

# A FIELD GUIDE FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

**PREPARED FOR:**

The Art of Social Innovation:  
Participatory Leadership for Strategic Results  
April 27-30, 2010  
Windhorse Farm, Nova Scotia

# THE ART OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

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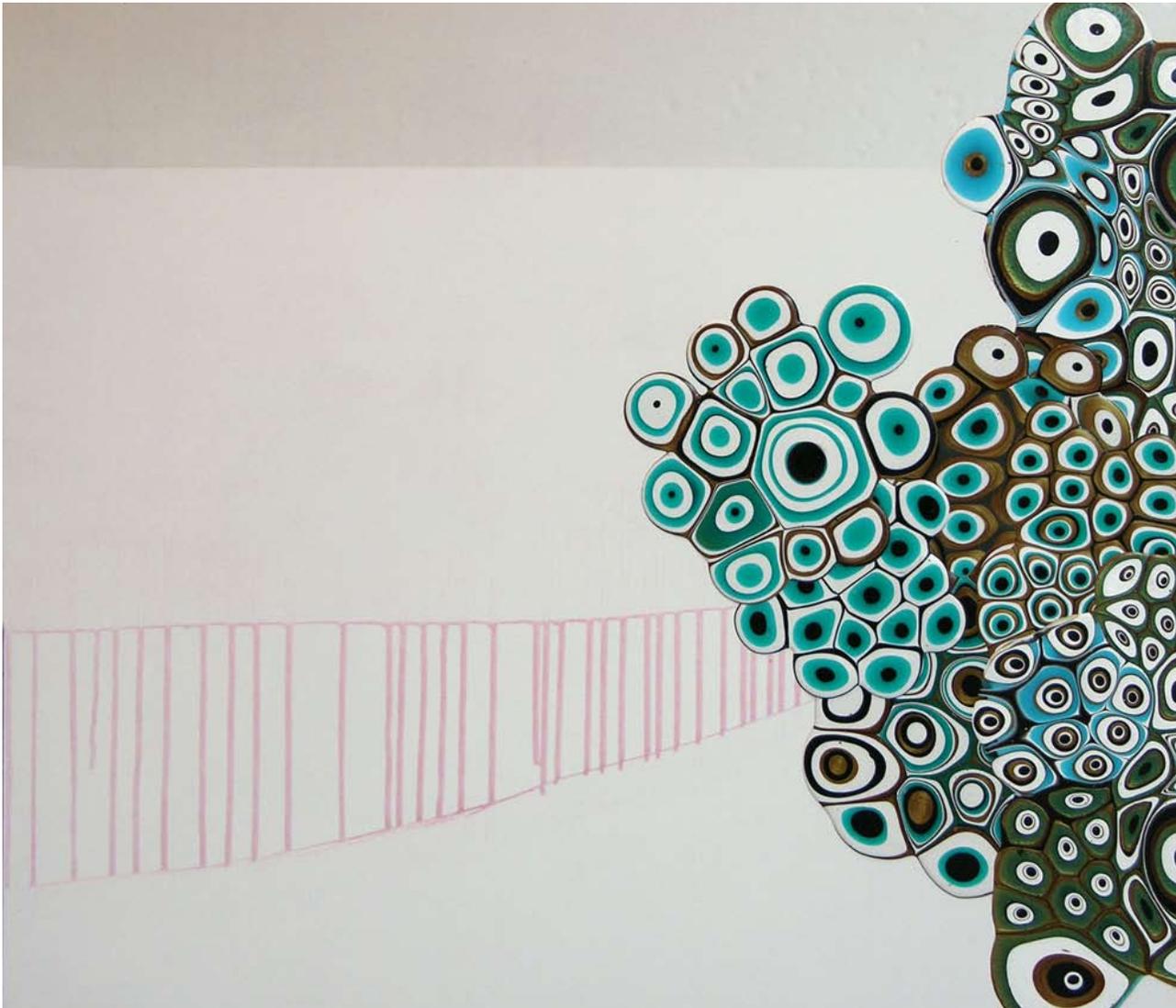
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# INTRODUCTION

“We are longing for profound renewal and change in our collective structures and institutions. We have been waiting, consciously or not, all our lives. And now, it seems, a window is beginning to open.”

—Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges*, 2007

# HOW DO WE CULTIVATE SOCIAL INNOVATION?



Social Innovation is a vast and emerging field. It is arising simultaneously in multiple arenas across the globe. It is a response to the increasing realization that many of our dominant systems and structures don't have the capacity to respond and address such complex challenges of our time as climate change, health care and growing inequity. In our time together we will explore Social Innovation as creating the conditions for new possibilities in social fields through the lens of participatory leadership. What makes our emphasis unique is the focus on the process of change not only the content, on relationships as the basis for results and on reflection as essential to wise action. We are interested in opening the space for the generative power of chaos as well as the clarifying power of order.

# THE ROOTS OF OUR APPROACH



As is characteristic of Social Innovation work, we have been influenced by a diversity of people, networks, theories and experiences.

- Much of what we will be exploring grows out of the Art of Hosting family of methods, models and practices. Many practitioners across the world have been exploring “hosting conversations” as a key metaphor for leadership and change for almost 15 years.
- We are grounded in the work of the Berkana Institute: the long explorations of new science as a metaphor, the on-the ground pioneering work that is happening in “learning centers” across the globe, and the theory of “taking social innovation to scale”.
- Theory U, has also been an inspiration in theory and practice and we have been inspired and guided by the work of Otto Scharmer and our friends at Generon and Reos in some of our work with large-scale change.
- The Authentic Leadership in Action (ALiA) Institute has long been a space that has brought

these and other thought-leaders and communities of practice together – allowing new relationships to form and larger patterns to surface. ALiA has also contributed enormously to the inquiry around personal practice and personal transformation as a basis for systemic change as well as the powerful metaphor of “container” for learning and transformation.

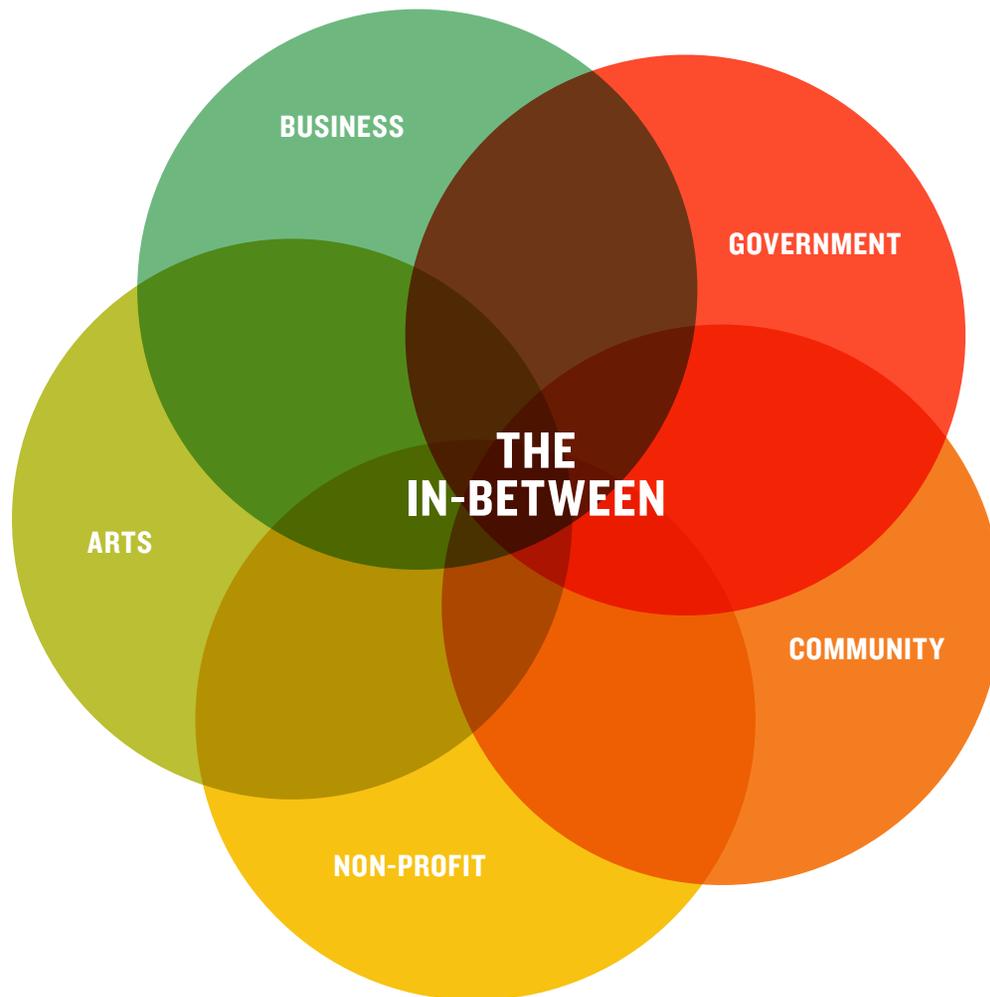
Many of these tools and approaches can be used alone and at various levels of scale. What is particularly exciting for us is to explore the possibilities of using them in to intentionally cultivate positive transformation across a larger system at geographic scale (a city or region). Every system is different with it’s own complex needs and elements coming together. What we hope to offer is an inquiry into how we might bring a diversity of approaches to respond to the needs of that system in a fluid and emergent manner.

# SOIL

“Learning new skills, facing new obstacles, living with new people, encountering new environments; such complexities provide the chaos and the friction that wear out preconceptions, challenge limits, invite inner strength, reveal natural brilliance. Properly contained, complexity reduces things to what matters most.”

—Crane Stookey, *The Container Principle*, 2001

# WORKING AT THE EDGE: HOW DO WE SEE THE WHOLE ELEPHANT?



The issues that face our communities and our planet do not fall neatly within the lines of our fragmented organizations and systems. The cross barriers and span into unexpected arenas. We can rarely understand let alone creatively address issues like youth engagement, racism or diabetes from the vantage point of one sector or discipline. Real and lasting innovation requires us to see, understand and act with unlikely partners and allies. We need to open up hospitable spaces at the edges of systems where multi-stakeholder, cross-border conversations can give birth to something new.

In the ALiA rural leadership initiative Arthur Bull, a long-time community leader was invited to bring together a “leaders” across his community to look at creative solutions to community resilience in Digby/Annapolis Counties in NS. He invited leaders from the local Fishing, First Nations, Arts, Local College, Environmentalists, African Nova Scotian and other communities. Knowing that if that group could find some common ground and mutual support it would be a powerful catalyst for change in the broader community.

# THE CONTAINER: WHAT SPACE CAN CATALYZE INNOVATION?



Social Innovation is an experiment with new: ways of seeing the world, relationships, power dynamics and practices. In order to try, fail, learn and try again; we need new spaces. These can be physical spaces, like a room or a forest; conversation spaces illuminated by a good question or a process which creates a container for dialogue and seeing together, it can be a temporal space where the use of timing in a given event and how we sequence multiple events over time lays the ground for new relationships, insights and actions. These are all ways of designing a space that can hold social innovation. Building a good container requires paying attention to multiple details and putting care into creating hospitable space as well as being responsive to the group and what is being asked for.

ELEMENTS: What do we as individuals need to shift in ourselves?

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# SEED

“No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.”

—Albert Einstein

# PERSONAL CHANGE: WHAT IS THE SHIFT IN US NEEDED TO CREATE NEW SYSTEMS?



Every system we live within has its own subtle rules and patterns. They are enacted through individuals who consciously or unconsciously take the assumptions at the heart of the system to be true. As change agents wanting to make a difference, our own personal transformation is key. Practices of personal contemplation that allow us to see our own habits, assumptions and intentions are a powerful and often overlooked force in catalyzing social innovation. The change that is possible in any system is in direct relation to the individual shift that the leaders and change-agents are willing to go through themselves. This is an essential and often overlooked aspect of social innovation.

At “Moving the Food Movement” a recent gathering of change agents across NS working on Food Issues, 35 activists, farmers, civil servants, change agents and connectors gathered to learn about participatory leadership approaches and to look together at the bigger picture of the local food system. We took time in the schedule to meditate, eat delicious local/organic meals and walk in the forest. A powerful conversation about burnout and how hard many of the participants drive themselves became central to the workshop. The question of how we learn to nurture and heal ourselves as we are working to heal a system, became for many, one of the most profound learnings of the 3 days.

# ORGANISM

“...Apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.”

—Paulo Freire

# CORE TEAM: HOW CAN WE GET A MICROCOSM OF THE SYSTEM IN THE ROOM?



When working intentionally to create a shift in a given system, forming a core team is a powerful way to open a space at the edge. A group of people who embody much of the diversity of the system (from youth, civil servants and artists to senior leaders and front-line workers) can have a great ability to heal fragmentation in that system. Ideal core team members have high commitment to creating change, have direct experience or knowledge, have good relationships in a given community or constituency and are self-selected (have joined the team by their own choice). Their role is to engage the system more broadly in a process of understanding a fuller picture of the system, build a foundation of relationships that can break down barriers and silos, to build a new culture that can spread virally across the system and discern acupuncture points or areas of focus that can help bring the desired change.

# PARTICIPATION: HOW CAN WE GENUINELY ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS IN SHAPING THE FUTURE?



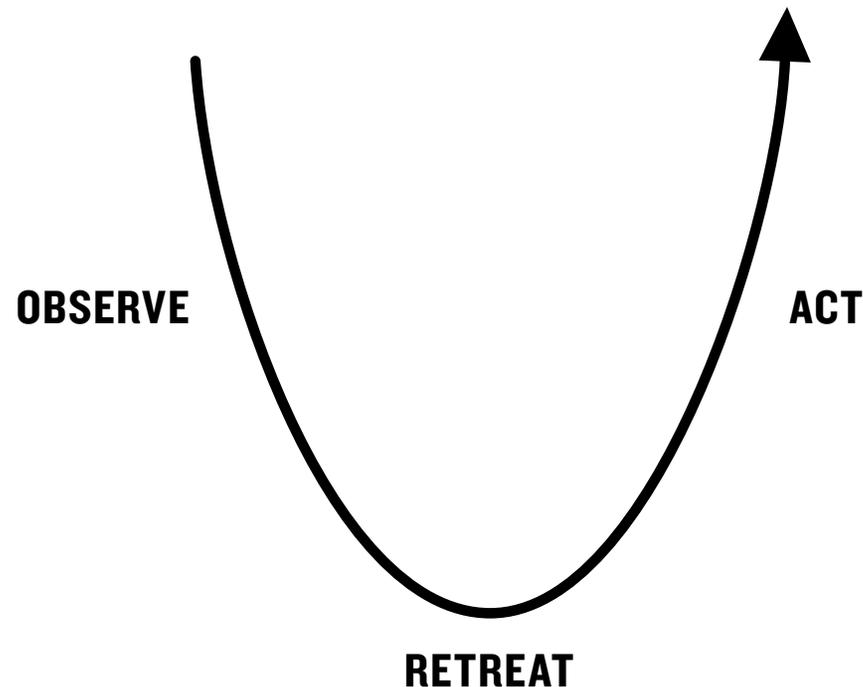
Vital and living innovations result from creating the conditions for people to solve their own problems through being in meaningful relationships that lead to action that everyone owns. The only way we can solve the complex nature of the problems we are faced with is by being in community with each other, and have a genuine influence over the decisions, design and direction of the future. In this light a Core Team must become community builders and engage others in the process. This requires that they become a strong community themselves. This is the age of participation and new forms of citizen engagement and conversational leadership are popping up everywhere, the challenge is to use them to genuinely build collective wisdom and catalyze collective action.

# CULTIVATION

“Despite current ads and slogans, the world doesn’t change one person at a time. It changes when networks of relationships form among people who share a common cause and vision of what’s possible. This is good news for those of us intent on creating a positive future. Rather than worry about critical mass, our work is to foster critical connections. We don’t need to convince large numbers of people to change; instead, we need to connect with kindred spirits. Through these relationships, we will develop the new knowledge, practices, courage and commitment that lead to broad-based change.”

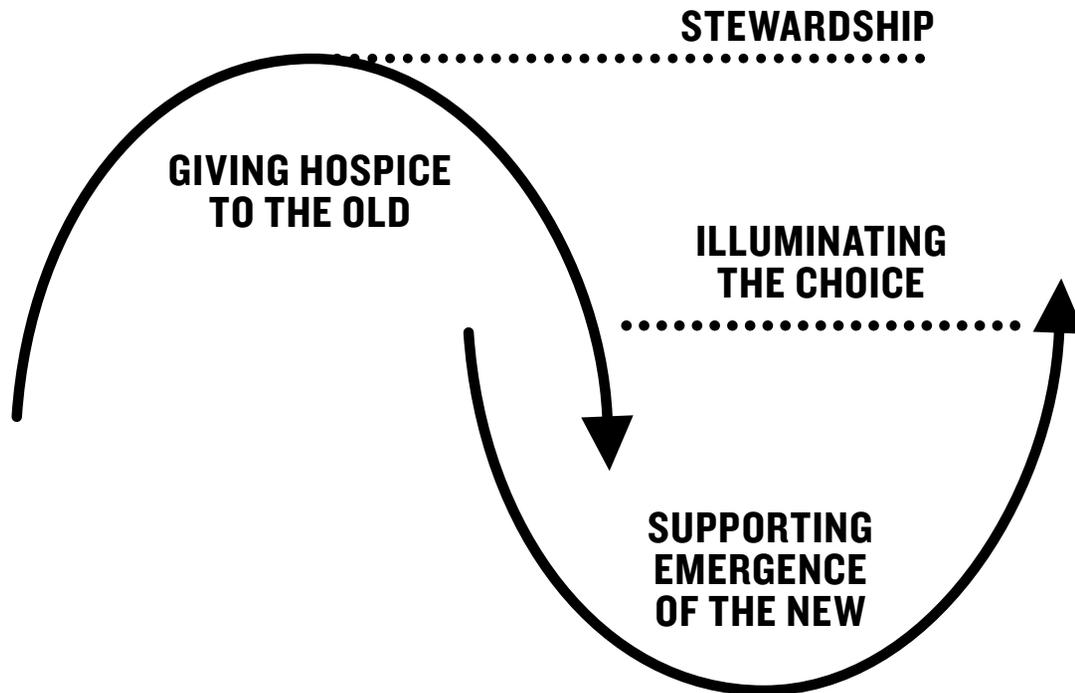
—Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze, *Using Emergence to Take Social Innovation to Scale*, 2006

# THEORY U: WHAT IS THE PATH TO COLLECTIVE INSIGHT INTO ACTIONS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?



The dominant response to problems in modern society is to “fix it”. When faced with current levels of complexity and uncertainty, rushing to solutions is rarely wise. Based on the work of Joseph Jowarski, Otto Scharmer and our friends at Reos Partners, we have been experimenting with “Theory U” and the Change Lab as an approach to discovering collective action. This work encourages taking a detour and acknowledging that we don’t yet know the best way to proceed. It can define a simple pathway to powerful collective discovery. It begins with exploring the system in new and diverse ways to understand the system, creates a space for collective retreat, where insight and commitment can emerge and allows the insights to be tested, experimented and eventually scaled up.

# EMERGENCE: HOW CAN SOCIAL INNOVATION BE TAKEN TO SCALE?



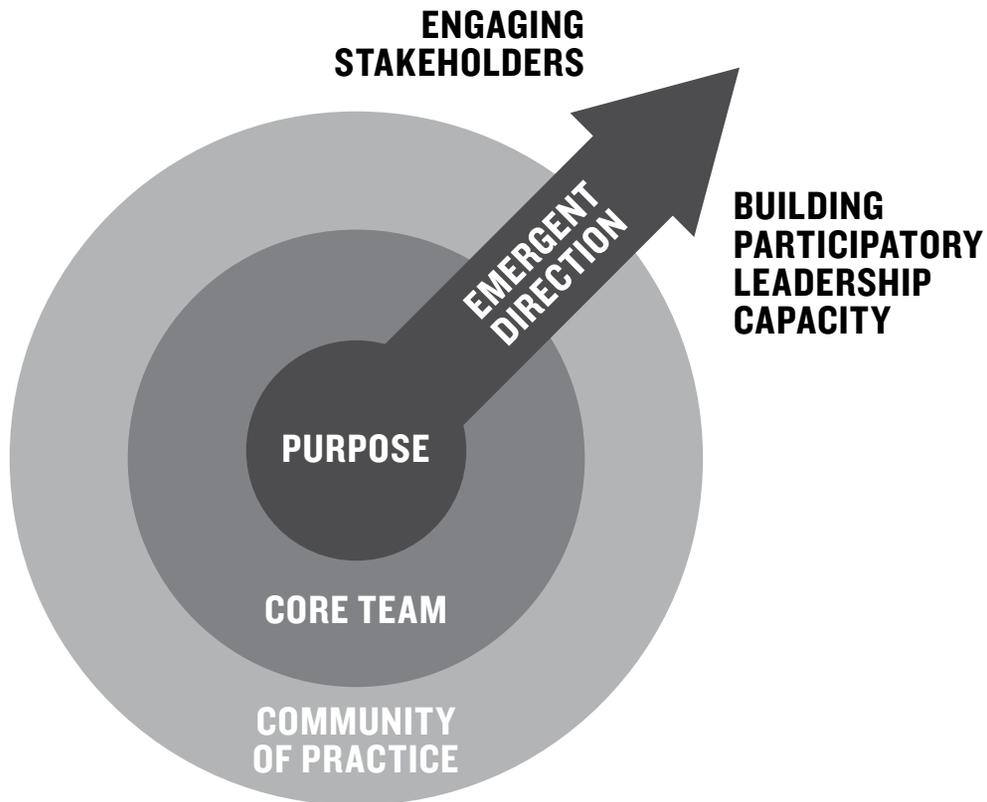
If we follow the trajectory of any system we see that they all have life cycles. They have a beginning, middle and end. We can see many of our modern systems seem to be failing to sustain themselves in the complexity of our times. Human systems, like systems in nature don't tend to change through plans or dictates, but through emergence. If we want to support movements taking hold, the best thing we can do is foster critical connections between pioneers who are working on the ground to create fresh and relevant solutions. By starting with building networks, that can evolve into communities of practice, we create the possibility for systems of influence which allow formerly fringe efforts to become the social norm.

# ECOSYSTEM

“Communities of Practice are self-organized. People share a common work and realize there is great benefit to being in relationship. They use this community to share what they know, to support one another, and to intentionally create new knowledge for their field of practice. These CoPs..are communities, which means that people make a commitment to be there for each other; they participate not only for their own needs, but to serve the needs of others.”

—Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze

# HOW DOES SOCIAL INNOVATION SUSTAIN ITSELF?

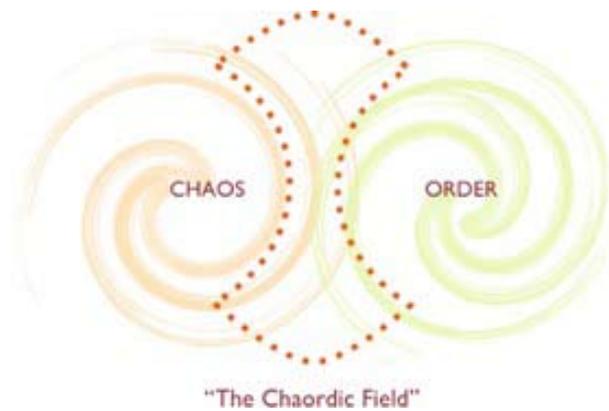


Authentic relationships between diverse practitioners and would-be allies in the system are a powerful force for creating movement towards a new system. A community of practice is a forum to bring together those who are experimenting with new initiatives with those who are successfully pioneering new alternatives in a given field. Communities of practice are physical and virtual containers created for intentional learning together, advancing the field of practice and sharing knowledge and stories. CoPs also keep multiple strategic initiatives connected, so that they don't fall into issues of fragmentation that may have been at the root of some of the original failures of the system.

**METHODS: What metaphors apply to complex social processes?**

# MODELS

# COMMON MODELS



## CHAORDIC PATH

There is a path to take between Chaos and Order that leads us to the emergence of the new, collective learning, real time innovation. The “Chaordic Path” describes this ongoing dance between chaos and order. In the extremes of chaos we find “chamos” and in the extreme of order we find control: If there is too much chaos, it can lead to “chamos”, despair, apathy or rebellion. If there is too much control, we will produce more of the same. The path between order and control is good for maintaining stability and status quo. As leaders we need to develop our “chaordic confidence”, i.e. our ability to stay in the space between chaos and order which supports a generative emergence that allows newness, collective intelligence and wise action to occur.

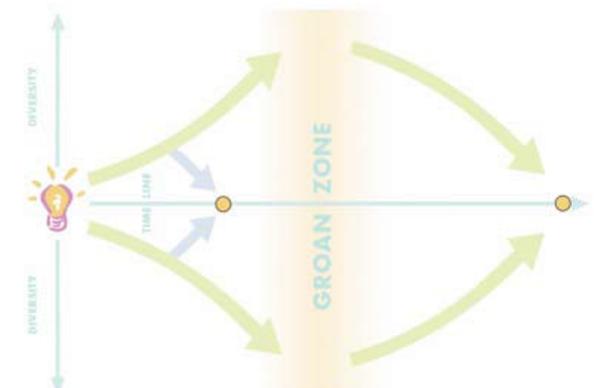
[www.chaordic.org/definitions.html](http://www.chaordic.org/definitions.html)



## CHAORDIC STEPPING STONES

There are clear strategic steps we can take when walking the Chaordic path. These steps are a way of bringing just enough structure or order into the chaos to keep us moving forward on the chaordic path. These steps allow us to progress gradually giving our project or organisation more form as we progress. These steps allow us to create conversational processes that are rooted in real need that are sustainable for the community they serve and the people working within them. These steps can be used both as a planning tool and to help understand what you are discovering about an organization, community or initiative.

[www.chaordic.org/cd\\_process\\_activities.html](http://www.chaordic.org/cd_process_activities.html)

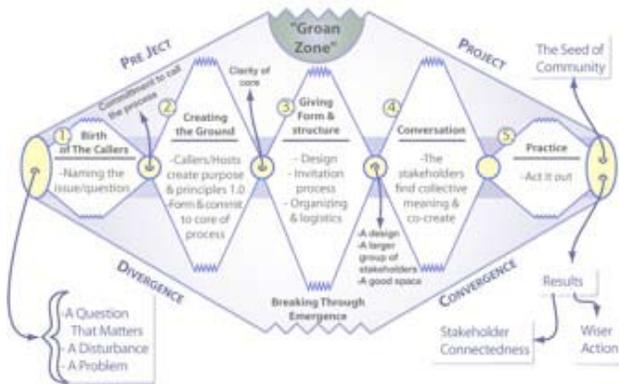


## CONVERGENCE-DIVERGENCE

This model is a basic pattern of learning. All groups who are trying to innovate go through three phases. If you want to design a process or collective innovation, it is important to plan for these. In the divergence zone, people explore ideas, and become aware of diversity and become aware of possibilities. In the groan zone, new ideas emerge that seem not to be the property of anyone in particular but rather the groups as a whole. It is called the groan zone, because it is often uncomfortable and stretching people beyond their comfortable views of reality. In the convergence zone, excitement and clarity builds and decisions become clear.

# COMMON MODELS

## 5 Breaths of Design



### 5 BREATHS OF DESIGN

This is taking the basic model of convergence and divergence and applying it to long-term engagements and change processes. They represent the 5 stages of project design each leading to the next and each going through it's own process of opening to new possibilities and discovering collective clarity. It goes from a group of people who have a burning question and care enough to act, moves to clarifying the core of the issue, giving form and structure, hosting a conversation with stakeholders and acting on the clarity that emerges.

[www.artofhosting.org/thepractice/5breaths/](http://www.artofhosting.org/thepractice/5breaths/)



### ORGANIZATIONAL PARADIGMS

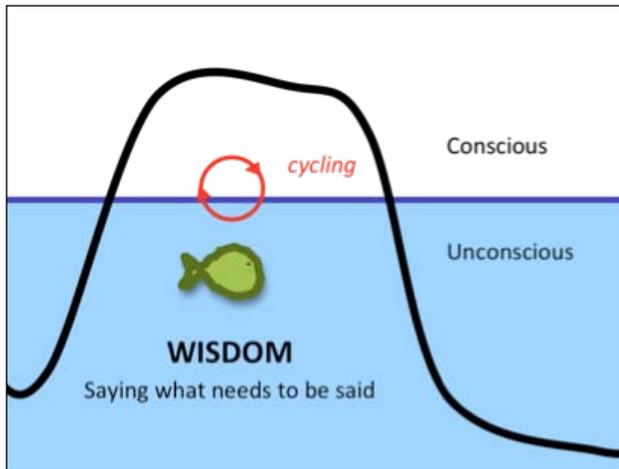
Throughout human history the living system of human organization has created many ways of organizing itself to get work done. We notice that these ways of working together can be captured within four organizational paradigms (circle, hierarchy (action triangles), bureaucracy and network). Each of these paradigms is alive and familiar to us, and each has its strengths and weaknesses. When we are designing process, projects and organizations, it is worth paying attention to the different roles of these paradigms so that they can be used wisely.



### 5TH PARADIGM

In the Art of Hosting Community there has been an ongoing experiment of blending these 4 into a new form of organizing that heals fragmentation and creates a container for wise, skillful and heartfelt learning and action. It starts with a clear sense of shared purpose in the centre, a core team at the next ring that is passionate willing to take responsibility to make change happen. As the stakeholders are engaged a network becomes a community of practice and as actions are identified to move things forward people take leadership and triangles form.

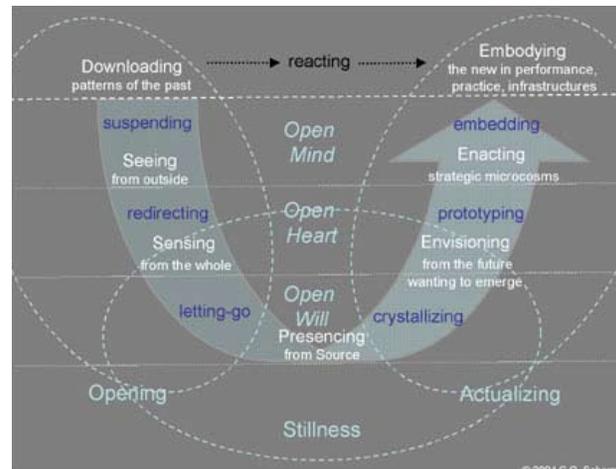
# COMMON MODELS



## DEEP DEMOCRACY

Deep Democracy is based on the assumption that there is tremendous untapped wisdom and potential in any group. In groups and society, there is often a bias towards preserving the status quo and maintaining harmony over listening to unusual or unpopular perspectives. Deep Democracy sees conflict and difference as a powerful source of creativity. The tools are aimed at creating more space to listen to and truly hear the divergent voices, so that the full wisdom and potential of any group can be brought to bear thus creating a more whole and wise group or society.

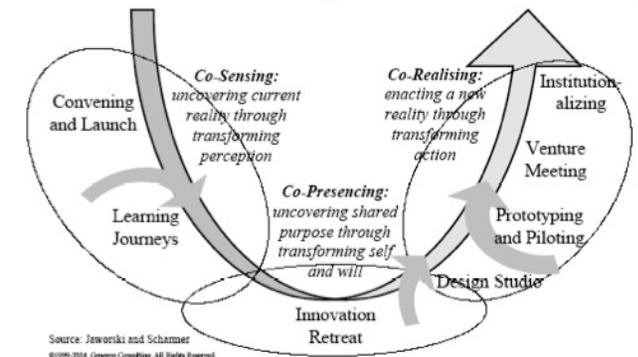
[www.deep-democracy.net](http://www.deep-democracy.net)



## THEORY U

Theory U emerged from conversations with dozens of top innovators around the world as an archetypal path to systemic renewal that can be intentionally stewarded. It has 3 key movements: 1) sensing: a deep immersion to understand the system cognitively, emotionally and intuitively from many angles. 2) presencing: retreating from the chaos to a quiet place where inner knowing and commitment can surface. 3) realizing: bringing new interventions and approached into being through creating small experiments that can scale up into the new normal for a given system.

[www.presencing.com](http://www.presencing.com)

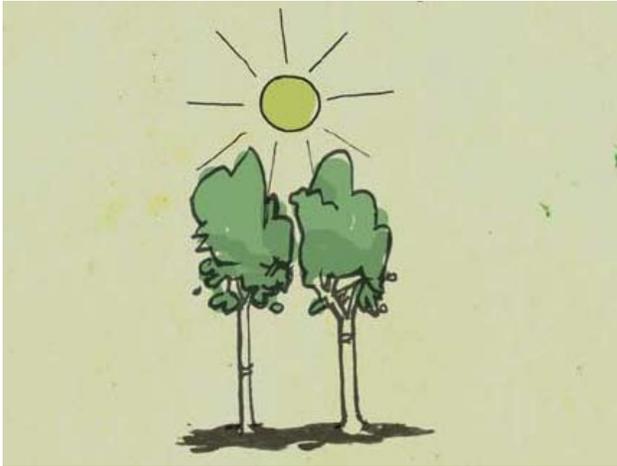


## CHANGE LAB

A multi-stakeholder dialogic change process designed to generate the shared commitment and the collective insight needed to produce breakthrough solutions to complex social problems. Each Change Lab is convened around a particular problem that appears to be stuck with no obvious solution in sight. Change Labs often bring together 25-35 key stakeholders who represent a “microcosm” of the system. These people are influential, diverse, committed to changing the system, and also open to changing themselves.

[www.reospartners.com](http://www.reospartners.com)

# COMMON MODELS



## TAKING SOCIAL INNOVATION TO SCALE

By working with emergence and helping to build the critical connections, friendship and shared sense of common purpose between change agents working in a given system, we create the conditions for systems of influence to develop which possesses qualities and capacities could never have been present in the individuals alone. To create the conditions for emergence, the following principles apply: Creating the Conditions: Start anywhere, follow it everywhere; The leaders we need are already here; We have what we need; We are living the worlds we want today; We make our path by walking it.

[www.berkana.org](http://www.berkana.org)



## KAOS PILOTS' PROJECT DESIGN MODEL

The KaosPilot project design cycle is an organizational design approach. A project's phased developed is mapped to this workflow (in order): Idea, Needs, Purpose, Values, Concept, Roles, Structure, Practices. This approach ensures that a concept is supported by a clear and pre-defined articulation of the needs, purpose and values that drive it. KaosPilots is a Danish business school that focuses on the creation of "positive societal change through personal growth and enterprise".

[www.kaospilot.dk](http://www.kaospilot.dk)

**METHODS:** What techniques can we use to facilitate a transformative experience?

# TOOLS

# COMMON TOOLS



## POWERFUL QUESTIONS

Good questions are essential for any conversation or inquiry. You can recognize a powerful question because it taps into what is meaningful for people, triggers curiosity, invites exploration and generates new ideas and connections. It is often a potent question that sparks a movement. When 100s of people around were asked about what makes a powerful question, this is what they said: A powerful question focuses attention, intention and energy, is simple and clear, is thought-provoking, generates energy, focuses inquiry, challenges assumptions, opens new possibilities and evokes more questions.

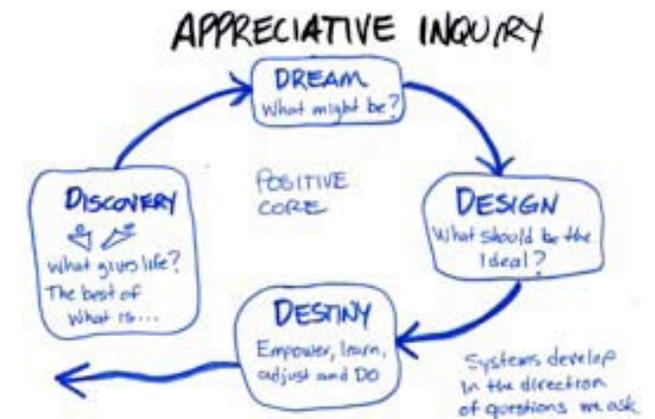
[www.theworldcafe.com/hosting.htm](http://www.theworldcafe.com/hosting.htm)



## CIRCLE

The circle, or council, is an ancient form of meeting that has gathered human beings into respectful conversation for thousands of years. The circle has served as the foundation for many cultures. What transforms a meeting into a circle is the willingness of people to shift from informal socializing or opinionated discussion into a receptive attitude of thoughtful speaking and deep listening and to embody and practice the structures outlined here.

[www.artofhosting.org/thepractice/coremethods/circlepractise](http://www.artofhosting.org/thepractice/coremethods/circlepractise)



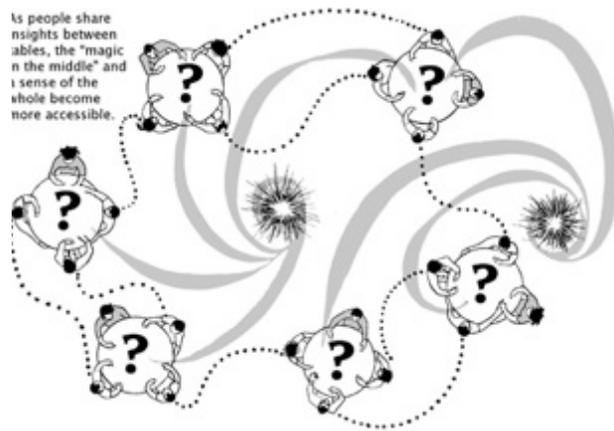
Source: Cooperrider et al.

## APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry is a strategy for intentional change that identifies the best of 'what is' to pursue dreams and possibilities of 'what could be; a cooperative search for strengths, passions and life-giving forces that are found within every system that hold potential for inspired, positive change. (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987)

[www.appreciative-inquiry.org](http://www.appreciative-inquiry.org)

# COMMON TOOLS



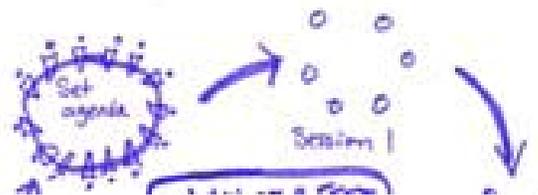
## WORLD CAFÉ

The World Café is a method for creating a living network of collaborative dialogue around questions that matter in organizations and communities. It allows groups of 12-500 to have small and intimate conversations while at the same time making visible larger patterns and wisdom in the collective. Café conversations rely on tables of 4-5 people sitting together in dialogue in successive rounds which then weave together the learning and insight across a room and ultimately make larger themes and patterns visible to the whole.

[www.theworldcafe.com/hosting.htm](http://www.theworldcafe.com/hosting.htm)

## OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY

Whoever comes over the right people.  
 Whatever happens is the only thing that could have  
 when it starts is the right time.  
 When it's over, it's over.



## OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY

The goal of an Open Space Technology meeting is to create time and space for people to engage deeply and creatively around issues of concern to them. The agenda is set by people with the power and desire to see it through, and typically, Open Space meetings result in transformative experiences for the individuals and groups involved. It is a simple and powerful way to catalyze effective working conversations and truly inviting organizations – to thrive in times of swirling change. It has been described as the most effective process for organizations and communities to identify critical issues, voice to their passions and concerns, learn from each other, and, when appropriate, take collective responsibility for finding solutions.

[www.artofhosting.org/thepractice/coremethods/openspace/](http://www.artofhosting.org/thepractice/coremethods/openspace/)

# CONCLUSION

# THE MAP IS NOT THE TERRITORY



Art Kleiner, a prominent business and strategy editor and writer has said that the whole field of change management is currently at the stage that where the field of medicine was when surgeons were also barbers. This is even truer for the field of Social Innovation. There is very little evidence or past experience that can give us certainty or a clear path in this time of unprecedented complexity and interconnectedness. As Margaret Wheatley said in a recent talk, “we don’t know what we’re doing, that is the starting point”. In light of this we are continually being asked to build the path as we walk it. These maps, models and processes being offered do not constitute a recipe or a truth, they are merely a set of navigation tools that are being tested in the turbulent waters of our times. Mastery in this context seems to be about flexibility, adaptation and curiosity rather than certainty. The invitation is to experiment and combine, to test and play and above all to continually learn and respond. Enjoy the journey.

# APPENDIX

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**CHANGE LAB / REOS** [www.reospartners.com](http://www.reospartners.com)

**BERKANA** [www.berkana.org](http://www.berkana.org)

**ALIA INSTITUTE** [www.aliainstitute.org](http://www.aliainstitute.org)

**DEEP DEMOCRACY** [www.deep-democracy.net](http://www.deep-democracy.net)

**THE HUB** [www.the-hub.net](http://www.the-hub.net)

**CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION** [www.socialinnovation.ca](http://www.socialinnovation.ca)

**WISER EARTH NETWORK** [www.wiserearth.org](http://www.wiserearth.org)

**KAOSPILOTS** [www.kaospilots.dk](http://www.kaospilots.dk)

# THE ART OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

[www.artofsocialinnovation.com](http://www.artofsocialinnovation.com)

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