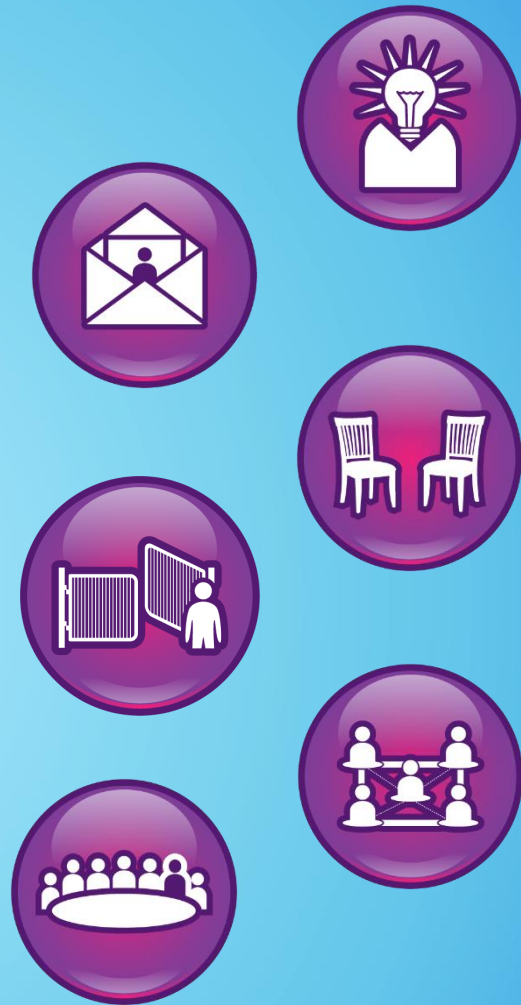
Six roles for a host leader

- **Initiate** – pick priorities and get things moving with small steps

- **Invite** – engage people with the 'soft power' of invitation, not instruction

- **Create space** – the space for interaction should support what you want to happen

- **Gate-keep** – negotiate boundaries, rules, norms, expectations, even 'rituals'

- **Connect** – introduce people to each other, share power, build know-how

- **Co-participate** – join in, follow the rules you establish, be 'one of the team' sometimes

Stepping back   **Stepping forward**
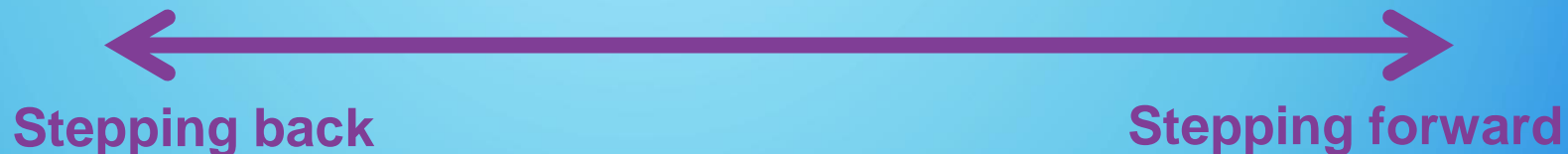
Think of yourself as a host
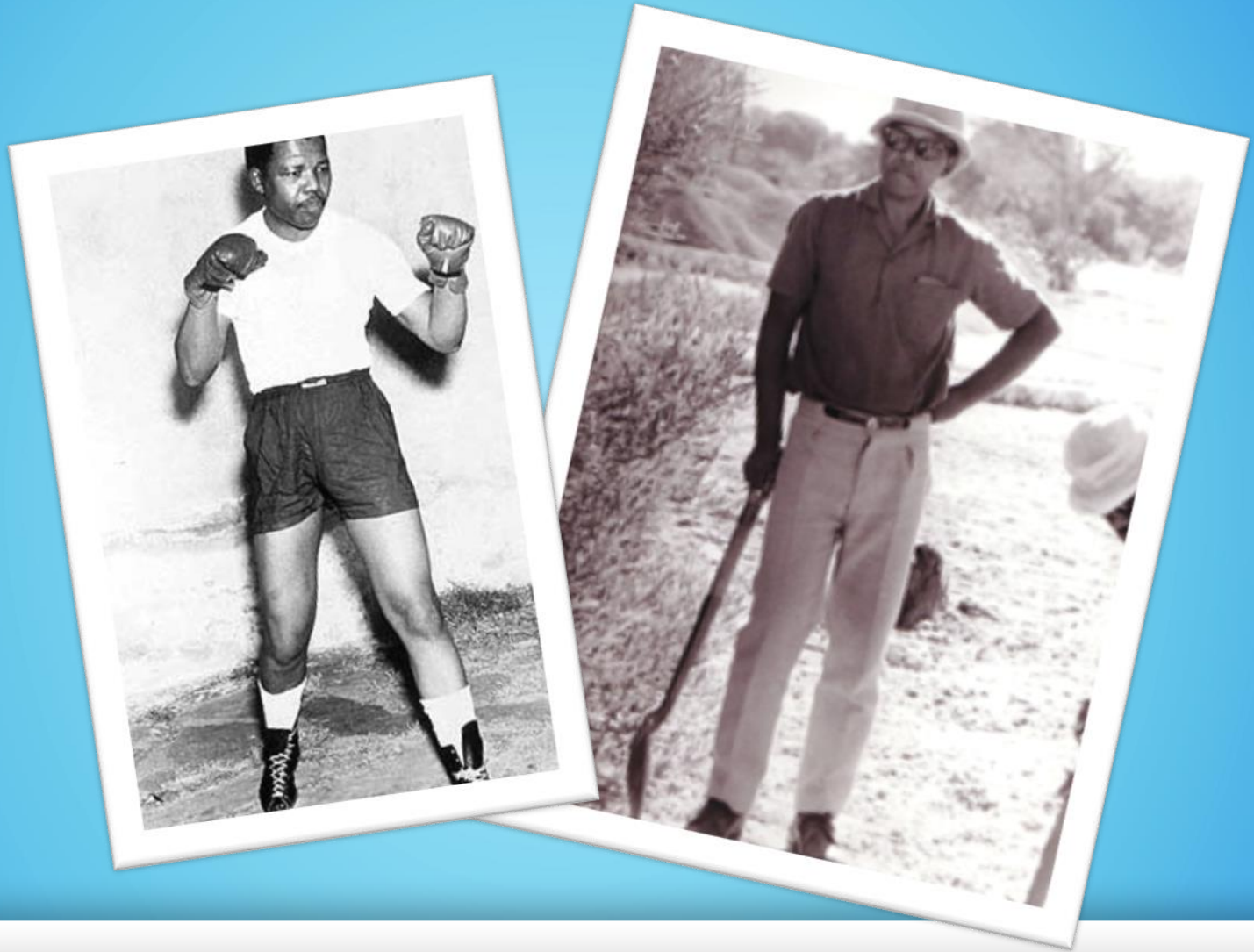
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Three ways to get started with leading as a host

- Practice stepping back, as well as stepping forward
  - So that others can step forward
- Think of your meetings/events as a bit like a party
  - Invite people, prepare the space, welcome them, connect them
- And join in!
  - Hosts 'eat the same food' as their guests – but they eat last

Want to find out more and develop your host leader skills?

- Get the books
- Mark's Substack markmckergow.substack.com
- Follow us @thehostleader on Twitter
- Join the Linkedin group
- Hosting Generative Change online starting 21 March 2023 for four weeks
- Host Leadership Gathering, 12-13 June in Vienna
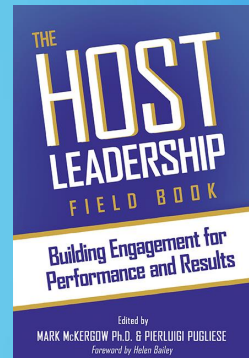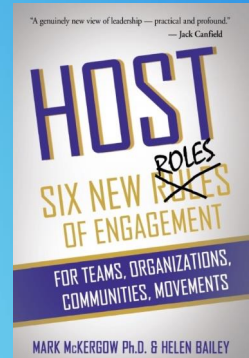
Thank you!

Extra slides about the roles and positions
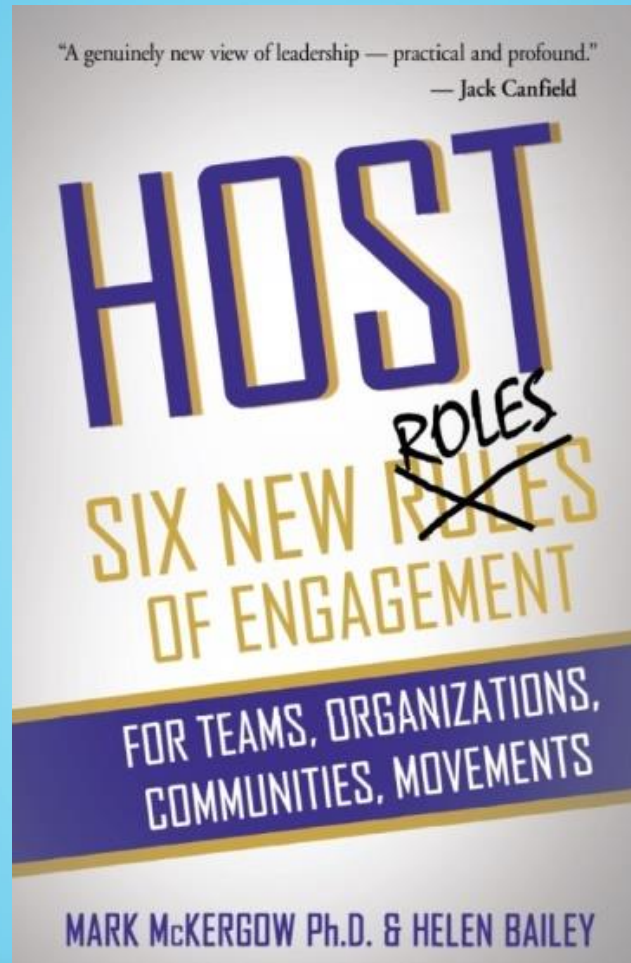
Initiator role
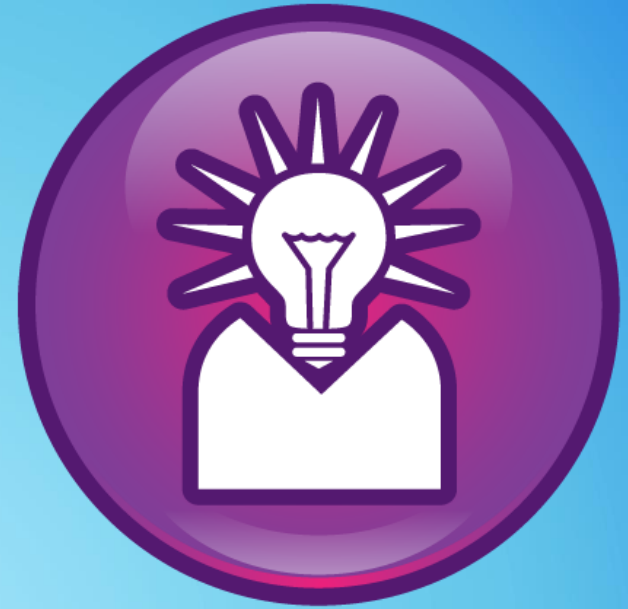
- Hearing what is being called for
- Finding and setting priorities, long-term directions and intentions
- Get things moving with small steps

Inviter role

- Use the 'soft power' of invitation – asking, not telling (mostly)
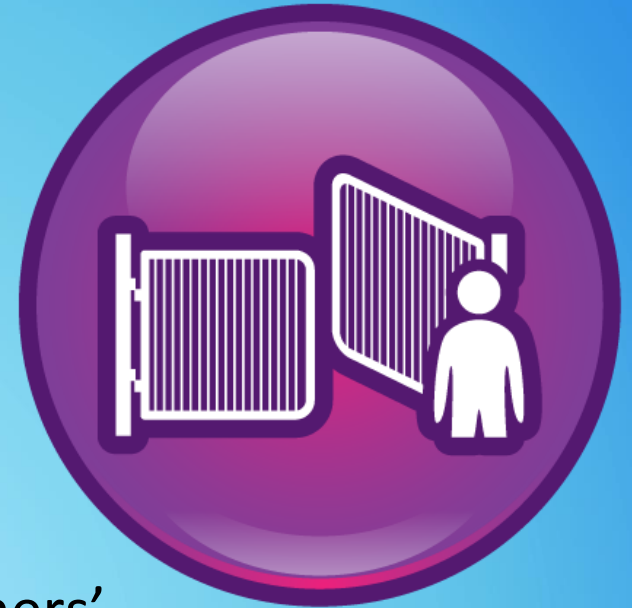- Reach out to people with a welcoming hand
  - Attractive, acknowledging, optional
- Looking to include people from the fringes where possible/desirable

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Space Creator role

- Create a space which supports what you want to have happen:
  - Physical space
  - Interactional (psychological) space
  - Headspace (for yourself)

Gatekeeper role

- Negotiate boundaries and 'containers' (topic/people/place) – for team, projects, meetings

- Welcome people over the threshold

- Set and teach house rules/routines and norms – 'the way we do things here'

- Be prepared to say No sometimes – in a positive way

Connector role

- Connect with people at three levels
  - Level 1. Connect with people directly
  - Level 2. Connect people with each other
  - Level 3. Connect with wise interconnectedness
- Look to make new connections – and let them get on with it

Co-Participator role

- Provide for everyone first
- Then join in - 'eat the same food', follow the same house rules, be part of the group as well
- Be *both* the first and the last

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Four positions for the dance of the host leader

Stepping forward

"In the spotlight"
Up front, in full view

"With the guests"
Public, yet intimate

Stepping back

"In the gallery"
Overview

"In the kitchen"
Private, intimate

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