The Reos Change Lab

Addressing Complex Challenges with Social Innovation

For the Innoweave Knowledge Sharing Platform & the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation

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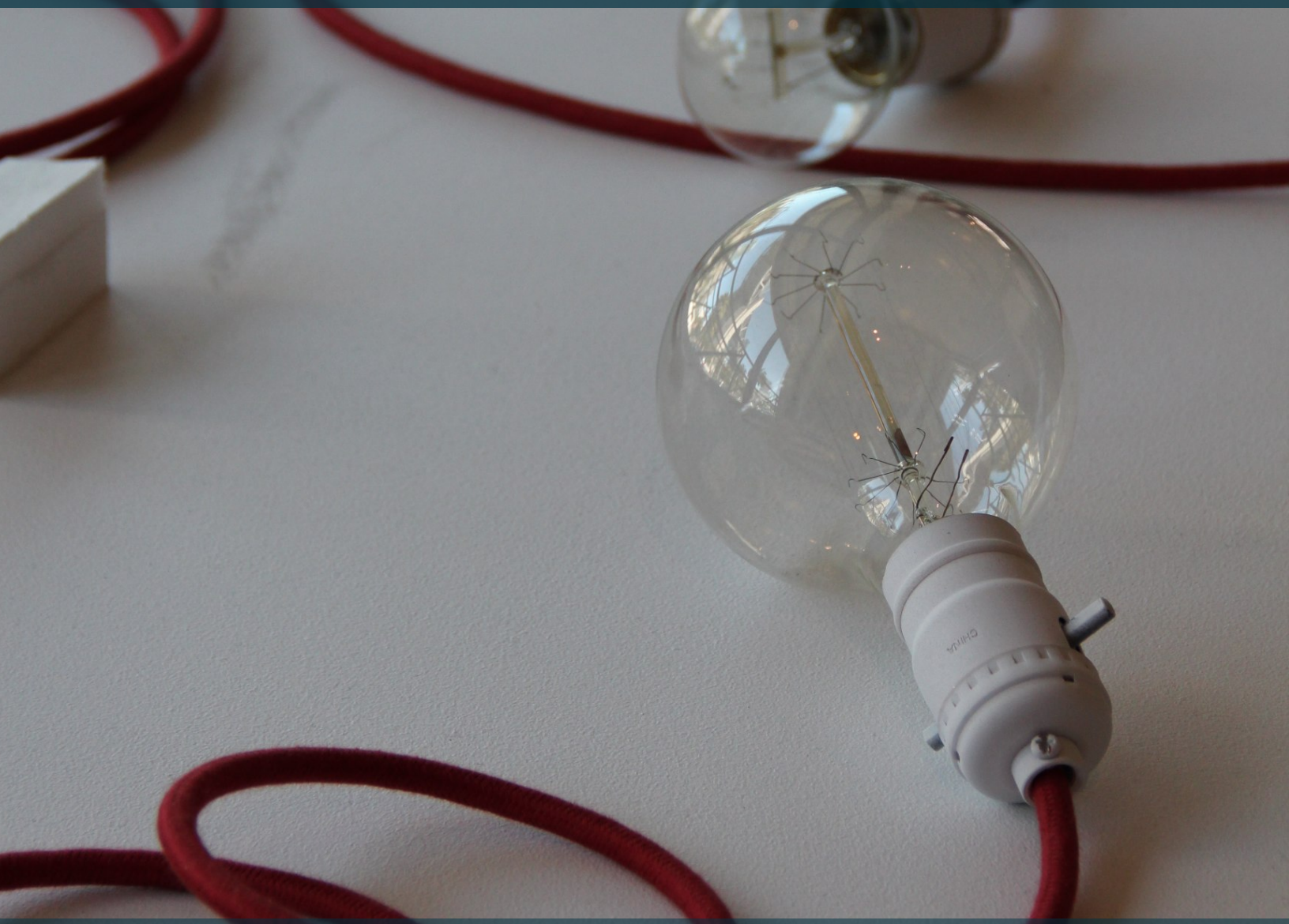

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The Reos Partners Change Lab

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Reos Partners *is a social innovation consultancy that addresses complex, high-stakes challenges around the world.*

We design and facilitate processes that enable teams of stakeholders—even those who don't understand or trust one another—to work together to make progress on their toughest problems.

We work on issues such as employment, health, food, energy, the environment, security, and peace. We partner with governments, corporations, and civil society organisations.

Our approach is systemic, creative, and participative.

We are guides more than advisors. We are experienced at helping diverse groups navigate uncharted territory to reach their most important goals.

Reos Partners works both locally and globally. We have offices in Cambridge (Massachusetts), Johannesburg, Melbourne, Oxford, São Paulo, San Francisco, and The Hague.

www.reospartners.com

FOREWORD

This is a document for change agents, innovators, and leaders who are ready to take a step into new territory and bring their colleagues, systems, and the world with them.

The topic of this booklet is the Reos Change Lab, an approach to creating and navigating change and transformation in complex social systems. While this document is not a “how-to”, it is an in-depth exploration of the Change Lab approach, as well as an overview of some of the principles and tools we work with at Reos Partners.

In this document, we will look at the process of initiating, convening, and facilitating a social change process that is systemic, creative, and participative—a “who”, “what”, and “why” of social innovation.

It is our hope that change agents who read this report will be inspired to make a different kind of difference in their lives and organisations by learning to get at the roots of the problems in their immediate systems through communication, dialogue, and collaborative action.

We also hope that you will be inspired to contact us and share your learnings and challenges. We invite you to collaborate and partner with us as you strive to address the difficult social challenges that are affecting your systems and organisations.

Please contact us at global@reospartners.com.

INTRODUCTION

Complex Challenges

The Change Lab is an approach to social innovation - a way of initiating and navigating social change - which has been incubated and evolved in the context of some of the world's most complex social challenges. The need for the Change Lab has arisen because of the increasing scope and complexity of social challenges in the world today. Climate change, species and habitat loss, conflict and social inequality are examples of challenges which involve many actors, and which often take place in rapidly changing social and political terrain. Conventional planning, development, and strategic responses these challenges have proven inadequate because they have failed to address their deep social, dynamic, and generative complexity. Addressing them requires an approach that is systemic, participatory and emergent at the same time, enabling a grounded approach that is simultaneously adaptable and responsive to the changing nature of the challenge.

Applied to a particular context, The Change Lab provides a safe, creative space to discover and grow the seeds of a healthier, more resilient and more just social reality. It is a new organizational form which incubates and grows initiatives focused on bringing about change in a complex, multi-stakeholder environment.

Defining Complexity

In order to understand and work with complex systems more effectively, let's look at three different types of complexity: **social complexity, dynamic complexity, and generative complexity.**[1]

Dynamic complexity is what we normally refer to when we talk about complexity. This type of complexity is present when cause and effect are far apart in time and space. In dynamic complexity, cause and effect are also interdependent, with the effects of our actions feeding back into the system, amplifying the system's behaviour (what we commonly know as "vicious" and "virtuous" cycles).

Without looking beyond the immediate events currently taking place to the deep cultural and systemic roots of a social challenge, it is impossible to effectively address the issue. When groups implement "fixes" that only deal with surface-level issues, unexpected results can emerge, apparently out of nowhere. These unanticipated consequences can put large investments of time, money, and human energy at risk.

In a system with dynamic complexity, merely addressing the symptoms of a problem will not work. Instead, a *systemic* approach must be utilised to get to the root causes of the problem.

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[1] Peter Senge and Otto Scharmer, "Community Action Research: Learning as a Community of Practitioners, Consultants and Researchers," in Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, eds., *Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001): 23.

For an example of **dynamic complexity,** see the case study entitled *Aboriginal Health Care in New South Wales, Australia,* in Appendix B: Case Studies.

Social complexity is present when various actors have diverse perspectives and interests in a particular system. They do not agree on the solutions or even on their definition of the problem. For example, environmental activists, government agency representatives, and oil industry CEOs may have very different perspectives on appropriate responses to climate change. Because of these siloed worldviews, and in the context of a socially complex problem, it is often difficult to come to a shared understanding of the nature and definition of the challenge, something that is crucial before participants can begin to address it.

In a system with social complexity, a *participative* approach must be utilised. By incorporating the diverse perspectives into the conversation, actors can gain a shared understanding of the problem and the system as a whole. Only this kind of collective participation can lead to shared leadership and action.

Peter Senge on **Dynamic Complexity**

"When the same action has dramatically different effects in the short run as the long, there is ***dynamic complexity.*** *When an action has one set of consequences locally and a very different set of consequences in another part of the system, there is dynamic complexity. When obvious interventions produce non-obvious consequences, there is dynamic complexity. A gyroscope is a dynamically complex machine; if you push downward on one edge, it moves to the left; if you push another edge to the left, it moves upward. Yet, how trivially simple is a gyroscope when compared with the complex dynamics of an enterprise, where it takes days to produce something, weeks to develop a new marketing promotion, months to hire and train new people, and years to develop new products, nurture management talent, and build a reputation for quality—and all of these process interact continually."*

—Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* [2]

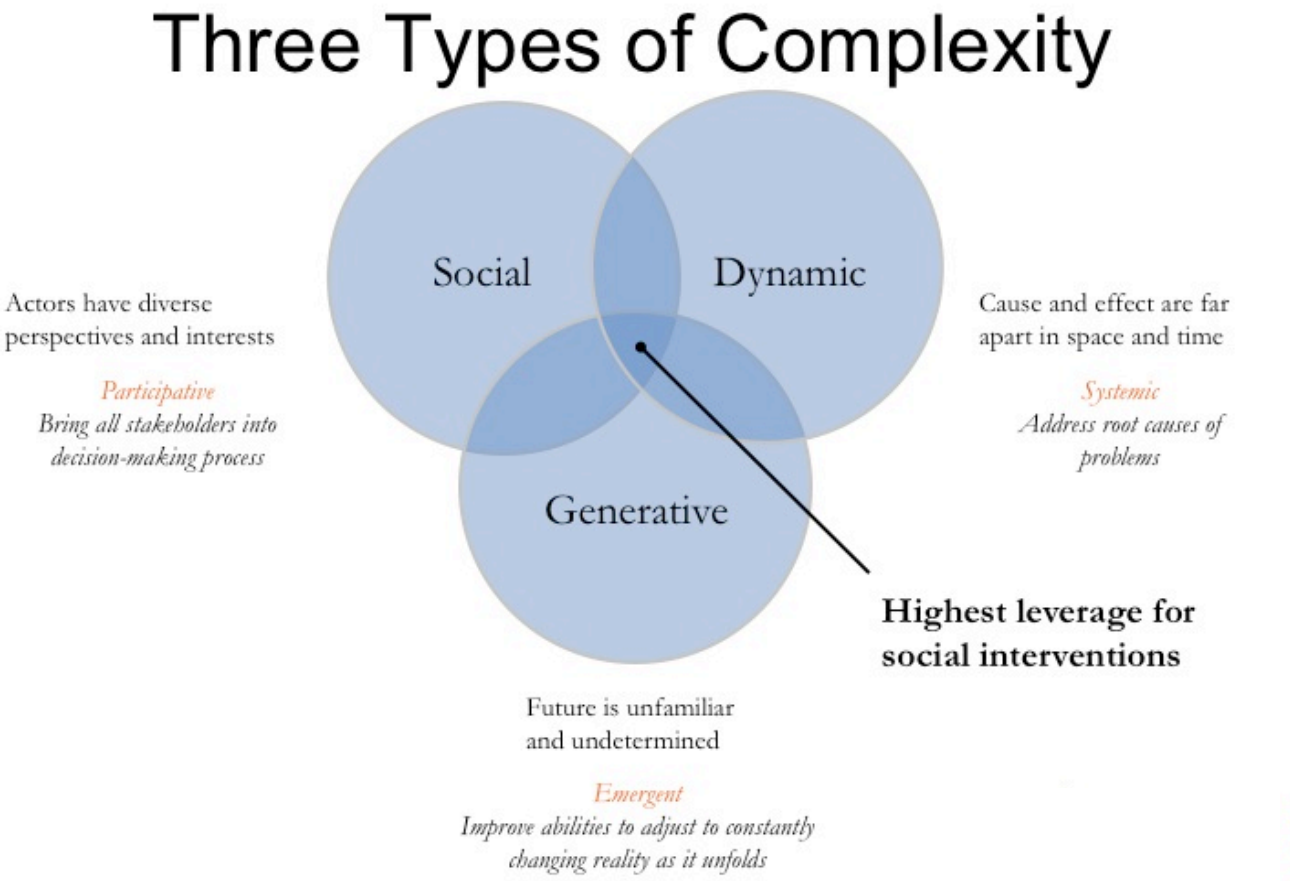
Generative complexity is present when the future is unfamiliar and undetermined. When no roadmaps, precedents, or best practices exist to guide the way forward, people looking to intervene in a problem area are left to their own devices to navigate an unknown terrain. This kind of complexity makes it difficult for actors to adapt to changes and navigate the system—the terrain itself appears to change and shift as the group works with the problem at hand.

In a system with generative complexity, an *emergent* approach must be utilised, in which teams creatively use improvisation and adaptation to navigate their social terrain and effect change in their system.

At the intersection of these three kinds of complexity we find what we can call "wicked messes": challenges characterized by multiple interrelated forms of complexity that, when combined, exacerbate one another, making the problem exponentially more difficult to solve. For example, an experienced group with consistent perspectives will be better suited to deal with unexpected outcomes than a group with widely varying

[2] Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (New York, NY: Currency Doubleday, 1990): 71-72.

perspectives whose members have never worked together before. When a social problem is characterised by a combination of strong interdependence, conflicting worldviews, unpredictability, and changing, uncharted terrain, it may be ripe for a systemic social intervention, such as a Change Lab.



Three Characteristics of Complex Social Systems

Another threefold understanding of complex systems comes from Reos Partner Zaid Hassan's forthcoming book, *Laboratories for Social Change* (2013). He lays out three characteristics of complex social systems that together define what a complex system is and how it behaves.

1. Emergence

First, a number of individual actions (by institutions and people) have led to the current situation, which has what are called "emergent" characteristics; that is, characteristics that are unpredictable and chaotic.

2. Information

Second, in response to this situation, decision-makers at every level in the system are generating and demanding increasing amounts of information. This information complicates the situation by creating a feedback loop: The more information is produced, the more it overwhelms our capacities to process or be aware of it in its entirety. In response to this information overload, decision- makers start creating simplified models of the situation in order to facilitate decision-making, which further distances them from facts on the ground.

3. Adaptation

Third, to survive in the face of unprecedented threats to livelihoods and well-being, multiple actors adapt their behaviours (sometimes very rapidly) in response to what they know, what they see, what they hear, and what they experience. Their actions in turn change the situation again.

Complexity Checklist

Successful multi-stakeholder partnerships are capable of designing robust responses to complexity. This document outlines a framework for groups to think practically about strategic responses to complex situations.

Working in situations of complexity mean that our strategic responses must meet a least ***three criteria:***

1. *Does your response allow for emergence? This means that your strategy must assume the situation you are working within is not predictable and will present you with challenges that are unknown when you start.*

2. *Does your response take into account the fact that new information will constantly be available? How will you cope with the emergence of new information?*

3. *Does your response allow for changes of strategy, tactics, or direction?*

Working With Systems

At Reos, when we talk of creating systemic change, we distinguish three different kinds of systems: (1) engineered or designed systems, (2) natural systems, and (3) purposeful human systems.

An ***engineered system,*** also known as a "hard system", is an entity that has been designed and built by people to perform predictably and meet performance criteria. Examples of hard systems include cars, computers, and other machines and devices. Engineered systems draw on the disciplines of physical science. They are known and mechanical, and their results are predictable and measurable.

> ***Definition of a System:*** *Any portion of the material universe (including ourselves and everything we have invented including social systems) which we choose to separate in thought from the rest of the universe for the purpose of considering and discussing the various changes which may occur within it under various conditions.*
>
> —Josiah Willard Gibbs, Harvard scientist [3]

A ***natural system*** is a collective of ecologically situated systems. It is not built, but is alive of its own accord. It constantly changes, adapts, and regenerates, and the behaviour of the system as a whole cannot be explained by linear cause-and-effect relationships. A natural system is a complex, living ecosystem composed of interdependent living parts.

Purposeful human systems are composed of people and designed for a particular purpose: organisations, schools, governments, orchestras, etc. Like engineered systems, they are designed to serve a function; however, they are made up of human beings and therefore also share the adaptability and unpredictability of natural systems. Purposeful human systems are also known as "soft systems".

Natural systems and engineered systems provide the environment and tools that enable people to mediate and navigate their world. Natural, engineered, and purposeful human systems combine to constitute the boundaries of our shared social realities: the products that we use and trade, the tools that we use to live in the world, and the norms, agreements, and disputes that compose our relationships. The rich complexity that takes place at the intersection of these different kinds of systems may inhibit our ability to effect sweeping social or institutional change. But complexity doesn't have to be a barrier to learning and moving forward. On the contrary, we can see complexity as a call for collaboration and subtle, informed action that takes place at a new level of thinking: the systems level. In other words, complexity can be both a challenge and an opportunity.

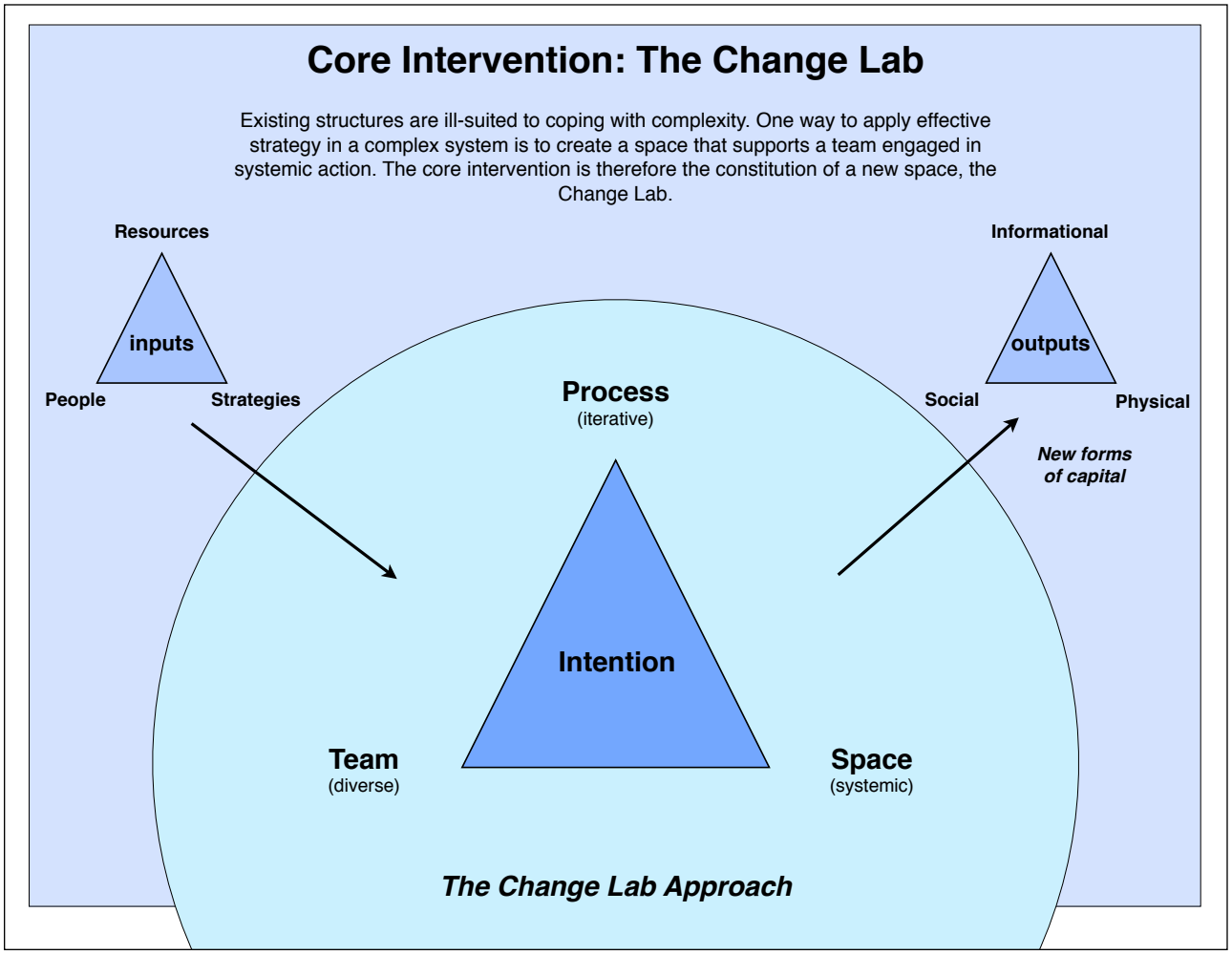
Sometimes the outcomes of a Change Lab are incremental cultural changes affecting the ways that people learn and collaborate. In fact, systemic change isn't really systemic unless it reaches the level of culture and shifts people's worldviews. The process of cultural change is one that often happens through dialogue and communication across

[3] Muriel Rukeyser, *Willard Gibbs* (Woodbridge, CT: Ox Bow Press,1988): 445.

institutional and personal difference. By seeking to understand that which we don't already know, we are able to subtly and incrementally transform our systems. Although the effects aren't always immediately visible, they can nonetheless result in powerful change. In places like Colombia, where conflict and war can keep political actors isolated from each other, sometimes even a simple conversation between leaders is a form of powerful systemic progress. If we are to change the very foundations of our cultures and societies, and collectively generate something new from the creative root of human activity, we sometimes need to start at the beginning and work gradually. Only when real-world projects are grounded in new cultural and social realities can they hope to create lasting and visible systemic change.

A group of stakeholder-leaders in South Africa work together in a Change Lab focused on the issue of orphaned and vulnerable children.

CHAPTER ONE: THE REOS CHANGE LAB



From Zaid Hassan's *Laboratories for Social Change* (2013, Forthcoming)

Introduction to the Reos Change Lab

The Change Lab, as defined and applied by Reos, is not based on a single methodology. It draws on a number of methodologies and approaches that, when collectively and skillfully applied to a complex challenge in a particular social system, can enable the people in that system to bridge cultural and institutional differences to form an effective team, see together what is needed for a systemic intervention, and collaborate to bring about new realities in the system as a whole. In this way, the Change Lab produces four kinds of innovative outputs in complex social systems:

- new insights about what is needed
- new relationships among diverse actors with a stake in the system
- new capacities for leadership and collaboration
- interventions or actions that address complex challenge by acting upon leverage points at the individual, organisational, and systemic levels

In this way, the Change Lab is at once a platform for dialogue and innovation, a methodological field or school of social change and collaboration, and a shared space dedicated to the co-creation of new social realities.

Following are some of the methodologies and approaches that have helped to give form to the Reos Change Lab (for more information and further reading on these and other tools, methods, and approaches, please see Appendix A, *The Reos Partners Toolkit*):

Systems Thinking: We're used to looking at problems as a mechanistic result of measurable causes. A systems approach takes a whole-system, dynamic, quantum view of a problem, looking for patterns, relationships, and leverage points throughout the entire system, and revealing root causes and the fundamental worldviews that underpin a social reality. This process allows actors to see and engage with a problem at its roots rather than simply applying surface-level "fixes". This understanding of systems thinking comes from Reos Partners Colleen Magner and Mille Bojer.

The U-Process: The U-Process (described below) can be used to design social processes at all levels—ranging from dialogue exercises to systemic interventions—that support a group in creatively accessing points of leverage in the system. It involves three primary phases: co-sensing, so-presencing, and co-realizing. The process is an excellent "meta-design" tool, allowing creative input from all participants at every level of the social change process. One of the most well-known theorists and proponents of the U-Process is Otto Scharmer.[4]

Design Thinking/ Prototyping: By creating prototypes of systemic initiatives in a creative studio setting, and repeatedly vetting, testing, debriefing, and editing iterations of these prototypes in the field, teams can launch intelligent learning initiatives that adapt to the social context and avoid large-scale failure. By scaling new initiatives with a self-contained prototyping process, groups build learning and adaptation into new institutions from the beginning, allowing for agile and effective social interventions.

Transformative Scenario Planning: Transformative Scenario Planning **(**TSP) uses the power of narrative to change how stakeholders imagine what is possible in a given social system. By creating new stories about a system's possible futures, a socially complex group of stakeholders is able to develop collective understanding of previously stuck situations, opening up possibilities for action and intervention. By convening a diverse and powerful group of people from throughout a given social system, and enabling the group to engage and learn together by creating "Transformative Scenarios", it is possible to find avenues for systemic actions that address all stakeholder needs and get to the roots of the issue at hand. In the context of the

[4] C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future As It Emerges* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009).

Change Lab, TSP provides a safe, low-risk setting for systemic multi-stakeholder work that can create a foundation for action later in the process.[5]

Deep Democracy: Developed by Myrna Lewis and drawing on the work of Arnold Mindell, Deep Democracy is a process that creates a focused and sensitive awareness of the many voices present in a particular system. Deep Democracy suggests that, to truly leverage systemic insights, we need information and input from all levels and parts of the system, including controversial ones. This approach draws from the understanding that transparency and radical honesty can deeply heal and transform social relationships.[6]

By working with these and other tools and methodologies, and carefully designing dialogue and engagement processes to fit with the nuanced needs and perspectives in a given system, Change Lab practitioners can facilitate learning, alignment, and creativity. In this way, diverse stakeholders can carry out effective and powerful interventions that address complex, systemic social challenges.

Introduction to the U-Process

With roots in anthroposophy and phenomenology, the U-Process is an archetypal process for social innovation given its current form largely through the work of Otto Scharmer. It is a useful and powerful model for collaboration and action based on the human creative process and a close study of people who have innovated and succeeded in their fields.

The "U" helps guide practitioners in the design, facilitation, and navigation of social change. It provides them with a meta-structure and vocabulary for seeing and working with social realities and mapping the creative process through time. Individual Change Labs generally utilise the principles, movements, and capacities associated with different stages of the U to determine which methods to bring into a process and when. The U-Process can also help facilitators see, understand, and name what is going on in the "social field"—the "feeling" of the group as a whole—of the multi-stakeholder group with which they are working. The U is one of Reos Partners' most often used "core" methodologies, so we will explore it here in more detail. For more about the U-Process and its origins, see Otto Scharmer's book, *Theory U: Leading From the Future As It Emerges*.

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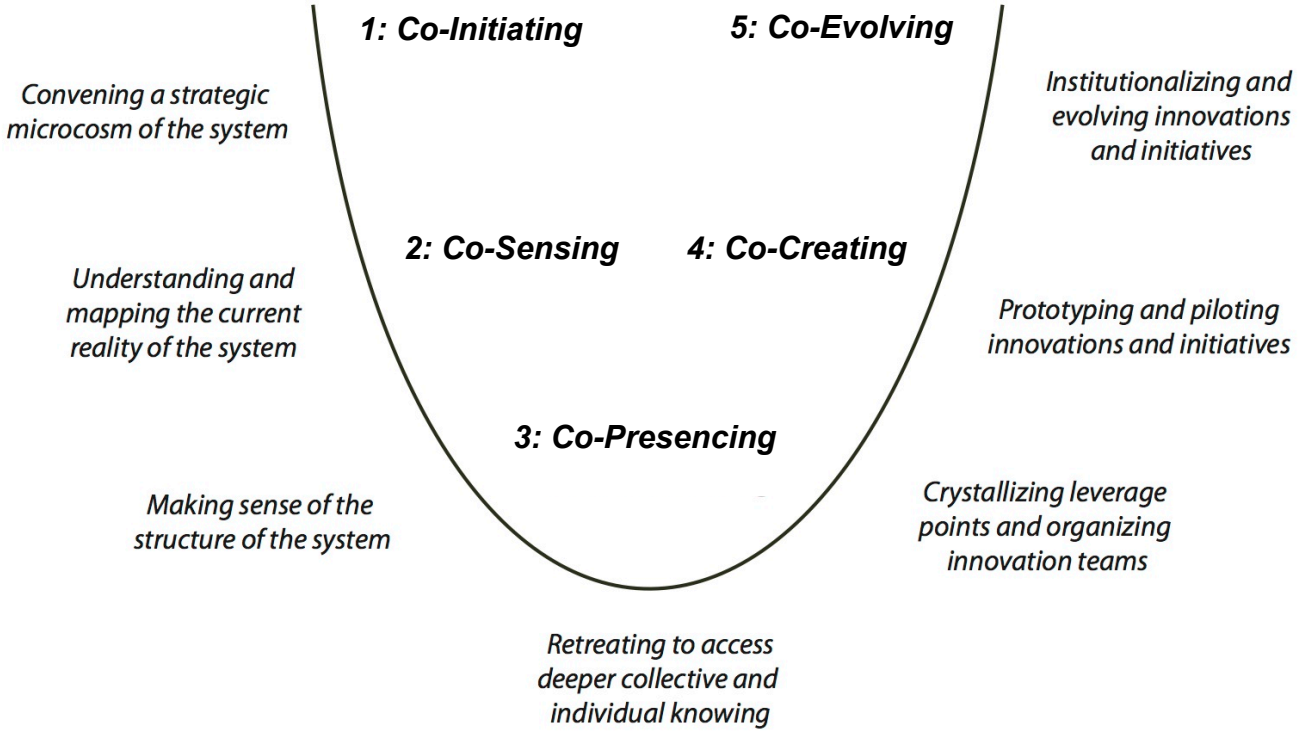
[5] Adam Kahane, *Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2012).

[6] Arnold Mindell, *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums: Practical Steps to Conflict Prevention and Resolution for the Family, Workplace and the World* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 2002).

THE U PROCESS

Five Spaces for Innovating in Complex Social Systems



The U-Process has five phases or "movements": ***co-initiating, co-sensing, co-presencing, co-creating,*** and ***co-evolving.***[7] In the context of the Change Lab, these movements are both a way of mapping the Lab's activities while they also represent the capacities that participants develop and utilise during each phase of the Lab itself.

For more information on the capacities in the U-Process, see Otto Scharmer's article *Uncovering the Blind Spot of Leadership,* Appendix C.

[7] C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future As It Emerges* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009): 18-19.

Co-Initiating: This is the opening phase of a project in which a core convening group gathers, looks closely and deeply at the system and its challenges by conducting interviews and other sensing activities, and brings together a diverse and powerful multi-stakeholder group comprising a "strategic microcosm" of the system. Getting the right people into the room is crucial. Doing so sets the stage for the rest of the process and determines the legitimacy, power, depth, and accuracy of much of what follows.

Co-Sensing: In this stage, the multi-stakeholder group immerses itself in its system. Participants hear all of the voices in the room and get to know each other outside of their limited institutional roles. By engaging with whole human beings from every part of the system, the group collectively sees diverse perspectives, and a common systems perspective begins to emerge. As the co-sensing phase culminates, participants often feel challenged by the amount and diversity of information that surrounds them. They have moved out of their comfort zones, and their fundamental beliefs and assumptions about their system may have been challenged. In this phase, participants also practice a capacity called *suspending,* in which they suspend their assumptions, judgments, and habitual patterns in relation to their system in order to make room for something new to emerge.

Co-Presencing: In presencing (presence + sensing), participants retreat and spend time alone, often in nature, to access a space of internal silence. By doing so, they allow a deep "inner knowing" to emerge and guide their understanding of what is needed in the system in general and from each of them individually. You can find more on presencing in the section below called "Inner Capacity and Social Change".

Co-Creating: In this phase, participants return to the group and begin to work creatively together, finding others with whom they share insights and energy. They gather in initiative teams and begin to prototype ideas for intervening in their system or new ways of organising that will allow for systemic shifts.

Co-Evolving: In the co-evolving phase, participants steward initiatives through ongoing iterations and innovations to ensure they are resilient and not simply absorbed by the status quo of the system at large. This stage often involves ongoing coaching sessions and other ways of maintaining the momentum of the systemic interventions and innovations. The Change Lab and/or its initiatives may also find new institutional homes where they can be sustainable in the long term, and where the ideas emerging from the Lab may be incorporated into new strategies and policies within and between institutions in the system. Co-evolving involves integrating innovations into existing organisational forms and ensuring that the Change Lab has impact on the ground.

The Steps of a Change Lab

Convening a Strategic Microcosm of the System

In the co-initiating phase of a Change Lab, a core group of change agents gather and resolve to address a particular social challenge together at a systems level. In order to do so, they need to convene a group of stakeholders that is a "microcosm" of the system they wish to shift. This process of convening is important and delicate, as it sets the stage for the rest of the social change process. To ensure that a social intervention has the potential to shift the system, the stakeholder group must be diverse enough to represent the system as a whole and powerful enough to make critical decisions.

An indigenous leader and a businessman work together to create collective prosperity in Colombia.

Seeing and Sensing the System

Once the stakeholder group has been convened, a process of co-sensing can begin (see "Introduction to the U-Process"), so participants can build a full understanding of the system as a whole. They can do this through stakeholder interviews, audio-visual materials, learning journeys, dialogue processes, scenario construction, and a variety of other activities and participatory research methodologies. In this phase, participants immerse themselves in the current reality and mine their perspectives and knowledge about their system. In addition to crossing boundaries into parts of the system with which they were previously unfamiliar, they also consciously examine the systems in which they live and work, drawing out the essential properties through authentic inquiry and intentionally looking at the reality of how things are.

Making Sense of the Structure of the System

Once a body of information has been collected about the system—ideally details that reflect both the "hard" structural or institutional complexity of the system as well as the "soft" complexity of peoples' thinking, hopes, fears, and challenges—it is then time to collectively map and make sense of this information. In this phase, participants take a step back and organise the information into a collective systems map. Facilitators use systems thinking and systems mapping exercises so that the group understands in detail the causal chains, mental models, and behaviour patterns present.

Retreating to Access Deeper Collective and Individual Knowing

In the co-presencing phase of the Change Lab, participants retreat as individuals to reflect on their roles in the system, quiet their minds and hearts, and tap into a deep knowing inside themselves. Participants typically spend time alone in nature; this "solo" may be a four-day wilderness trek, a one-hour silent walk, or anything in between. The key is that these stakeholders from throughout the whole system "get quiet" to allow something new to emerge. This is the "bottom of the U".

Crystallising Leverage Points and Organizing Innovation Teams

During the Crystallising phase, participants bring fresh eyes to their shared view of the system and begin to distill key leverage points—places in the system where intervention will be most effective. They begin to see how their unique individual, institutional, and sectoral perspectives and roles in the system fit with the bigger picture. This knowledge helps participants locate allies and collaborators across the system with whom they will be able to most effectively initiate change. New cross-sector innovation teams begin to emerge. This combination of leverage points and innovation teams sets the stage for action. At this point, participants begin to move up the righthand side of the U, shifting into the co-creation phase of the U-Process.

Prototyping and Piloting Innovations and Initiatives

Here, the truly creative work of the Change Lab begins. Prototyping and piloting is a process of building, testing, adapting, and rebuilding initiatives and interventions in a stimulating, collaborative way, just as an artist experiments with his or her subject matter when developing a piece of art. First, the innovation teams look carefully at their leverage points, their own team members' capacities and roles, and the system at large. They then begin to creatively prototype new initiatives, programs, institutions, and activities using drawing, sculpture, modeling, Lego Serious Play™, and other expressive processes to rapidly create and vet new ideas for action.

Reos Partners Zaid Hassan (left) and Joe McCarron (right) work with civil servants in the Netherlands to create models using everyday objects to prototype ideas for new initiatives. Prototyping helps Change Lab participants think holistically and creatively about their systems.

The diversity of actors in each team ensures that critical points of view have a voice in the process and that initiatives pass the "filter" of the whole-system perspective. Teams

build, scrap, and reinvent models and prototypes, developing many iterations of each. Without a diversity of perspectives, the groups might fail to surface unforeseen consequences and might launch new initiatives that don't really have the capacity to effect systemic change. These prototypes are not a finished product. On the contrary, they are a place to start, and eventually a number of them will be "composted", combined with other initiatives, or dramatically changed according to the needs of the system.

Once a group has prototyped initiatives, it can pilot them. Members begin by taking these innovative ideas out into the field, vetting them with others who work in the system, and testing them at a small scale in real-world situations. Over a period of time, they further adapt and evolve the ideas through additional sensing activities, bringing an even broader range of voices into the mix. Team members launch and test pilot initiatives in the field, and they bring those that are successful back to the Lab to explore taking them to scale.

Institutionalising and Evolving Innovations and Initiatives

Once the group has vetted and tested pilot initiatives, and these initiatives have proven effective at addressing certain systemic leverage points, team members can forge them into more deeply rooted institutions or scale them up to impact the whole system. During the piloting and institutionalising phases, Change Lab participants must be sure to design initiatives that incorporate learning as part of their way of working, so they are able to constantly see and adapt to the ever-changing terrain of their system. In this way, innovation is not an event with a beginning, middle, and end, but rather a process, a new way of working together that enables people and institutions to constantly evolve.

Likewise, the Change Lab doesn't ever really "end", but rather is woven into the new way that the system functions, building the capacity of institutions and actors to collaborate, innovate, and evolve on an ongoing basis. Collaboration teams should meet and share as a group to ensure that their work is continuing to uncover systemic blind spots and progress in a holistic and deep fashion.

At Reos Partners, we work on "problematic situations"—situations that different actors see as problematic from different perspectives and for different reasons. Sometimes we refer to problems as "problem-opportunities". At times, this kind of language helps us find social spaces and conversations that deliver impact, rather than those that limit our field of possibility.

The Characteristics of a Reos Change Lab

In each of its phases or steps, the Change Lab is *systemic, participative,* and *emergent* (or creative). All three of these characteristics are crucial; without any one of them, the Change Lab will not be present in its full expression. These three core characteristics correspond to the dynamic, social, and generative complexity that the Change Lab

process is designed to address. These types of complexity are not just barriers to social change, though. Looked at from another angle, they are also opportunities for systemic transformation. Implicit in each of these kinds of complexity is a strategy for revealing real-world, high-leverage responses to these wicked systemic messes.

For example, while ***social complexity*** can represent a powerful barrier to collaboration, it can also be a great asset in broadening the scope, practicality, and resilience of a system. In the same way that increased biodiversity strengthens an ecosystem (see box), social complexity, when intentionally leveraged through collaboration, can enable new possibilities for action to arise and new, more dynamic forms of support to be built. When a group in a socially complex system takes collective responsibility for a common challenge, the members can share and combine their unique perspectives to generate the most effective response. Thus, when diverse actors are able to find shared ground, the system's social resilience and capacity to innovate vastly increase. To that end, when the conveners strategically bring together the right stakeholders in a Change Lab, the Lab becomes a "microcosm of the system" with a focus on finding avenues for systemic action that address all stakeholder needs and get to the roots of the issue at hand.

"A diverse ecosystem will also be resilient, because it contains many species with overlapping ecological functions that can partially replace one another. When a particular species is destroyed by a severe disturbance so that a link in the network is broken, a diverse community will be able to survive and reorganize itself... In other words, the more complex the network is, the more complex its pattern of interconnections, the more resilient it will be."

—Fritjof Capra

In the same way that social complexity presents groups with an opportunity to work across the whole system, ***dynamic complexity*** offers them a chance to address a systemic challenge at its roots. For challenges with dynamic complexity, groups can't address symptoms piece by piece without looking at the complete cultural, institutional, and historical context that informs the system. Dynamic complexity requires thinking systemically; identifying patterns, structures, and mental models at work; and honing in on key leverage points where the different aspects of the challenge intersect. By looking for the systemic roots of the problem, actors can begin to generate an altogether new social reality, rather than just "rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic."

Generative complexity also presents opportunities for action. When the future is fundamentally unfamiliar and undetermined, and actors know they do not have roadmaps to rely on, they are forced to act creatively together. The unprecedented nature of the situation requires collaboration in a way that draws on the diversity and depth of the group, moment by moment, something that enables innovation and inspiration. When diverse actors listen carefully to each other and to their system for the best way forward, and then improvise in the interest of the whole, their actions may produce deep transformation. Without this shared creativity, groups of stakeholders

often fail to fundamentally change the system that created their problems in the first place, leading to the same unsuccessful results that have been tried in the past.

The Change Lab is designed to enable systemic shifts in situations where complexity renders traditional problem-solving approaches ineffective. Usually, groups try to address challenges by unilaterally defining the problem; using a rational planning process; delegating clear, often rigid roles; designing an intervention to address the visible symptoms of the problem; procuring funding; and directing the program's activities in a more or less linear, hierarchical fashion. If applied to a technical task (e.g., installing a refrigerator), this response may work brilliantly. However, in a complex social context with multiple actors from different backgrounds, all of whom are going ahead in a linear fashion according to their own siloed understandings of the system and the problem, this approach often makes things worse.

In contrast, by employing a systemic, creative, and participative approach, group members can find, nurture, and expand areas of agreement and mutual understanding within stakeholder groups that have very different views of the system and the problem. Considering the full range of knowledge and perspective in the system allows the group to map and therefore see the whole system together, in all of its breadth (diversity), depth (humanity), and complexity (system relationships). This process ensures that the systems map is owned by the group as a whole, and is as complete and thorough as possible.

If stakeholders participate fully, and if they are able to hear each other openly, they can develop "system sight". The group will see the system as a whole, according to a common map, creating a shared frame of reference. Members will then not only be able to reorient and align their thinking, but also co-design and co-iterate interventions that touch on crucial leverage points where different causal aspects of the challenge overlap and converge.

"If we want to get unstuck, we need to acknowledge our interdependence, cooperate, and feel our way forward." —Adam Kahane, *Power and Love* [8]

Structure and Improvisation

The Change Lab is a way of forging institutions, initiatives, and societal structures that are effective, resilient, adaptable, and able to navigate change. In order to achieve this, facilitators and designers of Change Labs constantly have to navigate the balance between structure on the one hand, and improvisation or emergence on the other. This dichotomy runs through every aspect of a Change Lab, including its purpose, the way its initiatives and institutions function in a given system, and the way that it is designed, facilitated, and carried out.

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[8] Adam Kahane, *Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publications, 2010): 5.

Facilitators, conveners, and organisers who are designing and running a Change Lab have an array of structured tools and methodologies at their disposal (see Appendix A, *The Reos PartnersToolkit*). While this may help give a Change Lab a certain degree of predictability or structure, facilitators still find themselves working with a "soft" system: an unpredictable group of people with fears, inspirations and motivations that can change moment by moment. For this reason, for an individual Lab to be successful, its conveners and participants must possess the capacity to improvise. Facilitators and designers of a Change Lab need to be aware that their plans may have to change in an instant, according to what emerges from the "social field" of the group. Sometimes our plans must adapt to the needs of living social systems and emerge spontaneously from the relationships that compose them.

In order to prepare for the unexpected, and to enable successful improvisation, alignment and agreements among conveners, facilitators, and other core team members should continually be renewed during the process. A common problem in Change Labs is that the perspectives of those running the Lab diverge, different points of view surface, and people rigidly attach to their own ideas of what's "supposed" to happen. Often, people with ownership of, or investment in, a given process or system are so committed to their own vision of how to proceed that their rigidity becomes a bottleneck, preventing effective collaboration and forcing participants into a process or series of exercises that doesn't match the energy and alignment of the stakeholder group.

STRUCTURE	***IMPROVISATION***
RATIONALITY	*CREATIVITY*
PLANNING	*PROTOTYPING*
OBJECTIVE	*PROCESS*
INTENTION	*EMERGENCE*
structure, grounding, clarity, direction, predictability, singularity	*improvisation, innovation, adaptability, mobility, resilience, fluidity, diversity*
rigidity, limitation, stagnation, fragmentation, forcing, square	*loose, dispersed, disorganized, uncontrolled, unpredictable*

It is important to note that this sometimes takes place in the most leverage-rich and high-stakes situations. When groups are on the brink of powerful innovation, people must let go of their most fundamental ideas about how something is supposed to function. This can be a scary experience! In those moments when a shift is about to occur, people often cling to their entrenched ideas about their own institutional identities.

For this reason, those working on a Lab must listen carefully to the "social field" of the group at all times, and strike a fine balance between the structured process (which plays an important role in providing a grounded and navigable experience for participants) and a willingness to adapt (which prevents an undue rigidity from forming and stagnating the innovative energy in the room).

CHAPTER TWO: FOCUS ON CONVENING AND INITIATING

Considerations for Convening: The Multi-Stakeholder Aspect of Social Change Processes

Convening the right multi-stakeholder group is one of the most important phases of a Change Lab, because it sets the stage for the rest of the process and its outcomes. Convening can literally determine the long-term success or failure of a Change Lab. Therefore, it is important to lay out a number of key guidelines that we use at Reos Partners during the convening phase of a Change Lab:

1. Diversity: The diversity of the team that is convened can determine how systemic the interventions and outcomes of the project are over the long haul. If members of the multi-stakeholder group are from just one sector or organisation, you'll get a single-sector or single-organizational outcome. If all participants share a certain political or social point of view, or a similar institutional role in relationship to a particular challenge, then initiatives and institutions will not be scaleable to the systems level because they will fail to reflect the needs and perspectives of all of the players in the system.

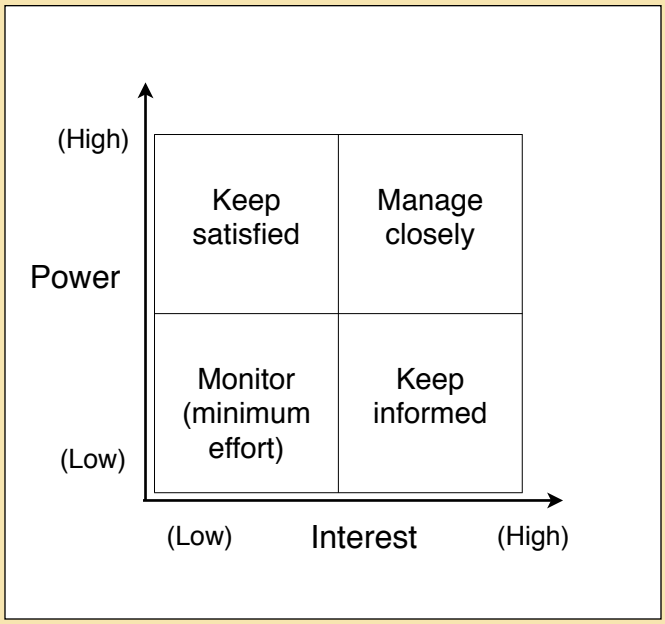
For example, if a group of environmental activists, NGOs, and local government representatives develops a national-level climate change Change Lab and fails to bring in the perspective of businesses in the energy sector or government agencies, the outcomes that are generated will reflect this limited diversity. When initiatives are piloted or scaled up in the real world, sometimes years down the road and with the investment of lots of financial and human resources, they will lack credibility or impact because they don't have legitimacy in key arenas. Diversity in a stakeholder group increases the likelihood of buy-in and ownership across the whole system; without it, initiatives and the Lab itself may fail before they even get started.

2. Power: If a stakeholder group is truly diverse, it will likely include some powerful players. But diversity is not enough to ensure that the group will be able to effect change in the system. The group must include the right people with the right kind of power, who can make decisions and influence change across the system when the time for action comes. This is not always power in the traditional sense. For example, a youth activist with no institutional power as such but an online network of 50,000 other young people can be an influential player. Diversity and power work together to ensure that voices are heard from across the system and that when action is necessary, those in the room will be able to move forward together.

For an example of excellent convening, see *The Leadership and Innovation Network for Collaboration (LINC)*, one of the Reos Partners case studies in Appendix B.

Convening Tool: *Stakeholder Mapping*

Map out your stakeholders on a Power/Interest Grid as shown, and classify them by their power in the system and by their interest in the work.



High-power, interested people: These are the people you must fully engage with and make the greatest efforts to satisfy.

High-power, less interested people: Put enough work in with these people to keep them satisfied, but not so much that they become bored with your message.

Low-power, interested people: Keep these people adequately informed and talk to them to ensure that no major issues are arising. These people can often be helpful with the detail of your project.

Low-power, less interested people: Again, monitor these people, but do not bore them with excessive communication.

(Rachel Thomson, *Mindtools* http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newPPM_07.htm)

Dialogue Interviews As a Convening Tool

Dialogue interviews are used in the convening and co-sensing phases of a Change Lab. They are one of the most useful convening tools because they go beyond being data-gathering exercises to provide an opportunity for participants to share experiences and stories, and to create connections between the interviewer and the interviewee. Because convening can be a delicate process, it is important for potential participants' voices to be included from the beginning. If conveners invite people to participate in "their project", coming from a particular point of view, they are likely to miss the opportunity to connect with potential contributors in a personal and generative way. On the other hand, if conveners come with an attitude of listening and invite participants to contribute their unique perspectives in all of their fullness, seeking to connect to and hear their points of view, then those people are more likely to see room for their unique contributions and be inspired to get involved.

Dialogue interviews thus serve a number of purposes:

- To see and understand the dynamics and complexities of the system
- To help interviewees to express and clarify their own thinking about the theme and to connect to their own commitment to make a difference in the system
- To help interviewers step into the world of the interviewees—their values, motivations, and frames for thinking about the issue
- To generate or inspire action by the interviewees—possibly with the interviewers
- To build the relationships between interviewers and interviewees and, through them, to the rest of the system

We call this form of interview a "dialogue interview", because of the roots of the word "dialogue." "Dialogue" comes from the Greek words *dia* and *logos. Logos* means "word" or "the meaning of the word". and *dia* means "through". So we are literally trying to create "meaning flowing through". While this is an interview—one person is asking the questions and listening and the other is responding—it is also a flow back and forth. Each new question is informed by the previous answer; it doesn't come from a prescribed list of questions. The interviewer and interviewee ideally "dance" together.

Interviewers play a specific role, based on these guidelines:

- Suspend judgment and be aware of your own mental models
- Create a safe and comfortable space for the interviewee
- Offer confidentiality
- Be "in service" to the interviewee
- Practice inquiry—don't offer your own point of view or assessment
- Invite examples from the interviewee's own experiences
- Try to put yourself in the interviewee's shoes
- Listen for surprises and disconfirming data
- Connect heart-to-heart on an emotional, human level
- Look for patterns and underlying causes
- Allow silence—do not jump in to fill the gaps
- Don't be afraid to ask simple or "stupid" questions
- Go with the flow
- Relax and enjoy

Change Lab participants from the mental health and addiction services sector in Auckland, New Zealand, conduct dialogue interviews to better understand each other and their system.

Interviewers pose questions to interviewees about their experiences with the topic area of the Change Lab. As mentioned above, the questions should flow, one into the other, helping interviewees to uncover a new perspective on or understanding of the topic. It's good to ask questions that will generate feelings and emotions, opening the mind and the heart.

The convening process gives the potential participants in a Change Lab the opportunity to be heard by the convening team and in this way gives change makers a way to make a systemic difference in the world. In addition, through the dialogue interviews, the convening group collects a storehouse of data about the social system: mindsets, challenges, perspectives, and the complex interrelationships between actors and institutions in the system are revealed in a safe and thorough way. This set of data contributes to the design and facilitation of the rest of the Change Lab process. The more you know about your system, and the more connected its parts, the more effectively you will be able to work with the actors and players to change its fundamental realities.

Inner Capacity and Social Change

"The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor." —Bill O'Brien

This thought-provoking quote by Bill O'Brien points to a powerful and important aspect of Reos Partners' social change work that is difficult to define and articulate. If this quote is true–if the success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor–then what is an "interior condition"?

When working with dialogue, conflict resolution, and the facilitation of change processes with socially complex groups, it is important to be able to maintain a presence of clarity, patience, and creativity even in situations wrought with conflict and tension. The danger in working in such groups is that facilitators' own emotional or subconscious vulnerabilities will be triggered by those they're working with, causing an inappropriate reaction that negatively affects the process or the participants. This reaction could be a minor outburst of frustration, a feeling of self-importance that draws the facilitator to the attention of the group, or a simple and subtle tone of voice communicating anxiety that leads participants to mistrust the process itself.

Human consciousness is extremely sensitive to verbal and nonverbal cues, and subtle behaviours can powerfully impact group dynamics, especially in charged or tension-rich environments. For this reason, calmness, clarity, patience, and emotional resilience are invaluable capacities for a facilitator to have and to train in others. To effectively and consistently maintain a relaxed and generative character in the midst of emotion and

conflict requires training that falls outside of what would normally be recognised as "professional" capacity. What is required is "inner work".

Otto Scharmer, in his book *Theory U: Leading from the Future As It Emerges,* names three capacities—open mind, open heart, and open will—as the "core capacities of the U", or the three "instruments" that leaders use to effectively transform social fields.[9] Scharmer writes of these as three different kinds of intelligence, each with its own characteristics, that can be cultivated and learned on an individual and a collective level. This individual and collective training is one way of looking at Reos' Change Lab approach to social innovation. By cultivating these core capacities, not as active tools, but as receptive "sense organs", practitioners can learn to embody a deeper and more subtle form of learning.

The three core capacities of the U-Process are:

Open Mind: The open mind corresponds to mental intelligence: receiving and processing information, generating systems maps, understanding causal relationships, and thinking abstractly. The open mind is about observing and understanding without expectation or judgment. It receives and comprehends whatever appears in the system. According to Scharmer, this ability enables practitioners to see with fresh eyes and deal with objective facts and figures.

Open Heart: The open heart is an organ of perception, corresponding to empathic human intelligence. It is how we sense our way into the world and connect with others. Developing an open heart enables teams and leaders to connect to each other, and to the real and powerful human experiences that take place when dire complex challenges affect real-world communities. By connecting with others and with the world with an open heart, people can be more deeply inspired to commit to and invest in social change.

Open Will: The open will corresponds to the human capacity to connect with purpose and action. This intuitive form of spiritual intelligence is about understanding how our actions positively and negatively impact the world. By cultivating a will that is open to feedback and that responds to the world rather than acting upon it, leaders and change agents can learn how to act more effectively. The open will is about being the change the world needs.

At Reos, we often speak of "inner work" as a prerequisite for doing our work effectively in the world. But inner work is difficult to define and tough to put a finger on even if we have an innate sense of what it is. Because we are seeking to train our selves to be generative and creative, not abstractly, but *in the world*, we have to ask ourselves "what is the mind?" "what is the heart?" and "what is the will?" These are not easy questions, and to try to answer them may send us reeling into a never-ending spiral of philosophy and speculation about the nature of consciousness and the universe. However, this is not really the point of doing inner work. On the contrary, that kind of activity may train

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[9] C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future As It Emerges* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009): 41.

the mind, but completely leaves out the heart and will. In other words, we have to ask these questions not with the mind, but with the whole being, even "asking" with our actions, and learning from the responses provided by the world. When one's actions are imbued with listening and learning, that's called "practice".

So, when we talk about doing "inner work", we're talking about practising or training in the kinds of human capacities that enable us to excel, in a relaxed, natural fashion, in all areas of life. These capacities include listening, sensing, relating to other people, inspiring others to be creative, accessing something deep and creative inside our hearts, and finding and building something that inspires us profoundly. They are about knowing what's at the heart of our experience, and the experience of others, and then intentionally training that capacity in order to allow it to grow and spread into the rest of our lives.

Inner Work and the Change Lab

The Reos Change Lab is a process that increases a system's capacity to learn and enables groups of change agents to unify and understand their role in that system. The Change Lab is a kind of "inner work" that allows a system to reach a new level of self-awareness. We at Reos practice inner work individually to enable us to support others in practising inner work in groups.

For many people, this practice looks like meditation, simply sitting on a cushion and quieting the mind, paying attention to whatever thoughts or emotions pass through our sentience, and listening very carefully to the inner world. For others, it might mean spending time in silence, drawing, painting, or creating some other form of artwork. For others still, it could mean practising martial arts, tai chi, dance, or yoga. Inner work could also include sports, golf, baseball, or billiards. The important point is that the practitioner is not just putting paint on a canvas or hitting a ball with a bat, but is working to access the deepest possible source of sentience and clarity that is possible for that human being. She is working to connect her deepest inner experiences to the outer world through the medium of her own mind, heart, and will. This inner practice is about accessing the magic of awareness and training in it like a master of aikido or a samurai in order to intentionally build a presence that is deep, open, stable, and powerfully creative.

In this way, when confronted with a group or conversation that is riddled with conflict, facilitator-practitioners will be able to keep their own centers and minds rooted in a creative and open point of view, stay relaxed, listen carefully to what is happening in the group, and allow an appropriate response to emerge from the silence and awareness that they have spent so many hours cultivating. They will be able to help that group navigate its social challenges without getting caught up or swept away in the complexity itself.

For this reason, it is highly recommended that the designers, facilitators, and organisers of a Change Lab take on a practice that will help them cultivate an open mind, heart, and will.

CHAPTER THREE: PARTICIPATION IN MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CHANGE PROCESSES

The Participatory Aspect of Multi-Stakeholder Processes

One of the fundamental characteristics of multi-stakeholder change processes is that they are *participatory* in nature. Diverse stakeholders, that is, people who would not normally work together on a pressing issue, are brought together to find common ground and collaborate across their differences. Each unique perspective and role in the system is crucial and should be included in its full potential in the process, to ensure that the outcomes are holistic and systemic.

If particular stakeholders are unwilling to bring their contributions to the table or they keep their voices isolated from the rest of the team, this dynamic can create weak points and vulnerabilities in the cohesion of the group. When facilitators foster a safe space for expression, a virtuous cycle of participation, trust, and ownership can result. When this happens, change processes can take on a momentum of their own, generating a great deal of creativity, energy, and collaboration among unlikely allies. Forging and maintaining this kind of participatory spirit is one of the cornerstones of a successful Change Lab.

But how is this accomplished? In practical terms, facilitators can design this quality into the process through tools and exercises, but they also must be prepared to improvise on the spot. One of the keys to a successful Change Lab is building *sensing* into every stage of the process, including the creative parts! Co-creation and co-sensing are not exclusive, but rather support one another. By incorporating sensing throughout the process, facilitators can ensure that the group's diverse and changing voices are continually heard, enabling participation to build and evolve as the process moves forward.

The Reos Partners Toolkit

A number of tools and exercises can help build participation in a multi-stakeholder group. For example, if you want to quickly read the energy in the room before moving into a creative exercise, you can use a fun tool called "Green, Yellow, Red"*. For a more in-depth read of the group, try* "The Soft Shoe Shuffle"*. A useful sensing tool that encourages participation is* "The Check-In"*, in which all participants bring their voices into the room at the beginning of the day or during a transition to a new exercise. This initial opportunity to be heard can set the stage for more and deeper participation later. (See these and other tools in Appendix A: The Reos Partners Toolkit.)*

Participation can also be aided by individual coaching. Although it may seem counterintuitive, focusing on individuals can build the whole group's capacity for meaningful participation. Some participants will naturally feel less comfortable making their voices heard in the group, especially if others might find their points of view controversial. If facilitators build coaching into the process, they can work individually with participants to unearth their concerns and hidden voices, and then make appropriate opportunities available for them to express their perspectives in the group setting. Facilitator-coaches may even be able to bring participants' points of view into the room anonymously to take the pressure off of the individuals themselves. Sometimes just breaking the ice will lead those who have been timid or silent to show up with new energy and bring a leadership voice into the room. It is often the most delicate or unseen perspectives in the group that have the greatest impact in shifting the direction of the system.

Different Kinds of Participation, Different Kinds of Listening

Active participation alone is not enough to ensure that voices in the system are heard; people also need to listen. While this may seem like common sense, many of us have difficulty hearing or listening to points of view that do not fit inside of our particular frame of reference. This fundamental and simple aspect of human nature can indeed prove to be a deep barrier to participation and collaboration. For this reason, training participants in listening is an important element of the Change Lab.

In his book *Solving Tough Problems*,[10] Adam Kahane draws on the work of Otto Scharmer to articulate four ways of talking and listening: Downloading, Debating, Dialoguing, and Presencing.[11] Understanding these different ways of being in communication and then building our own capacity for listening—or "listening to our listening"—can shift the ways in which we relate to each other and to our system.

Downloading: In this mode of talking and listening, we simply repeat what's already in our heads and listen for what we already know and recognise. We scan what the other person is saying for things that register with our current understanding or worldview and discard the rest. We give standard, polite responses and may edit our contribution based on what we think the other person wants to hear, thereby restricting what's possible.

Debating: In Debating, we say what's really on our mind, standing up for a particular and genuine point of view. This mode of conversation is often argumentative and heated, and the point is to find out who is right. While people are still listening for things they recognise and identify with, they are no longer afraid to say what they really think.

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[10] Adam Kahane, *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2004).

[11] C. Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future As It Emerges* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009): 236, 240.

They may even have some idea of what they want to say prepared before the conversation begins. In this way, both Downloading and Debating re-enact what already exists and reinforce habitual patterns that are already present in the system.

Participants in the LINC Change Lab in South Africa in deep dialogue.

Dialoguing: In Dialoguing, we move into a more connected and generative form of shared communication in which participants have their own points of view but are genuinely interested in understanding and building on each other's perspectives. In this mode of communication, barriers between worldviews begin to dissolve, and participants can see how their own perspectives and points of view can contribute to polarisation and conflict in the system. This is a reflective form of communication in which participants are both aware of their own prejudices and interested in fundamentally understanding that which falls outside of their box. This is not an objective, external kind of listening, but a listening to what is going on inside of both "me" and "you". Bill Isaacs, author of *Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together,* has said that a dialogue, in contrast to a debate, is a conversation with a center, not sides.[12]

Presencing: The fourth type of listening, Presencing, is described in detail in *Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society* by Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers.[13] In Presencing, the listening and speaking are part of one process. Boundaries dissolve, enabling previously separate conceptions of social reality to unite in one, shared vision and purpose. In this mode, we listen for the larger, more fundamental reality that is at the heart of what the other is saying. We make ourselves available to receive their experiences as if they were our own. We no longer really know who the ideas "belong" to. When a group reaches this mode of generative dialogue, there is great potential for profound and permanent shifts to happen in the system, as participants forge a new, shared reality that enables them to work together and understand one another in ways that were previously impossible.

By understanding these four types of speaking and listening, and paying close attention to our own ways of communicating, we may find additional opportunities to let our guards down, listen for what wants to emerge, and forge new and deeper connections

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[12] William Isaacs, *Dialogue: The Art of Thinking Together* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999): 19.

[13] Peter Senge et. al., *Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2004).

of communication. In a multi-stakeholder group, these connections act like the synapses in a brain, allowing a shared experience that can support much closer collaboration and collective action, which is strengthened by mutual recognition and trust.

In this way, we can see that participation is more than actively sticking your nose out and saying your piece. It is exponentially increased by building the capacity to listen generatively. When mobilised, these listening skills can bring about the opening of a group's collective mind and heart. In a room where generative dialogue and presencing exist, great things are possible.

Seeing and Serving the Whole: The Possibility for Leadership in the Change Lab

Dialogue, presencing, and participation support the emergence of leadership in a change process or social system. Leadership can come from anywhere in the multi-stakeholder group. If there is a *need* for leadership in the system, and one of the equal participants in the group *sees* this need and immediately *feels* what action could take the group to the next level, then the natural outcome of the group process may be for that person to take a leadership role in the service of the whole.

In the same way that some forms of communication and listening can be more open and connected than others, leadership can be seen as a spectrum, with dominance and manipulation on one end, and service and collective will on the other. The former takes place when someone tries to impose his or her will on others, without any consideration for what is good for the whole. Service and collective will, on the other hand, occurs when a leader steps forward and gives voice and action to what lies dormant in the system. By seeing what is needed, and identifying him- or herself with the collective voice and will of the system, an effective leader is able to give direction to the group through service.

In the same way that effective dialogue implies listening, leadership implies humility and being in touch, especially in a group that is going through a process whereby their authenticity and relationships are being strengthened. If someone takes a leadership stance for the sake of his or her own ego, the group will likely sense this attitude, and the leadership initiative will fail. If people in the group are participating and empowered, they won't allow themselves to be led by someone who doesn't have the interests of the whole at heart. Effective leadership happens when people see themselves and their principles and ideas expressed in another, and therefore are more than willing to work with that person's guidance.

Leadership cannot function without feedback from the group. A leader is like a sounding board for the group's highest potential, so that when he or she expresses this potential in word and action, all can feel it and reflect it back into the system. Unless the whole group gives feedback and ensures that members' voices are heard, it may end up following a leader blindly down a road that doesn't actually serve the process.

So participation and leadership go hand in hand. When a group clearly knows and can see its common purpose and is connected in a process of generative dialogue, leadership can emerge naturally. Those who are tapped by their peers may find themselves acting in a leadership capacity without even realising it. Leadership is a natural outgrowth of a group that is connected in true collaborative action. In this context, leaders must be able to listen while doing: a "listening action" or "open will". There is really no separation between what a leader does and what a group does. A leader's action is a direct response to what it "hears" in the group's will. In this sense, a true leader is an integral and connected part of the group and is therefore able to act *as* the group, *for* the group, and *with the will of* the group at the helm.

This kind of leadership is rare and difficult to achieve. What we have described here is not necessarily a prescription for how to create leadership in a social system, or even a realistic understanding of what leadership will look like. Rather, it is an ideal—a set of principles or archetypes—through which we can better understand leadership.

Dealing with Power in the System

Constituting a group of any type inevitably raises the question of who has power in the group. Traditional organisations deal with this challenge through the designation of what can be thought of as *authority,* which Harvard professor Ronald Heifetz defines as "a contract for services" (see *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* for more details). [14] Authority is typically formal and manifests in a role such as "CEO" or "Minister of State". Power, however, is much harder to define and designate.

Traditionally, power was seen as something one has or does not have, like a bar of gold. Over the last half century, our understanding of power has changed from being something *material* to being something that is more *relational.* Modern conceptions of power see it as a form of relationship, and this relationship is not immutable like gold but changes over time. Working with power means being able to see beyond authority, to witnessing how relationships between people play out "in the room".

One way of "seeing" power is to look through the lens of one of three "channels"—a little bit like looking at a different television station. These channels are: (1) Linguistic/cognitive—how people typically express themselves through speech. (2) Physical—how and where someone sits, stands, or moves; for example, an individual can exercise power by being physically disconnected from the group, such as by staring at a computer screen. (3) Emotional—what emotional state people project into the room; for example, expressions of anger or love can be seen as ways of exercising power. A skilled facilitator has a choice of intervening in any one of these channels, and sometimes the most effective interventions are not linguistic/cognitive. For example, if two people are arguing face to face, simply inviting them to sit down changes the dynamic dramatically.

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[14] Ronald Heifetz et. al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

The relational nature of power typically means that while it may appear that someone "has power", this state can change rapidly. For example, while a CEO may be in his element in a boardroom, when the group travels to a community setting, he may well be out of his depth, unable to get anything done. Other people may have far greater power in this context. One of the reasons traditional approaches to social change fail is because they fail to recognise what has been called, "the power of the powerless". Those who are deemed to have no power often kill all sorts of utopian schemes to improve the human condition because they have not agreed to be subject to top-down change from people whom we traditionally see as "having power".

One task of a facilitator is to support a group in directing its own power in order to achieve shared goals. An analogy for this process comes from observing a rowing team. An unskilled team churns up lots of white water, wasting precious energy. A good rowing team glides through the water, wasting very little energy. Like the members of any team, everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and a good team has the ability to exercise different forms of power in different situations.

One of the core challenges of a Change Lab is efficiently working with the issue of power and the dynamics that it brings up in the room. A useful way to do so is to address the power issue explicitly, making it visible to all. For example, in Reos, we have at times played a light-hearted game in which each participant puts a playing card on his or her head without looking at it. The group members then move through the room and treat each other according to the rank on these cards (Ace being the highest rank and 2 being the lowest). Afterwards, when people look at their cards, they talk about what they experienced and how the group wants to deal with power differences. This game brings power to the group's consciousness early on.

If participants are prepared for and aware of the dynamics that can arise around power, they will be better able to see the effects of their own presence in the room. If corporate CEOs and community activists alike are able to be sensitive to the power dynamics at play, they may find room to collaborate and work together from the get go. The mark of a skilled facilitator is the ability to constructively move the group forward though differences, tensions, and disagreements. If handled skillfully, power differences that result in disagreements are not a bad thing but rather can help propel the group forward. If handled badly, they can cause a group to become dysfunctional or at worst fall apart.

One tool for setting the stage for collaboration in a group that is rife with diverse power dynamics is the concept of "rank", an idea first coined by Arnold Mindell. Rank is one way of surfacing and collectively seeing asymmetrical power relationships among

For more on rank, see Arnold Mindell's book, *Sitting in the Fire: Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity.* [15]

[15] Arnold Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire: Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity* (Portland, OR: Lao Tse Press, 1995).

people in a group. Rank can be determined by anything that represents relative power or privilege, such as official job title, race, or gender. Rank can also include more subtle things like physical height or marital status. The way rank arranges itself is specific to each group and context. People carry out implicit ranking all the time, but we don't usually acknowledge it. Failing to acknowledge rank can split a group into subgroups of "powerful" and "powerless" members, and lead to strong feelings of helplessness or even to direct conflict. Sometimes acknowledging the subtle types of rank like physical strength/health or parenthood can help to create a more nuanced understanding of power in the group.

It is important for those who feel they have relatively high rank to acknowledge that they can't give away that power or privilege. It's theirs, whether it's owing to their job titles, race, gender, physical characteristics, or marital status. Denying that one has some power and privilege just aggravates those with less rank. The question then becomes, how do I carry this rank well and with awareness?

If people who perceive themselves as having lower rank identify only with the areas where they have relatively less power in a particular group, it can lead to a sense of victimhood. Most of us identify most easily with the places where we have low rank in comparison to others; we feel our marginalisation, oppression, or invisibility more keenly than we feel our privilege. Many people who perceive themselves to have low rank in some contexts enjoy high rank in others, even in the same group. They may, for example, have relatively low rank in terms of race and gender, but have high psychological rank, i.e., they speak with a sense of eldership and an ability to see the big picture. People listen when they speak, recognising their implicit power even if its not officially sanctioned authority.

Rank Exercise

It is useful for Change Lab participants to consciously identify where they have relatively more rank than others and where they have relatively less in the group.

To enable participants to see the rank that they carry and the rank in the room, first introduce the concept of rank. Then write the following questions on a flipchart:

Where do I have high rank here?
Where do I have low rank here?

Allow time for feedback and discussion of what people noticed about their own rank.

Then instruct participants to ask themselves:

How do I want to use the rank that I carry in this process? In the Change Lab as a whole?

Sometimes we have blind spots when it comes to our high rank. This lack of awareness creates another choice for those with low rank: Are they going to wake those folks up with gentleness or with a bang? What often happens is that attempts to alert high-rankers to their blind spots start quietly but become increasingly loud and disturbing when the high-rankers don't respond adequately.

Another tool for dealing with the problem of power before it comes up is to build personal connection between participants from the start (especially during the initial sensing phase of a Change Lab). Rather than focusing on people's authority,

institutional roles, and identities, it can be helpful to run dialogue exercises early on that get people talking about their personal lives and inspirations, and the reasons why they got involved in the work they're doing in the first place. Dialogue can be a way of equalising perceived power imbalances between people.

A number of different exercises can support this process, including *The Check-In*, *Paired Dialogue Interviews*, *Sharing Stories of Connection*, and *Cynics and Believers*. These activities can help people get out of their normal institutional identities and into a new mode of exploring the system and the people in it, from the heart and with a creative and open mind.

Paired Dialogue Interviews, for example, take place between pairs of participants, ideally from different sectors, who have never met before. It is best if participants pair up with someone with whom they wouldn't normally talk or who they think has different views from theirs. Once the participants are in pairs, the facilitator introduces the concept of the dialogue interview and gives some guidelines for suspending judgment and listening with an intention of serving the other. To begin, participants look at each other for a time and reflect on what kinds of judgments and thoughts they may be having about their partners based on appearance or what they already know about them. They work to suspend their judgments, and connect with their curiosity and their intention to be in service to their partner as they conduct the interviews.

The point of dialogue interviews is for interviewers to step into the shoes of the interviewees and get a real sense of their points of view, motivations, aspirations, and challenges as a person as well as in relation to the issue or system. Sometimes in dialogue interviews, participants tell their life stories or stories of profound moments of impact. They also offer participants an opportunity to practice suspending their own judgments and listen generatively. When people from different worlds of power are able to connect on a human level, their institutional roles and identities can become secondary, leaving room for more immediate collaboration and more effective communication for the duration of the process.

The other tools listed above each have unique ways of bridging power gaps and connecting participants. For more details on each of these tools and how they're used, see Appendix A: *The Reos Partners Toolkit*.

Putting the "Co-" in "Co-Creation": Participatory Design and Prototyping

Like co-sensing, co-creation should be built in to every phase of a Change Lab. For participants, creativity means constantly seeing the social system with new eyes, and adding and evolving their contributions to the process as that system changes. In a Change Lab, participants learn to see themselves as artists, carefully creating something inspired from within that responds directly to the medium they're working with. The medium is the social system or the multi-stakeholder group itself and the subject matter is the complex challenge or issue area that the Lab has been convened

to address. Thus, to participate creatively in the Change Lab means seeing that very participation as a work of art.

Reos Partner Jeff Barnum has been working as an artist and social change agent for the last 15 years and has done a lot of thinking about the role of creativity in social change processes. Influenced heavily by artist Joseph Beuys, Jeff has come to understand that everyone has the capacity to make art and that creativity is an integral part of what it means to be a human being. But we need to broaden our idea of what creativity entails. In the context of a Change Lab, it could mean taking risks and saying something difficult for the group to hear, or retreating to a place of listening and watching until you find an avenue to participate in a way that's generative.

According to Jeff, creating art is a process of *guided metamorphosis*. We generally imagine people as first designing and then implementing a creative vision. In contast, co-creation is a structured, collective "hunting process" through which the artwork is allowed to change form and emerge. A popular saying in social innovation circles is "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've already got." Creativity, on the other hand, requires the artist to rethink and re-evaluate his or her own ideas and presuppositions along the way, changing and redirecting the course of creating art in alignment with new information and changing circumstances.

We can look at the co-creation that takes place in a Change Lab as a destructive process as much a creative one. It's about unlearning the patterns and habits that keep the group locked in a cycle of business as usual, and revealing something underneath that is lying dormant in the potential of the group as a whole. When the group lets go of the things that don't serve it, truly creative and innovative ideas and solutions may emerge.

When asked how he creates such magnificent sculptures, French sculptor Auguste Rodin famously said, "I choose a block of marble and chop off whatever I don't need." In the same way, a multi-stakeholder group may have to "chisel away" or "chop off" that which is not needed. Even ideas or initiatives that at first appear well suited to the system may have to be sacrificed in the interest of the whole. It is only by going through the process of co-creation itself that the group will come to build something new, something capable of effecting systemic change.

What this approach means for participants is that there is little room to hold tightly to their own ideas. By detaching from the desire to have their individual contributions validated and focusing on the system and group as a whole, participants can see more

"Every artist knows that if you think of something brilliant, when you go to do it, it will turn out differently. The artist is not the person who imagines something perfectly and executes that thing exactly as conceived in his or her mind. The artist is one who begins with an inspiration and has the ability to evaluate what actually happens in the medium, in the process of working to produce an outcome, and improvise along the way."

—Reos Partner and artist Jeff Barnum

clearly what is needed and create something together that is far more powerful than a bunch of individual ideas. In this case, the whole is much more than the sum of the parts. Only those contributions that are truly well suited to the situation should continue to be cultivated. If a good idea is getting in the way of a great one, it must be "composted".

One example of this undertaking in the art world is Pablo Picasso's *Death of a Matador*, which depicts a matador being flipped upside down by a bull. Interestingly, Picasso documented the creation of this painting, during which he changed the bull's head (the centerpiece of the painting) many times (see Appendix D: *Videos*). At one moment during the process, when Picasso has completed a beautiful and realistic bull's head, the painting appears to be finished. But instead of stopping, and at great risk to his painting, he decides to paint over it, completely transforming the bull's head and the painting as a whole. Picasso had not found what he was looking for and decided to risk destroying his painting to get the result he was after.

Picasso's *Death of a Matador*

In the Change Lab context, especially when it comes to creating initiatives, participants often get attached to their ideas and want to move forward with their prototypes before they are ready. This can result in initiatives that repeat the same dynamics that were already present in the system. To create systemic interventions, participants must see the creative process all the way through. It is this willingness to see and to go irreversibly beyond the current boundaries and mindsets of the group, always in the interest of the whole, that makes serious innovation possible.

Of course this is easier said than done, and we certainly don't want to take risks that will destroy our creative work. For this reason, the process of co-creation in a Change Lab takes the form of prototyping and then piloting before being taken to scale, or launched in earnest in the system. By going through many iterations, Change Lab participants are able to work through layers of their patterns, thoughts, and habits, and remove the ideas

that don't serve the process. By creating many prototypes of institutions and initiatives, and getting rid of what isn't needed over and over again, Change Lab participants are able to create, destroy, and re-form their ideas in a safe setting that doesn't have implications in the world. Once the creative process has run its course, ideas can be vetted in the field and piloted. Those that succeed can be launched and taken to scale. If the creative process is built into the institutions themselves, they are much more able to adapt, learn, and succeed over time.

Traditional planning doesn't work for solving complex challenges because a structured plan will produce results based on what's already present in the system. If what's present in the system isn't working, a true creative process will be necessary.

The Role of the Facilitator

The role of the facilitator in a Change Lab is crucial. Without skilled facilitation, a Change Lab will not produce the desired results in the real world. Facilitators help to create a safe "container" in which all participants' voices are welcome and heard. Facilitators know by reading the "social field" when to move forward, when to spend more time on a particular dialogue exercise or conversation, and when to take a break. Their job is to keep things moving, but not to move so fast that something is lost.

Reos facilitators are also process designers. That is, they design series of events, workshops, and studio sessions, and help groups create, manage, and integrate initiative teams over the course of a Change Lab. If the participants and stakeholders are responsible for determining the *content* of a particular Change Lab, the facilitation team is responsible for creating and stewarding the *form* and *process* through which those stakeholders can most effectively work together to reach their desired goal.

Much of the work of the facilitator is keeping track of the high-level view and understanding where the project is in the process as a whole. During many phases of a Change Lab, participants are so deeply immersed in the content of the issue area and the system they're working with that they don't have the mental bandwidth to simultaneously keep track of what's happening at the broader system level. Without this high-level view, participants won't be able to navigate to where they're trying to go. So facilitation is really the work of supporting a group of people in getting from one place to another.

In this way, facilitation can be likened to guiding a group through a particular unknown terrain. In a journey that seeks to transform a complex social system, the stakeholders don't start off with a shared map of the system. So part of the facilitator's job is helping the whole group see the system together, so that they create that shared map. However, because the terrain can change from moment to moment depending on the dynamics in the system, the group will continually need to draw a new map together.

Since a social system is a soft system, filled with people who have desires, fears, and motivations, it can change rapidly, requiring a quick response from the group working with it. But in a stakeholder group with social complexity, people will often react differently to different kinds of shifts in the terrain of the system. In these kinds of complex systems, facilitation is of dire importance. Someone is needed to steward conversations, direct the learning process, and ensure that unheard voices are included. Shepherding these interactions requires both deep investment in the social change process and neutrality, or detachment, from any particular perspective that may be present in the group.

Qualities of a Good Facilitator

Strong Listening Skills: Facilitators need to be able to listen closely during all phase of the process. Doing so enables the facilitator to design an appropriate process, to mirror to participants what is going on, and to help the group become more aware. Strong listening skills depend partly on the ability of facilitators to let go of their own agendas.

Personal Awareness and Authenticity: In addition to paying attention to what is going on in the group, facilitators need to be able to understand what is going on within themselves when in the group. This is quite a profound meta-skill of facilitation, which is particularly important in less structured, more open-ended processes. Facilitators are essentially "holding" the group; as such, they need to avoid projecting their own issues and insecurities while also dealing with the group's projections toward them. In this context, personal awareness relates to the ability to be honest about one's own limitations (what one is and isn't capable of) and the willingness to hand over a process to participants when they are ready.

Good Questions: In our field, asking good questions is a form of art. Effective questions will wake participants up, link into what they care deeply about, and make visible their interdependence in finding the answers. They will surface new insights participants hadn't thought of before in understanding the issue at hand. The phrasing of a question can determine whether people feel hopeless and despairing or curious, energized, and excited.

A Holistic Approach: Being able to assess which method to use in a given situation, or if one's preferred method is applicable, requires a facilitator to understand the particular context. Taking a holistic approach is also about being able to see patterns, helping the group make connections, and recognizing that multiple intelligences are at work. By inviting the "whole person" in to a dialogue, facilitators enable people to engage equitably.

From the book *Mapping Dialogue* by Marianne (Mille) Bojer, Heiko Roehl, Marianne Knuth, and Colleen Magner

Deep investment and neutrality can be difficult for a facilitator to balance. If a facilitator is not invested in the process she is guiding, she may miss crucial information—essential cues from the group. On the other hand, if a facilitator is invested to the point of having a personal stake in the issue, she may fall into holding a particular stance,

isolating and silencing some participants while strengthening the voice of others. If this happens, dangerous dynamics can evolve in which parts of the group lose their willingness to participate in what appears to them to be a tainted process. Factions can emerge that threaten the cohesiveness of the group, prevent collaboration, and even sabotage the success of particular initiatives. So it is important that the process remain clear of the facilitator's own prejudices.

Reos Partner and facilitator Mille Bojer facilitating a social change process in July 2012.

But neutrality goes a step further. Facilitators must be careful to continue to serve the group's process, especially when things get sticky. Times may arise when the group is inclined as a whole to move forward in a particular direction, while the facilitation team— aided by their high-level view of the process— sees things differently. Budgetary constraints and time constraints are notorious for pushing groups ahead prematurely. Facilitators are responsible for ensuring that the group's needs are met, while the process also moves in a fruitful direction. For this reason, facilitators must take great care in examining and unpacking their own motivations and mental models when working with complex groups. If they allow themselves to be swept up in the group's momentum, they may lose sight of the overall process and allow the group to move down a road that leads to failure. For this reason, the neutrality or detachment of the facilitation must be well tended.

This can be difficult to accomplish, so it is highly recommended that facilitators work in teams of at least two. A single facilitator is limited by her own isolated perceptions and relies solely on the stakeholder group for feedback. It is much more effective for facilitators to work in twos or threes so that they have a team of their own, all of whom are committed to holding a high-level view, and all of whom see different aspects of the group and the process. In the same way that a diverse stakeholder group is capable of bringing about systemic change in its system, so a diverse facilitation team is capable of stewarding a systemic process. By putting their heads together, listening closely, and watching for each other's blind spots, facilitators can combine to form a collective intelligence that is far more capable of reading a group than a single facilitator. This collective intelligence is magnified when facilitators get to know each another over long periods of time and create facilitation teams with a balanced and complimentary skill-set.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: The Reos Partners Toolkit

Appendix B: Case Studies

Appendix C: Articles

Connecting to Source by Zaid Hassan

We Can't Keep Meeting Like This by Mille Bojer

Social Sculpture: Enabling Society to Change Itself by Jeff Barnum

Change Lab Workshop Notes by Zaid Hassan

Uncovering the Blind Spot of Leadership by C. Otto Scharmer

Places to Intervene in a System Donella Meadows

Appendix D: Videos

LINC: Building Leadership and Collaboration for South Africa's Orphans and Vulnerable Children

The Change Lab: A Course in Social Innovation

Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change

The Change Lab: A Way to Work on Complex Social Challenges (SiG)

Appendix E: Other Resources

Reading List:

Mapping Dialogue: Essential Tools for Social Change by Marianne (Mille) Bojer, Heiko Roehl, Marianne Knuth, and Colleen Magner

Laboratories for Social Change by Zaid Hassan (Forthcoming, 2013)

Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change by Adam Kahane

Solving Tough Problems by Adam Kahane

Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future by Adam Kahane

Thinking in Systems: A Primer by Donella Meadows

Sitting in the Fire: Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity by Arnold Mindell

Theory U: Leading From the Future As It Emerges by C. Otto Scharmer

The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization by Peter Senge

Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future by Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers

From Dust to Diamonds by Beulah Thumbadoo, Gretchen L. Wilson, and Colleen Magner (ed.)

Shambhala: the Sacred Path of the Warrior by Chögyam Trungpa

Links:

Reos Partners
http://reospartners.com

Presencing Institute
http://presencing.com

Society for Organizational Learning (SoL)
http://www.solonline.org

Jeff Barnum
http://jeffbarnum.com

ALIA Institute
http://aliainstitute.org

Social innovation Generation (SiG)
http://sigeneration.ca

Reos Course Offerings

The Change Lab: Innovation in Complex Social Systems
Transformative Scenario Planning
Effective Group Facilitation
Systems Thinking and Social Change
Dialogue Interviewing
Nature Retreats

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Reos

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We work on issues such as employment, health, food, energy, the environment, security, and peace. We partner with governments, businesses, and civil society organizations.

Our approach is systemic, creative, and participative.