A Whole Greater than Its Parts:

Exploring the Role of Emergence in Complex Social Change

Marilyn J. Darling • Heidi Sparkes Guber • Jillaine S. Smith

Fourth Quadrant Partners, LLC

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About Fourth Quadrant Partners

Fourth Quadrant Partners, LLC, helps mission-critical organizations and social innovators to use the principles and practices of Emergent Learning to accelerate, deepen and institutionalize their ability to think about and learn from their work in order to consistently achieve or exceed desired outcomes even in the midst of unpredictable challenges.

Acknowledgements

The 4QP research team would like to thank the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation for their generous support of this research. We are grateful for the careful reading and good questions of our advisors, Lori Grange, Diana Scearce, Kelci Price, and Tanya Beer. Thank you to Robert Axtell and his fellow scholars at the Santa Fe Institute and to Benyamin Lichtenstein for their help in pressure testing our translation of complex adaptive systems theory into a social-change context. Thank you to James E. M. Stiles who led the development of our survey, and to Nora Bateman, Anne Gienapp, and Kelci Price for reviewing a draft. We are grateful to James for his thoughtful partnership throughout the development of the research and the analysis of results, and for his contribution to and review of each case study and several drafts of the report. Thank you to everyone who submitted a nomination and who took the time to respond to our surveys or participate in interviews. And, finally, we are very grateful to our 4QP clients and our community of Emergent Learning practitioners, whose vision, insight, and courage to explore and learn together have informed the findings in this research.

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From the Fourth Quadrant Partners Research Team

We at Fourth Quadrant Partners (4QP) have been on a long journey.

The tools we began creating many years ago were a response to our intuitive sense that there was a mismatch between the complexity of the problems people in the for-profit and nonprofit worlds were trying to solve and the tools and practices they were drawing on to solve them. We labeled what we were creating ***emergent***. We had a general idea of what that meant, having studied the work of John Holland, who created the field of complex adaptive systems theory. But our intuitions were far ahead of our ability to express the connection in any articulate way.

When the field of philanthropy started to talk about emergent strategy, we felt it was time to step into the idea of emergence more explicitly. We wrote an article for the ***Foundation Review*** that explored the distinction between ***adaptation*** and ***emergence***. We visited researchers at the Santa Fe Institute—the epicenter of research into complexity in the US—to pressure test our understanding of complex adaptive systems theory and how we were translating it for practical use in the social sector.

This research project is our next step in a continuing process. Studying and comparing these eight very different initiatives has helped us to develop a more nuanced understanding of what emergence might look like in practice. It has helped us to better articulate our intuitions about the role of emergence in creating sustainable social change that is fit to its environment and continues to evolve over time. We feel that we have just scratched the surface.

We have written this report for what we refer to as ***core initiative teams***. That may mean funders but, in several cases, it translates into those passionate nonprofit leaders who hold steady to a vision and create the space to bring all the wisdom to the table. We hope this report offers insights and new questions to anyone who seeks to create change in a complex world.

What we discovered was not some ***new*** way of doing philanthropy. Readers will recognize network strategies, data platforms, participatory facilitation, and many other familiar forms. What we have tried to lift up is ***how*** these strategies are being combined to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts—a hallmark of emergence.

This report represents where we are today on our journey. We hope that it stimulates a conversation among agents of change. We invite people to share their stories that might bring to light other examples of what emergence really looks like in practice. As we will say again in closing, there is much more to learn . . . always.

—Marilyn Darling, Heidi Sparkes Guber, and Jillaine Smith

Why explore the role of emergence in social change?

Social change is complex and nonlinear.

There is no single cause of low literacy in a community. Many factors—the percentage of children living below poverty level, the breadth and depth of preschooler vocabularies, teachers' facility with the curriculum, child health or level of physical activity, the availability of books—interact with one another in ways that are difficult to tease apart and together contribute to a child's readiness and ability to learn to read. They are nonlinear. If you increase physical activity across the community by 10 percent, you cannot count on it producing a 10 percent increase in literacy levels.

Philanthropy has been deeply focused on trying to solve the problem of how to have the greatest possible impact on complex social, economic, and ecological problems, such as literacy, with its still relatively modest resources. One idea that has gained interest in the last few years is emergent strategy.[1]

In a ***Foundation Review*** article from 2016,[2] the 4QP research team argues that there is a difference between adaptive and emergent strategy and that a careful exploration of emergence, using complex adaptive systems theory as a guide, would not only change the field's understanding of the term but also suggest a wholly different approach to creating sustainable change at scale when addressing today's complex social challenges. Seen through this lens, emergent strategy is about creating the conditions that expand the agency of a whole ecosystem to work toward a shared goal. *(See sidebar: "Comparing Strategic Philanthropy Frameworks.")*

The difference between playing chess and playing a team sport illustrates the difference between strategies that are adaptive but still funder driven and those that are truly emergent. In a game of chess, agency is maintained by the two chess players. The pieces have no vote in what happens to them. Chess players adapt their strategy on the basis of an opponent's move, but it is still each player's strategy that is being enacted.

Thinking of social change as if it were a chess game fails to acknowledge the agency of the people in an ecosystem who are doing the real work of social change. It is more useful to think of social change as a sports team, where each player has a unique perspective from his or her position on the field about the quickly unfolding game, a point of view about the best move to make in the moment, and the ability to make a split-second decision to act in support of the team's goal. But funder-driven strategy unintentionally operates as if it were a chess game, designed to meet the needs of the funders' boards, not the service mission of the nonprofits they fund.

1 Henry Mintzberg, "Patterns in Strategy Formation," *Management Science* 24, no. 9 (1978): 934–48; Patricia Patrizi et al.,"Eyes Wide Open: Learning as Strategy Under Conditions of Complexity and Uncertainty, *Foundation Review* 5, no. 3 (2013): 50–65; John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Patty Russell, "Strategic Philanthropy for a Complex World," *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 12, no. 3 (2014): 26–33.

2 Marilyn Darling et al., "Emergent Learning: A Framework for Whole-System Strategy, Learning, and Adaptation," *Foundation Review* 8, no. 1, (2016): 59–73.

Comparing Strategic Philanthropic Frameworks

In this report and the associated cases, we compare initiatives that reflect emergence and practices that reflect funder-driven philanthropy. We thought it might be helpful to map out these distinctions:

Funder-driven and predetermined	In this more traditional strategic model, the goals, metrics, and strategies are defined by the funder at the beginning of the initiative. The purpose of evaluation is to validate performance against these goals, metrics, and strategies.
Funder-driven and adaptive	Goals, metrics, and strategies are defined by the funder at the beginning, but processes are put in place that allow the funder to revise any or all of them. The purpose of evaluation is to support and track the evolving strategy.
Grantee- or community-driven	Goals, metrics, and strategies are defined by the grantee or by the community that is the beneficiary of the work. General Operating Support grants fall into this category. These initiatives can be designed to be emergent but on their own, they are not designed to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.
Emergent	Goals are defined at the beginning through some process, either by the funder or by the ecosystem of actors. The core initiative team creates conditions that allow individuals to (1) experiment with strategies in their context and (2) bring back what they learn and compare it with what other members of the ecosystem have learned. Goals, metrics, and strategies may evolve through iteration over the course of an initiative.

In reality, these models are not cut and dried. They are more like a continuum: any one initiative has elements that are predetermined and elements that are adaptive. In part, this reflects the fact that many different players are involved in planning and enacting an initiative. In the initiatives we studied, we sometimes saw the intention to be emergent, but the players involved in implementation chose strategies and actions that countered this intent. In other initiatives, there was no intention to be emergent, but the agents implemented strategies in a way that shifted the initiative to be more emergent over time.

Defining *emergence*

Emergence is about more than simply finding adaptable strategies or correcting course on the basis of evidence. Emergence is a process by which, through many interactions, individual entities, or agents, create patterns that are more sophisticated than what a single individual or entity could have created alone. This is often described as creating a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

This research project draws from the study of how complex systems use emergence to adapt—a field originated by University of Michigan researcher John Holland. Rather than analyzing a complex system from the outside in, Holland analyzed it from the perspective of an agent operating inside of the system.

Holland asked, How do the interactions of many agents, each engaging in its own actions, create emergent responses that help the larger system to adapt to its environment?

How do these solutions evolve in ways that are fit for their environment, even as the needs of agents change over time? Steven Johnson described this behavior of complex adaptive systems as "growing smarter over time" as patterns or solutions "respond to the specific and changing needs of their environment."[3] *(See the attached article, "How Complex Systems Learn and Adapt.")*

An example of a familiar complex adaptive system is the ecosystem of the iPhone. Written histories tend to emphasize the elegance of the iPhone's design and its capabilities. But as brilliant as Steve Jobs was, if the iPhone had never evolved beyond his team's original design, it would not be the powerful tool we use today.

But as brilliant as Steve Jobs was, if the iPhone had never evolved beyond his team's original design, it would not be the powerful tool we use today.

What made the iPhone a platform for emergence was opening it up to a wide community of app developers and creating a marketplace that gives developers rapid feedback from an eager public. The whole community of app developers learned simultaneously how to design for the iPhone, and users learned how to interact with it. Popular apps are shared and less popular apps are ignored. Developers pay attention, and they focus on what works. Through trial and error; interactions with users; and "mashing up," or combining, popular apps, the collective ecosystem makes it possible for designers to create even more innovative apps that no one could have thought of, much less designed, even a few years ago. Today, we use our phones to guide us through traffic, monitor our health, and increase our home security. At the same time, users have extended the use of those apps in creative ways to solve their own, sometimes complex, challenges, stories of which make their way back to the developer community and feed into the next so-called killer app. And today no one person can predict how we will use the iPhone and similar devices two years from now. They (and we) will grow smarter over time.

Understanding emergence is important in the context of complex social change because it describes how the environment in which we aspire to create change actually operates. This understanding helps us to see why some initiatives fail to achieve the impact to which they aspire, and why it is challenging to sustain or scale solutions.

3 Steven Johnson, *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 20.

Our research goal and hypotheses

The goal of this research was to explore what emergence might look like in complex social-change initiatives and how it could help create the sustainable impact at a scale that philanthropy aspires to in these complex and nonlinear environments. What quality of results might we expect to see from an emergent strategy, and what does an emergent strategy look like in practice? What are the trade-offs to consider in deciding to pursue an emergent strategy?

Our hypothesis about results

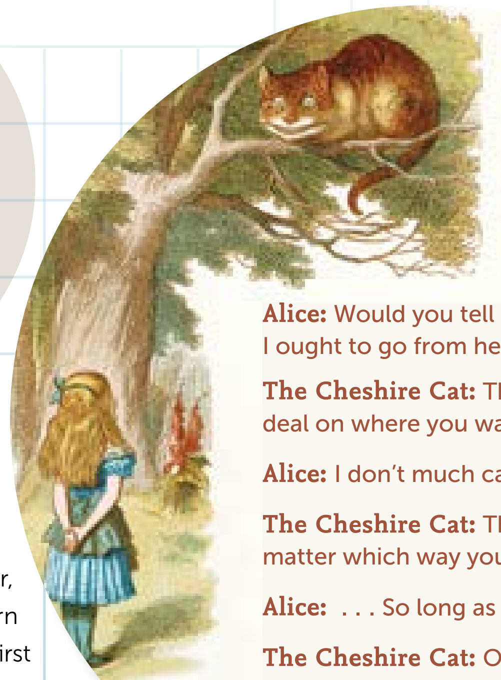
The most obvious benefit of an emergent strategy should be that it produces nonlinear results—results greater than the sum of the investments made in producing them. In an initiative designed to create a prototype for, and then scale up, a predetermined solution—for example, developing replicable one-stop shops for social services—a funder could use the prototype to estimate how much money it would take to develop ten such centers and could use the findings from an evaluation to specify the benefits it should provide to community members.

A one-stop shop that was more emergent, as was the case in The Storefront (one of the initiatives we studied), might cost about the same amount of money to 'replicate' in other communities, but the benefit to each community would be unique and unpredictable. Because the community plays a role in defining and even producing these benefits, the benefits would be expected to evolve to fit the needs of that community, even as those needs changed over time. Most important, because of the agency activated within the community, collective solutions would emerge from particular needs and opportunities and, over time, be greater than what would be expected from a predetermined solution.

Because of the agency fostered by an emergent initiative, we can also predict that the initiative would be more sustainable or resilient in the face of major crises. A sense of local ownership might lead community members to, for example, look for alternative funding or fight through major setbacks to sustain a benefit. Even if the specific program closed down, the community might discover new and creative ways to achieve the same benefit on a smaller budget. This increased sense of agency might also lead community members to develop additional unexpected benefits. In the case of a one-stop shop for social services, residents might discover that what they have learned about bringing the community together to design a building can be applied to addressing a spike in gang-related crime.

Our hypothesis about the three conditions that create emergent results

The 4QP research team posed an emergence hypothesis at the beginning of this project that the presence of three conditions—(1) a strong line of sight, (2) the freedom to experiment which, together, amplify agency in a system, and (3) a way to return learning back to the system which, paired with the first two conditions, would serve as an engine to produce more emergent results from an initiative.



Alice: Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?

The Cheshire Cat: That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.

Alice: I don't much care where.

The Cheshire Cat: Then it doesn't much matter which way you go.

Alice: . . . So long as I get somewhere.

The Cheshire Cat: Oh, you're sure to do that, if only you walk long enough.

—Lewis Carroll

Line of sight refers to a straight line along which an observer has unobstructed vision. In the context of this research, line of sight refers to actors maintaining unobstructed vision from their current decisions and actions to their ultimate desired outcome. Maintaining unobstructed vision helps actors to avoid conflating strategies and outcome (e.g., collaboration for its own sake) or neglecting their own outcome in the face of competing funder expectations.

For funders and intermediaries, line of sight means staying focused on the agents who are producing actual results on the ground, and making sure everyone along the value chain is focusing on the same outcomes but is not feeling constrained to pursue the same aligned strategies.

When the effort is collective, the whole system maintains a clear and shared view of an ultimate outcome, so that everyone recognizes what success looks like—it becomes their North Star.

Freedom to experiment refers to maintaining a clear distinction between the ultimate outcome and the pathway to getting there, and allowing actors the freedom to choose the path—or hypothesis—that, on the basis of their experience and perspective, is most likely to achieve this outcome. With that freedom comes the expectation that actors will learn from their choices—to treat their decisions and actions as an experiment and to honestly assess and learn from their success or failure.

The 4QP research team saw several types of learning activity: for example, learning journeys, peer learning events, and leadership development. **Returning learning to the system**, however, refers to a specific form of learning, one that sometimes is not even thought of as learning: the ability of the whole system to learn from the collective experiences of its agents as they explore different pathways to achieving a shared outcome.

The research team proposed that the rate at which a system of actors adapts to produce better outcomes depends on how frequently and rigorously the actors learn from one another—about what they are seeing and what is working (or not) and why, in service to their shared outcome.

This act is akin to bees returning to a hive and performing a dance that communicates the location and quality of a nectar-rich flower patch.

Conversely, what happens when line of sight, freedom to experiment, or returning learning to the system is missing? The research team hypothesized that the following results would occur:

- **If line of sight is weak:** Line of sight creates the potential for rigor in the learning process—an agent either moves toward a goal or does not. Agents in an initiative can experiment and can come together to learn from, and with, one another. But without line of sight to a recognizable goal, the agents, like Alice in Wonderland, will not recognize or agree on a destination and, as a result, which path to take. We expected that the felt need for learning would be lost when line of sight is weakened, and learning activities, even if they happened, would not lead to the larger system adapting its behavior.

- **If freedom to experiment is absent:** When agents in an initiative are asked to align all their resources around a single approach to, or hypothesis about, how to achieve a goal, they can engage in learning together. But we expected that this learning would happen around the edges and not get to the heart of the matter. In practice, the commitment to a single hypothesis would mean that there was only one experiment going on at a time, rather than many happening simultaneously. This commitment would make it more difficult to challenge prevailing thinking and would, as a result, impede the process of recognizing when the hypothesis was wrong or needed to be refined. And if agents did not take responsibility for learning from their experiments, even if they had the freedom to do so, progress toward a goal would likely be slower.

- **If learning is not returned to the system:** Each agent in an initiative can strive toward a goal, experimenting along the way. But we expected that if agents had no structure or process for returning learning to the system, they would have no way to adapt as a system. They would be like a field of a thousand blooming flowers that come and go with the seasons. The agents would not create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts, and, rather than continually improve, they would be more likely to keep learning the same lesson over and over.

(See the attached article, "How Complex Systems Learn and Adapt," for a description of the basis for our hypothesis in complex adaptive systems theory.)

The research case studies

For this project, we broadcast a call for examples of initiatives that reflected the principles of emergence. We were looking for initiatives in which the following had occurred:

- Ideas and solutions had emerged from the interactions of a diverse set of people doing the work—whether funders, grantees, partners, beneficiaries, or, ideally, a combination of these.
- The path that a successful program or initiative had taken could not have been predicted by any of these players.
- Ideas and solutions continued to evolve—to get smarter—over time, even if the program or initiative was done and the funding had gone away.

In short, we were looking for initiatives that expanded agency and created results that were greater than the sum of their inputs. Through a series of case studies, the 4QP research team sought to understand what emergence looks like in practice, what it might take to design emergence into an initiative, what results it might produce, and what trade-offs foundations might need to consider in choosing to take an emergent approach.

Our call for nominations brought forward forty-five initiatives. The research team reviewed the initiatives against our criteria and ultimately chose eight very different cases to study—from a small neighborhood-based community services initiative to a multi-continent health initiative. Each initiative that was the subject of our three in-depth case studies—the East Scarborough Storefront, the Social Innovation Generation initiative, and the Leadership Development for Mobilizing Reproductive Health (LDM) initiative—had been in existence for ten years or longer. The other five initiatives began in 2012 or later. *(See Appendix: "Research methodology and approach" for more information about how initiatives were chosen.)*

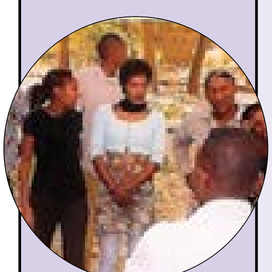
The following is a brief overview of the initiatives we selected:

Case	Geographic Focus	Goal	Core Initiative Team	Time Frame	Funding Amount
In-Depth Case Studies					
East Scarborough Storefront	Kingston Galloway/ Orton Park neighborhood of Toronto, Canada	Facilitate collaboration and build community. Support people to learn and create together; live healthy lives; find meaningful work; and increase their knowledge, freedom, and opportunities.	The Storefront itself and the community of residents, service providers, and other partner organizations	Ongoing Started in 2001	Current operating budget: $1,991,500 (as of 2016)
Leadership Development for Mobilizing Reproductive Health	Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines	Effect systemic changes that improve reproductive health options and overall quality of life in Africa and Asia, especially for vulnerable populations	David and Lucile Packard Foundation and Institute of International Education	2000–2011	$13.5M
Social Innovation Generation	Canada	Bring focus and scale to the work of social innovators in Canada in order to address Canada's most urgent social and ecological challenges by creating a culture of continuous social innovation	McConnell Foundation, University of Waterloo, MaRS Discovery District, and PLAN institute	Partnership: 2006–2017 McConnell still investing in social innovation	$10M (2006–2011) $6M government funding for MaRS Additional funding for 2012–2017

Case	Geographic Focus	Goal	Core Initiative Team	Time Frame	Funding Amount
Promising Cases					
Charleston Illumination	Charleston, SC	Promote both public safety and individual freedom following the 2015 shootings at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston	The City of Charleston	Ongoing Started in 2015	$120,000 in 2016 $25,000 in 2017 and 2018
Data Driven Decsion-Making Institute and Working Families Success Network	North Texas	Help working families to achieve economic stability using data to identify community needs and help a cohort of nonprofits to become a working-family-success center	Communities Foundation of Texas	Ongoing Started in 2012	$150,000 per cohort in 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018
Letsema Gender at Work	The Vaal, South Africa	Eliminate gender-based violence in a part of South Africa experiencing challenging circumstances, including very high unemployment	Gender at Work	2013–2015 Recently received new funding	Original budget was $150,000 plus $20,000 for capacity building
The Story Garden	Gallup, NM	Create a small, safe space where children and adults who experience persistent poverty can create community while exploring the world of books, art, games, and crafts	ATD Fourth World	Ongoing Started in 2012	Annual budget is $1 million for four US centers

Initiative results

The 4QP research team scanned each initiative for results that were greater than the sum of the inputs; results that were attuned to, and fit to, diverse and changing environments; and results that continued beyond the life of an initiative or its funding. Not surprisingly, the results varied widely. Surprisingly, some of the initiatives that started in 2012 or later, and which we labeled as promising, demonstrated more emergent results than some of the initiatives from our in-depth case studies, all of which had been active for at least ten years.

In-Depth Case Studies	
East Scarborough Storefront 	An early threat to The Storefront's location and the loss of a major funding source drove the organization to build local agency by engaging residents in finding ways to bring broader attention to their needs and, in the process, helping them learn how to solve their own challenges. Residents and others involved with the community created numerous programs, including an arts program, a breakfast club, an after-school soccer club, a festival marketplace, and a reading partnership for mothers. The Storefront's Neighbourhood Trust supported twenty-one resident-initiated efforts. These included a partnership with the local college to train, and in some cases certify, local residents in such things as child welfare, safe food handling, first aid and CPR, and developing and sustaining community partnerships. The one remaining question in terms of emergence is whether The Storefront can sustain its commitment to its principles and results after its founding director leaves. As of this report, the community is coming together to ask what it will take to sustain what it has created. *(For a more complete description of this case, see the attached case study.)*
Leadership Development for Mobilizing Reproductive Health (LDM) 	David and Lucile Packard Foundation Fellows came from widely varying regions of five very different countries in Africa and Asia. Strategies they created were tailored to the specific regional needs that they observed in their places. Their work ranged from policy advocacy in Northern Nigeria to reducing instances of female genital mutilation in Ethiopian villages to building maternal health clinics in India. Fellows were in a position to see and leverage site-specific opportunities. They were supported by their networks of peers and often funded by Packard mini-grants. Attempting to implement these diverse strategies through a funder-driven, predefined initiative would have been substantially more challenging and expensive than Packard's ten-year investment of effort and money ($13.5 million) allowed. Some networks that had depended on infrastructure support lost momentum when the initiative closed. However, several of the networks of Packard Fellows are still active six years after the close of the initiative. Because it focused on leadership development, the initiative was, by definition, about local ownership. And because leadership was so well distributed, leadership transitions were never a sustainability issue. Local leaders trained in participatory methods like Future Search are now being called upon to use these methods to help their communities address other issues. *(For a more complete description of this case, see the attached case study.)*

Social Innovation Generation (SiG)

When it came to their goals of promoting social innovation and creating tools to support it, the partners in this initiative were able to achieve far more than they had expected. The partners created a knowledge hub, a change-lab process, a task force on social finance, and a curriculum for social innovation. The Canadian government announced in June 2017 that it was creating a social-innovation and social-finance strategy for the entire country. During the initiative, however, SiG's tight boundaries as a partnership and its lack of attention to learning from results decreased its ability to produce emergent results related to Canada's important social and ecological challenges.

SiG's design created the potential to address an endless range of issues. People who developed skills in social innovation to address one issue could easily apply what they had learned to other issues. The change-lab process embraced by SiG was designed to bring together change agents to address any type of issue. As SiG comes to a close, a greater focus on the innovators themselves—the agents of action—will help amplify and make visible results related to moving the needle on Canada's social and ecological challenges.

(For a more complete description of this case, see the attached case study.)

Promising Cases

Charleston Illumination Project

The Charleston Illumination Project was a year-long project started in response to the shootings at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 17, 2015. The project was the crisis-driven extension of a community program that had been led by the chief of police since 2010. The City of Charleston has since continued the project, to expand neighborhood resolution of local safety issues.

During the year that this project ran, local participants in thirty-four listening sessions identified five goals and eighty-six strategies, sixty-six of which came from ideas or comments provided by more than 850 citizens participating.

The listening sessions and strategies that were generated continue to be owned by the city and have been incorporated into a strategic plan that is closely monitored by city organizers.

Beyond the eighty-six strategic actions being tracked, there are many new activities emerging from the relationships and trust that were cultivated in the original effort. These include an emerging community leadership program and a faith-based book club studying the history of Charleston and delving deeply into racial history. This group hosted a conference on criminal-justice reform in November 2017 that attracted two hundred attendees, showcased ten local agencies doing criminal reform, and received 160 commitments of support in the form of donations and volunteer service.

(For a more complete description of this case, see the attached case study.)

Data Driven Decision-Making Institute (D3) and Working Families Success Network	Using the Data Driven Decision-Making (D3) and the Working Families Success (WFS) models as a foundation, the Communities Foundation of Texas created a network of agencies with its own data-driven learning platform and encouraged those agencies to connect and communicate regularly with one another. Results of D3 and WFS included organizational change and culture shifts in participating agencies. Now, caseworker's lives are better, with less burnout, and individuals and organizations are excited and motivated by seeing clients do this work for themselves. Agencies also started rethinking how to permanently deliver services to change themselves and their philosophy. Between 2012 and 2015, forty-six nonprofit agencies that served low-income individuals and families participated in the D3 Institute. Among the reported results were (1) a heightened awareness of the need to share information more frequently with frontline staff, as opposed to sharing information with only executive leadership and board members, and (2) program participants' shifts in behavior on collecting large amounts of insignificant data, translating into decreased expenses and increased funding from grantmakers in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. There are nine active agencies that make up the Working Families Success Network of North Texas, and another nine that are in the process of adopting the WFS model. Early results indicate that the WFS members are seeing equivalent client outcomes, including increased income, improved credit, and the retention of employment for longer than peers who receive only employment services. All of these agencies are also pursuing stronger, more effective collaborations to serve low-income clients with a more holistic approach. Since August 2014, 3,424 clients have been served across nine WFS agencies. Eighty-nine percent received bundled (two or more) services. On-the-ground results as of December 2016 include 852 people finding employment, 779 people enrolling in training and education programs, and 268 people increasing their credit scores.[4] Evaluation of the WFS model, both in Dallas and nationally, showed that clients who received bundled services were three to four times as likely to achieve a significant economic outcome—for example, increased income, decreased debt, improved credit score, or the purchase of a home or car. In the critical measures of monthly savings and hourly wages, receiving all three services more than doubled monthly savings, from $202 to $413, and almost doubled hourly wages, from $7.98 to $14.04.
	(For a more complete description of this case, see the attached case study.)

4 The data in this section was compiled by the Communities Foundation of Texas and analyzed by Measuring Success. For more information, see these reports: Sandy Allen and Ena Yasuhara Li, Sparkpoint: 10 Key Findings (San Francisco: United Way of the Bay Area, September 2015); Sarah Rankin, Building Sustainable Communities: Integrated Services and Improved Financial Outcomes for Low-Income Households (New York: Local Initiatives Support Corporation, April 2015); Anne Roder, First Steps on the Road to Financial Well-Being: Final Report from the Evaluation of LISC's Financial Opportunity Centers (New York: Economic Mobility Corporation, September 2016)

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Letsema Gender at Work
</td><td>When funding went away after only two years, it was unclear what, if anything, in the Letsema Gender at Work initiative would sustain itself. But the highly participatory design resulted in a core group of local leaders taking ownership of the initiative and launching a series of action groups that have remained active and have developed their own way of working toward the larger goal of zero gender-based violence.

The Traditional Healers Action Group has focused, for example, on creating a safe space for dialogue among gangsters, government agencies, the broader community, initiation graduates, victims of the initiation malpractices, traditional initiation practitioners and the broader community. Participants reported having the confidence to speak out about gender-based violence, address LGBT discrimination head on, and address abuse in their personal lives. A sports action group has organized quarterly gender-based-violence workshops, holiday-school sports tournaments, and monthly Saturday sports clinics for boys and girls between the ages of six and fifteen to encourage positive relationships and give life skills that emphasize respect and nonviolence.

Other key institutions, such as schools, churches, local councils, and stokvels (community-based credit unions) have increased their knowledge of gender-based violence and have opened spaces to Letsema activists for engaging the larger community in conversation about the Letsema goal.</td></tr>
<tr><td>(For a more complete description of this case, see the attached case study.)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">The Story Garden
</td><td>As reported in a recent participatory evaluation, the Story Garden has brought greater peace, trust, and well-being to the entire market community of Gallup, New Mexico, and now to the rural communities that meet there. Adversarial relationships between vendors and managers have improved. Safety and literacy for children has transformed the relationships in families and between flea market management and vendors. There is far greater intergenerational and intercultural accord—elders have had many redemptive experiences of being better neighbors and better parents and grandparents to a new generation of children. This has led to individual and family courage for sharing and taking on community issues, such as homelessness and the impact of incarceration on almost every low-income family in the community.</td></tr>
<tr><td>(For a more complete description of this case, see the attached case study.)</td></tr>
</table>

Initiatives that focused on creating the conditions for expanded agency created wider-ranging, more sustainable results.

In comparing these results, whether it was the funder, an intermediary, a single nonprofit leader, or some combination of these, we saw that when the core initiative team focused not on orchestrating action themselves but on creating the conditions for the larger community of agents to take action, it resulted in a variety of activities that had not been imagined when the initiative was launched, and that responded to the needs and opportunities seen by various agents in their environments. Creating conditions for expanded agency led the core team to be more open to results they had not planned for or expected.

These results were most obvious in the geographic and cultural spread of Packard Foundation's Leadership Development for Mobilizing Reproductive Health (LDM) initiative. But this variety of activities was also evident in a single community in the case of The Storefront, an initiative in the East Scarborough neighborhood of Toronto, Canada. The Storefront was designed as a one-stop shop for social services with the intention that an external authority would decide what those services should be. But in this initiative, the agency for identifying needs shifted to the community itself, which led not just to social services being selectively invited in but also to the launch of a variety of activities that would otherwise have been challenging to conceive of and implement centrally by a small local nonprofit.

In both the LDM and the Storefront initiatives, small grants were made to support some of these community-generated ideas. Former Packard Foundation program officer Kathy Toner said this shared agency made the LDM initiative not feel "terribly burdensome."

In the case of the LDM initiative, six years after the initiative's close, several of the networks that were created in Africa and Asia are still working on improving reproductive health and ancillary issues such as the environment and budget reform. Local leaders who went through leadership development and who were also trained in participative methods like Future Search and Open Space have moved into different positions in nonprofits, foundations, and local and federal agencies. These leaders have continued to use their skills to support reproductive health and other social issues.

A similar approach—training local leaders in participative methods—in the much smaller, two-year Letsema Gender at Work initiative continues to contribute to reducing gender-based violence in the Vaal, South Africa. The initiative was conceived as an eighteen-month action-learning process, and its original funding ended in 2016. But the impact of the initiative continued to be felt through local commitment until this past year, when new proposals by local leaders won new attention and funding. Organizers of Letsema believe that the gender-based-violence work was unprecedented in engaging the communities at a deep level through local capacity building and informal leadership development in self-generated and highly popular working teams

In cases where most of the decisions and implementation were managed by the core initiative team, the initiatives still depended on that central leadership to sustain existing results and generate new ones. The Charleston Illumination Project has fostered much greater understanding between the police and the community in the wake of a tragic shooting. Community listening sessions have generated a range of actions, and these actions have been centralized into a strategic-planning process that is owned by the city. The initiative is expanding, both within Charleston and to other cities, but that expansion still depends on design, implementation, and centralized funding. In the case of Social Innovation Generation (SiG), the strong boundaries held by the partnership meant that the solutions it produced depended on the partnership leaders themselves and were owned and implemented by those original partners. Unlike the experience of the Packard Foundation with LDM, in the SiG initiative the amount of work involved in creating these solutions left partners with little time for learning from and with one another. Now, the McConnell Foundation is more directly engaging the community of social innovators as a community, which will help develop a network of innovators and make their achievements and learning more visible to one another.

Observations about our emergence hypothesis

Did we see evidence that the presence or absence of line of sight, freedom to experiment, and returning learning to the system affected the results above?

Line of sight

Nearly every initiative we studied had strong line of sight—the reproductive health of women and children in Africa and Asia; eliminating gender-based violence in the Vaal, South Africa; marginalized community members in a Toronto neighborhood being able to identify and address their own social and economic needs.

The goal of the Storefront, in Toronto, is to connect people with the systems that support them and create the conditions for people within and outside the community to create initiatives together and influence the systems that make the community a better place and improve the lives of its residents. This line of sight is kept alive through all of the Storefront's work and is especially present in the group's decision-making process. As decisions are made, the group asks itself these questions:

- Will this help us to fulfill our vision?
- Does this conflict with any of our values or beliefs?
- Who will receive the most benefit?
- What will be the impact on agency involvement, community involvement, staff time, and trustee agency resources?
- What do we need to put in place to ensure its success?
- Who needs to be consulted before we commit to this decision?

This decision-making process keeps the community at the center and, the 4QP research team believes, reinforces line of sight and ensures that it keeps producing emergent results. Keeping line of sight while making decisions is a form of reflection that also strengthens relationships across the community and increases the community's confidence that it is getting better at making important decisions.

The Charleston Illumination Project has also kept deeply focused on its line of sight: to promote the safety of both citizens and police by strengthening the relationship between them through polarity mapping. With the immediate crisis behind him, retired police chief Greg Mullen, who is still an important driving force in this project, now sees that the whole effort is really about the sanctity of life, which goes well beyond promoting safety. This shift may promote agency. It makes it possible for the whole community to work on the related problems they see in their environments and to see possibilities that reach well beyond addressing safety.

In the interesting case of Social Innovation Generation (SiG), the funder, the McConnell Foundation, envisioned four partners working together to choose one social or ecological issue in Canada and bringing together their skills and resources in social innovation to move the needle on that issue. Failing to achieve consensus on where to focus, the SiG partnership moved from a tight coupling to a loose coupling model[5] and shifted its focus to promoting and building tools to support social innovation as a concept. As a result, the SiG partners lowered their line of sight from moving the needle on an important issue in Canada to promoting social innovation as an approach to creating systemic change. The SiG partners also held tight boundaries around their work, which reduced their ability to attend to what social innovators were discovering on the ground, and the partners lost focus on learning from one another. As the case illustrates, this reduced their ability to learn together how to move the needle. (As the case also describes, recent shifts in line of sight are improving the chances that McConnell Foundation and the social innovators who are part of their ecosystem will produce more emergent results in the years to come.)

5 The concept of tightly coupled and loosely coupled organizations was created by Karl Weick. See J. Douglas Orton and Karl E. Weick, "Loosely Coupled Systems: A Reconceptualization," Academy of Management Review 15, no. 2 (1990): 203-23, http://dimetic.dime-eu.org/dimetic_files/OrtonWeickAMR1990.pdf.

Observations: Freedom to experiment

Nearly every initiative the 4QP research team studied demonstrated significant freedom to experiment. For the initiatives that prioritized outcomes over hypotheses, the initiative team measured the success of each element of their strategy on the basis of the results being produced by those agents. With just a few exceptions, where the core team had the freedom to experiment, it also extended that freedom outward into the whole ecosystem.

The results of having freedom to experiment were especially clear in the case of the Packard Foundation's Leadership Development for Mobilizing Reproductive Health (LDM) initiative. This initiative focused on developing and then networking reproductive health leaders who were spread out over five countries on two continents. The core initiative team created a container for the initiative by defining the mission and desired outcomes. Within that container, Packard Foundation Fellows were encouraged to think for themselves about what was most needed, and many received mini-grants to help them implement their ideas. What they chose to focus on depended entirely on the conditions of their environment—large cities or small clusters of villages in very different countries with different politics, economies, and religious orientations. Their focus ranged from policy advocacy in Northern Nigeria to a reduction in female genital mutilation in villages in Ethiopia to the building of maternal-health clinics in India. As described in the LDM case, it would have been unrealistic to tackle this range of issues across five countries using a funder-driven strategic framework and a $13.5 million budget.

The very short Letsema initiative received funding for just a couple of years, during which five action groups were launched. Self-generated and still operating, the groups have been credited with sustaining meaningful activity even when funding stopped, in 2016. Letsema's action groups differ in size, but all groups work closely with the people in their community, so the regular participants in action-group activities extend beyond a group's members. Each action group has developed a differentiated work area (e.g., sports, gardening, traditional healing) that greatly interests its members but is always linked to the overall, guiding question: How can we create a Vaal that has 0 percent gender-based violence?

There was an observed tension in the Charleston Illumination Project between centralized control and freedom to experiment. Perhaps because of the crisis it was addressing—the palpable tension immediately following the mass shooting at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015—the Illumination Project in its first year was a highly orchestrated series of thirty-three listening sessions that resulted in a long list of actions. These actions were incorporated into the city's strategic plan, with a commitment to reporting specific, measurable results—for example, the number of sessions, the number of participants, the number of actions generated. To a city reeling from a harrowing incident, it may have been comforting to see real, concrete actions and a plan to implement them that was actively owned by the city. All of this is reported in detail on the project's website. What is interesting, as described in the case, is that there were also experiments happening on the margins—outside the scope of the more structured process—that are not included in the report. This led the research team to pose the question, When a core initiative team communicates a strong sense of structure for an initiative, what does that say to residents about if and how they are invited to use their own agency to help improve the health of the community outside the bounds of what was defined in the plan?

Observations: Returning learning to the system

Generally speaking, returning learning to the system was the least developed characteristic in almost all the cases. The specific type of learning that complex systems need in order to adapt is best illustrated, as described above, by bees returning to the hive and doing the "here's where I found flowers" dance. What is needed, and what was most often missing, is a way for agents in the system to ***easily*** and ***regularly*** communicate to peers, "Here's what I saw, here's what I did, and here's what happened as a result," and a way for the community of peers to compare these stories, begin to see patterns, and make meaning from them. It is the equivalent of the players from a sports team watching a game film the day after a competition and talking about what they were seeing and thinking as they made their split-second decisions about what action to take, and then reflecting together on the results and why it worked or what they might have done differently.

Where learning from experiments is getting returned to the system, an observer should be able to see the whole system getting smarter over time. The change should be visible in the thinking of the core initiative team, as well as in the approaches being tried by agents in the system. *(Complex adaptive systems theory refers to this process as discovering "building blocks" that help agents to navigate the "perpetual novelty" of a complex system. See the attached article, "How Complex Systems Learn and Adapt.")*

Learning took very different forms in different cases—from annual peer-learning events to reflection days for community residents to storytelling and participatory evaluations. The challenge of doing this kind of learning was different in each case—for example, a lack of technology; a lack of time for or focus on learning; an emphasis on education over peer learning; teams or team members working far away from one another; or a gap or boundary between the core initiative team and agents in the system.

Some of the most successful efforts to return learning to the system did not look like learning at all. In particular, deliberate decision-making processes that included conscious reflection on past decisions and results, as was done in The Storefront and the LDM Initiatives, informed the thinking of the core initiative teams. These practices also benefited from happening more frequently and in a just-in-time way that did not seem like extra effort.

In the case of the Packard Foundation's LDM initiative, the core team did a good job of supporting peer learning with the resources they had at the time. There were annual peer-learning events that crossed borders and more regular events held within each country. The geographic spread and a lack of appropriate technology in 2006, when networks were being formed, made it difficult to come together to learn beyond country boundaries more than once a year.

The intermediary, the Institute of International Education (IIE), conducted a participatory evaluation at the end of the ten-year initiative. It helped the network of leaders to see how much they had accomplished and how widely their approaches and activities varied from place to place. IIE was proud of the evaluation, but participants commented that making these results visible would have been most valuable earlier in the initiative. Done earlier, a participatory evaluation could have raised the level of confidence among Packard Fellows, helping them to expand their agency and develop more of their own funding sources. In 2006, many of these nascent networks were dependent on external financial and technical support. With today's technology, LDM could have designed in this kind of learning across geographies more frequently and with less effort. Today, those networks that still exist are informally using social media to capture, share, and learn from results among their peers.

In the Letsema initiative, storytelling was introduced in the initial meetings. Participants introduced themselves by sharing either a story from their own experiences with gender-based violence or something else that had deeply affected them. Members were also encouraged to share their work by telling stories at reflection meetings with coaches. In 2015, Letsema members and facilitators created the book ***Our Hearts are Joined***, which is based on writing done through a writing workshop.[7] The act of sharing their narrative helped members to connect at a deeper level and to compare their own experiences of gender-based violence with one another. Sharing the narrative also reflects the kind of learning needed by a complex system to adapt.

The best example of returning learning to the system in our cases is the D3 Institute and Working Families Success initiative, launched by the Communities Foundation of Texas (CFT). The initiative works with local agencies in North Texas to help working families achieve economic stability. In D3 (which stands for Data Driven Decision-Making), participants began by questioning their understanding of the general terms and standard metrics used in the field and created deeper definitions with agencies that were doing the real work on the ground. CFT is using a cohort model to work with local agencies in North Texas, which allows the agencies to do their own learning from year to year, and they are supporting a vibrant and growing network of graduates. Participants continue to question their understanding of these terms in every cohort and network learning session. Agencies meet frequently to talk about recent data and progress in the context of shared outcomes, but they talk with one another even more frequently between sessions. They have an online platform, which they use frequently. They also visit one another, coach one another, and share their results and learning. CFT has been deliberate about helping the agencies to build relationships with one another apart from the foundation. While the initiative is still relatively young, the frequency of these interactions, paired with CFT's iterative learning across cohorts, should set the stage for nonlinear results over time.

In summary, and to reiterate, the 4QP research team hypothesized that three conditions—line of sight, freedom to experiment, and returning learning to the system—would promote emergent results in complex social-change initiatives. This initial research was not so much intended to prove our hypothesis as it was to clarify what we meant and develop a more nuanced description. Readers should consider this as more of a question to explore than a recommendation to follow.

6 Shameem Meer, ed., *Our Hearts Are Joined: Writings from Letsema* (Gender at Work and Labour Research Services, 2016), https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7Da5L0N_Qz4VmNvVmNsR2wxWG8/view.

Observations about the funder relationship

The most emergent funding relationship was that of a thinking and learning partner. It should be no surprise that those funders that created the most space for experimentation and had fewer requirements about how money was to be spent were rewarded by more emergent results. But the funder relationships that produced the most emergent results were not completely hands off. Rather, they were relationships in which, as Anne Gloger of The Storefront put it, "They were with us the whole way, learning with us through a developmental evaluation process, embracing learning and course correction . . . but putting us firmly in the lead of the process."[7] This contrasts with the other end of the spectrum, where a core initiative team decides for itself what the solution should be and then finds grantees to help implement it. A funder can decide on its own to focus on workforce development, but that represents the funder's own hypothesis about how to solve someone else's problem.

In a relationship similar to what Gloger described, the McConnell Foundation worked closely with PLAN institute—a Social Innovation Generation (SiG) partner and social innovator focused on disabled individuals and their families—standing ready to offer ideas and new questions at the appropriate moment when the initiative was at an inflection point. The foundation's patience and commitment to learning not only supported Plan's evolution in developing more systemic and sustainable solutions but also contributed to McConnell being able to shift how it thinks about social innovation today.

The Packard Foundation's Leadership Development for Mobilizing Reproductive Health Program (LDM) initiative was transformed by the productive thinking and learning partnership between the initiative leaders within Packard and their intermediary, the Institute of International Education (IIE). In the initial five years of the LDM initiative, the relationship was more hands off, and a disconnect developed between the strategic focus of the Packard Foundation and the intermediary. A leadership change created the opportunity to strengthen the relationship and redefine strategic as an ongoing process of learning together how to use

resources wisely, on the basis of local needs, priorities, and opportunities.

In the cases of LDM and SiG, interviewees praised the Packard and McConnell foundations for their patience and openness to the emergent quality of the work of their grantees. Interviewees contrasted the stance of these foundations to that of other funders that held tighter expectations and constraints, describing how they typically found themselves having to work around conflicting or unrealistic expectations. At The Storefront, Anne Gloger described one foundation that funded deep resident-engagement work. Initially, The Storefront was expected to use the foundation's branded model, which Gloger found to be "formulaic in nature."[8] Given the strength of The Storefront's history, the foundation not only allowed the initiative to define its own approach to

7 Anne Gloger, email to Jillaine Smith, 3 December 2017.

8 Gloger, email.

engaging residents but also removed the requirement of using the brand from future initiatives.

Nearly every core initiative team also made maintaining relationships across the whole system a deliberate priority. It was through those relationships that they could allow community members to bring their own perspectives, creativity, and energy to identifying the most important local problems and developing creative solutions that made sense in their own environments, while ensuring that the whole system maintained strong line of sight.

This relationship depended as much on the stance of the agents in the system as on the funder. In the case of the LDM initiative, which supported network development, some of the networks took the traditional stance of beneficiary, depending on the Packard Foundation and IIE for funding and infrastructure support. In the participatory evaluation done at the conclusion of the initiative, members of those networks complained that not enough had been done to secure future funding, and they had become inactive. But the networks that had made themselves self-sufficient remained active.

These teams did not relinquish all decision-making to their communities, but they recognized that making decisions is, indeed, a team sport...

A leader's style could expand or close down agency.

A common characteristic of core initiative teams that were able to focus on creating the conditions for emergence was humility—a recognition that they could not know enough to solve these complex problems alone. While leading with expertise sometimes reduced the ability of agents to join the conversation, humility created the space for sharing agency with change agents in the system.

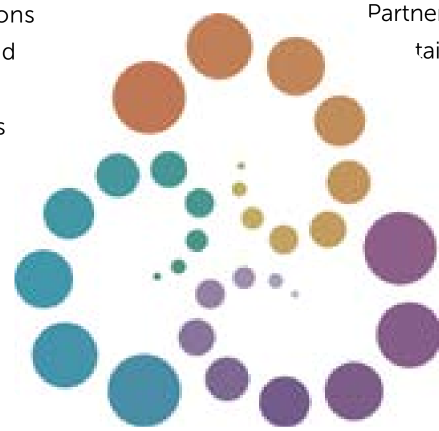
In some cases, it was an expressed acknowledgement made at the beginning of an initiative. The founders of the Story Garden defined and implemented their flea market initiative only after many months of community events and many conversations with an array of community members about what mattered most to them.

In a few initiatives, this humility came later, as happened with the LDM and SiG initiatives, with the recognition that what they had been doing would not be enough to move the needle. These teams did not relinquish all decision-making to their communities, but they recognized that making decisions is, indeed, a team sport, in which the experiences and perspectives of everyone are important to bring to the table.

Evaluation played very different roles in the cases studied.

Most of the initiatives did not try to narrow or quantify outcomes in advance, recognizing that what they would look like was unpredictable. Evaluation was more about documenting results as they emerged. Some evaluations focused on supporting the core initiative teams; others focused on supporting the larger system. Developmental evaluation,[9] when it was used, was more useful to the core initiative teams—helping them to keep their line of sight, keep the important questions in front of them, and think more critically about the decisions they were making. Participatory evaluations were more helpful in making results visible and building agency across the system. [10]

Both the Leadership Development for Mobilizing Reproductive Health Program (LDM) and the Story Garden used a participatory evaluation. Both evaluations involved participatory data-gathering and meaning-making. While both evaluations were resource intensive, each was seen as highly valuable—making results visible that were surprising and validating for everyone involved. Organizers of the Story Garden see the participatory evaluation as an inflection point in the growth of the initiative. The LDM evaluation revealed a remarkable forty pages of specific on-the-ground results. This contrasts with a previous five-year evaluation, which showed evidence of changing attitudes and behaviors but little evidence of on-the-ground impact. LDM participants wished the participatory evaluation had been conducted earlier.[11]



The partners in the Social Innovation Generation (SiG) initiative began working with a developmental evaluator at the initiative's inception but discontinued the relationship after a tense first year as a partnership. They hired the same evaluator to do an evaluation seven years into the initiative. Partners expressed regret that SiG had not maintained that relationship, which would have helped them to focus more deliberately on learning from their work.

9 Developmental evaluation aims to meet the needs of social innovators by applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use. Developmental evaluation focuses on what is being developed through innovative engagement. See *http://aea365.org/blog/michael-quinn-patton-on-developmental-evaluation-applying-complexity-concepts-to-enhance-innovation-and-use/*.

10 Participatory evaluation is an approach that involves the stakeholders of a program or policy in the evaluation process. This involvement can occur at any stage of the evaluation process, from the evaluation design to the data collection and analysis and the reporting of the study. A participatory approach can be taken with any impact-evaluation design, and with quantitative and qualitative data. See *http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/participatory_evaluation*.

11 The difference in results reported is dramatic. It is not clear, however, whether the lack of results in the previous evaluation was due to the evaluation methodology, the length of time of the intervention, or the fact that the program was focused on individual development, rather than networking.

What does it take to create the conditions for emergence?

Is there a takeaway for those who are designing initiatives and for agents of change who operate within them?

We did not discover any one model for designing an emergent initiative. And we found no examples that matched our hypotheses exactly. Comparing all eight cases helped us to significantly refine our understanding of, and our ability to talk about, these hypotheses and showed us the variety of ways that social-change agents can create the conditions for emergence. We were struck by the amount of energy and potential that was lost when one of these conditions was not present. In comparing all eight cases, we aimed to demonstrate what happens when these conditions exist and what happens when they are absent, and what funders and nonprofits did that contributed to creating the conditions for emergence to arise. More research is needed to validate these initial observations.

Below, we summarize our ideas and questions for funders and nonprofits to think about, on the basis of this initial study.

Expanding agency across an ecosystem

We observed that it is not so much what funders invest in but how they invest in it that promotes emergence. In the initiatives we studied, funders invested in networking, capacity building, leadership development, and community engagement to facilitate participative processes. None of these investments is unusual, but it was the stance funders took in making the investments that seemed to affect emergence. Did they seek to expand agency, or was their approach more instrumental?

A funder's orientation shows up in the questions it asks. Asking, "What capacities do we need to develop in this community?" communicates that the funder is holding onto the agency to decide what a community needs. If the funder asks, instead, "What will it take for the community to be able to identify the capacities it needs and to make sure they get developed (and what role can we play in that?)," it communicates the intention to share agency with the community. If a funder focuses on building agency from the start, the question of sustainability should not come up only in the twilight of an initiative.

What is the role of strategy and whose strategy is it?

Perhaps the most challenging proposal for funders that aim to be strategic in complex environments is the idea that it may not be possible to fully design in advance the "best" strategies—those that are both robust and adaptive, those that address the widest range of situations and adapt to stay closely fitted to those situations as they evolve.

In the initiatives we studied, when funders became overly invested in a particular strategy about how to achieve a goal, it reduced the agency of members of the larger system to experiment on the basis of their own perspectives. Emergent strategies arise from, and are refined through, experimentation among multiple actors.

This raises the question, What is the role of strategy and whose strategy is it? Foundations do have a strategic role in an emergent initiative, but the initiatives that fostered emergence had a meta-strategy: focusing on expanding agency, maintaining relationships, strengthening line of sight, funding experimentation, and supporting a process for returning learning to the system. In a sense, their strategy became nested—the strategy itself was to support the development of adaptive strategies across the ecosystem. For the most agency-rich initiatives, the core initiative teams experienced the work as being more distributed and less onerous than what was reported by initiatives in which funders held the agency within their own boundaries.

Acting as a thinking and learning partner

In the initiatives that displayed the most emergent results, funders did not maintain a hands-off stance. They were involved as thinking partners, and they learned, just as they expected their grantees or communities to experiment and learn along the way. The funders recognized that they needed to be deliberate about how they made their own decisions in collaboration with their grantees and communities, and they learned from this collaboration. There was a fractal quality to these relationships.[12] It was not a one-way street from the funder to the grantee to the beneficiary. The more these thinking and learning partnerships existed at each level of the ecosystem, the more the whole ecosystem learned and adapted. The initiative teams that experienced the greatest emergence focused on building and maintaining strong relationships and communication across the whole system to enable this flow of doing and learning.

There were great examples in the cases of funders being there as a thinking partner to offer a new question or a new piece of research at an inflection point, but also being careful not to set up their ideas as expectations for grantees. This contrasted with initiatives in which funders had preconceived ideas about what a good solution should look like and communicated these at the outset. *(See sidebar: "The Search for Impact.")*

In some cases, boundaries were an impediment. They existed to maintain agency within a boundary or with the good intention of giving others the latitude to make their own decisions. In either case, strong boundaries impeded the learning and adaptation process. This suggests that managing the boundary relationship so that funders can both share their resources and perspectives and maintain the agency of their grantees and communities is an important component of creating the conditions for emergence to happen.

(continued on page 28)

12 Fractals are infinitely complex patterns that are self-similar across different scales. For more on fractals, see: http://www.fractalfoundation.org.

The Search for Impact

Strategic philanthropy is a response by funders to some of the outcomes they were seeing in their work: programmatic solutions that were not going anywhere, that were not creating a measurable impact at a satisfactory scale. Instead, funders were seeing their dollars unintentionally reinforcing the status quo. Grantees may have said that they were experimenting, learning, and adapting, but in our conversations with funders, they shared their skepticism of grantees' abilities to get to impact at scale without assistance.

One result is that funders have been pushing grantees to work explicitly at a systems level from the get-go. As they launch new initiatives, funders have increased their investments in front-end planning processes and brought in experts to build skills in systems thinking, collaboration, and other areas where gaps are perceived.

From an emergence perspective, this strategic push has had unintended consequences.

One of the tremendous resources of the nonprofit world is its entrepreneurial spirit—the vision and doggedness that keep people doing the good work against all odds. A core principle of emergence is the expansion of agency for decision-making across a whole ecosystem of actors. A hallmark of emergence is that it can produce solutions that no one person or entity could have imagined in advance. Emergence depends on the wisdom and energy of the whole system and the ability of each agent to make his or her own decisions, on the basis of that wisdom and the situation they see in front of them.

Initiatives that invest in these bulked-up planning and training phases may implicitly, or even explicitly, ask nonprofit entrepreneurs to hold off and to align with others on a consensus project or a set of actions that have been guided by in-depth data gathering and reflection. This process can unintentionally slow down or even discourage entrepreneurial experimentation.

The Search for Impact *(continued)*

It can make passionate visionaries feel frustrated and as if they are being judged to be wrong. This tension displayed itself at the beginning of the Social Innovation Generation (SiG) initiative. In its own work with initiatives, the 4QP research team has heard versions of this comment, which indicates a relinquishing of agency, from grantees: "Just tell us what you mean by systems change. What are you asking us to do?"

Another potential risk of deep up-front investment is that it may overcommit a group to assuming that the solution they have developed is fully formed and guaranteed to succeed. In fact, by assuming that there is only one entry point into systems-level change, and that it needs to be driven from the outside to overcome a stubborn status quo, strategic funders may be missing another path that could produce systems-level change in a way that is more sustainable and continues to evolve over time through emergence.

But does choosing an emergent approach have to mean giving up on pushing for greater impact? How can funders help grantees to discover more systemic, impactful solutions without squashing the entrepreneurial spirit and commitment that could inspire the next unpredicted breakthrough?

The challenge for funders may be having more patience—not concluding prematurely that small, local efforts cannot evolve into deeper systems change—and being ready to walk the path with the people they have invested in. In the SiG initiative, the McConnell Foundation walked the path with the Canadian nonprofit PLAN institute—a group of parents of disabled children who are working to plan for their children's future. McConnell created the conditions for emergence by funding and following PLAN's experiments. McConnell was there with new questions and ideas when PLAN was ready to ask a next-level question—those moments when PLAN needed and welcomed a larger perspective. The rigorous back-and-forth about what was happening and what the next step might look like helped create inflection points that led to deeper, more systemic solutions. Meanwhile, from PLAN's perspective, the grantee stayed focused on, and anchored in, the real and immediate problem of their children's future, rather than being asked to focus on systems change in the abstract. McConnell helped PLAN to think about systems-level levers of change such as finance vehicles and province-by-province banking regulations. Without this mix of passionate agents of change who have direct, personal experience within the system, along with experts who can see other potential systems levers that may be less visible from the parents' perspective, some barriers might have been difficult to surmount. Some of the most innovative ideas might never have seen the light of day.

Expertise about systems change can be invaluable to social-change initiatives, but our research suggests that when and how systems change is invited into an initiative can significantly affect whether entrepreneurial spirit gets fed or squashed; whether agency expands or contracts. To support emergence, expertise must be offered at moments, and in ways, that support agency, and in a way that continues to allow the system to be open to other perspectives and ideas.

It is through developing a collection of building blocks and becoming adept with combining them that complex systems learn.

For grantees and communities, the cases suggest a benefit from, on the one hand, not allowing externally imposed criteria to cloud their line of sight and, on the other hand, being open to funders as thinking partners to help them see patterns they were not aware of, and to ask questions that might challenge their thinking.

Using evaluation to expand agency

The initiatives we studied illustrate how developmental evaluation can support adaptation among core initiative teams by maintaining line of sight and supporting reflective decision-making, and how participatory evaluation can support growing agency by making results visible across the system. In our cases, technology could have been better used to assist in growing agency.

The cases suggest that evaluation needs to be thought about in a different way for emergent initiatives. For the most part, the initiatives did not have predefined measurable outcomes, and they did not evolve from emergent to more structured frameworks. Per complex adaptive systems theory, adaptation in complex systems depends on the ability of agents to identify and learn how to use building blocks that emerge from experimentation. It is through developing a collection of building blocks and becoming adept with combining them that complex systems learn. For example, meteorology and weather forecasting took a huge leap forward when the jet stream was discovered. Meteorology is still the study of a highly complex system, but the jet-stream discovery led to the discovery of other building blocks, and each new building block led to innovations in forecasting. *(See the attached article, "How Complex Systems Learn and Adapt.")* By focusing on identifying and understanding building blocks, rather than assessing against predetermined outcomes, evaluation can help ecosystems to produce more emergent results and share useful knowledge that leads to new innovations in what will still be a very complex field of work.

Strengthening line of sight and freedom to experiment

The core initiative teams that produced the most emergent results focused on outcomes for the whole ecosystem—for example, improving the reproductive health of women in Africa and Asia—and helped the whole system to keep those outcomes in sight. These teams used decisions to keep testing what their outcomes looked like in practice, asking, To what should we say yes or no? They adjusted their own strategies over the course of the initiative to make those ultimate outcomes more likely. These funders did not conflate strategies and outcomes and did not become overly invested in their own hypotheses. Continually focusing on outcomes as they made decisions and compared results with their original goals, helped the whole system to do the same.

What success looked like varied from context to context—from improving maternal health in India to changing policy in Northern Nigeria to reducing female genital mutilation in Ethiopia. What appeared to matter more was how much care and attention local agents gave to these outcomes and how effectively these agents and the larger system recognized results and compared them with outcomes. The nonprofits with the strongest line of sight were able to stand their ground with funders that wanted to impose their own thinking.

Grantees chafed at cookie-cutter, or formulaic, program requirements from funders. Those funders that were able to let go of their preconceived notions about what solutions should look like, and encourage agents to bring forward and experiment with their own ideas, seemed to do the most to promote agency and emergence. But this did not mean simply unleashing agents to follow their own wisdom and letting a thousand flowers bloom. Emergence was most evident when the results of those experiments were made visible to the larger system—through storytelling, reflective writing practices, or participatory evaluations.

A corollary to this principle is being cautious about alignment. Funders of the most emergent initiatives had a clear outcome in mind (i.e., they had strong line of sight), but they did not constrain strategies by requiring that every player in an initiative commit to a particular strategy or to developing a predetermined set of skills. In fact, these funders encouraged the community to develop ideas and often funded experiments to test out those ideas. The grantees who took this offer seriously generated their own agency and appeared more likely to sustain their work. The funders that committed to a particular hypothesis, on the other hand, risked not only hampering experimentation but also missing outlier data that might be an early indication of emergence.

Returning learning to the system

If the initiatives we studied are any indication, returning learning to the system may be the biggest challenge, and the biggest opportunity, for core initiative teams when it comes to creating a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Using complex adaptive systems theory as a guide, the 4QP research team proposed that the kind of learning that supports emergence is a very specific kind of learning—it brings the results agents are getting across the system back into the system, so that agents learn from the results together in order to strengthen everyone's thinking and actions. This may not look like traditional learning. We saw examples of core initiative teams anchoring learning to decision-making. We saw examples of making results and data visible across the system through a data platform, storytelling, and participatory evaluations.

What we did not find as often was this kind of learning happening across the ecosystem at a rate that supports the kind of adaptation that complex adaptive systems theory calls for. Agents do not have the time to wait for annual gatherings to compare notes with peers or wait five years to get data about their results. A sports team would never wait until the end of the season to reflect on its results and what contributed to them. The Working Families Success (WFS) Network offered the best counterexample with its online data-based platform and frequent peer interactions.

As the WFS initiative suggests, it may be useful to think about creating a platform with multiple kinds of learning supports—places to collect stories; easy ways to ask for peer assists; frequent but fit-for-purpose learning events; and decision-making processes that incorporate reflection on past results. Technology can play a role today that it could not play when many of these initiatives were being planned. Today, technology is available that can (1) connect people across geographies; (2) provide better, more specific, closer to real-time quantitative data; and (3) provide easy ways to gather qualitative data (e.g., simple-to-create surveys).

This also suggests that initiatives seeking to create emergent results should focus convenings, as much as possible, on returning learning to the system by giving participants a chance to compare what they are seeing, thinking, and doing and the results—both positive and negative—they are getting, rather than use most of their valuable time together to provide expert-led training.

Trade-offs: When is emergent strategy called for? When is it not?

As described above, there is a real and undeniable trade-off for funders between wanting to know in advance what return on investment to expect and letting go of predictable results in the hope of creating a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. There is a trade-off between being able to take credit for what was created and creating something that has the potential to be greater, but in which one's role may be relatively invisible. And there is trade-off between being able to use one's own deep expertise and creating the space for others to bring their own, possibly different, ideas to the table.

When is emergent strategy a good fit?	When is emergent strategy **not** a good fit?
Broadly speaking, we proposed that emergent strategy is a good fit for complex and dynamic challenges and environments. More specifically, we discovered that initiative teams chose emergence when • it was clear that more traditional approaches that relied heavily on ownership and agency by the core initiative team would be too resource intensive; • their traditional approaches were not getting the impact they aspired to, and the team knew it did not know enough to tackle the problem on its own; • the geographic scope of the initiative was wide and diverse; • the initiative actors were more committed to the solution than to the credit for achieving it; or • strengthening the community and its voice was a goal in itself.	We did not specifically research the question, When is emergent strategy not a good fit? But on the basis of our cases, we propose that emergent strategy is not a good fit when • the problem is straightforward (perhaps complicated, but not complex) and the solution is replicable; • the issue being tackled is urgent and requires immediate and coordinated action; • the only way to achieve a goal is by aligning all the available resources to invest in a large or expensive solution; • a funder requires commitment to specific, measurable outcomes in advance; • a funder is committed to a fixed hypothesis or theory; • a funder or intermediary is looking to validate and brand a predefined and complete solution (as opposed to the discrete building blocks of a larger strategy); • the core team is invested in taking responsibility for, or owning, the results; or • the initiative team does not have an appetite for learning.

Is there a natural transition from emergent to more stable strategies? In the cases we studied, we did not see any initiatives make this shift, though at least a couple of the initiatives shifted in the other direction, for some of the reasons cited above.

And this raises another question:

Can emergence be propagated? When an initiative team—whether it is led by a funder or a grantee—decides to expand (and possibly brand) its work to other locations, and if emergent properties was one aspect of what helped the team to produce its results, how can the team ensure that what gets codified still supports that aspect of its approach?

In our emergence hypothesis, the 4QP research team proposed that holding both strong line of sight and freedom to experiment, and returning learning to the system, contributes to emergence. **To propagate emergence**, what we found in the examples we studied would suggest four guidelines:

1. Focus on creating the conditions that expand agency
2. Be careful to keep goals and strategies separate
3. Hold the principles and strategies that get codified as hypotheses, not expectations
4. Be open to the idea that what gets branded may be only partly right and will need to be refined through working in partnership with new places so that local implementers can experiment and adapt

In the case of The Storefront, in Toronto, Canada, after fifteen years of highly visible success, the executive director decided to brand the work as the "Connected Community Approach" and bring it to other communities. The team hired a developmental evaluator and created a theory of change to help them spread their approach. It is premature to study the success of this effort, but it would be an interesting example to track to see if its emergent characteristics were preserved.

There is one case that is already an example of propagating emergence. The Story Garden, in Gallup, New Mexico, is the latest in a long series of initiatives undertaken by ATD Fourth World since its inception, in 1956. From what we have observed so far, the Story Garden appears to have borne out our emergence hypothesis. Exploring the question of how to propagate emergence may be a useful next step in ongoing research into the role of emergence in complex social change.

In closing…

None of the initiatives we studied represent a fundamentally new approach to philanthropy. The forms they took included networks, data platforms, movement building, community centers, university curricula, and training in participatory facilitation models. Some of the initiatives set out to be emergent; some did not. What those that seemed to produce the most emergent results had in common was the way in which they approached these conventional forms. There was a fractal quality to it—applying the same principles to their own decision-making that they were applying to implementing these forms in the outside world. The initiatives created the conditions for everyone in the ecosystem to bring his or her own wisdom to the table in helping solve the complex social issues they were addressing.

John Holland observed that "the hallmark of emergence is this sense of much coming from little."[13] These cases suggest, but do not prove, that growing agency across the system of actors in an initiative creates a whole greater than the sum of its parts and offers ideas about how to promote that agency. This raises the question, How would the field validate nonlinear results—results showing that a whole greater than the sum of its parts was actually created?

There is much more to discover from these cases. It is our hope that this report and the case studies associated with it will help create a conversation among funders and nonprofits about new ways to increase the impact of their investments and their work. We also hope that readers will recognize and bring forward other examples that might further our collective understanding about what emergence looks like, and can achieve, in complex social change.

There is much more to learn . . . always.

13 John Holland, *Emergence: From Chaos to Order* (Perseus Books, 1998), p. 2.

Appendix

Research methodology and approach

The research team used an inductive approach from the outset, starting with a definition of emergence developed from the literature on complex adaptive systems and our experience as consultants in the field. Because emergence in the philanthropic sector is still a relatively new and unexplored concept, the research team chose to explore this topic through a broad call within the sector for initiatives that exemplified emergence, rather than use a more representative sampling method.

The core research team was guided in its efforts by an advisory panel of philanthropic and evaluation-experienced practitioners:

- Tanya Beer, associate director of the Center for Evaluation Innovation
- Diana Scearce, independent consultant and former director of learning and evaluation at the Skoll Global Threats Fund
- Lori Grange, strategy officer, effective philanthropy at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- Kelci Price, senior director of learning and evaluation at the Colorado Health Foundation

Nomination process

Our definition and several examples of emergence were used to create a call for nominations from practitioners, researchers, and actors in the field. We asked them to nominate initiatives that they perceived to have achieved some level of emergence or that appeared to be on that path toward it. The call was announced in a blog post[14] by the Center for Effective Philanthropy; on our own website; and through emails sent to professional contacts, funding organizations, and thought leaders in philanthropy. Individuals or organizations could self-nominate or identify likely candidates. Organizations and initiatives were encouraged to share the call for nominations with others and nominees were invited to nominate other projects. From this we obtained nominations for seventy-eight projects in the United States and Canada, and across the globe.

We sought initiatives launched by any source—grant makers, nonprofits, communities, or government agencies. Nominations could be for current or past initiatives. We gathered a range of examples—from clear instances of emergence that would continue to evolve to examples that were not, in fact, in any way emergent under our working definition. This range helped us to discover patterns through the comparison of similarities and differences.

Selecting initiatives to study

To select initiatives for our case studies, we developed an in-depth questionnaire (thirteen pages, twenty-seven questions) using a combination of closed and open-ended responses.[15] Nominated initiatives were sent a link to the online questionnaire and asked to describe the initiative's beginnings, organization, strategy, funding, and results. Because one of the hallmarks of our definition of emergence was a sense of agency on the part of multiple players

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14 For the announcement, see http://cep.org/whats-the-value-proposition-of-emergence/.

15 Special thanks to our colleague James E. M. Stiles, who led the development and creation of the survey and this research methodology appendix. Thank you to our colleagues who reviewed the draft survey: Nora Bateman of the McKnight Foundation, Anne Gienapp of ORS Impact, and Kelci Price of the Colorado Health Foundation.

within the initiative, we encouraged the primary respondent to suggest additional initiative participants who could complete the survey, such as funders, staff members, or beneficiaries.

We received ninety-six completed surveys from a total of forty-five initiatives. Our first layer of analysis involved looking at the survey responses for three characteristics of emergence:

- Ideas and solutions had emerged from the interactions of a diverse set of people doing the work, whether they were funders, grantees, partners, beneficiaries, or, ideally, a combination of these;
- The path that a successful program or initiative took could not have been predicted by any of these players; and
- Ideas and solutions continued to evolve—to get "smarter"—over time, even after the program or initiative had ended and the funding had gone away.

Using qualitative analysis, we identified initiatives that described creating agency across a number of stakeholders—initiatives that did more than merely ask for people's opinions and that appeared to actively involve a diverse set of people in either the design or the implementation of the initiative. We asked respondents to consider how their goals and strategies changed from initial design through implementation, and about the perceived freedom among stakeholders to experiment with strategies or tactics. We assessed respondents' open-ended answers about the results created and how those results had evolved. While it was evident that all initiatives had some history of results, we categorized the initiatives into those with results that were traditionally conceived, those that were adaptive, and those that were potentially emergent.[16]

The list included initiatives that showed promise of emergence but that were either too early in their development or too closely associated with one or more members of the research team to be added as full case studies. For the other semifinalists, we conducted initial interviews with a survey respondent to explore responses in depth. Using a semistructured interview protocol, we conducted these interviews in person, on the phone, or on Skype. From an analysis of these interviews, we identified nine semifinalists for case studies; four were selected for in-depth study and five for a category we called promising initiatives.

Case study development and analysis

Ultimately, we completed three in-depth cases[17] and four promising cases. The full case studies involved interviewing at least five individuals using semistructured and extensive document review. Individual respondents were generous with their time and often agreed to multiple conversations over a year as the case developed. The promising cases involved interviewing one or two people per case and document review.

The in-depth cases ranged from a small neighborhood-based social services organization to a multi-continent reproductive health initiative. Each reflected very different aspects of emergence. Likewise, the promising cases were

16 The research team notes that the nomination process sought programs that the nominators considered emergent and by implication judged to be successful. Future researchers might consider what could be learned from programs that set out to be emergent but were not successful.

17 One additional case study from the semifinalist list was planned but could not be completed in time for publication.

varied and described different components of the concept. While all the initiatives described in the promising cases were in their early years, the research team was often surprised about the results some of them had accumulated.

The analysis challenge in any research like this is how to use comparisons among the cases to develop a nuanced understanding of what a new concept, such as emergence, looks like in practice. Guided by the literature and the extensive review and comparison of the cases by the full research team, our analysis led to the development of the key themes and patterns noted in this report.

We are deeply in debt to the research respondents who reviewed the case studies that featured their initiative and to our advisory panel, which reviewed both the case studies and the draft report. Our work was deepened and broadened by their efforts.

Limitations of the study

This research is exploratory in nature. Our purpose was to help deepen philanthropy's understanding of the term ***emergence*** and how it applies to complex social-change initiatives. As noted above, we did not actively seek to study initiatives that represented other philanthropic frameworks (e.g., a purely funder-driven or grantee-driven initiative). Interestingly, though, some aspects of a few of the initiatives studied revealed elements of these frameworks. We were grateful to be able to study how these different elements affected emergence.

The study was conducted using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling to discover examples from the field and, as such, our findings in no way represent the larger field. While our reach for nominations was wide, the findings are, by their nature, limited to the initiatives that were nominated and chosen for review.

As exploratory research, this report is, in our opinion, a first step toward future study. The most obvious focus for future study might be a follow-up to the promising cases after several years and a more complete analysis of the full survey data from participants in the forty-five cases who completed the survey. While the full surveys were reviewed to select initiatives, and the responses to the surveys were used in developing those cases, we or another research team could use the data in that extensive survey to further this exploration. The research team looks forward to engaging with the philanthropic community to explore these ideas, and others, and how an emergent approach to addressing complex social-change initiatives can be developed in practice. We welcome contributions of more examples of emergent initiatives.

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Case Study on Emergence in Complex Social Change:

Reproductive Health in Africa and Asia

Marilyn J. Darling, *Fourth Quadrant Partners*

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Sidebars

Quick Facts: Packard Foundation's LDM Initiative

- LDM was one of a series of reproductive health-focused leadership development initiatives within the Packard Foundation's Population Program (see Packard Foundation Reproductive Health Leadership Development Initiatives for descriptions of the portfolio of initiatives)
- The goal of LDM was to effect systemic changes that improve reproductive health options and overall quality of life, especially for vulnerable populations
- Phase 1: "Leadership Development Mechanism;" 2002-2005 - focused on leadership development
- Phase 2: "Leadership Development Mobilization for Reproductive Health;" 2006-2011 - focused on building or supporting existing networks of Packard Fellows
- Packard Foundation Funding: Phase 1 - $7.55M; Phase 2 - $5.95M ($13.5M total)
- Country focus: Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines
- Intermediary: Institute of International Education (IIE)

Executive summary

Aiming to improve family planning and reproductive health across a wide geography in Africa and Asia, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation invested in a series of leadership development programs that ultimately targeted five countries: Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and the Philippines. A five-year evaluation found that the attitudes and behaviors of leadership Fellows had changed, but that on-the-ground change in reproductive health was, perhaps not surprisingly, slow to materialize.

This case describes the evolution of these separately managed programs into one program—Leadership Development for Mobilizing Reproductive Health (LDM)—that focused on networking the Fellows from all the previous programs. A final evaluation in 2011 showed a surprising and wide-ranging uptick of on-the-ground results over the last five years of the Packard Foundation's investment.

Our research, which this case is a part of, focused on the role of emergence in complex social-change initiatives.[1] A network strategy is a natural platform for emergence. We found several factors and deliberate strategies that combined to amplify this emergence and, thereby, amplify the results that the Packard Foundation and its intermediary, the Institute of International Education, were able to achieve. Key elements of the contributing strategy included strong line of sight around reproductive health and family planning; an emphasis on growing local agency; a close partnership between the funder and intermediary in each country; and support for peer learning across the network.

The LDM initiative produced a whole that was greater than the sum of its parts and, six years after its conclusion, is demonstrating an enviable level of sustainability. With the technology available today, an initiative such as this could do even more to amplify emergence during and after its lifetime by supporting learning and making the network's results visible in real time, across wide geographies.

Tackling the challenge of reproductive health in Africa and Asia

The David and Lucile Packard Foundation has been committed to improving family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) since its founding, in 1966. The foundation believes that FP/RH are fundamental to the health, well-being, and opportunities of women and young people in all countries. Huge disparities in reproductive-health information and services around the world have contributed to maternal deaths, poor health outcomes, and social and economic inequality for women, especially in the developing world.[2]

In 1999, the Packard Foundation's Population and Reproductive Health program began to invest in a series of leadership development programs aimed at addressing reproductive health in several countries; two of these programs were co-funded with the then-new Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (See sidebar: "Packard Foundation's Reproductive Health Leadership Development Initiatives.") The Packard Foundation's selection of leadership development as an approach reflected the experience of David Packard, who rose from modest beginnings to graduate from Stanford in the 1930s and co-found Hewlett-Packard.

Don Lauro developed, oversaw the implementation of, and ran the Packard Foundation's FP/RH leadership development strategy from 1999 to 2008. As he explained, David Packard "really embodied the idea that individuals can develop themselves and make a big difference."

1 Marilyn J. Darling, Heidi Sparkes Guber, and Jillaine S. Smith, *A Whole Greater than Its Parts: Exploring the Role of Emergence in Complex Social Change* (Fourth Quadrant Partners, 2018); see also Marilyn J. Darling et al., "Emergent Learning: A Framework for Whole-System Strategy, Learning, and Adaptation," Foundation Review 8, no. 1 (March 2016): 59–73, 10.9707/1944-5660.1284.

2 "Population and Reproductive Health: Why It's Important," David and Lucile Packard Foundation, https://www.packard.org/what-we-fund/population-reproductive-health/why-its-important/.

Each program had its own process for selecting participants. For example, the two Gates co-funded initiatives—the Population Leadership Program and the International Family Planning Leadership Program—focused on established regional and national leaders, used site visits to countries, and consulted with leaders in the field, previous program participants, and key international and local organizations about who should be recruited and interviewed.

LDM took a more country-centric approach. According to an evaluation of these programs from 2005, "the LDM program team created committees of highly respected and diverse FP/RH leaders in each country to help them make decisions about who should be recruited and selected for the program. The composition of these Selection Committees offered a strategic opportunity to ensure that a diversity of constituencies that are important for achieving FP/RH process is selected."[3]

Most of the initial programs emphasized providing a core curriculum delivered in the United States and then supporting leaders in their countries with convenings, technical assistance, and mini-grant programs for local projects. LDM was slightly different. It was designed in response to the Packard Foundation's felt need for a program that could be fine-tuned to the particular capacity-building and technical-knowledge needs of a range of emerging leaders in these different environments.

LDM was run by the Institute of International Education (IIE). Rather than have its Fellows focus on training in the US around a core curriculum, Packard matched the Fellows with training programs and other opportunities, many of which were in developing countries. LDM focused on identifying Fellows, assessing their needs, and matching them to short, targeted programs. IIE hired local coordinators to support the initiative in each of the five focus countries. These local IIE staff tracked Fellows' academic and professional goals and progress each year and made recommendations for what each Fellow needed that year. The staff organized gatherings, met with directors of Fellows' organizations, and introduced the Fellows to colleagues.[4]

Mini-grant investments addressed specific needs or took advantage of opportunities to advance reproductive health. In LDM, Fellows used mini-grants to host seminars and workshops, conduct policy research, or disseminate information using local communication channels.[5] Kathy Toner led the leadership program for the Packard Foundation, starting in 2006. She shared an example of how mini-grants were used: "Someone might say, 'I need [this mini-grant] because it allows me to do educational and convening activities that will strengthen the understanding of this network of midwives, and I see an opportunity to build their understanding of the full definition of reproductive health and engage them more actively as advocates for this broader definition of services.'"

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3 Claire Reinelt et al., *Leadership Matters: An Evaluation of Six Family Planning and Reproductive Health Leadership Programs* (Development Guild/DDI, 2005), 12, http://leadershiplearning.org/system/files/PackardGates_FinalReport_Web_0.pdf.

4 Reinelt, *Leadership Matters*, 25

5 Amparo Hofmann-Pinilla and Judith Kallick Russell, *Executive Summary: Evaluation of the Leadership Development for Mobilizing Reproductive Health Program* (New York: Research Center for Leadership in Action, 2011), 2, https://wagner.nyu.edu/files/leadership/rcla_iie.pdf.

Packard Foundation's Reproductive Health Leadership Development Programs

Between 1999 and 2011, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation's Population and Reproductive Health program funded several leadership development programs.[6] In 2006, one program, LDM, shifted its focus (and changed its name) to support Packard Fellows from all the previous programs, in five targeted countries.

Program	Description	Dates	Funding	Intermediary	Fellows
International Family Planning Leadership Program	Approximately twenty to thirty family planning leaders from twelve countries participated annually in an intensive three-week leadership program.[7] The program included a one-year in-country follow-up.	1999–2005 and beyond	Total: $13 million Packard Foundation: $6 million Gates Foundation: $7 million	Public Health Institute, Santa Cruz, CA	197
Population Leadership Program	Twelve mid-career nonprofit professionals and political leaders in population health from different countries participated annually in a year-long leadership curriculum at the University of Washington.[8] Follow-up included small-project funding and an annual alumni conference.[9]	1999—2007	Total: $8.67 million Packard Foundation: $3.85 million Gates Foundation: $4.82 million	University of Washington	33 (as of 2005)
Visionary Leadership Program	This initiative developed leaders from nongovernmental organizations in Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, and Sudan. The model was coordinated through in-country institutions. It combined a self-learning phase, a two-week leadership forum, mentoring, peer-exchange, and networking.[10]	2002–2006	Packard Foundation: $3 million	Three international and four in-country partners	200

6 For three years, the Packard Foundation funded an additional initiative, through a partnership with Population Communications International and the Annenberg School at the University of Southern California focused on leaders in media; information on this initiative is unavailable. Packard also funded a short-lived program conducted through the Ashoka Foundation.

7 Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, "Grants From Gates And Packard Foundation Expand International Family Planning Leadership Program," January 26, 2000, https://www.gatesfoundation.org/Media-Center/Press-Releases/2000/01/International-Family-Planning-Leadership-Program.

8 "Overview - Introduction," Population Leadership Program, University of Washington, http://population-leaders.washington.edu/overview/intro.shtml.

9 Reinelt, *Leadership Matters*, 5.

10 Visionary Leadership Program in Population and Development, *Making a Difference for Population and Development: Leaders in Action*, vol. 1, *Emerging Leaders: Profiles of Selected VLP Fellows* (VLP Consortium, September 2006), http://www.icomp.org.my/uploads/news/Volume%201%20of%20VLP%20Leadership%20Profiles%20on%2022%20Selected%20VLP%20Fellows.pdf.

Packard Foundation's Reproductive Health Leadership Development Programs *(continued)*

Program	Description	Dates	Funding	Intermediary	Fellows
Leadership Development Mechanism (LDM, Phase 1)	The goal of the original LDM was to build and sustain a critical core of well-trained emerging and established leaders who had the skills, vision, knowledge, and commitment to improve the delivery of FP/RH services. The program matched policy makers and promising leaders—from communities and local and national organizations—in five targeted countries with training courses in twenty-five developing countries. The initiative provided custom courses and study tours. Follow-up included mini-grant competitions, online discussion boards, and in-country meetings.	2002–2005	Packard Foundation: $7.55 million	Institute of International Education	480
Leadership Development for Mobilizing Reproductive Health (LDM, Phase 2)	With a name change, LDM shifted from providing Fellows with training to developing the network of existing Packard Fellows in five targeted countries: India, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and the Philippines. Its strategy was to consolidate the efforts of those who had already participated in all Packard Foundation leadership programs and to encourage the Fellows to work more collectively on strategic FP/RH issues within each country.[11] Ultimately, the goal was to effect "systemic changes that improve reproductive health options and overall quality of life, especially for vulnerable populations."[12]	2006–2011	Packard Foundation: $5.95 million	Institute of International Education	Total by end of program: 1,200

11 Hofmann-Pinilla, *Executive Summary*, 1.

12 Amparo Hofmann-Pinilla and Judith Kallick Russell, *Evaluation of the Leadership Development for Mobilizing Reproductive Health Program: Final Report* (New York: Research Center for Leadership in Action, 2011), 4.

Evolving attention to context

Over time, all the Packard Foundation leadership programs evolved to pay more attention to regional, country, and cultural contexts.[13] During this time, rather than setting up full offices in the targeted countries, Packard Foundation engaged consultants to serve as in-country advisors. This was due, in part, to an economic contraction, but in the opinion of Don Lauro, it was also "the best of both worlds." It provided Packard Foundation with a team of very knowledgeable people on the ground to help with selection, provide technical training, and support local grantees. And, according to Kathy Toner, the teams were able to be more flexible and adaptive than full country offices could have been.

When these foundation-intermediary relationships worked well, they became real in-country partnerships between the IIE local coordinator and the Packard Foundation country advisor. But the partnerships were relationship dependent. When they worked, "it was like magic," Toner said. When the relationship between the local coordinator and the country advisor did not work well, it had a negative impact on how well the whole program team understood what was happening in a country (each of which had unique challenges) and responded to that local context. "They didn't need to be best friends, but there needed to be clarity of roles, alignment of vision, respect, and trust." (See sidebar: "Challenging Environments for Moving the Needle on FP/RH.")

Challenging environments for moving the needle on FP/RH

The Packard Foundation initially invested in building leadership in more countries, but reduced that number to five -- Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Pakistan and the Philippines, in response to growing demands on its grantmaking resources during times of constricting grants budget and shifts in the donor environment. The economic, social and political environments are complex and evolving in different ways in each country, and presented different challenges related to FP/RH:

- At the start of LDM, Ethiopia was the sixth least developed country in the world, suffering from low life expectancy, poor nutrition and disease. Over the course of the initiative, the political climate toward reproductive health and family planning activities became more and more restrictive.
- In the two regions of India targeted by Packard Foundation -- Bihar and Jharkhand -- women were treated as unequal, and the population suffered from poverty and malnutrition, low literacy, and inadequate educational and health systems. The lack of governance stability and transparency added to the challenge.
- Nigeria was divided between the predominantly Muslim north and Christian south, with wide disparities in health statistics between the two. Experts have cited that high fertility rates and uncontrolled population growth are some of the most important factors for the endemic poverty that exists in the country. They also point to too many pregnancies and too little spacing as the cause for the very high rates of maternal death.
- In Pakistan, internal destabilization from extremist forces has weakened the already fragile economy and health systems of Pakistan. In this climate, reproductive health has become the responsibility of local provinces. The society is patriarchal, especially in rural and lower economic strata, where women are considered to be inferior and men's property. Girls and women are often subjected to physical and psychological violence, including honor killings, demand for dowry and acid throwing.
- While predominantly Catholic Philippines had experienced economic growth and political stability in the 1990s, the church has asserted more influence in recent years, phasing out funding for contraceptives and placing more responsibility for reproductive health on local governments with limited budgets. This change has led to a reversal of what had been positive population health trends.[14]

13 Reinelt, *Leadership Matters*, 20.
14 Hofmann-Pinella, *Evaluation*, 5-10.

Lauro had also been working to develop more local ownership by, and networking among, the Fellows. In particular, Lauro brought the Future Search process to Northern Nigeria in 2000, at a time when not many organizations were working in or funding the region because it was seen as a difficult place to work. Working on family planning, reproductive health, and empowerment for girls was even more challenging.

Future Search is a convening approach that deliberately brings together a diverse group of people for three to four days to talk about the past, present, and future in order to find common ground before turning to planning.[14] This approach was a radical departure from what people in most of the five targeted countries expected of convenings.

Susan Dupre was a consultant who facilitated a number of Packard Foundation-funded meetings using methods like Future Search. In a survey she completed for our research, Dupre wrote, "Previously, conferences in these countries consisted of people getting up and reading academic papers out loud." Dupre described the Future Search meetings as "very liberating to those in attendance." She observed that these democratizing methods "contributed to the proliferation of ideas, to relationship building, to both planning and organic action." Dupre went on: "I think this helped create the enabling environment for FP/RH to take root in Nigeria, Ethiopia, and the Philippines." Lauro described how it created some unlikely partnerships—for example, between a Nigerian nun and young gay activists.

Future Search and Open Space, another large-group systems-change convening process, continued to be a part of the Packard Foundation's approach to leadership development in reproductive health. They spread organically from country to country as local Fellows saw how this meeting methodology contributed to building local ownership in their regions. Eventually, Future Search and Open Space convenings were conducted primarily under the auspices of the LDM program.

15 "What is Future Search?," Future Search Network, http://www.futuresearch.net/method/whatis/.

15 Reinelt, *Leadership Matters*, 56–58.

Packard Foundation's desire to increase impact

In 2005, an evaluation of six FP/RH leadership programs funded by the Packard Foundation and/or the Gates Foundation was conducted. The evaluation found that the six programs had been "highly successful at strengthening the commitment, confidence, and skills of FP/RH leaders" and that the leadership, resources and programs had a "significant potential to transform the lives of vulnerable populations."[15]

But the evaluation also observed that change was slow to come about, especially in Africa and Asia. Don Lauro observed that it was difficult to demonstrate the immediate value of leadership development—that it required a view toward longer-term benefits. Also, the programs co-funded with Gates were closing down, as the priorities of the by-then-established Gates Foundation evolved.

The Fellow selection process had been challenging. Given the per-capita cost of the US-based programs, Lauro was frustrated that some of the selected Fellows "were not all that interested in reproductive health." Speaking about the Institute of International Education's management of LDM, he observed that the program was initially staffed without a great familiarity with the countries in which the Packard Foundation was working. Not entirely satisfied with the program in its early years, Lauro was pleased to see movement toward engaging in-country advisors. He also wanted to avoid being too prescriptive with the intermediary. "These funds were made available to the grantees, and they should be the real decision makers on how they spent their money and not be dictated by us."

Kathy Toner observed that "the country advisors always sought to be a good resource to the program, helping to identify good candidates and, very importantly, providing guidance on how to tie the leadership program selection to the country strategy. It didn't always work, though, because the IIE country leads were not sufficiently empowered; decision-making was overly concentrated in San Francisco.

So that meant value add as local partners and advisors was limited, just because the decision-making power at the country level was less."

The Packard Foundation had begun to realize that the program was more centralized than it had intended, and that the focus on individual leadership development alone was not sufficient to achieve its goal of influencing reproductive health in the targeted countries in Africa and Asia. All the programs had evolved and built on what they were learning through implementation. But it had become clear that the programs needed to embrace collaboration among themselves to get to the quality of results they aspired to.

The 2005 evaluation recommended that the next phase of leadership development needed "to focus on generating and sustaining more leadership with less intensive individual investment; providing opportunities for leaders to share and learn more from each other within their countries and across national boundaries; strengthening advocacy efforts for progressive reproductive health policies and their implementation; and mobilizing more resources for collective action."[16]

2006: LDM changes its name and approach

In 2006, there was a change of leadership for the initiative at both the Packard Foundation and the Institute of International Education (IIE). Cheryl Francisconi, who had left the Packard Foundation to pursue a master's degree, completed her program and joined IIE, where she took responsibility for the LDM program. On the foundation side, as part of renewing the overall Population and Reproductive Health program by shifting portfolio management, Kathy Toner took over LDM from Don Lauro. As Francisconi described it, the leaders at Packard Foundation, including Lauro and his colleagues, were asking, "We're putting these people through all these trainings, but then what? Are we making a difference and creating an environment on the ground that will actually change the system?"

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By 2006, among the four programs, the Packard Foundation had trained somewhere between 750 and 850 Fellows in its five targeted countries. To address Packard Foundation's evolving thinking, given the experience and lessons learned, the foundation and IIE accelerated their shift in focus from leadership development of individuals to building a network among these leaders. At the same time, they shifted a large portion of program-management responsibilities to the country level. Developing leaders across geographies, in different spheres, and at multiple levels within a country was particularly important in countries where the political environment made it critical to take action at the local level. Toner described how, by opening up the network to all Packard Fellows, they "ended up networking more diverse sectors that tended to operate in silos—doctors, government officials, academics and NGO activists." She went on: "The point was to strengthen the overall ecosystem for family planning and reproductive health."

While still called LDM, IIE changed the name of the initiative from Leadership Development Mechanism to Leadership Development for Mobilizing Reproductive Health Program. As Francisconi described it, "The LDM program ultimately helped network and support all of the leaders at various levels—senior, mid-level, and emerging—while continuing to support their ongoing leadership development on the ground." (See "Appendix B: LDM Theory of Systems Change: 2006–2011.")

16 Reinelt, *Leadership Matters*, 58.

Reproductive health networks then and now, six years after the close of LDM

Between 2006 and 2011, the network grew to approximately 1,200 leaders, through additional reproductive-health leadership training provided by both IIE and the Fellows. The Packard Foundation and IIE made a conscious decision to continue growing the network so that those active in FP/RH could continue to be connected and strengthened by their involvement.

LDM did not just create a single network. The combined efforts of IIE and Packard Foundation in-country advisors and the Fellows themselves created several networks, and connected local networks that already existed and were doing adjacent work, to create a web of connections. All participants were working, in some way, to improve reproductive health, and all were bringing what they were learning back to their colleagues. As Toner described it, "We wanted to avoid funder-driven network building that was not aligned to the felt needs and relationships already in place. Why create artificial competition? It was an ecosystem approach."

Some Fellows in geographically dispersed countries created local support networks. Other networks focused on specific issues across geographies. Using these networks, Fellows produced a range of on-the-ground improvements in reproductive health that would not have been feasible with a more centrally managed initiative. (See "A broad range of results in leadership and reproductive health," p. 15.)

Six years after the close of LDM, these networks continue, formally or informally, and to different degrees, in each country. In a survey for our research team, Cheryl Francisconi wrote, "Even though it's been several years since the program ended, I still see evidence of engagement among stakeholders, many of whom I'm still in touch with. I also track the field and see that many of them are leading initiatives now at the highest levels and that RH outcomes are improving in many countries." In the Philippines, Fellow Luz Francess "Bicbic" Chua explained, the Packard Fellows have not only sustained their connections but also continued adding new people to the network. And they have used this network to focus on other social issues, including other women's issues, the environment, and budget reform.

Yemeserach "Yemi" Belayneh is Packard Foundation's country advisor in Ethiopia. She described how active networks of Fellows are in Ethiopia, even today: "Networks of young people are doing research on sexual and reproductive health. They are providing services. Youth advocates are promoting the agenda. The program has helped build capacity of young leaders to advocate on these issues."

Using these networks, Fellows produced a range of on-the-ground improvements in reproductive health that would not have been feasible with a more centrally managed initiative.

Namrata Jha is an LDM Fellow, a former LDM program manager, and the executive director of Duke University in India. She described how Fellows in India are connected informally and also through formal networks related to their organization's work. There are subgroups organized on the basis of geography, the nature of the work, and personal relationships. "There is a common thread that gives them a 'we identity' despite working in different organizations and areas of work," Jha said.

Still-active networks—those established by LDM or nascent or existing ones that grew, developed, or were strengthened with support from LDM—include

- The Women Leaders Network and the Lawyers Forum in India
- The Islamic Scholars Network in Nigeria
- The Pakistan Reproductive Health Network
- The Pakistan Alliance for Post-abortion Care
- Catholics for Reproductive Health and the AIDS Society in the Philippines

New reproductive-health networks have also been created in these countries, with support from organizations like Oxfam and the United Nations Population Fund. LDM Fellows became part of these numerous larger networks.

Ethiopia Tilahun is also an LDM Fellow, as well as a former Program Manager and now the country director for IIE in Ethiopia. She observed that "even if there are no formal networking activities, some Fellows still work together and share their expertise and experience." Fellows are maintaining an online group for ten reproductive-health organizations, through which they share news and events. Tilahun said that in a recent survey conducted by IIE, the Packard Foundation, and the Centre for African Family Studies, almost all the Fellows surveyed wanted the network to be revitalized.

The LDM networks were seen by Fellows as more than just professional. The networks also connected people on a personal level. Chua described the network relationships that developed in the Philippines as being "like a second family." In 2011, a participatory evaluation of the LDM initiative covering the period from 2006 to 2011 was conducted. In the evaluation, a Nigerian Fellow described these networks as similar to being a part of a fraternity; it was "a fellowship of friends and comrades."

Working on FP/RH issues is isolating and difficult. The personal connections engendered by the networks provided solidarity and emboldened participants, and these connections likely contributed to the sustainability of the networks, beyond the life of the LDM initiative. Members of these networks described helping one another to find jobs and make connections through other networks in which members were active. Susan Dupre, who helped develop local skills in collaborative-meeting methodologies, described how, "over time, some of these people left Packard Foundation or their local NGO organizations and went to other organizations (i.e., Gates Foundation, The Nigeria Federal Ministry of Health, the Institute of International Education, Pathfinder International, etc.). So the initiative grew in very organic ways that created new partnerships and collaborations across many borders, literal and figurative."

Local Packard Foundation country advisors also contributed to the sustainability of the LDM networks. "Sustainability and institutionalization has been given priority from the beginning," Ethiopia's Belayneh observed. Yasmeen Sabeeh Qazi, country advisor for Pakistan, agreed, noting that the LDM network is still alive and well in Pakistan, six years after the initiative ended:

> We spent quite a bit of time in the last phase of LDM to ensure sustainability, which is always easier said than done. However, the LDM community is connected in Pakistan through a dedicated Facebook page and, recently, a WhatsApp group has been created, although discussions are usually chit-chat and not strictly around reproductive health. But, yes, the group is cohesive, and we inform each other of emerging family planning and reproductive health opportunities and updates.

The LDM team also worked to ensure that LDM alumni were connected to other FP/RH networks. Qazi said that not everyone stayed active, "but a large number who are highly motivated did utilize this opportunity."

One of the goals of the LDM initiative was to break "the mindset of dependency" on funders. As described in the 2011 evaluation, LDM was not designed to provide significant funding to initiatives, but "to create transformative, self-sustaining networks at the program's completion."[19]

Nonetheless, some networks relied heavily on LDM for network support. As a result, some Fellows felt that LDM could have done more to build sustainability into the initiative earlier in the implementation process. "Many Fellows felt caught 'off guard' and left unprepared" for the close of the program and were looking for structures to support the continuation of networks.[20]

Contributors to emergence

LDM's shift from individual leadership development to a network strategy naturally set the stage for emergence. But several factors contributed to and amplified the emergent results LDM was able to achieve in reproductive health in five very different countries:

- A large pool of well-regarded Packard Fellows in five countries, all focused on FP/RH, had been developed by 2006.
- The leadership of the Packard Foundation's Population and Reproductive Health program was committed to broader in-country ownership and was open to input from people familiar with the local environment.
- A transition in LDM leadership brought new perspectives and experiences to program implementation.
- The Packard Foundation trusted Cheryl Francisconi's leadership of the Institute of International Education's LDM program.
- LDM's relatively small budget came with a low level of perceived risk, allowing Kathy Toner and Cheryl Francisconi to experiment more freely.
- Network strategies had recently become popular in philanthropic circles.
- A minimal, flexible infrastructure allowed the Packard Foundation country advisors to partner with their IIE counterparts and experiment and adapt to local needs.

19 Hofmann-Pinilla, *Evaluation*, 99.
20 Hofmann-Pinilla, *Evaluation*, 98.

Francisconi and Toner's strategic choices helped create the conditions that amplified emergence. The conditions, which we describe below, included (1) strong line of sight around reproductive health and family planning; (2) an emphasis on growing local agency; (3) a close partnership between the funder and the intermediary in each country; and (4) support for peer learning across the network.

Strong line of sight around reproductive health and family planning

While many foundations support leadership development initiatives or initiatives on specific social issues, marrying the two in a single initiative offered distinct advantages. LDM's dual focus—supporting both the development of local leaders and their efforts to improve reproductive health in their home countries—was challenging, but it also created the potential to produce emergent outcomes on the ground in a way that might not have been possible if the two had been separated.

Had the initiative team lost sight of either goal, it could have slipped into a more technical focus: leadership development for its own sake or more technical solutions for improving reproductive health (e.g., disseminating training programs or tools for improving procedures at health clinics). Don Lauro described how, in fact, some intermediaries in the Packard Foundation's FP/RH leadership programs lost track of one goal or the other. Some of the US-based programs lost sight of their reproductive-health focus, and some in-country LDM training programs overemphasized reproductive health and lost sight of the leadership component.

The 2006 shift in focus for LDM created space for agency to grow among all Packard Fellows, across the different leadership programs.

Country advisors and coordinators made each program decision on the basis of its connection to the larger goal and what they were learning about how to advance it. Toner observed that the shift to making decisions across the network of in-country partnerships—always focused on reproductive health—required a huge commitment from local advisors. But this shift also helped the initiative avoid the one-off technical orientation of many traditional leadership development programs.

Line of sight to a clear on-the-ground goal also led to more flexible, fit-for-purpose investments. For example, investments focused on building leadership for health-policy change in Northern Nigeria, establishing maternal health clinics in India, and providing training sessions on fatherhood in Pakistan were all made possible by local Packard Foundation and IIE staff and Fellows understanding their own needs and leveraging points in their quest to improve reproductive health.

An emphasis on growing local agency

Don Lauro had laid the groundwork for building agency among Fellows with his work in participative techniques like Future Search. Local facilitators—about sixty in all—had been trained in these meeting methods. Cheryl Francisconi wrote, "We built skills in facilitating emergent practices, breaking down traditional meeting methodologies and introducing other methods of engagement such as Future Search, Open Space Technology, and other custom designed meeting methodologies that built strong cultures of participation and leadership."

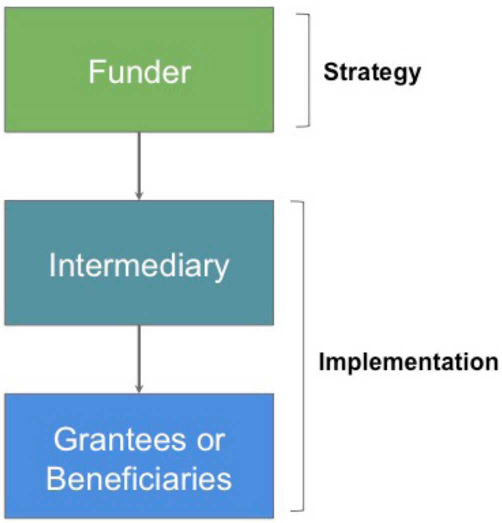
The 2006 shift in focus for LDM created space for agency to grow among all Packard Fellows, across the different leadership programs, and built a platform on which Fellows could experiment with innovative solutions that were culturally appropriate for their places and learn from each other. The resulting agency was evident to outsiders. Eugene Eric Kim, who worked with the LDM networks to find ways to enhance collaboration, described a meeting he observed in Northern Nigeria: "I was really blown away by the amount of mutual respect and listening and acknowledgment and building on each other's ideas versus just shutting other people down. It was not only a meeting where it was structured in a way for it to be participatory but it was a meeting in which everyone who was participating was very skilled and practiced at this form of engagement."

The restructured program also increased agency among local IIE and Packard Foundation staff. "We were able to unleash the power of the country advisors," Kathy Toner observed. These advisors "knew the foundation strategies, had excellent networks and could serve as advisors to IIE. IIE retained full power and authority over the selection of leaders but with the input and support from the country advisors." The existence of trusted and experienced advisors and a trusting relationship between the funder and the intermediary made this agency-building dynamic possible.

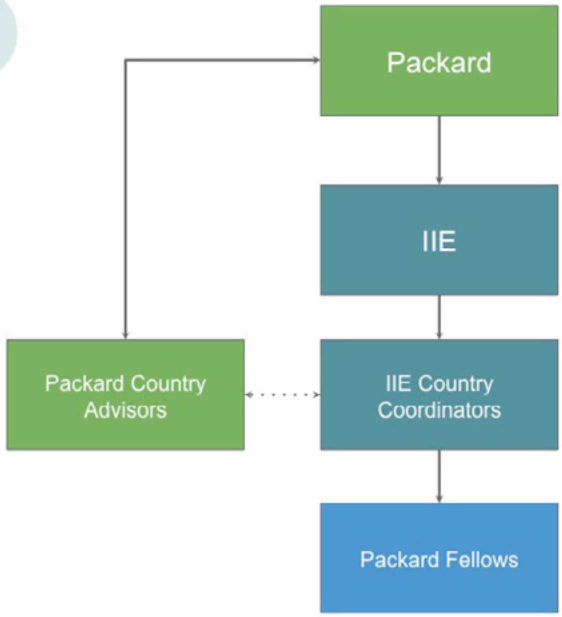
The shift to in-country ownership allowed each initiative to change shape in response to what was happening in the country and the opportunities that presented themselves. Each IIE country coordinator had a discretionary budget for convenings, study tours, and other ways of bringing people together to generate new ideas and relationships around an aspect of reproductive health. When people who cared about this work were able to connect with one other and identify opportunities on the ground, and when the Packard Foundation was able to bring resources to support those opportunities, leadership became, as Kathy Toner observed, "a collective endeavor," and it happened "at all levels of a system."

Close partnership between the funder and intermediary in each country

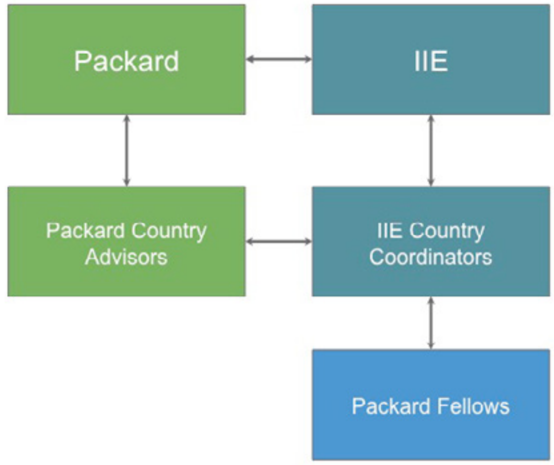
In a funder-driven strategy, the funder develops a strategy and oversees its implementation.



In the case of the LDM initiative, that translated into a relatively weak relationship between Packard Foundation country advisors and IIE country coordinators.



To achieve real change in different communities and regions, in five very different countries with distinct and evolving political and social environments, required a large amount of flexibility across regions. Magdalena Lopez, who managed LDM for IIE in the Philippines, observed that the Fellows had been receiving "cookie-cutter" training. Building a stronger relationship between the Packard Foundation's country advisors, who had deep knowledge about each place, and IIE's country coordinators would help create the flexibility to adapt to very different and dynamic environments. Implementation in the last half of the initiative became a partnership between IIE and the foundation, at both the global and in-country levels.



Cheryl Francisconi and Kathy Toner developed a capacity- and leadership-strengthening strategy. The strategy focused on building a network of leaders, in the targeted countries, who were prepared to deploy and advocate for reproductive health in culturally appropriate ways and at moments when unpredictable opportunities arose. By supporting this network, the Packard Foundation would make greater progress in sustainably improving the health, well-being, and opportunities of women and young people in all five countries than if the in-country leaders implemented a strategy designed by the foundation and IIE in California.

Their strategy was not unique. But in the context of promoting emergence, it is important to understand it as a "meta" strategy: *a strategy to foster the leadership capacity needed to enable agents to produce their own fit-for-purpose strategies.* It created a platform on which local leaders could experiment together to develop and refine their local strategies for creating change in their places over the long run. The strategy created a stage on which emergence could happen.

"Where it worked well, there were so many people pulling a different piece of it that I don't think it felt terribly burdensome," Toner observed. "If it had just been me and there hadn't been someone on the ground, it could have been much easier for that LDM coordinator to go off strategy."

In the context of promoting emergence, it is important to understand it as a "meta" strategy: *a strategy to foster the leadership capacity needed to enable agents to produce their own fit-for-purpose strategies.*

Making this partnership work required an intensive focus on process and relationship management, rather than on tactical management. As Kathy Toner described it, it was her job to make sure "the different nodes in the network understand what the overall purpose is and that there's good flow of information and trust between those people."

Toner described LDM as a "demand-driven model" that created a strategic partnership and a built-in feedback loop between the Fellows and the IIE team. This produced a flexible architecture that enabled Fellows to identify reproductive-health solutions that were fit for their environment. In some cases, Fellows received a small amount of funding from the Packard Foundation to implement these solutions. Some of these emergent efforts grew and found new sources of funding and were continuing as of 2017, six years after the conclusion of the initiative.

Bicbic Chua, a Fellow in the Philippines and the founder of Catholics for Reproductive Health, observed that many funder relationships are hierarchical and grantees feel more as if "they are being subcontracted to implement the deliverables." Chua described her relationship with LDM differently: "We're really walking the talk. When we talked about partnership for development, we did it."

In comparing LDM with other initiatives, Eugene Eric Kim said, "LDM wasn't about imposing a view but, in fact, honoring the leadership mind-set and culture from the locations they were working in. You see it in the basic dignity and respect of saying, 'You were chosen here because what you're already doing matters. We want to come and give you an opportunity to develop. We're creating the space for that, but we're not coming here to tell you what to do.'"

Support for peer learning across the network

Emergence relies on the work of individual "agents," as they are described in complex adaptive systems theory. The more frequently agents communicate with one other about what they are discovering, the more quickly they are able to create a larger response that is more complex and sophisticated than what they can do on their own. In other words, emergence requires a high volume of peer learning and "depends on the *interactions* much more than the actions."[21]

LDM had an explicit peer-learning agenda as part of its network strategy. Within networks, Packard Fellows were encouraged to connect, share experiences, and keep up to date on their changing environments. "While the trainings which people were able to attend were very important," Cheryl Francisconi wrote, "I think the more important work were the various summits, meetings, and visioning activities (Future Search and Open Space for example), which were instrumental in bringing so many community stakeholders together and exposing them to different ways of working together." [22]

21 John Holland, *Hidden Order: How Adaptation Builds Complexity* (Perseus Books, 1995), 3.
22 Hofmann-Pinilla, *Executive Summary*, 2.

"We continually brought larger and larger numbers of people together to focus on what had happened, what was learned, and what was next. This iterative process made visible both challenges and successes. Each time, the landscape had changed and needed responding to in different ways," Susan Dupre observed.

Dupre facilitated many of these convenings, which included local facilitation partners she had trained. She continued: "Goals, strategies, and approaches shifted. New people were brought in with new perspectives; it shifted again. Everyone experimented."

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Packard Fellows were encouraged to share what they were learning across regions and countries. This sharing happened in annual meetings hosted by participating countries, and in study tours, through which Fellows could see how leaders in other countries were promoting reproductive health. Cheryl Francisconi observed that "individuals had opportunities for exposure in other countries to expand their world view and learn techniques for managing and leading programs that would be effective in their own contexts."

For example, Catholics for Reproductive Health, in the Philippines, drew on lessons from other Catholic organizations. A study tour through Mexico, introduced the organization to Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (Catholics for Choice), a group that similarly differed with the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy on reproductive-health issues. But members of Catholics for Reproductive Health also learned from the experiences of the Islamic Scholars Network in Northern Nigeria. They reflected on the groups' commonalities: What it takes to enlist a country's religious leaders. And they reflected on the differences: One group worked in a Muslim context, which is not monolithic, while the other group worked in a Catholic country where the Vatican plays an important role.

Still, LDM could have done more to promote emergence through these peer interactions.

The frequency of in-network learning was much greater than the opportunities to learn across geographies, which happened primarily in annual meetings. A conclusion of the 2011 evaluation was that putting more emphasis on cross-country reflection would have benefitted the initiative.[23]

At the close of the initiative, Cheryl Francisconi conducted a participatory evaluation. She described being proud of it but, she commented, "I wish we had done it earlier. The fact that so many people could be engaged, especially over an extended time in a variety of different action reflection groups, and to bring in their evaluation data took a lot of effort. But I feel like it changed the way people think about learning and about evaluation, and I think it may have been one of the most important things we did."

The evaluation gave Fellows an opportunity to come together and make their results visible to one another, and to reflect on what it took to accomplish these results. The evaluation helped the system to see itself:

23 Hofmann-Pinilla, *Evaluation*, 119.

> The participatory methodology, especially the AR [action reflection] groups, provided a space where participants discovered important insights that, at times, led to concrete action: Several evaluators stated that the methodology allowed participants to generate important 'ah-ha' discoveries on key issues related to their work and involvement with LDM. As a result, the participants began to discuss how to overcome challenges and proposed concrete solutions to obstacles that they diagnosed through their reflections.[24]

While Fellows praised LDM for creating space for them to share their experiences and knowledge, they criticized LDM for not doing enough during the initiative to document and share the work and the results that accumulated.[25] This lack of information impeded the ability of the Packard Foundation, IIE, and the Fellows themselves to demonstrate their impact; by being better able to demonstrate impact, they might have attracted more participants and additional funders.

Technology played a role in supporting networks in each country. Where technology was strong, it was an enabler; where it was weak, as in Northern Nigeria, it was an impediment. Today, apps like Facebook and WhatsApp play an important role in supporting geographically dispersed networks and niche interests. Had technologies like these been available in 2006, they could have played an even greater role in providing a platform for peer learning across countries and capturing results in real time. This might have supported even greater emergence and more sustainable leadership networks.

I did this great work just because of LDM.

A broad range of results in leadership and reproductive health

Through its efforts to develop and connect local leaders who were invested in reproductive health, LDM aimed to affect individual beliefs and behaviors. It aimed to mobilize resources to create change at the organization and systems level and, ultimately, in the lives of women and children in five countries. This dual focus created two kinds of result: changes in attitudes and behaviors, and improved reproductive health for women and youth on the ground.

Networks affected leadership attitudes and behaviors

Because the initiative focused on both leadership and reproductive health, it affected attitudes and behaviors on both dimensions. Networks of Fellows helped individuals to achieve things they would not have achieved without the networks. One Fellow in Pakistan had been doing research on domestic violence. In the LDM evaluation, she described the situation in Pakistan after the 2007 assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto. She realized that her research study on domestic violence would be a daunting task because "the entire country was burning, and doing such a research project in this context looked like nothing but igniting more fumes." The Fellow described how many people had told her to hold off, but she said, "I thought that if I stopped at this time, I will never be able to do it again. I contacted Fellows in a big organization that had reach to many communities in Sindh. In fact the CEO of the organization was also a LDM Fellow. To my surprise, I had no difficulty in explaining the cause to the Fellows in that organization. They just agreed to the proposal. I did this great work just because of LDM."[26]

One Fellow in Northern Nigeria who previously believed that women should never be educated, described a change in his own attitude: "After going to Sudan on the LDM program and seeing what women empowerment does, I have made a promise to myself that my daughters must reach the highest level of education that they are capable of achieving." A Nigerian Islamic preacher with many followers described being transformed completely from being resistant to family planning to altering the entire belief system of his community.[27]

Attitudes about leadership also changed. As reported in the 2011 evaluation, "Fellows got new insights into themselves and the world around them. It was an opportunity to learn,

24 Hofmann-Pinilla, *Executive Summary*, 22.
25 *Executive Summary*, 27.
26 *Executive Summary*, 47.
27 *Executive Summary*, 34.

grow and appreciate the value of working collaboratively."[28] They learned that they could take greater risks, because of support coming from other Fellows, and be more creative in their approach to solving social and health issues, which ultimately led to many Fellows moving up to senior positions in their government and nonprofit organizations. A Fellow from Ethiopia noted that the LDM program gave Fellows the skills for taking action, even in unfriendly circumstances. "[It encouraged me] to develop my ability to solve challenges in difficult situations instead of backsliding and shifting responsibility to others."[29]

Results related to improving reproductive health

When researchers describe how complex adaptive systems learn, they talk about creating a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Applying this to a philanthropic initiative, researchers would predict that results coming from the collective efforts of a diverse group of actors on the ground, rather than from a single expert or a small group of funders working behind closed doors, would create solutions that are (1) more fit for their environment and (2) able to evolve to address the needs of constantly changing environments.[30]

Did the results that LDM achieved follow this prediction? As expressed in its Vision Statement, LDM ultimately sought to effect "systemic changes that improve reproductive health

options and overall quality of life, especially for vulnerable populations"[31] in five very different countries, each with distinct social, political, and economic dynamics. In many cases, the political environment forced decision-making to happen at local levels, which made it even more difficult to have a meaningful impact across all five countries.

As described by Cheryl Francisconi, "the leadership networks were effective in passing legislation in their countries related to reproductive health, were able to advocate for increased budget spending in their countries, and led their organizations to do more strategic work." The full report on the 2011 evaluation includes more than forty pages of specific results achieved in five countries. While the goal was the same across all countries, the pathways Fellows took to achieving this goal varied in significant ways:

- **Policy:** Fellows in Northern Nigeria held an Open Space conference that was the biggest gathering of reproductive-health leaders ever held in the country. People from six regions came together, representing the community, policy makers, academia, civil society, government officials, and the religious establishment. The gathering resulted in a joint-advocacy push, through a policy-dialogue process. This led to an increased health budget in six Northern Nigerian states; success in making one state include maternal health as a budget line item; and a coalition to track the budget and ensure that the allocated money was used, judiciously, for its intended purpose.[32]
- **Building cross-sector collaborations:** In the Philippines, Fellows worked to build cross-sector collaborations among local leaders in governmental and nongovernmental organizations. They invited mayors to join them on a study tour in Thailand, which was an opportunity for the mayors to become more involved and sensitive to FP/RH issues. One result was that the mayors developed a good-natured competition among themselves regarding initiatives on reproductive health in their municipalities.[33]
- **Community empowerment:** Ethiopian Fellows focused on female genital mutilation (FGM). Fellows worked to build local capacity and community empowerment; they encouraged ex-circumcisers to become change agents by offering trainings for local service providers and

28 *Executive Summary*, 34.
29 *Executive Summary*, 38.
30 Holland, *Hidden Order*, 9.

31 Hofmann-Pinilla, *Evaluation*, 4.
32 Hofmann-Pinilla, *Evaluation*, 61.
33 *Evaluation*, 61.

female community members. According to the 2011 LDM evaluation, in Seka Chekorsa, a town in Southern Ethiopia, FGM incidents decreased from 99 percent to 0 percent.[34]

- **Media:** Fellows in Nigeria provided leadership development to individuals in key positions in the media to report on maternal mortality and other reproductive-health issues. Their goal was to reach isolated women who received outside information only through the radio. One Fellow started a column about maternal health and childbearing in the Sunday newspaper. Other Fellows collaborated with the Motion Picture Practitioners Association of Nigeria to develop videos that promoted positive attitudes toward gender and maternal health.[35]
- **Health clinics:** In India, Fellows established maternal-child health clinics in local communities, introduced reproductive-health services in other clinics, and increased awareness about HIV and AIDS among workers.[36]
- **Training:** In Pakistan, Fellows conducted train-the-trainer sessions on fatherhood and male involvement in child care. They helped develop a reproductive-health curriculum that addressed such difficult issues as the sexual abuse of street children.[37]

Local funding and control gave country staff the flexibility to capitalize on local needs, resources, and opportunities, making it possible for staff to pursue very different pathways in different environments. If IIE had tried to design an initiative that thoughtfully addressed all of these areas of focus in all the different regions of five very different countries, the effort would have been substantial. Solutions designed through this top-down approach would likely have been less culturally sensitive and fit for purpose. Staff would have been less able to take advantage of time-sensitive opportunities. Even if IIE could have designed solutions using a top-down approach, the likelihood of the solutions sustaining themselves beyond the life of the initiative would have been significantly lower.

If IIE had tried to design an initiative that thoughtfully addressed all of these areas of focus in all the different regions of five very different countries, the effort would have been substantial.

Examples of agency in Nigeria and the Philippines

The experience of Fellows working in Nigeria and the Philippines illustrates the importance of developing shared agency for strategy development among funding organizations, intermediaries, and the beneficiaries on the ground. Two networks that produced some of the most substantial results in these countries were driven by country staff and Fellows responding to their environment. These networks focused their strategy on the dominant religion. The population of Northern Nigeria is predominantly Muslim. In the Philippines, it is predominantly Catholic. In these countries, Fellows worked with an existing network or created a new one to influence local beliefs and advocate for new policies that supported reproductive health. In Nigeria, the network was the existing Islamic Scholars Network. In the Philippines, Fellows created Catholics for Reproductive Health. Local leaders recognized the need to build from within the abiding faith of their communities to bring the citizens and faith leaders to a new understanding of reproductive health.

In Northern Nigeria, the Islamic Scholars Network brought together religious leaders who represented different sects and different interpretations of reproductive-health issues. According to the members interviewed, the network created a safe space in which participants could discuss difficult issues—a space that did not distinguish among Islamic sects.[38] Together, the members produced a statement of consensus endorsing child spacing, which allows mothers to increase the time between the births of their children, as acceptable in Islam. Members also advocated for "open permission," encouraging husbands to grant permission for their wives to go to a hospital for medical issues, even if the husband is not available to grant permission in the moment.[39]

In the words of one Fellow, "We are all Muslims and our women are dying; this is what unites us. We do not bother much about sectarian differences when it comes to our dying

34 *Evaluation*, 48. No specific dates were reported for this result.
35 *Evaluation*, 35–36.
36 *Evaluation*, 43.
37 *Evaluation*, 31.
38 *Evaluation, 62.*
39 *Evaluation, 65.*

women."[40] Mairo Mandara, another Fellow and the Packard Foundation's country representative, observed that the most surprising result of LDM was that "reproductive health is no longer a taboo in Northern Nigeria."

In the Philippines, Catholics for Reproductive Health (C4RH) was launched through a Packard Foundation mini-grant. This very small investment, of less than $10,000, turned out to have a disproportionately large impact. C4RH has mobilized practicing Catholics who are reproductive-health advocates to speak out. It has helped members of the Catholic faith to openly discuss and share reproductive-health and sexuality concerns in a venue that is separate from church leadership.[41]

In 2008, C4RH launched the Speak Out! movement, which organized advocates across the country—including people not originally a part of the Packard Fellows programs—to advocate for the passage of a reproductive-health bill. The Catholic Church, a very powerful presence in the Philippines, strongly opposed the bill's passage. As Fellow and C4RH executive director Bicbic Chua explained, "Discerning Catholics who practice and support family planning welcomed us and were glad that we were courageous enough to openly declare our pro-reproductive-health position, as a matter of conscience."

The most surprising result of LDM was that "reproductive health is no longer a taboo in Northern Nigeria."

C4RH and its Speak Out! movement were part of a larger, collaborative effort by reproductive-health advocates. These advocates bonded together under the banner of the Reproductive Health Advocacy Network to advocate for a reproductive-health bill. Magdalena Lopez, from IIE, noted that it took more than a full decade of countrywide efforts to achieve this policy win. She observed that the Packard Foundation's investment in people made this possible, in contrast with other donors that "are very impatient and want immediate results." After years of struggle, and the advocates' building on one another's accomplishments, a reproductive-health bill was passed in 2012.

Lopez said that over time, C4RH used active local networks of Fellows to expand its reach geographically. As of 2010, there were five hundred members from around the country. The group has now registered as a nonprofit organization, and it has secured funding from local and international sources.

40 *Evaluation, 62.*
41 *Evaluation, 65-66.*

Conclusion: Designing for emergence

The LDM initiative is an instructive example of what happens when an initiative shifts from being centralized to being emergent—what makes it possible, and how it changes the potential for producing results beyond the scope of the funder's original thinking and capacity.

As a research team, we looked to test in these cases a key hypothesis: (1) building strong line of sight (so that everyone agrees on, and will recognize, what success looks like), (2) maximizing the freedom to experiment, and (3) returning learning to the system amplify the potential for agency among participants in an initiative and produce emergent results. In the case of LDM's early days—when the Packard Foundation had the intention of spreading ownership for finding adaptive solutions—evidence suggests that the line of sight and the relationships that would support it were not strong enough to create that shared ownership. Additionally, focusing on individuals did not create an ecosystem or platform for Fellows to learn from their individual forays and accumulate results and learning.

What the Packard Foundation ultimately funded was leadership development, network building, and mini-grants. By pairing a content focus (reproductive health) with a process focus (leadership development and network building), the foundation increased the potential for producing emergent results on the ground. Evidence from results reported in the 2011 LDM evaluation suggests that the whole that was created is far greater than the sum of its parts. Today, technology could do even more to help the network see and learn from its results in real time, rather than wait for a post-initiative evaluation.

We cannot definitively conclude that it was the shift to networks that produced emergent results. And this case study does not make the argument that all initiatives should be designed for emergence. This case study does propose that, where the goal is challenging and complex, and where the environments in which the goal is being pursued are complex and constantly changing, enabling agency across an ecosystem of people around their passions may produce more, and more sustainable, results than any centrally planned initiative could engineer.

Appendices

Appendix: Interviews and surveys

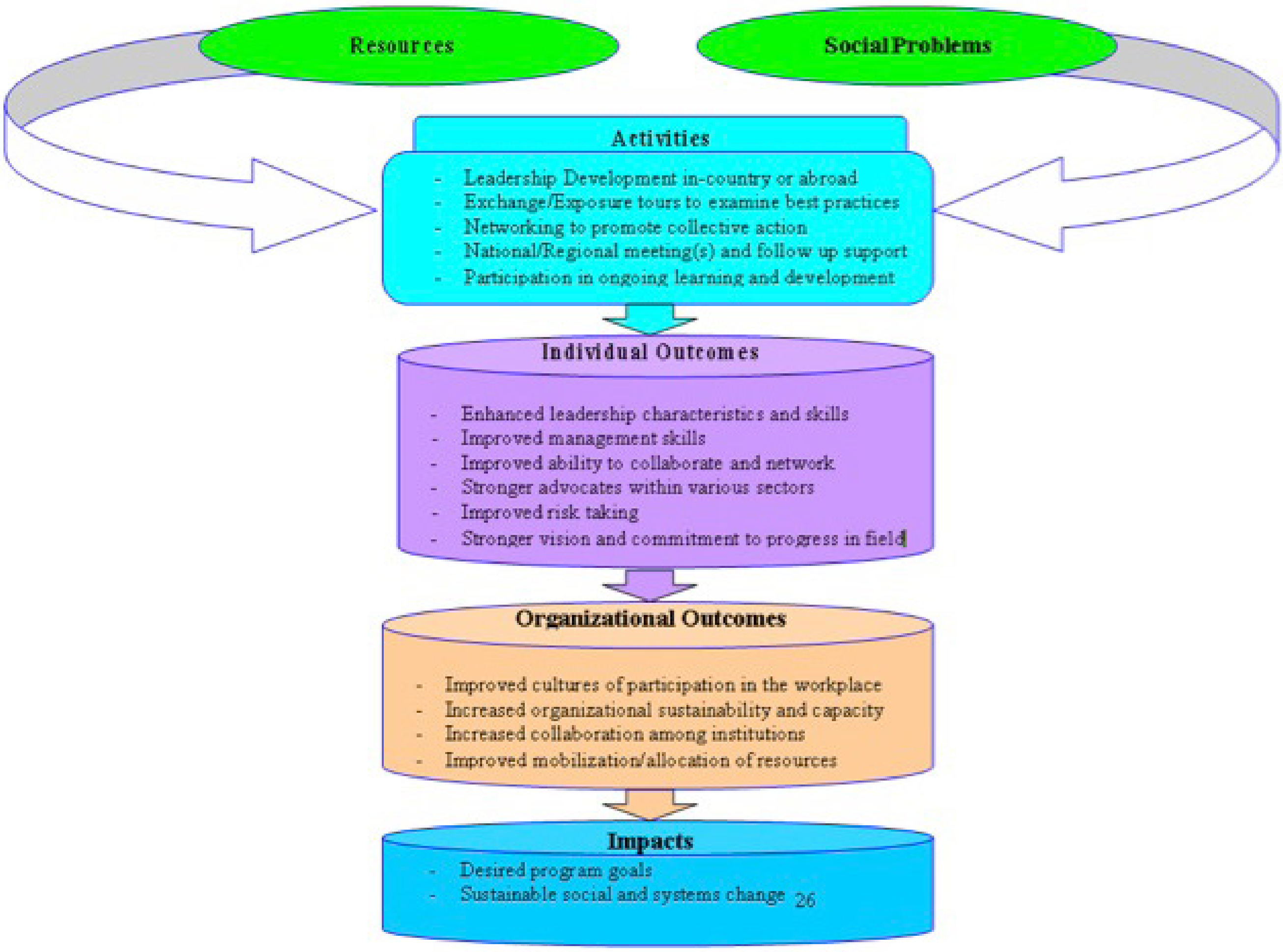
Interviews conducted

- Yemeserach "Yemi" Belayneh (country advisor for Ethiopia, Packard Foundation), interview with the author, December 2016.
- Luz Francess "Bicbic" Chua (LDM Fellow in the Philippines; executive director, Catholics for Reproductive Health), interview with the author, January 2017.
- Cheryl Francisconi (head, Institute of International Education Europe), interview with the author, July 2016.
- Namrata Jha (LDM Fellow in India; executive director, Duke University India), email messages to the author, April 2017.
- Eugene Eric Kim (principal, Faster Than 20), interview with the author, January 2017.
- Don Lauro (former senior program manager, Packard Foundation), interview with the author, January 2017.
- Magdalena Lopez (partnership advisor, Save the Children, Philippines), interview with the author, October 2016.
- Yasmeen Sabeeh Qazi (country advisor for Pakistan, Packard Foundation), email messages to the author, March 2017.
- Ethiopia Tilahun (LDM Fellow in Ethiopia; country director for Ethiopia, Institute of International Education), email messages to the author, April 2017.
- Kathy Toner (former program officer, Packard Foundation), interview with the author, November 2016.

Survey respondents

- Susan Dupre, independent consultant in organization development
- Cheryl Francisconi
- Mairo Mandara, country representative for Northern Nigeria, Packard Foundation
- Kathy Toner

Appendix B:
LDM Theory of Systems Change: 2006–2011



Case Study on Emergence in Complex Social Change:

Social Innovation Generation

Marilyn J. Darling, *Fourth Quadrant Partners*

The 4QP research team would like to thank the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation for their generous support of this research.

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Sidebars

Quick Facts: Social Innovation Generation

- Social Innovation Generation (SiG) was a ten-year initiative supported by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation to address Canada's social and ecological challenges by creating a culture of continuous social innovation.
- Partnership launched in 2007; closed in 2017
- SiG Partners:
  - J.W. McConnell Family Foundation
  - University of Waterloo
  - PLAN Institute
  - MaRS Discovery District
- Definition of Social Innovation: "In the context of changing the system dynamics that created the problem in the first place, a social innovation is any initiative (product, process, program, project, policy or platform) that challenges and, over time, contributes to changing the defining routines, resource and authority flows or beliefs of the broader social system in which it is introduced. Successful social innovations reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience. They have durability, scale and transformative impact."
- http://www.sigeneration.ca/

Executive summary

The Social Innovation Generation (SiG) initiative was launched in 2007 by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation to bring focus and scale to the work of social innovators in Canada. McConnell aimed to address Canada's most urgent social and ecological challenges by creating a culture of continuous social innovation. Recognizing the complexity of the change it was seeking, the foundation aspired to build emergence into the initiative from the start.

The SiG story has been analyzed in two evaluative reports. The purpose of this case is to explore how the story unfolded, using the frame of emergence as it is defined in complex adaptive systems theory. This case describes how a partnership of so-called unusual suspects—a foundation, an academic center, a nonprofit social innovator, and an urban innovation hub—tried and failed to develop a "tightly coupled" focus on a social-innovation project and shifted to "loose coupling" around the idea of promoting social innovation and developing tools to help social entrepreneurs work at a systems level.[1]

Shifting to loose coupling unleashed the creative energy of the partners. It allowed them to focus on what they each could contribute, and, over seven years, it resulted in significant accomplishments in promoting and supporting social innovation. What was lost was the initial focus on addressing Canada's most pressing social and ecological challenges. The partners, in essence, shifted from focusing on social ***innovators*** to focusing on social ***innovation***. In doing so, they reduced their ability to learn what it takes to move the needle on these complex challenges. Viewing this work from an emergence perspective, we can see that while each SiG partner did work with social innovators, the partners did not bring back what they were learning to the partnership. The partners could have played a significant role in amplifying emergence by promoting the agency of social innovators and learning from and with them about what it takes to create transformative change on Canada's social and ecological challenges.

As the case describes, however, the SiG partnership has closed down and what was produced is being absorbed back into each partner organization. McConnell is starting to shift focus back to the innovators themselves. It is creating the platform that will allow the foundation and the ecosystem of social innovators in Canada to learn from and with one another in a way that will help them to collaboratively answer the important questions posed by McConnell at the inception of SiG.

How the Social Innovation Generation initiative came to be

Tim Brodhead became the CEO of the McConnell Foundation, in Montreal, Canada, in 1995. At the time, Canada was in the midst of fundamental challenges. "An economic recession had led to high unemployment, with many people's wages and salaries frozen," Brodhead recalled. "The country had large public deficits—both at the federal and provincial level—and as a result, the government began slashing spending and closing institutions such as hospitals."

That year, Quebec had held its second referendum about whether the province should proclaim sovereignty and become an independent state.[2]

1 The concept of tightly coupled and loosely coupled organizations was created by Karl Weick. See J. Douglas Orton and Karl E. Weick, "Loosely Coupled Systems: A Reconceptualization," Academy of Management Review 15, no. 2 (1990): 203-23, https://tinyurl.com/y77p3s6n.

2 Susan Parker, *First Among Equals: The Evaluation of the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation Social Innovation Generation Initiative* (Clear Thinking Communications, 2014), 3, http://www.evaluationroundtable.org/documents/SiG_Teaching_Case.pdf.

In 1999, under Brodhead's leadership, McConnell began experimenting with different funding models to support social innovation. The foundation was grappling with the long-standing challenge of trying to achieve large-scale impact by replicating local-level interventions. McConnell and its partners felt that "most social innovators focus on experimenting with small-scale responses to complex issues (e.g., a new program), rather than on seeking to disrupt, tip and transform systems on a scale to generate deeper and more durable results."[3] As a result, McConnell chose to experiment with funding processes of change—investing in leverage points in a system, rather than making discrete grants to specific institutions. The initiatives it funded included a leadership development program for executives in the voluntary sector; grants to support the dissemination of ideas and practices related to change processes; a think tank aimed at the application of business innovations to addressing complex issues; and a grant to explore how to move beyond individual leadership support to create a sustainable shift in the larger cultural mindset around such deep social issues as climate change, species extinction, and violence against women.[4]

Encouraged by these exploratory grants, McConnell wanted to bring together a set of committed partners to pool their resources in a more comprehensive and focused way. This became the impetus for the Social Innovation Generation (SiG) initiative. In 2006, McConnell's board approved a five-year, $10 million initiative. The goal statement was this: "To address Canada's social and ecological challenges by creating a culture of continuous social innovation. Our focus is on social innovation that has the potential for impact, durability and scale."[5]

SiG defined social innovation in a specific way. Frances Westley described it like this:

> In the context of changing the system dynamics that created the problem in the first place, a social innovation is any initiative (product, process, program, project, policy or platform) that challenges and, over time, contributes to changing the defining routines, resource and authority flows or beliefs of the broader social system in which it is introduced.
>
> Successful social innovations reduce vulnerability and enhance resilience. They have durability, scale and transformative impact.[6]

The SiG Initiative was conceived by the McConnell Foundation to be deliberately emergent. As described in our 2016 *Foundation Review* article,[7] funders often confuse emergent and adaptive strategy—referring to a strategy as emergent when, in fact, it does not actually reflect the principles of complexity. McConnell had a deeper appreciation for the idea of emergence. The SiG initiative closely followed the 2006 publication of *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed*, a book about social innovation that describes several social innovators and reflects on their experiences, using the frames of complexity and emergence. The authors, one of whom became a principal actor in SiG, define emergence as "a term used to describe things that are unpredictable, which seem to result from the interactions between elements, and are outside of any one agent's control." They describe complex systems as a "whole that is different from the sum of its parts," and propose that, "paradoxically, openness to what emerges *becomes* the goal, even though one is simultaneously moving toward an envisioned future."[8] McConnell and its SiG partners talked regularly about what would make SiG more than the sum of its parts.[9]

McConnell and its SiG partners talked regularly about what would make SiG more than the sum of its parts.

3 Mark Cabaj, *An Evaluation of the Social Innovation Generation Initiative, Preliminary Findings* (Here to There Consulting, 2014), 6.

4 Parker, *First Among Equals*, 4–5.

5 Cabaj, *Evaluation*, 9.

6 "Introduction to Social Innovation," SiG Knowledge Hub, Social Innovation Generation, accessed October, 2016. http://sigknowledgehub.com/2012/01/01/introduction-to-social-innovation.

7 Marilyn Darling et al., "Emergent Learning: A Framework for Whole-System Strategy, Learning, and Adaptation," Foundation Review 8, no. 1, (2016): 59–73.

8 Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Patton, *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2007), 128.

9 Parker, *First Among Equals*, 9.

SiG has been consistently studied and analyzed by the partners, but in 2014, two formal evaluative reports—a summative evaluation and a teaching case developed for the Evaluation Roundtable—were released. The partners have reflected deeply on the lessons they took away from SiG, and this has informed their own practices in ways that will be discussed in this case.

This study focuses on what evolved over the course of the SiG initiative in relation to its goal of being emergent. In seeking cases to study for our research into the role of emergence in complex social change initiatives, we put out a call for initiatives that were considered to be emergent. Our criteria, which were based on the principles of complex adaptive systems theory,[10] included the following:

- Ideas and solutions emerged from the interactions of a diverse set of people doing the work—whether these people were funders, grantees, partners, beneficiaries, or a combination of these.
- The path that a successful program or initiative took could not have been predicted by any of these players.
- Ideas and solutions continued to evolve—to get smarter—over time, even after the program or initiative was done and the funding had gone away.

The McConnell Foundation's original intention was "to create transformative change" in one or two domains around Canada's most formidable social and ecological challenges. (See appendix B: "Social Innovation Generation Theory of Change, 2008.") However, as this case will describe, SiG's partners quickly chose to focus instead on "shifting the ecosystem" to create a culture that supported innovation. Over the ten years of the initiative, the partners succeeded beyond their expectations in promoting the idea of social innovation and developing an infrastructure of tools and academic training to support it. But in the end, they were disappointed by their inability to learn together about the largest questions the initiative had first posed. (See sidebar: "The Big Questions Posed by the SiG Initiative.")

By shifting focus away from the issues themselves, as this case will illustrate, SiG ultimately reduced the emergent potential of the initiative, though actions taken by McConnell in the last three years have the potential to produce more emergent results. It is our hope that, in addition to helping the field understand and support emergence, this case will give McConnell additional ideas about how to amplify emergence in its social-innovation work in years to come.

The Big Questions Posed by the SiG Initiative

- What does it take to fundamentally change the beliefs, basic routines, resource and authority flows of the social systems we target?
- What does it take for the innovations we discover or develop to have impact, durability and scale?
- And, ultimately, what does it take to use social innovation to move the needle on Canada's biggest social and ecological challenges?

Striving for alignment

Tim Draimin became the executive director of SiG National in 2008. He described the idea behind the overall initiative as bringing together a diverse set of partners that were already working on social innovation and combining their resources and networks "to be more than the sum of the parts by allowing people to follow an emergent strategy." As described in the teaching case, "it was a brew of bringing unusual suspects together that were capable of producing outcomes that otherwise would not have happened."[11] To support emergence, the McConnell Foundation proposed a structure and strategy for the initiative that was purposely vague, so that the initiative could be shaped through a collaborative process, "rather than through an up-front design and orchestration on the part of the foundation." [12]

These four "unusual suspects" comprised SiG for the life of the initiative:

- The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation (SiG@McConnell), with Tim Brodhead as SiG principal
- The University of Waterloo (SiG@Waterloo), which became the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience, with Frances Westley and Cheryl Rose as SiG principals

10 For more on our criteria, see our related article, *"How Complex Systems Learn and Adapt."*.
11 Parker, *First Among Equals*, 8.
12 Parker, 6.

- Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN) Institute (SiG@PLAN), with Al Etmanski and Vickie Cammack as SiG principals
- MaRS Discovery District (SiG@MaRS), with Allyson Hewitt as SiG principal

The McConnell Foundation had a long-standing relationship with Frances Westley and had worked with her on the groundbreaking McGill-McConnell program. The foundation helped to establish Westley at the University of Waterloo (which had won an RFP to be part of the SiG initiative) to create a connection with a source of research and curriculum development. PLAN Institute was an example of a social innovator and had served as a case in *Getting to Maybe*. The principals of these organizations had been longtime colleagues before the formation of SiG. MaRS was added "to round out the engagement or linkage to the corporate/private sector and the traditional or technical world of innovation," according to Hewitt.

The funder also explicitly aimed to see itself as an equal partner in the exploration, not the orchestrator of the initiative's unfolding. Rather than the initiative using a funder-driven approach, the idea was "that the foundation generates meaningful goals and strategies in collaboration with others and recognizes that they are one among many independent, yet interdependent, actors."[13]

The initial intention was for the SiG partners to focus on large-scale joint action on specific substantive issues. Brodhead wanted partners to agree "that we were going to wrap our arms around one domain and really move it." The measure of success, as described in SiG's original proposal to the board, would be "the number of innovations achieving real and lasting social change and the project's ability to engage other partners and funders."[14] With that in mind, the partners began by trying to decide on a structure and focus for their work. But the partners had very different preferences in choosing a social issue to focus on:

- McConnell wanted to work across multiple domains.
- The University of Waterloo wanted to focus on ecological resilience and mental health.
- MaRS was open to multiple domains but wanted to be able to use its knowledge of health, science, business, and technology.
- PLAN wanted to continue focusing on social vulnerability, particularly for people with disabilities and their families.

From the very beginning, there was evidence of tension among the partners related to how the initiative was framed. Frances Westley understood that she would be leading SiG and that the project would be based at an academic institution. McConnell expected a greater presence in, and focus on, the foundation's work, including having Frances Westley maintain an office there. McConnell also held different assumptions about how funding would be used. For example, MaRS considered itself to be financially self-sufficient, having obtained funding for its SiG work from the Province of Ontario, "while some SiG principals assumed that MaRS would contribute at least a portion of the funds from the Province of Ontario to MaRS for shared work within SiG."[15]

Brodhead wanted partners to agree "that we were going to wrap our arms around one domain and really move it."

The evaluation and teaching case documented these differences and how the different institutional goals among the partners contributed to their felt tension. McConnell had delayed some initiatives and needed SiG to provide direct support to the foundation and its grantees to achieve scale. Frances Westley needed to start up a new academic center and begin researching and teaching. Allyson Hewitt needed to demonstrate the value of focusing on social innovation at her institution and to deliver on commitments made to the Province of Ontario. PLAN was focused on expanding its existing work on social innovation in the disability field.[16] As Tim Draimin observed, "I think people ended up wanting to establish their bona fides to be able to get their own house in order, and they really didn't have the bandwidth for anybody to stretch themselves and become the receptacle for that collective work."

The tension showed. An evaluation of the initiative reported that "the underlying uncertainty and power dynamics began to manifest in behavior that was at many junctures poor, mean-spirited, and hurtful" among people who had been

13 Parker, *First Among Equals*, 3.
14 Parker, 7.
15 Cabaj, *Evaluation*, 20–22.
16 Cabaj, 20; Parker, *First Among Equals*, 9.
17 Parker, 12.

friends for a long time.[17] As Westley described it, "All of us felt responsible for SiG, but nobody had authority. It was a very stressful situation."[18] The tension almost pulled the initiative apart in its first year. Brodhead described the source of the strain as "trying to get four people with their own strong views and experiences, who also represented institutions that were quite different, to get on the same page." He said, "We couldn't achieve that common purpose because people were not willing to give up their own set of issues."[19] Hewitt added, "We did not have a good understanding of each of our respective limitations and obligations and lacked clarity about how we were accountable to each other."

Did the SiG partners need to give up their own agendas in order to focus on the largest questions SiG hoped to answer? They appeared to be operating under the assumption that they if they were going to move the needle on a social issue, they needed to demonstrate a different way of thinking about social innovation by taking on a project together. But their differing priorities and pressures made a joint project unrealistic.

The scale and diversity of what was produced between 2008 and 2011 surprised the partners.

As this case will demonstrate, if the SiG partners had thought more deeply about emergence in the context of complex adaptive systems theory, they might have avoided the tension they experienced in the first year. This frame would have led them to focus on (1) expanding agency for their inquiry into the ecosystem of social innovators they were interacting with, and (2) creating a deliberate platform for learning from, and with, innovators, rather than trying to demonstrate their hypothesis themselves. This would have also allowed them to simultaneously test multiple hypotheses, which, as complex adaptive systems theory suggests, may have sped up learning and adaptation by "orders of magnitude."[20]

Shift from "tight coupling" to "loose coupling"

After a year of unresolvable tensions, SiG's partners agreed to shift from tight coupling to loose coupling in 2008. As described in the teaching case, "tight coupling forces formal structures, explicit relationships, and more detailed plans; 'loose coupling' is more self-organized, emergent, and go-with-the-flow."[21] In practice, this meant that each partner would continue to focus independently on the threads of work that were "closest to their heart and expertise"—doing research, conducting workshops, meeting their obligations, engaging in policy work on disabilities and others areas—and would work together only as opportunities arose and made sense to individual partners.[22]

Principals had mixed feelings about this decision. Allyson Hewitt and Cheryl Rose felt that it allowed them to "ground their work more clearly" before collaborating with others. McConnell staff, on the other hand, had been eager for the help promised by SiG "to embed social innovation in [its] work more deeply," and especially for more access to researchers through the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience (WISIR). Al Etmanski wondered whether the group might have eventually "found the common space for a tighter arrangement" if it had persevered.[23]

For the most part, SiG partners worked independently for the rest of SiG 1.0, which ended in 2011. Each partner focused on its own priorities—establishing WISIR, supporting innovators and grantees, pursuing their own social-change agendas (e.g., PLAN's work on disability). "When we were set loose, we accomplished much more," Westley said.[24] The scale and diversity of what was produced between 2008 and 2011 surprised the partners. Brodhead observed that "SiG has been productive in terms of the sheer scale of its effort and gone into areas that we could not have fully anticipated when we started."[25] In addition to the partners' individual achievements, such as the launch of WISIR, the MaRS Solutions Lab, and the British Columbia Partners for Social Impact, there were the products of their collaboration. Together, they promoted the emerging field of social finance, creating the first Social Impact Bond, the MaRS Centre for Impact Investing, the annual Social Finance Forum, and the Canadian Task Force on Social Finance, among others.

18 Parker, 12.
19 Parker, 20.
20 John Holland, *Hidden Order: How Adaptation Builds Complexity* (Perseus Books, 1995), 37.
21 Parker, *First Among Equals*, 16–17.
22 Parker, 20.
23 Cabaj, *Evaluation*, 22-23.
24 Parker, 32.
25 Cabaj, 34.

Results created by the SiG partnership

Using SiG's 2008 Theory of Change, the 2014 evaluation reviewed the initiative's results in three areas: awareness building, infrastructure for social innovation, and creating transformative change on one or two societal issues. The summary assessment was that SiG's results in awareness building were "beyond expectations." In building an infrastructure, there was "clear progress," but the evaluation found that "transformative change" around a societal issue was "unrealized."[26]

The partners built awareness across Canada for social innovation

Over the course of the SiG initiative, and through the SiG principals' extensive networks, relationships with different sectors, and speaking and teaching about social innovation, the partners were able to make social innovation a significant focus in Canada. "It is remarkable how far the conversation and understanding of social innovation has come in Canada since 2008," Allyson Hewitt, of MaRS, observed, "and I think we can take some credit for that."[27]

There is now SEontario, funded in part by the government of Ontario and dedicated to "strengthening Ontario's economy through social enterprise."[28] In British Columbia, and supported by SiG partners, Al Etmanski helped create a regional ecosystem for social innovation. By 2011, "The curating[29] work of Al Etmanski in British Columbia led to the world's first Minister for Social Innovation and the BC Social Innovation Council, a multi-sectoral group designed to help the Provincial Government support social innovation in the Province."[30]

In fact, the Government of Canada announced in June 2017 the creation of a seventeen-person steering committee to create a social-innovation and social-finance strategy for the entire country. "The Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy will support communities in unlocking innovative local solutions to our most difficult challenges, and create positive outcomes for Canadians most in need."[31] Allyson Hewitt and the McConnell Foundation's current CEO, Stephen Huddart, serve on the steering committee. According to Hewitt, "the Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy Co-creation Steering Group, supported by Employment and Social Development Canada, is a significant step in the progress of social innovation in Canada." She hopes that it will "set the standard for policy creation in Canada and lead to better social outcomes for our citizens."

The partners generated a significant amount of infrastructure to support social innovation

The partners launched SiG 2.0 in 2012. It was funded for three years, at a lesser amount, and it continued for another two years, until 2017, to enable transition. "In SiG 2.0 partners focused on building on, elaborating and consolidating the momentum and gains of the first five years."[32] Having agreed that their goal was to promote systemic change, the partners shifted their attention to building the infrastructure to support innovators working at a systems level.

WISIR, with national SiG staff, took the lead in developing SiG's Knowledge Hub, a website with learning resources and examples of social innovation, and it continued to develop its teaching curriculum. MaRS continued to support individual social entrepreneurs. It launched the Centre for Impact Investing and the MaRS Solutions Lab and took over the hosting of the Canadian Task Force on Social Finance. SiG National cosponsored the Social Enterprise World Forum in Calgary, contributed to knowledge development, and supported

26 Cabaj, *Evaluation*, 40–46.
27 Cabaj, 42.
28 This is the tagline of SEontario. For more information about this initiative, visit http://seontario.org/.
29 *Social curation* is defined as "convening diverse people to come together to explore new ideas, build new relationships and experiment with new approaches." Cabaj, 54.
30 Cabaj, 27.
31 Employment and Social Development Canada, "Government of Canada Brings Together Leaders to Co-create a Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy for Canada," June 8, 2017, http://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/government-of-canada-brings-together-leaders-to-co-create-a-social-innovation-and-social-finance-strategy-for-canada-627294753.html.
32 Cabaj, 27.

convening. McConnell set up the Social Innovation Fund, and continued to provide one-on-one support to social innovators. McConnell also launched Innoweave, a platform that provides training, coaching, and assessment to social innovators through a growing, practical toolkit that supports social innovation—for example, systems thinking, impact investing, collective impact, innovation labs, and developmental evaluation.[33]

But the partners were unable to achieve the transformative change they had hoped for

When SiG was founded, the questions it might have explored were challenging and exciting. (See sidebar: "The Big Questions Posed by the SiG Initiative.")

The partners started out under the assumption that if they wanted to move the needle on a social issue, they would need to choose one and create a learning lab among themselves. But they were unable to decide on a focus. The factors that led the SiG principals to shift to loose coupling—their differing social priorities and institutional needs, and their limited bandwidth—led them to focus on what they had in common: the belief that social innovation was the best pathway to tackling Canada's most pressing social issues. With this choice, the partners shifted from attending to what they could discover about moving the needle on these big questions and toward what it would take to promote and support the practice of social innovation, as they had come to define it.

McConnell's website lists a number of lessons it has taken from SiG. One in particular stands out: "While the term 'social innovation' has spread quickly, along with notions of complex adaptive systems and related concepts, it is not clear that its use is leading to or associated with transformational change."[34] By losing sight of the larger goal, the SiG partners were less focused on challenging or validating their own belief in the value of social innovation and testing their assumptions about social change and the tools they could use to achieve it.

By losing sight of the larger goal, the SiG partners were less focused on challenging or validating their own belief in the value of social innovation and testing their assumptions about social change and the tools they could use to achieve it.

The SiG team had hired a developmental evaluator at the beginning of the initiative, as described in the teaching case, but the evaluator ended the developmental evaluation when SiG shifted to loose coupling because "nothing was developing."[35] At the time, the partners agreed with the evaluator's decision; in hindsight, they wished that they had spent more time reflecting on what they had been doing and learning. Allyson Hewitt observed, "We were too busy being busy, and we weren't focused on leveraging the incredible momentum we were creating." Al Etmanski reflected on what a continuing relationship with a developmental evaluator might have provided: "We might, for example, have spent more time linking our efforts with grassroots activists and less time focused on raising awareness about social innovation within government. To have someone with that lens would have been helpful to point that out and ask questions: Why are you doing what you are doing? How does it link to your original intention?"[36] Darcy Riddell, the McConnell Foundation's director of strategic learning, acknowledged that gathering stories about the results of people doing social innovation work has not been the main focus "because they've been so distributed."

It is unlikely that the goal of moving the needle on social issues was, ultimately, unrealized. In fact, it is almost certainly true that the needle was being moved by social innovators throughout the seven years of the initiative; SiG's work undoubtedly contributed to the innovations being created. But SiG could have contributed more directly to making these innovations more visible and learning from and with innovators, as described below. (See "Learning how to move the needle.")

33 Cabaj, *Evaluation*, 33.
34 This quotation comes from a page on the McConnell Foundation website that is no longer online. However, in an email message to the author on November 22, 2017, Darcy Riddell, McConnell's director of strategic learning, confirmed that the quoted statement is correct. The McConnell website can be found at https://mcconnellfoundation.ca.
35 Parker, *First Among Equals*, 17.
36 Parker, *First Among Equals*, 25.

Explaining SiG's results using an emergence framework

If, as we described in the beginning of this case, emergence is characterized by ideas and solutions emerging from the interactions of a diverse set of people doing the work, solutions that could not have been predicted and that continue to evolve over time, what does it take to create the conditions for this emergence to arise?

In our research, we propose that emergence is fostered when all of these conditions are present:

- Strong line of sight: a clear and shared view toward an ultimate goal, so that everyone agrees what success will look like.
- Maximum freedom to experiment: agents have the freedom to take into consideration what they see in their environment and develop their own hypothesis about how to achieve the goal in that context.
- A platform for learning together: agents have a systematic way to bring what they are learning from their experiments back into the system to help everyone improve future results.

During the starting phase of SiG, partners were asked to pool their resources around targeted projects on an issue that would help demonstrate the value of social innovation by moving the needle on a social or ecological challenge and help create a culture of social innovation in Canada. Looking at this initial effort through an emergence lens, we see that asking SiG partners to coordinate on a single project would have constrained their ability to experiment with their own thinking and interests. Each partner had been chosen because of its rich commitment to, and history of investing in, social innovation. But the initiative was being unintentionally structured in a way that constrained emergence.

Funders and nonprofits often confuse alignment on purpose with alignment on process. The SiG partners' initial thinking was that they needed to align on both purpose (having an impact on a shared issue) and process (a project). When the partners moved to loose coupling, they let go of both the idea of a shared project and the aspiration for a shared purpose related to lasting social change. The SiG partners maximized their freedom to experiment but reduced their line of sight toward their ultimate goal. By focusing on their own social-innovation work, rather than on learning from and with social innovators, or agents, in the field, they reduced their ability to learn as a whole system.

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The good news is that the seeds of emergence have been planted. Much of the infrastructure SiG developed has created the potential for emergence to blossom across the system of innovators. The social-innovation labs conducted by MaRS and others create a platform where social innovators working on social issues can feed what they are learning in their work back into the community of innovators. Over the course of the SiG initiative, labs have focused on advocating on housing issues, reducing emissions in Toronto, improving the tender-fruit industry in Canada, and developing regulatory solutions for the sharing economy, among other topics.[37] The Natural Step Canada launched a lab focused on energy transition in Alberta, the Energy Futures Lab, involving a diverse array of partners and participants, including industry partners. "What's interesting," Chad Park, the lab's director, said, "is that despite the fact that there are so many people working on this issue already, a lot of the industry and government representatives in the lab have found that it has created a space for them to do the kind of thinking and ambitious strategizing that isn't possible in other forms and formats."

37 "Canadian Lab Stories," Social Innovation Generation, http://www.sigeneration.ca/canadian-lab-stories/.

SiG's social-finance work has also planted the seeds of emergence. Tim Draimin pointed to this work as one of the partnership's most significant collective results. "We created a whole field of social finance or impact investing that hadn't existed before and helped to fast track the development of policy frameworks that are contributing to building the financial capital marketplace to support social innovation." The Canadian Task Force on Social Finance produced recommendations on the creation of new investment vehicles and with new kinds of partners that were taken up at both the federal and the provincial level.[38] SiG's and MaRS's work in social finance has already influenced funding streams—in particular, how Canadian foundations are investing their endowments. The field will continue to develop creative financial solutions to support and sustain social innovations in ways that could not have been designed in advance by any one institution.

PLAN experimented with ways to create networks of relationships among people with disabilities and then explored what those networks would make possible.

A great emergence story within a story: PLAN Institute

Over the course of the initiative, the work that appeared to illustrate emergence most fully was the work of Al Etmanski and Vickie Cammack, at PLAN Institute.

For two decades before the SiG initiative, Etmanski and Cammack of PLAN (Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network) had been working with parents who, like themselves, had children with physical and intellectual disabilities. They were focused on answering the question, "What happens to my child when I die?" This work became one of a handful of cases used by Frances Westley and her coauthors as a foundation for *Getting to Maybe*.[39]

Studying programs in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, they developed their own approach, which arose from their insight that social isolation was one of the biggest barriers faced by people with disabilities. The principle they came to, as described in *Getting to Maybe*, was this: "Relationships [do] not *lead* to quality of life; they [are] quality of life."[40] They focused on developing personal support networks for people with disabilities.

Using this principle, PLAN experimented with ways to create networks of relationships among people with disabilities and then explored what those networks would make possible. "Once a network became stable, support and advocacy flowered from it naturally,"[41] PLAN was even able to use this principle to affect the definition of legal competence and capacity in British Columbia. "PLAN argued that relationship or 'interpersonal' knowledge is a powerful form of intelligence, and that those who are capable of relationships are also capable of helping to decide who their legal guardian should be."[42]

PLAN successfully advocated for the Canadian government to create the world's first Registered Disabilities Savings Plan (RDSP) and to increase British Columbia's asset limit for people with disabilities, which allows families to invest and save for the future without affecting disability benefits. PLAN also worked to develop and implement the Representation Agreement in British Columbia, a grassroots alternative to legal guardianship.

Results like this illustrate PLAN's founders working at a systems level—recognizing that what they were trying to accomplish was taking place within a larger system and would require solutions that were larger and less straightforward than conventional approaches. But PLAN did not begin with the intention of working at a systems level. Al Etmanski observed, "I think people are disrupting systems all the time, because people are part of systems, and they may not say 'I'm a player in the whole systems change game.' Most people don't think that way. But they're obliged to disrupt the status quo in order to make things better for someone or something they love." About himself and his partners he said, "[We] wouldn't have thought of ourselves as disrupters. We thought that we had an idea that made sense for our constituency. There was a role we could play in making that happen. It's that simple."[43]

38 Cabaj, *Evaluation*, 43.
39 This case is described in Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton, Getting to Maybe, 72–81.
40 Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton, 74.
41 Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton, 78.
42 Westley, Zimmerman, and Patton, 81.
43 Geraldine Cahill, "A Disruptive Conversation with Al Etmanski," Social Innovation Generation (blog), June 5, 2017, http://www.sigeneration.ca/disruptive-conversation-al-etmanski/.

Before SiG started, PLAN and the McConnell Foundation had been working together and grappling with how to scale their work. Brodhead recalled, "It was that interplay between PLAN and the foundation around the challenge of scaling that led us to understand something about why the models of scaling we were and everybody was using, which was essentially industrial, were completely inappropriate and didn't work."

Tim Brodhead described how PLAN's achievements were founded deeply on trust, which made them difficult to scale over a wider geographic area. A traditional social-services model would never be able to meet the demand. Brodhead said, "That's when they took a system lens to it, as opposed to 'Let's take our service and disseminate it as widely as possible.'" The question, as Brodhead described it, was this: "What in the system had to change so that this problem could be addressed at a much greater scale than a single organization could ever hope for?"

Even the best initial idea is unlikely to fundamentally change a system. Systems change for PLAN was like peeling an onion.

And just thinking deeply about systems was not sufficient. Scaling this work required partnership and experimentation. In fact, as described by McConnell's Darcy Riddell, PLAN went to the government "with a really hairy, ugly, clunky idea about how to take disabilities out of the welfare system." But because PLAN had let go of the need to be the expert in the room, "they didn't go in jamming ideas into government and really came with the understanding that a better solution would emerge and other champions would emerge to take it and refine it."

PLAN's work also illustrates the power of continual experimentation and learning around a very specific goal, even in the face of apparent failure. Even the best initial idea is unlikely to fundamentally change a system. Systems change for PLAN was like peeling an onion. After the legislation that led to the RDSP was passed, PLAN discovered the next layer of problems. One of these, according to Brodhead, was that while the federal government provided the RDSP benefit, "in some cases the provinces operating on a different set of principles would claw back all the benefit." This required PLAN to negotiate with banks to create savings vehicles. And then PLAN discovered that it needed to inform the disability community that these vehicles existed and how to use them. And so on.

According to Riddell, "that's where they became really interested in culture shifting and scaling deep in terms of actually getting disabilities financial systems out of the welfare system, and that has to happen province by province." This required everyone involved to have a different view of the idea of *failure*. Brodhead noted that when a new layer of challenges arose, they learned together that "it's not a defeat. It's natural." He said their thinking became, "We have moved into a different scale and we should be expecting this."

According to SiG's Tim Draimin, "the key thing from a systems point of view wasn't just to create a vehicle to support people in a particular circumstance. Al [Etmanski] would say it was to break apart the traditional poverty system, which placed people in a dependent position, and start destabilizing the precepts of the poverty system that had been created forty years previously."

Etmanski has taken what he learned from PLAN and is continuing to work on the issue of social isolation in areas outside of disability. He remains convinced that what he, his colleagues, and their networks achieved at PLAN, which addressed their specific needs and priorities, could never have been achieved by the traditional social-services delivery system. In reflecting on the experience of this small group of parents of children with disabilities, and what they were able to achieve, Etmanski described his most important lesson: "The incredible power and capacity of so-called ordinary people to do extraordinary things in the face of adversity."[44]

The evolution of PLAN Institute, from addressing an immediate and personal challenge into working at a systems-level, intervention, informed by a simple principle, is a beautiful example of emergence—both at a systems level for members of the PLAN network and for the networks that were created to support individuals with disabilities.

PLAN's work on disabilities relied on high levels of agency among the network members. Together, they produced results that no one individual or organization could have designed or even predicted. They focused on learning from

44 Cahill, "Disruptive Conversation."

and with the ecosystem. PLAN's evolution illustrates how continuing to learn over time within a community leads to much richer, more nuanced lessons. PLAN evolved to have a systems focus by tackling a real and immediate problem, rather than by declaring in advance that solutions needed to be systemic. This also illustrates the important role of expanding agency beyond the principal "intervenor." Al Etmanski, more than any of the SiG partners, believed in the importance of "passionate amateurs," beneficiaries, and activists.[45]

PLAN's evolution illustrates how continuing to learn over time within a community leads to much richer, more nuanced lessons.

In the research report "A Whole Greater than its Parts: Exploring the Role of Emergence in Complex Social Change," we address this tension between encouraging the kind of experimentation called for by emergence and striving to break through the status quo and quick-fix solutions by investing in gaining a systems perspective before engaging in change. The work of PLAN illustrates how a group of social innovators was able to follow its intuition yet benefit from the interplay between its own experimentation and the questions and perspective McConnell brought to the inquiry in a fit-for-purpose and just-in-time way.

Learning how to move the needle

Returning to SiG as a whole, we ask, Could this partnership of "unusual suspects" have found a way to learn about moving the needle in the midst of their very different pursuits? Had SiG focused on social *innovators*, rather than on social *innovation*, and deliberately tracked and learned from the results and experiences of innovators tackling the social and ecological challenges they cared about, we would have expected the partners to develop a number of insights and refine them over seven years, using real results in the field as a guide. What works to create systems change in what kinds of situation and why? When it does not work, what is the right lesson to take away from it to improve our thinking? Are the tools and practices we have developed or promoted beginning to produce the quality of systems change we expected? What are we learning about the real challenges faced by social innovators, and how should these tools and practices be adapted for different situations and different change goals?

The ecosystem of social innovators with whom SiG partners engaged during SiG 1.0 and 2.0 was likely extensive. There were the social innovators showcased in *Getting to Maybe.* There were the social innovators McConnell was funding directly. There were the innovators being trained by WISIR, and the innovators who engaged with MaRS through its advisory, solutions lab, and impact-investing work. Collectively, the examples—successes, partial successes, and outright failures—that could be learned from over the course of seven years was likely rich and diverse. SiG's partners undoubtedly learned on an ad hoc basis from these interactions and their many convenings. Darcy Riddell observed that, "*Field scanning* is a verb and is done in relationship in an ongoing basis, and we perhaps could be better at reporting on it, but we are doing it continuously."

But according to self-reporting from partners in the evaluations, the quality of the lessons they drew from SiG did not demonstrate a consistent focus on learning together from what was happening in this ecosystem of innovators. On the basis of its early experience with partners trying to collaborate among themselves, SiG implicitly made the decision not to expand its boundaries. According to the evaluation, "the partnership was closed and somewhat mysterious to those on the outside who were interested in participating in the work in a more central role."[46] Over the course of the initiative, the SiG partners prioritized promoting social innovation and creating infrastructure over learning together about the larger questions they originally set out to explore. They reported lacking the time, attention, and platform as a partnership to consistently return what they were learning back to the system.

The breadth of the term *social innovation* may also have contributed to the challenges faced by the partners. SiG developed a fairly specific definition (see sidebar: "Quick Facts: Social Innovation Generation"), but *social innovation* can be construed in many different ways. The term was trending among Canadian funders, and people in the field could imagine themselves operating under the umbrella of social innovation; in fact, they had the incentive to do so. But by SiG's more nuanced definition, their work did not qualify.

45 Cabaj, *Evaluation*, 72.
46 Cabaj, 60.

The SiG partners' early experience was tense and frustrating. Is emergence, by necessity, this challenging? Complex social change is, as it name explicitly indicates, complex. But conflating shared purpose and a shared project may have contributed to the partners' perception that emergence is inherently ambiguous and rife with potential conflict. If the partners had been able to focus more clearly on learning from and with the ecosystem of innovators in SiG 1.0, and if they had not felt the need to align on a specific project around a specific issue, they may have not come away from SiG thinking that all emergent work is inherently ambiguous and conflictual.

We propose that if the SiG partners had deliberately explored their questions with innovators working on different social issues between 2007 and 2017, when SiG concluded, the partners could have begun to answer these big questions without having to organize themselves into a tight-coupling structure. They could have benefitted from comparing their diverse perspectives and experiences, encouraging experimentation by innovators on emerging ideas, and iterating over time, reflecting on both innovation successes and innovation failures. This kind of shared inquiry could have helped them to better define—as a whole community—what social innovation means and looks like. This inquiry could have produced a robust and growing body of shared thinking about how it contributes to lasting social change, and about what works and what doesn't in the many different contexts in which social innovation is being used.

Shared inquiry could have helped them to better define—as a whole community—what social innovation means and looks like.

The good news is that in SiG 1.0 and 2.0, there were pockets of this quality of learning from, and with, the ecosystem about how to move the needle on social issues. The McConnell Foundation is expanding its efforts to learn from this collected experience. *Getting to Maybe* draws lessons from the experiences of real social innovators, such as Al Etmanski and Vickie Cammack, who were, in one way or another, moving the needle on social issues. A 2010 article in *The Philanthropist* by Stephen Huddart, "Patterns, Principles, and Practices in Social Innovation," draws principles from three case studies.[47] SiG has also issued a series of social-innovator profiles that is available on the SiG Knowledge Hub.

In 2016, SiG published "*Getting to Moonshot*,"[48] a report on fifteen case studies that asks, "What would it take to make Canada's social impact sector world-renowned for continuous learning, rapid and high-quality experimentation, and data-savviness?" The report looks for patterns across these cases that went beyond basic tools and discovers nuances that seem to have contributed to moving the needle—for example, "relationships, not hierarchy," "understand the context," and "diverse voices to unlikely allies." In its conclusion, the report calls for "a learning platform and marketplace to search, share, aggregate, demonstrate, crowd-source, transfer, and adapt insights, knowledge, and innovations. Such a platform would be context-based, and enable clusters and cohorts that are based on location, stage, outcome or demographic."

The patterns identified in this report are just a starting point; an invitation to go deeper. Maintaining the kind of learning platform that the report proposes would help expand these initial insights into principles. And these principles could become powerful guides for social innovators, helping them to deepen their collective understanding of social innovation and its role in addressing Canada's most pressing social issues. In fact, McConnell has seeded the development of a distributed learning platform for social innovators across Canada.

Tim Draimin described how McConnell is now focusing on this quality of learning: "We need to create multiple points on the map of players working on this and help build a community of practice, people working on different issues to be able to create a shared learning among all those different issues. I think that's what we're doing right now." For example, as Darcy Riddell explained, McConnell is helping convene indigenous innovators and leaders from across sectors to advance the recommendations of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and work toward a sustainable economy that benefits all people equally.

Finally, after a decade of supporting SiG's work, McConnell has invested in a distributed group of innovators whose pur-

47 See *The Philanthropist* 23, no. 3 (2010), 221–234, https://thephilanthropist.ca/original-pdfs/Philanthropist-23-3-422.pdf.

48 Vinod Rajasekaran, *Getting to Moonshot: Inspiring R&D Practices in Canada's Social Impact Sector*, (Social Innovation Generation), https://app.box.com/embed/preview/395ou8hot9ha8uc87pmahzp7f9obszhp?direction=ASC&theme=dark.

pose is to listen to, and co-create a network according to the needs of, practitioners across Canada. This work is being led by the Centre for Social Innovation (CSI), of Toronto, which has thousands of members and frames its work as movement building. CSI and most of those involved were not a part of the original SiG initiative, but they are a part of a diverse group, from different regions and sectors, that is leading the next generation of innovators in Canada.

McConnell has taken the lessons from SiG and applied them to its Cities for People initiative, which is often called SiG for Cities. Its goal is to "foster change so that cities can embrace the needs and aspirations of their populations and come up with ways to meet them."[49] In keeping with what it had learned from SiG, McConnell built support for experimentation and social curation into the initiative from the start.

From the beginning, McConnell aspired to be a learning partner in this work. Inasmuch as McConnell can actively learn from and with these innovators, rather than simply host the community as part of a predetermined strategy, the foundation can amplify the potential for emergent results and knowledge to continue to grow.

Conclusion

The SiG partnership contributed, in a substantial and sustained way, to promoting and supporting social innovation in Canada. The partners created a number of platforms that will support social innovators and, ultimately, produce solutions to social problems that could not have been designed by any one person back in 2007. These platforms will continue to evolve and adapt to Canada's social issues into the future.

This case focuses on how the SiG partners might have used principles of complex adaptive systems theory to accelerate and amplify their results against their ultimate goal. During the SiG initiative, McConnell could have benefitted from, and is now making efforts to focus on, the following:

- Maintaining line of sight toward moving the needle on social and ecological challenges
- Actively inviting the whole ecosystem into the inquiry about its largest questions
- Encouraging and learning from the experiments of social innovators, large and small

Tim Brodhead entered philanthropy with a healthy skepticism for funding projects with discrete boundaries and predetermined outcomes. He describes how McConnell walked away from SiG having learned this lesson: "Almost anything emergent is going to take twice as long as we thought it would or planned, but we were prepared to fund that and so time wasn't the constraint that it usually is."[50] As a result, McConnell demonstrated a patience for emergence that was welcomed by its grantees and, in some cases, replicated by other funders. Chad Park, of The Natural Step Canada, noted that he and his partners in the Energy Futures Lab appreciated their lead funder, Suncor Energy Foundation, taking this approach, inspired by McConnell. Park said, "For many other funders, it's a much more traditional approach, where investments are drawn based on specific intended outcomes and a tight logic model. This often misses the emergent way that change happens in complex systems."

Canada has developed a large and diverse ecosystem of social innovators, and the work done by the SiG partnership has created a resource-rich platform that will, we hope, help move the needle on Canada's most pressing social and ecological challenges

49 *"About Cities for People," Cities for People, http://www.phase1.citiesforpeople.ca/about/.*
50 *Note that the 4QP research team did not observe in its other case studies that emergent initiatives took longer to produce results.*

Appendices

Appendix A: Interviews and surveys

Interviews

- Tim Brodhead (former CEO, McConnell Foundation), interview with the author, July 2017.
- Tim Draimin (executive director, Social Innovation Generation National), interview with the author, November 2016.
- Allyson Hewitt (director, social entrepreneurship, MaRS Discovery District), interview with the author, April 2017.
- Chad Park (director, Energy Futures Lab, The Natural Step Canada), interview with the author, January 2017.
- Darcy Riddell (director of strategic learning, McConnell Foundation), interview with the author, June and August 2016.

Survey respondents

- Allyson Hewitt

Appendix B:
Social Innovation Generation Theory of Change, 2008

Theory of Change for SiG

November 10, 2008

1. The Foundation

Foundation Mission: to support initiatives that engage Canadians in building a society that is resilient, inclusive and sustainable.

2. SiG Vision

SiG's vision is a society which recognizes, promotes and celebrates continuous innovation to resolve important social challenges facing Canada.

How this Vision links to Foundation Mission

In a rapidly changing environment, strengthening resilience, inclusion and sustainability requires that we work with complex and inter-dependent variables, that we explore and test new approaches, and that we develop a better understanding of how innovation can be recognized and supported. SiG embodies both a set of programmatic initiatives to support innovation outside the Foundation and a prod to generate innovation inside the Foundation, i.e. in our own policies and practice.

3. SiG Objectives

a. To achieve transformative change within one or two domains in SiG's 5-year timeframe.

b. To create a range of supports (knowledge, consulting, workshops, networks, grants) for social innovators to make their work more efficient and impactful, and by means of these non-granting tools to make the Foundation more effective.

c. To build and disseminate a body of knowledge around processes of social innovation in Canada.

d. To model innovative practice in its own methodology and ways of collaborating.

4. Critical Assumptions

a. That a multi-sectoral set of partners can work together effectively and thereby create synergies that amplify their individual and collective impact, and that governance (decision-making, accountability) can be informal, consensual, and dependent on personal relationships.

b. That the Foundation's experience through its AD grants, along with the work of PLAN and others, can generate a body of practice that advances our understanding of social innovation.

c. That there are social innovators in Canada who constitute a 'market', and who, if supported appropriately, could advance the Foundation's overall Mission.

(continued)

d. That suitable programs can be designed and delivered by SiG members to implement its objectives and the necessary resources will be available.

e. That SiG will have the credibility and legitimacy to leverage change not just in the not-for-profit sector but more generally (e.g., through dialogue with government).

f. That SiG will in time engage other actors to reinforce its message and add other insights and assets.

5. Activities

It has been planned that activities will be carried out by each of the SiG partners in each of the quadrants of the Panarchy framework, and that together they will constitute a comprehensive, integrated suite of SiG activities: workshops and training opportunities, provision of consulting, mentoring and other personal and organizational support, research and academic access, funding, etc. Creating a more favourable environment for social innovation will also be addressed by public presentations, writing, use of the Internet, etc. and by introducing new mechanisms through Causeway (social finance), new technology ("web of change"), and interacting with all levels of government. The following is illustrative rather than comprehensive:

i. SiG@Waterloo: workshops ("Sustainagility" [Jan. 28-30] and case-writing) to be beta-tested; Waterloo Institute for Young Social Innovators (CFC); graduate student research; design/consultation for a follow-up to McGill-McConnell; speaking and lecturing by FW…

ii. SiG@MaRS: introductory course for social entrepreneurs (Social Entrepreneurship 101; development of a consultancy service for individuals & organizations; policy development for social finance; Social Venture Fund development; convening and education 'Web 2.0' social technology, etc.…

iii. SiG@PLAN: work on public policy development for Caregivers (Sean Moore) and social finance; elaboration of tools for RDSP implementation; use of technology for connecting (Tyze, etc)…

iv. SiG@McConnell: grants and consulting ('strategy development') to Foundation initiatives and others; some convening; staffing (Communications director); design of McG-McC II.…

v. SiG@Large: communications strategy for SiG; national policy environment; social finance, with the Causeway consortium…

Case Study on Emergence in Complex Social Change:

East Scarborough Storefront

Jillaine S. Smith, *Fourth Quadrant Partners*

Table of Contents

Sidebars

Storefront Quick Facts

- Original goal: Provide a one-stop shop for service provision
- Current goal: Facilitate collaboration and help people learn and create together, live healthy lives, find meaningful work, play and thrive
- Location: East Scarborough; high concentration of public housing and residents, including many recent immigrants, living below poverty level
- Launched in 2001; ongoing
- Diverse set of funders: federal, provincial, and city government, and a private foundation
- Currently a project of Tides Canada shared platform
- Website: www.thestorefront.org

Executive summary

Responding to the need for services within an immigrant community outside Toronto, Canada, and motivated by an early crisis that could have closed its doors, The Storefront shifted from a one-stop service hub to a backbone support for community-identified and community-led solutions.

This case describes The Storefront's evolution from one-stop shop to a community-driven resource with a strong emphasis on relationships. This evolution has created the space for community members to take action in support of their own lives—individually and collectively—and The Storefront is starting to produce emergent results.

With The Storefront and other cases, the 4QP research team was testing this hypothesis: If the team responsible for an initiative has clear line of sight and makes it visible to others, and if the agents in the system are activated authentically, given freedom to experiment, and have a way to come together and learn from their experience, then the effort will produce results that are greater, more fit to their environment, and more sustainable than if the initiative had been designed and implemented in a top-down fashion. *(continued)*

The Storefront exemplified this hypothesis in several interdependent ways:

- Its decision-making process reinforces the primacy of relationships; each major decision becomes an opportunity for members of the community to test and strengthen their line of sight to their goal and learn together about what this goal means and looks like in action.
- The locus of work is not in building an institution but in building the community's ability to voice issues and activate solutions, which places ownership in the hands of the community and creates agency.
- Careful attention to relationship building and power imbalances has also increased agency and has helped build the bench strength of stakeholders, both within and outside the organization. With this, the organization has shifted from relying on the vision and leadership of the founding director to developing ownership and pride across the community.
- By holding high expectations for the people it serves, The Storefront has surfaced a diversity of wisdom throughout its ecosystem, resulting in solutions that could not have been preplanned and results that could not have been anticipated.

These characteristics of The Storefront helped create the conditions that allowed solutions appropriate to the community to emerge and led to results within and outside the organization that could not have been predicted. Today the question is, How will The Storefront community sustain its vision and priorities when its founding executive director leaves?

Origins of The Storefront

By the year 2000, the City of Toronto had placed about eight hundred recent refugees into social housing—old motels along a road strip in the Kingston Galloway / Orton Park (KGO) neighborhood of East Scarborough, a district of Toronto. This neighborhood on the outskirts of Toronto already included the highest concentration of public housing and residents living below poverty level in the city. The percentage of the population living below the poverty level had increased from 13 percent in 1981 to 20 percent in 2001. While a myriad of social-service agencies existed to support this population, these services were largely inaccessible to the intended beneficiaries. The agencies were concentrated in downtown Toronto, far from the Kingston Galloway neighborhood, and there was a lack of sufficient public transportation.

East Scarborough Storefront (The Storefront) was initially conceived to solve these access problems by being a one-stop shop where these agencies could offer such services as youth groups, legal advice, employment help, and settlement support. It quickly became clear that there were other people in the neighborhood, besides the refugees, who needed these services.

These characteristics of The Storefront helped create the conditions that allowed solutions appropriate to the community to emerge...

Initially funded, in 2001, with $114,000 from Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), then a department of the Canadian federal government, The Storefront was based in a neighborhood mall and served as an operational hub, or backbone, (with a single overhead) for forty agency partners. The Storefront initially worked with the Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough as its fiscal agent before becoming a part of Tides Canada's shared platform.[1]

"[HRDC] realized that people in marginalized circumstances who want help getting a job may have multiple barriers to getting that job, so funding a one-stop shop made sense," Anne Gloger, The Storefront's initial staff person and now its director, explained. Gloger, who has a background in business, social development studies, and early childhood education, was hired to coordinate services across the forty agencies and engage the community residents.

The Storefront spent its first years bringing together multiple agencies to serve the needs of the community. These agencies were accustomed to working independently with their own work styles and expectations. Gloger spent much of her time building trust, establishing a shared vision, and figuring out with providers the best approach to working across agencies with different work cultures and personalities in a community highly diverse in income, ethnic background, and education level. These elements set a strong foundation for the emergent nature of The Storefront's future work.

1 *Fiscal agent* is a term commonly used in the United States but not in Canada. For more information about Tides Canada's shared platform, visit http://www.tidescanada.org/approach/shared-platform.

Loss of funding, loss of space

In 2006, after five years in existence, the now-popular Storefront experienced two near-mortal hits: It learned that it would lose its space because the shopping center where it was located was going to be torn down and that HRDC, which provided 90 percent of The Storefront's funding, had withdrawn its support. HRDC was shifting its funding focus to direct services.

Early in The Storefront's history, Gloger had launched Community Speaks—dinners at which residents were invited to share their ideas with representatives of the partner social-service agencies. At the dinner after The Storefront learned it would lose its space and most of its funding, residents discussed in small groups ideas for how to respond. When they reflected on the various ideas, they saw two common themes: getting media attention and communicating to funders the importance of The Storefront's services. Out of this discussion arose the idea to mobilize a march to bring media and public attention to the plight of The Storefront. Gloger explained, "Dip, our volunteer manager, brought people together and brainstormed messages," which "volunteers later painted on signs and carried during the march." The effort successfully drew the attention of both print and television media.

It was a new kind of action for this community, and the first taste for residents of organizing on their own behalf. The action also changed the quality of what residents saw as success and what they saw as possible. By providing people with opportunities to engage in collective action *and* see that they are capable of succeeding (or of working together, even if a project fails), residents increased their sense of agency for taking action in other areas of their lives. This created a springboard to creating even more action, ideally increasing their own impact as well.

Residents increased their sense of agency for taking action in other areas of their lives.

In the meantime, each of the social-service agencies sought support for the hub from their own funders—direct-service grantmakers with little experience supporting the coordinating activities of an intermediary like The Storefront.

At about the same time, the City of Toronto and United Way Toronto published a report on the state of the region's neighborhoods.[2] KGO was one of thirteen neighborhoods selected for attention. This report helped motivate five funders—the City of Toronto, United Way Toronto, the Province of Ontario, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, and the George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation—to stretch their funding mandates and commit to supporting The Storefront for five years. "This was an opportunity for the funders at the table to focus on something that was working while addressing a need identified by the city and United Way," Gloger said.

Meanwhile, the City of Toronto provided The Storefront with a new home in an old police station, at below-market rent. In turn, The Storefront offered space to service providers at a rent of two dollars, in exchange for the providers not charging residents for services. This change eliminated the landlord-tenant power dynamic that could have diluted collaboration.[3]

The Storefront team convened the community again, this time for a four-hour visioning session with funders, residents, and agencies. "It became really clear that people thought the potential of The Storefront went way beyond service delivery help, but could also incorporate strengthening residents' ability to lead," Gloger shared. The Storefront would become more than a collection of agencies delivering services to residents; it would also become the locus for strengthening the ability of residents to identify and address the challenges in their community.

2 City of Toronto, *Toronto Strong Neighborhoods Strategy: Report to Policy and Finance Committee*, October 2005. The initial study is no longer available online. An update from 2012 can be found at http://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2012/cd/bgrd/backgroundfile-45145.pdf.

2 Cathy Mann, *The Little Community That Could*, (Toronto, Canada: East Scarborough Storefront), 32. Excerpts from this book can be found at http://www.thestorefront.org/ourbook/.

New vision, expanded results

The Storefront began to develop what it later called a "community backbone" model,[4] with the purpose of amplifying the work and aspirations of many different entities. "We started with social-service organizations," Gloger said. "But building a strong neighborhood isn't just about good access to social services. You need to strengthen residents' capacity to lead and strengthen the network and communication and strategy of work of a myriad of players—not just the agencies within the service hub, but other entities within and serving the neighborhood as well, such as the Boys & Girls Club, libraries, schools, police, Native Family and Child Services, and more."

The Storefront, in partnership with its community of providers and residents, made a major shift in strategy from being an access point for services to collaboratively building a stronger neighborhood. The Storefront became the place for helping residents to vocalize issues and activate solutions. According to Gloger, discussions at Community Speaks dinners shifted from focusing on what The Storefront should be to what the *neighborhood* needed, what leadership roles *community members* would take and, only then, to how The Storefront could support this. Its support would take the form of linking residents to policymakers, funding opportunities, and similar initiatives in the area.

For example, in 2007, The Storefront supported a community-designed effort, called the Bus 54A Campaign, to petition for improved bus service. The 54A bus, one of only two connecting KGO to downtown Toronto, ran on an unreliable schedule and was not accessible by wheelchair. The bus often turned around before the bridge that entered the neighborhood, abandoning passengers to a long walk home. A petition drive, and the use of The Storefront's social capital to help residents get in front of decision-makers, led transportation officials to acknowledge the problem and promise improvements. (Gloger reported that ten years later, public transportation has improved, but it remains a problem for the neighborhood.)

By 2016, The Storefront was working with an operating budget of $1,991,500; supported by a range of public and private funders;[5] and actively convening, coordinating, and strategizing with institutions, residents, and nonprofit organizations. The Storefront had an impressive diversity of results, including these projects, which were initiated and led by residents:

- The Bridging Project: The bridge on Lawrence Avenue East that connects the Kingston and Galloway neighborhoods has been unpopular due to the high speed of its traffic; its narrow, sometimes dangerous, sidewalks; and its history of suicides. In the summer of 2011, seven community groups, including The Storefront, organized community youth to reclaim the bridge through an art project and community event, which was celebrated by the entire community in September 2011.[6]
- Community. Design. Initiative: This project grew out of an effort to engage community youth in renovating the interior of a former police station into a new home for The Storefront. The project has grown into a skill-building program that links youth with mentors from a variety of professions to plan and implement building and landscape improvements in the community. Many of the youth involved in the renovation of the police station have gone

4 While informed by FSG's Collective Impact model (which was informed by the work of StriveTogether), The Storefront never formally followed that path. The organization distinguishes its own model, Connected Community Approach, on page 16 of its Theory of Change.

5 For more about funding sources, see East Scarborough Storefront, *Our Story*, 2015, http://www.thestorefront.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/OurStory2.0.pdf.

6 To learn more about this event, visit http://bridgingproject.blogspot.com.

on to study social work, architecture, or international development in college.

- Local economic viability: The Storefront supports local businesses in working together to tackle issues of economic viability, both for individual enterprises and for the community as a whole. For example, local hospitality industry players support would-be entrepreneurs and youth looking to get into that kind of work. A KGO business network, launched in 2012, provides a platform for local businesses to cross-promote, learn from one other, and advocate for local change. It helps new entrepreneurs with business planning and provides them with financial tools and other services. For example, the network gives culinary entrepreneurs free access to a commercial-grade kitchen, where they can develop and test their products.[7]

There are many lessons to be learned from The Storefront, and much has already been written about it. (See the bibliography at the end of this report.) For the purpose of this case study, we focus on those elements of The Storefront's work that suggest emergence. In writing this study, we were guided by these questions: What sets this initiative apart from other community-based efforts? Why did we select it as an example of emergence? What contributed to The Storefront's success in an environment that would have normally defeated the initiative?

Our overarching hypothesis is this: If an organization's line of sight is clear and visible to others, and if the agents in the system are activated authentically, given the freedom to experiment, and have a way to come together and learn from their experience, then the effort will achieve results that are greater, more fit to their environment, and more sustainable than if they were designed and implemented in a top-down fashion. All of these conditions were not only present in The Storefront but also importantly intertwined with one other, and they formed the foundation for decision-making at many levels.

7 East Scarborough Storefront, internal report to Metcalf Foundation, 2017.

8 What *is* The Storefront? In general, when we refer to "The Storefront," we are referring not only to a physical space but also to the staff, partners, and volunteers responsible for the day-to-day operations of the organization. That said, we have come to appreciate that The Storefront is more than this and that it includes the funders that support it and the community members it serves.

Relationships became critical to every element of The Storefront's success and work model.

Strong relationships lay groundwork for emergent results

From its beginnings, The Storefront[8] sought to engage and build relationships between service providers and local residents. Then it intentionally designed and built ownership from the bottom up to create a pathway for the community to create its own solutions over time, regardless of the challenges it faced. Relationships—among the hub staff, the agencies on site, the community residents, and other stakeholders—became critical to every element of The Storefront's success and work model. Initially, this showed up as Gloger sought to create coherence among the forty social-service agencies and trust between residents and service providers:

> [This focus on relationships] taught us so much about what to include in the [Storefront] model, how to engage people, what organizational cultures to seek out and what characteristics to avoid. It taught us when it was okay to compromise and when it was critical to hold our ground.[9]

Gloger extended this focus on relationships to engaging the community to guide all The Storefront's work, from strategy development to hiring decisions. But community engagement is nothing new. What is it about The Storefront's practice of community engagement that has made it so successful?

In our research report, we describe the distinction between top-down and emergent strategy as being akin to the difference between a game of chess and a team sport. In chess, there are only two agents of action—the chess pieces have no agency of their own. A team sport recognizes the important role of the thinking and experienced agents on the field. The role of the coach is to help the team develop the skills to bring their thinking and experience to the field in order to achieve something larger together. The Storefront's approach to community engagement is akin to a sports team's.[10]

9 Mann, *Little Community That Could*, 15.

10 See also Tony Bovaird, "Beyond Engagement and Participation: User and Community Coproduction of Public Services," *Public Administration Review*, 67, no. 5 (September/October 2007): 846–60.

As Paul Dowsett, an architect who has become deeply involved with The Storefront, put it, "From what I've seen from [traditional] community engagement, the so-called experts have already made the majority of the decisions and are trying to sell it to the community. They call that community engagement."

Anne Gloger concurred: "Older, more traditional forms of community development tend to be focused on getting community residents to *do* things, to *change behavior*. Effective, authentic, community engagement focuses on figuring out what community members want to do, want to accomplish, and then supporting them in doing so, all the while paying attention to momentum and opportunity because we're not trying to get people to *do* things."

What does this look like in practice?

Resident and steering committee member Colleen Bone described her first Community Speaks dinner: "I just figured it would be like a town hall meeting where people are telling you what they're doing. I was pleasantly surprised when they involved *all* the people there and we all got a chance to speak. . . . They listened to what the community wanted, looked into it, and most often made it happen."

Lifetime resident and fellow steering committee member Carol Armstrong was struck by the alignment that was reached through these community conversations. "At the end of the day," she said, "there was common ground in what everyone in the community saw as important to address."

Longtime steering committee member Janice Simmons said that The Storefront had a more sophisticated understanding of both community engagement and ownership, and of the relationship between The Storefront staff and the community. "The impact of having high expectations for the community is enormous," Simmons told us. "Historically, most folks hadn't expected much from people in this community. But at The Storefront, everyone's ideas are equal."

The importance of relationships also shows up in decision-making, according to Simmons. "They've never jumped right into something without having a conversation with the staff, having a conversation with the steering committee, having a conversation with the community: Does this idea make sense, and how are we going to continue to support it?"

This practice takes community engagement to a whole new level. Having both respect for, and high expectations of, the residents creates the space for inviting community members to value and contribute their own experiences and priorities to discussions of community problem solving. This has resulted in resident-led projects becoming part of the fabric of the neighborhood and integrated into the work of organizations, faith communities, and resident associations. Many new relationships have developed that have led to reciprocal learning, sharing, and support, and so have relationships that continue to transcend any one specific outside-funded project, or even The Storefront itself.

Gloger stressed that community engagement is more than just engaging *residents*. "So much that's written about community development focuses only on the residents; and everybody else is other," she said. "Our ability to be emergent is to look at everybody as partners, whether they're resident leaders, universities, businesses, and so on. We have relationships in all zones in the neighborhood, and not just with residents. We'll put residents and university folks in the same place and work with them on the same issues."

The Storefront does not engage residents and other stakeholders on *every* decision. Relationships with the community are so solid that staff members have a strong sense of when to bring in the community voice and when the community trusts them to make decisions on their own. "I think that this is a fundamental skill to work in emergence," Gloger shared, "the ability to know when, how, and who to engage in what, and to design processes so that everyone feels involved and has meaningful input, while not getting bogged down in the need to consult in each decision." She also pointed out that while there are many resident-led groups, the Residents Rising group consistently engages residents on a variety of topics, pressure testing ideas.

Breaking through a Brick Wall The Storefront approach encourages residents to push past their expectations for themselves. As part of the Neighborhood Trust initiative (small grants given to residents to launch their own projects), one resident sought support for a program to provide breakfast to the neighborhood children. She had passion for the project, but stymied the staff one day by walking away in a huff. She returned a few weeks later, intent try again. She admitted that because she did not know how to read, the requirement for documentation felt like an impenetrable brick wall. Using imagery and other cues, staff walked her through the proposal and she successfully applied for the funds.

Building the ability of residents to solve community problems

From its inception, The Storefront embedded a principle of co-creation into how it identified problems and designed solutions. Initially, this co-creation was done among the original service organizations, focusing on the question, How can we, in an era of political austerity, deliver a wide range of services to this community without building multiple social-service organizations?

After the 2006 march to save The Storefront, it became clear to all stakeholders—staff, funders, agencies, and several community residents—that developing the ability of residents to design their own solutions to community problems was essential to helping them improve their quality of life and their community. Co-creation shifted to include the residents. "We had an honest desire to build something by the community, for the community," Gloger said. "Plus, we were also committed to an asset-based approach—really believing that everyone has wisdom to contribute, that residents are active agents not merely service recipients."

Developing the ability of residents to design their own solutions to community problems was essential to helping them improve their quality of life and their community.

This is now reflected in The Storefront's theory of change, as part of the impact it wants to see:

> People in KGO will have increased freedom, knowledge and opportunities to make meaningful choices concerning their own and their community's well-being. People and organizations inside and outside KGO will develop new ways of thinking about and working in communities.[11]

And The Storefront put this into action immediately.

Police station renovation

The Storefront had a new home in a former police station, but there was concern that, in its original form, the space would not be inviting to the people who needed The Storefront's services.

Zahra Ebrahim, a Toronto designer and self-described "change creative," received a $30,000 grant from the city to create an art installation with low-income youth. The city sent her to The Storefront. After a couple of conversations with Anne Gloger, and after seeing the work of the community, Ebrahim suggested making the renovation of the police station itself the art installation. And youth would design it. Gloger agreed, saying she would veto decisions only if the youth made choices that affected program delivery. Otherwise, she would go along with what the youth designed.

Meanwhile, the designer invited architectural firms to assist in a design charette with the youth. At the last minute, the chosen firm canceled, and Paul Dowsett, the principal of the replacement firm, SUSTAINABLE.TO Architecture + Building, had no idea what he and his staff were walking into. "We didn't know anything about The Storefront project but only that it involved a bunch of youth from a marginalized neighborhood on the fringes of the city of Toronto," Dowsett explained. "We certainly didn't imagine that we would continue to be involved beyond this one day, and I certainly didn't expect to still be involved seven years later!"

At the design charette, Ebrahim spread magazines across the tables and asked the youth to cut out images of what they really liked and what they did not. The likes and dislikes were grouped on different parts of a wall. "We [the architects] noticed there were some commonalities that ran through their choices but that there were also some interesting outlier ideas," noted Dowsett. The architects found that they could teach design by pointing out the good design reasons behind the youths' likes and dislikes—how combinations of colors might affect mood or people with visual impairments.

The designers and architects continued to engage the youth in different aspects of the renovation, including managing available resources, not a topic the organizers expected the youth to have much aptitude for. But, as Dowsett explained, "these kids understood budgets in a way that was surprising at the time. They grew up in families where money is tight, and their parents are probably making budget decisions all of the time. So they understood, OK, we have one hundred dollars. How can we best stretch each dollar? Where could they do two things with that dollar, instead of one thing?"

Dowsett noticed that some of the best ideas came when the group was confronted with a challenge. "These kids were mostly newcomers to Canada. They came from all over the

11 The Storefront Theory of Change, p 5.

world. And they brought what they knew from their original homes. 'In my country, we did things this way,' said one youth. Another: 'In my country, we would do it this other way.' These two came up with a hybrid solution that no one person would ever have come up with. They combined two traditions they knew of and put them together to solve a problem."

Not only did these often-disregarded youth devise a better solution but they also recognized that they had something valuable to contribute in a quasi-professional setting, and that differences in where they came from—often a source of conflict on the streets—could bring surprising benefits.

But would The Storefront leadership approve their contributions? The youth had learned through the design sessions that contrast helps visually impaired people to distinguish a door from a wall. They selected orange and blue paint for the internal walls of the station. Unfortunately, these colors just happened to be the director's least favorite.

"Anne abhorred orange and disliked blue," Dowsett said. "But she knew that she only had the right to veto if a decision the youth made affected functionality in program delivery. Color does not. She vowed that as long as they followed good process, she would go along with it." And she did. Ultimately, she liked the result.

Guidance from the field suggests that community engagement that leads to true agency for participants means sharing power, control, or authority in order to build trust.[12]

Whether it was in choosing colors, addressing challenges, or deciding how to spend limited resources, "the youth learned that their opinions were valid," Dowsett told us. "We didn't make decisions for them, but we gave them the tools they needed to make their own decisions." In the process, the youth also learned leadership, presentation, and negotiation skills—all kinds of soft skills that could be applied to other areas of their lives. "Who really cares about the building being renovated?" Dowsett said. "These kids' lives got renovated, and that's the important thing."

12 *In Stewardship: Choosing Service Over Self-Interest* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1993), Peter Block implies this without specifically naming letting go of control. See also "Chapter 13: Section 11, Collaborative Leadership," Community Tool Box, Work Group for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas, http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/leadership/leadership-ideas/collaborative-leadership/main

These new abilities show up in changed lives. Lifetime resident of East Scarborough Carol Armstrong shared this: "Our neighborhood is full of high-rise apartments, with many folks in there isolated and afraid to come out because they feel a sense of shame because they're not doing as well as others and can't get a job." Through its people and the way it engages residents, The Storefront communicates that "there is no shame, no moral issue in being poor or not having a job," Armstrong continued. She explained that through workshops and conversations, such residents begin to envision futures and possibilities they had not thought of before. "Look at these people. See the smiles that come on their faces. Even their physical demeanor changes, because now they have a sense of 'I'm really worthy.'

Pollination

The Storefront is generating results that could not have been predicted: successful advocacy on the part of residents for policy change and funding, increased college attendance for at-risk youth, a stronger local economy, improved literacy and leadership skills. A surprising example of these results came from Paul Dowsett, the architect who worked with youth to renovate the police station. After working with The Storefront, Dowsett changed how he works with other clients, whether they are communities wanting solutions similar to The Storefront's or private clients renovating their kitchens.

Before working with The Storefront, Dowsett had been a partner for fourteen years in a traditional firm, where, as he said, "we did things the usual way"

(continued on page 9)

Pollination *(continued)*

—a top-down model in which the architect is the only author. "There was something about that that wasn't working for me any longer, and I struck out on my own and created my own firm where we vowed we'd do things differently," Dowsett explained. "I didn't know exactly what that was going to look like, but I knew the old traditional way of doing things wasn't working anymore."

The initial design charette with The Storefront youth helped Dowsett and his colleagues begin to see what a new way of working could look like, and he took this to his next project.

After Dowsett helped The Storefront to renovate the police station, another opportunity to work with a community came along. "We were approached by the St. Stephen's Community House to solve the problem created by program participants going to smoke in the shaded areas of neighbors' properties, much to the dislike of the neighbors," explained Paul Dowsett. "I said no. The people in your program will design it." Following the model of working with KGO youth on the police station, Dowsett supported program participants in designing their own shaded smoking area on the property of St. Stephen's Community House.

Dowsett is also an advocate for changing how other firms and stakeholders do their own work—from designing solutions for clients to helping clients discover their own solutions and, in the process, to develop their own design skills.

"We have now successfully applied our learning to work with other stakeholders in other projects, including the Tower Renewal Project," Dowsett said, "and we've opened their eyes to how this way of working can be very successful."

He continued: "Our entire neighborhood renewal project is based on the lessons learned from the youth-led renovation of the police station. We're working now with a local landlord who owns the two tower buildings behind [The Storefront] to use the same process."

Resident action planning

The Storefront took the principle of youth-designed solutions back to the community and now periodically convenes what it calls Resident Action Planning. Between sixty-five and one hundred residents attend a community meal, typically at a restaurant, during which an initial report of The Storefront's progress is shared. As Anne Gloger explained, "Then, there are three questions each of the tables grapple with and flip chart and report back on: What issues do you see emerging in the neighborhood? Where do you see energy for residents to work on these issues? What role do you want to play in organizing around these issues?" This process leads to the creation of resident-led teams to work on specific issues. The Storefront then plans how it can best support these efforts and what capacity the community will need to be successful.

Gloger continued, "Then we create a document that goes back to various tables and helps The Storefront to inform funders about what is emerging in the community." Often, a funder will step forward to invest additional funds in one of the resident-led initiatives. Early resident-led initiatives included the following, which are ongoing:

- Residents Rising: Volunteers work throughout the community to identify, and engage residents in addressing, neighborhood issues.
- Healthy Living through Art: Projects stress healthy lifestyles and encourage children, youth, and their parents to engage in artistic expression.

In 2010, in an effort to further support resident-led solutions, The Storefront set up the Neighbourhood Trust, a platform through which grassroots resident groups received small amounts of funding (no more than $15,000) for their own initiatives, with The Storefront acting as legal and fiscal agent. This was a new kind of relationship for The Storefront and its community residents.

As described in an unpublished, draft report by The Storefront, which it shared with our research team, "The time was right for the development of Neighbourhood Trust because of a convergence of three things: momentum in our own community among KGO residents to make tangible contributions to their community's well-being; renewed interest among funders in resourcing resident-led initiatives, and Storefront's increasing understanding of the opportunities, challenges and pitfalls of using 'trusteeships' and shared platform models in a community development context."

"We believe that a myriad of connected activities need to be in place in order to intentionally and over time strengthen the community's social fabric," Gloger said. "We also believe that the more the social fabric is created and sustained by residents, the stronger that social fabric will be."

Working closely with United Way Toronto's Action for Neighbourhood Change initiative, The Storefront rolled out and activated a new structure designed to create local change by putting resources from multiple donors into the hands of residents. Toronto Community Housing Corporation and the Ontario Trillium Foundation provided three years of grants to support logistics, networking, administration, and capacity building.

A power imbalance is created that makes residents accountable to the organization which, if not handled carefully, can reduce residents' agency and control rather than increasing it.

The Storefront staff helped residents to apply for the funding and offered coaching throughout the course of a project.

These are some of the programs residents created:

- A breakfast club that fed fifty-six children each school day for three years, supported by five different funders
- KGO Kicks, an ongoing, after-school soccer club to help youth not only kick a soccer ball but also kick drugs and kick crime out of the neighborhood
- Healthy Living through Art, which helps young people to learn about healthy living and depict their goals and aspirations through artistic expression, bringing color and life to the community
- Reading Parent Partnership, which equips mothers with the skills, tools, and knowledge to teach their children to read
- The East Scarborough Festival Market, where residents not only mingle and socialize but also explore small-business endeavors

The Neighbourhood Trust had many successes, including these:

- A total of $136,000 supported twenty-one resident-initiated efforts, of which eight continue independently.
- Ten resident leaders earned certifications in areas relevant to their projects, including event planning, first aid/CPR, and safe food handling, through George Brown College.
- Through formal training, residents articulated and demonstrated increased capacity in ten key areas, including child welfare, partnership development, and dynamics of local leadership.
- Resident leaders reported greatly increased ability and confidence in leading.

Despite this success, the Neighbourhood Trust generated unintended consequences that led to its closing after five years.

One project was so successful in its initial year that it required funding beyond the Trust's $15,000 ceiling. The Storefront did not have the capacity to support this larger project and could not offer more funding, much to the unhappiness of the resident who had launched the project. Jillian Witt, who had supported the Neighbourhood Trust, admitted that the Trust created new and unanticipated power imbalances. "Residents started seeing The Storefront as a power gateway, controlling access to resources," she said. According to the unpublished draft report on the initiative,

> [although] the Neighbourhood Trust was explicitly designed to shift power away from formalized organizations and into the hands of local residents, the new legal and financial relationship that The Storefront had with residents actually gave us [The Storefront] more power over them than before.

This power imbalance was contrary to the original intent of the Neighbourhood Trust and against the principles of The Storefront's larger vision. From the report:

> This is one of the fundamental flaws with the model—not just of Neighbourhood Trust, but with any "trustee" or "shared platform" approach to funding grassroots projects in a community development context—when the resident-led project is funded with government or charitable dollars, a power imbalance is created that makes residents accountable to the organization which, if not handled carefully, can reduce residents' agency and control rather than increasing it.

The Storefront could have tackled this power imbalance as it had tackled so much of its other work. But, ultimately, funders were not willing to support the staffing and indirect costs that would have allowed the Trust to continue in a way that aligned with The Storefront's principles. "Without ongoing, collaborative and sustainable funding," Anne Gloger explained, "for residents, it feels like opening the door to shared power and control and then slamming it shut again."

Despite the Neighbourhood Trust's closing, The Storefront continues to support resident action planning in general and will accept funding for resident-initiated projects. "If someone wants to give money to residents, we work with the resident to make sure that they are able to use the funds for community benefit," Gloger said. But The Storefront did have to give up the formalized structure of the Trust because, as Gloger explained, "we couldn't fund really good authentic community-based process [as a re-granter]."

In addition to supporting work led by residents, The Storefront also works with partners in support of the community:

- Through a community/university initiative, the University of Toronto Scarborough meets its community-engagement goals while helping faculty to meaningfully connect with the community.
- SCENE is a network of employment service providers working collaboratively on behalf of the community despite government mandates that promote competition.
- Access to Recreation is a coalition of organizations creating joint initiatives to promote and more meaningfully engage people in recreation activities.

The Storefront continues to emphasize placing agency with the community—to help residents identify, build, and sustain solutions to their own challenges—just not as a regranter/funder. Residents and other community stakeholders continue to create and implement adaptive, innovative solutions. In the process, everyone learns how to identify, design, and lead efforts to solve future challenges.

Making thinking visible through decision-making

In our research report, we propose that the stronger the line of sight to a group's ultimate goal—including the thinking about how best to get there—and the more that individual agents learn collectively from their experience as they work, the greater their collective impact and the more sustainable the investment.

Holding strong line of sight helps group members respond to opportunities and challenges that might otherwise divert them from their path.

The Storefront case illustrates this benefit. It also shows how holding strong line of sight helps group members respond to opportunities and challenges that might otherwise divert them from their path. From the very beginning, The Storefront team members have been deliberate in how they use decision-making—in everything from day-to-day operational decisions to decisions about high-level strategy development—as an opportunity to make their thinking visible to one another and check current thinking against what they've learned from their work.

At one of The Storefront's earliest community sessions, staff sought not just resident input but also resident-designed policies for the organization. Gloger described the session: "We threw a bunch of organizational policies on the table and asked them to dissect them for what they liked and what they'd like to see changed."[13] Residents literally tore the policies apart, choosing desirable elements, tossing out undesirable elements. "The residents really guided how we built this place and how Community Speaks started," Gloger explained. Out of this, The Storefront's policies emerged.

The Storefront's governance includes a steering committee that, from the beginning, has comprised agency staff and community members. At first, "[residents were] reluctant to come to the table where they don't know for sure their voice is going to be heard," observed Janice Simmons, of the Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough. She has served on the committee from its inception.

Two residents—now members of the steering committee—echoed this sentiment. "I looked at all these people—a university president, a business owner, and I thought, What am I doing here?" Carol Armstrong shared. Colleen Bone, another resident, added, "I don't like sitting in on all the 'politics' stuff." They were both surprised to see that the group turned to them for their experience as community members, as parents. "They listened. They sought my opinion," Armstrong said. "I came to the realization that I've got a heck of a lot to contribute."

13 This may sound similar to the design charette for the police station, and it was. "A design thinking or charette model is pretty indicative of how we facilitate processes to elicit collective wisdom on a subject," shared Gloger. "We do this kind of thing all the time."

The committee initially had a higher agency-to-resident ratio than its 50:50 goal. The Storefront addressed this imbalance by inviting residents to simply sit, listen, and watch, and to contribute if they wanted to. Simmons explained: "I think it became quickly very clear that the way the steering committee operated, everybody's voice was heard and everybody had something to contribute to the conversation, big or small." Residents were also encouraged to start out on subcommittees. "This served as a gateway to involvement at the steering committee level," Simmons said. Over time, the ratio changed. "Now, you have no idea who is a community member and who was an agency member," she pointed out.

Everybody's voice was heard and everybody had something to contribute to the conversation, big or small.

The Storefront's decision-making process for staff recruitment and hiring also reflects its principles. For any open position, The Storefront invites any candidate who meets the minimum requirements to a group work activity. "The minimum allows [The Storefront] to consider people who might not have a stellar résumé but can demonstrate their skills and approach more accurately in a community setting," Jillian Witt, former senior project specialist with Tides Canada, explained. Because The Storefront is seeking individuals who can also work well with community members, it invites eight to twenty candidates into a room, where they sit at small tables and are given a problem to solve collectively. Staff members observe how the candidates solve problems; those who pass muster move on to the interview, which is held by a group of three: a community resident, an agency representative, and the hiring lead (a manager or The Storefront director). The decision of who gets hired has to be unanimous. "It's either an absolute yes, or it's no. Otherwise, we re-post the position," Anne Gloger said.

From Gloger's experience, ignoring The Storefront's principles has predictably negative results. She allowed one hiring decision to go through without following the "absolute yes or no/repost the position" rule, because she did not want to admit to one of the internal applicants (who was not a finalist) that the group had to go back to the drawing board. Instead, Gloger withheld her reservations, and the committee hired an outside candidate who did not have unanimous support. As she admitted, "it turned out to be a bad hire in the long run."

Clear line of sight has helped The Storefront to avoid some very common nonprofit mistakes. At one point, The Storefront was approached by a funder about supporting a very large project to engage residents in identifying priorities for change. Three months in, the funder changed its expectations. "[The potential funder] wanted to know what the outcomes were before they'd commit to the funding," Paul Dowsett explained. "Anne had to say, 'I can't tell you.' Despite the amount of money on the line, she had to stick to her principles about people and process coming before product." The Storefront turned the money down. Gloger said, "The reason we walked away was because we had told the residents that this was *their* process. We couldn't go back to the residents and tell them they had to conform to a new set of constraints." She added, "We figured out a way to continue the project without the funding." Meanwhile, the funder did not just walk away; instead it invested in strengthening the relationship with the grantee. "While we ended that particular funding relationship, they knew they wanted to continue to work with us," Gloger explained. "They invested in resources to strengthen the relationship, and they continue to fund other areas of our work today."

At another point in its evolution, The Storefront was offered a grant from Employment Ontario, a public social service available to every community in Ontario. The province wanted The Storefront to be its arm in KGO. This required The Storefront to offer direct services, something that, in its capacity as a connector, it had never pursued; this felt like a threat to The Storefront's mission.

The steering committee, comprising staff, agencies, and community members, engaged in a thoughtful exploration of the benefits and risks, led by its vision (what is now its mission): "We seek to collaborate to support people to live healthy lives, find meaningful work, play and thrive."

Jillian Witt explained that the group found a way to accept the Employment Ontario grant and offer a direct service "only after having grounded themselves in their mission, understanding that they needed to grow, and [seeing that] this grant would allow them to do that." She added, "The Storefront also tied this service to their other economic work, making sure that whatever program Employment Ontario was putting out actually did support [KGO's] local economy."

Over time, through a careful process of building thoughtful reflection into the decision-making process, staff members became more and more confident in their ability to stay on track and, therefore, thoughtfully consider opportunities that might previously have felt risky to their mission. Today they follow a checklist when considering new initiatives; it asks, among other things,

- Will this initiative help us to fulfill our vision?
- Does this initiative conflict with any of our values and/or beliefs?
- Who will receive the most benefit if we take on this initiative?
- What will be the impact on agency involvement, community involvement, staff time, resources?
- If we proceed with this initiative, what do we need to put in place to ensure its success and the ongoing success of The Storefront as a whole?
- Who needs to be consulted before we can commit to this initiative?

Even if a decision led to unexpected results, sticking to the process was still worth it, Anne Gloger insisted. "Embedding these kinds of principles back into the working part of the job can never be wrong, even if the monetary or initial outcome doesn't come to fruition," she explained.

Groups go back to their own projects and organizations and incorporate the results of these discussions into their forward planning.

Because of this very deliberate attention to making decisions and using them to strengthen and test the community's thinking, The Storefront was able to continue strengthening both the trusted relationships with residents and the agency of the community members to solve their own problems.

Getting smarter over time

The Storefront creates intentional opportunities for staff, residents, and agencies to build their skills in areas they have identified—for example, creating a theory of change or strengthening their communications through storytelling. The Storefront also embeds reflection and learning into its work and then applies what it is learning to future work, through strategy circles, evaluations and, as described earlier, decision-making. Not surprisingly, the organization applies its principles of people before process and product to decision-making, as well.

At the time of this writing, The Storefront is well into a developmental evaluation that began in 2014. "I always struggled with evaluation for The Storefront's work because it just didn't align well with traditional formative and summative evaluation methodologies," Gloger shared. Reading Michael Quinn Patton's book *Developmental Evaluation* changed all that, and the organization is now exploring the questions, What value does The Storefront as a community backbone organization bring to the community? What is better because of this work? Two Storefront projects received additional funding to incorporate rigorous developmental evaluation:

- KGO ACT is exploring the questions, How are organizations better able to support youth? How are youth influencing the ecosystem that supports them?
- ESW is exploring how aligning supports and services with employment opportunities in a geographic context improves the ability of people living in poverty to benefit from jobs created through public spending.

The results of these evaluations will feed into the larger organization-wide evaluation. "By the end of 2018, we should have a solid year of data to analyze against these and other questions," Gloger said.

In the meantime, the developmental evaluation process includes "reflection days" with local youth and organizations, separately and together. "They review the evaluation data and have a data party," Gloger explained. They explore such questions as, "What do we know about youth, about organization relationships in the neighborhood? What does that tell us about how well they use an organization to support one another? What does that tells us about what we collectively should be doing moving forward?" The groups go back to their own projects and organizations and incorporate the results of these discussions into their forward planning. Elements of their evaluation and learning processes include the following:

- Every month, The Storefront convenes the staff members of each of its five community-impact strategy teams to analyze results and how what they do advances their strategies; to examine how they know what works; and to discuss what could be done differently. "It's an eclectic group of people who may not regularly work directly together, but they all contribute to a particular community impact area," Gloger explained. "They are core to the evaluation process."

- A developmental-evaluation committee includes staff, residents, academic partners, and other sector partners.
- Strategy circles, the equivalent of departments, are organized by staff, and members meet when they need to, usually every week or every two weeks. For example, members of the Resident Leadership circle meet to explore how their work advances The Storefront's aspirations for impact, how they work together, and how their work connects with the work of other circles.

The reflection done at these and other meetings is usually a facilitated process "We use storytelling, games, flip-chart brainstorming, and lots of sticky notes and crafts," Gloger explained. "The idea is to reflect on the learning we have done together. . . . We often use a 'What? So what? Now what?' approach."

This approach also builds internal bench strength, growing leadership beyond the director. "I facilitate good process among the staff, hold them accountable to the values and guiding principles," Gloger shared. "Staff all embrace the approach, are eager for constant learning, and take on leadership roles in a variety of ways as and when they are ready." Just one result is that all recruiting for, and the running of Community Speaks dinners, is now done by Gloger's staff.

Throughout all of these learning activities—whether building skills or reflecting on and applying what they have learned from their work to upcoming work and strengthening strategy—The Storefront engages with its community of staff, funders, agencies, and residents, further putting into practice the principles that support, encourage, and even respond to emergence.

Can The Storefront's success be propagated?

The Storefront has won awards, been written about in academic publications,[14] and produced high-impact results, and now funders and communities frequently turn to The Storefront, seeking to replicate the organization's success. But as Janice Simmons, a longtime steering committee member, pointed out, "There is no cookie-cutter approach

The Storefront Theory of Change

Fifteen years into its existence (in about 2015), The Storefront, now a project of Tides Canada's shared platform (http://tidescanada.org/approach/shared-platform), knew it was onto something that was really working. But the organization had no systematic evaluation process or capacity to evaluate its work. The Storefront engaged a strategy coach and an evaluation consultant to facilitate the development of its theory of change and evaluation framework. Staff, residents, designers, sociologists, social-service providers, and even botanists participated in an eighteen-month process that resulted in a community-centered approach that places The Storefront at the intersection of three groups:

- Local change makers: anyone within and outside the community intentionally working to make the community a better place
- People who live and work within the community
- Policy and sector: the larger systems influenced by, and influencing the work of, The Storefront.

"The Storefront works across boundaries so that people are connected to the systems that support them, and those systems are better connected to the people they support. People and organizations are encouraged and supported to collaborate and co-create initiatives."[15]

Anne Gloger, director of The Storefront, said, "The theory of change informs everything we do. . . . It's all about the autonomy of individuals, agencies, and institutions and what we can do to support, strengthen, align, coordinate, and collectively strategize how to amplify efforts for the good of KGO.

15 East Scarborough Storefront, "Theory of Change," (undated) p. 13.

14 Adriana Stark, "Revitalization on the Margins: Exploring 'Revitalization' as a Potentially (Dis)Empowering Process in Toronto's Inner Suburban Communities," *Landmarks: The Undergraduate Geography Journal* 2 (Fall 2016), 14–22, http://geography.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Landmarks_2016_Journal.pdf.

for replicating The Storefront in other places. Instead, Anne Gloger emphasizes the *principles* that guide all the work of The Storefront." These are documented in the group's theory of change:

- We are rooted in past learning, grounded by today's context, and inspired by future opportunities.
- We put people and process before product.
- We explore possibilities as they emerge.
- We focus on people's strengths and aspirations.
- We foster innovation that is meaningful and sustainable.

These principles are embedded in The Storefront's Connected Community Approach and serve to

- leverage and mobilize community assets to increase the social, economic, and environmental well-being of people living in marginalized circumstances; and
- support networks of planners, architects, businesses, residents, academic institutions, and social-service organizations in having meaningful discussions, running programs, organizing events, sharing learning, and participating in a wide range of activities effectively and collectively.

Staff members are also very intentional about embedding the principles in every discussion. For example, two new managers have been engaging the hub staff in facilitated processes that were designed to surface how their work exemplifies the principle of "people and process before product" and which past learning is shaping their work today.

The Storefront continues to evolve, responding to both opportunities and momentum that emerge through its work. "We're now working on place-based systems change, policy, and influence in a bigger way," Gloger said. "Addressing the tension between doing big systems work and neighborhood work is something that has to be navigated very carefully."

Due to The Storefront's success and requests from other communities to share what it has learned, Gloger has created the Centre for Connected Communities, and she recently published *A Community Backbone's Theory of Change*. In addition, Gloger is working on a digital platform for sharing the principles and practices that have contributed to The Storefront's success. The goal is to help people translate what worked for The Storefront into what would be meaningful and appropriate for their own communities.

What will it take to propagate this success? A key component of The Storefront's success has been taking care to keep strong line of sight. Keeping the initiative emergent will require not conflating its goals with the strategies it took to reach them.

There is no cookie-cutter approach for replicating The Storefront in other places.

Conclusion

The Storefront started as a one-stop service-delivery shop—a technical solution seeking to solve a specific problem of access to needed services. Its evolution exemplifies the potential of emergence to produce results that are greater, more varied, more adaptive, and more sustainable than what would have been possible if the organization had remained focused solely on the technical solution. At The Storefront, the focus shifted from providing services to residents to building their ability to identify their own needs and challenges, and discover new ways to solve them. Now, as the community sees its needs and challenges change, it has the ability to work together to address them.

From the moment the neighborhood marched to save The Storefront, everything about how the organization has operated has helped residents learn to identify and solve their own problems. In a traditionally disempowering environment, The Storefront created the conditions for residents to recognize their expertise and their ability to contribute, and to get beyond the barriers that society has put in place. It created the conditions for residents to overcome the assumptions they had learned to hold for themselves.

What made this possible? From the beginning, The Storefront leadership invested in building relationships among the organization, its agencies, community residents, and a range of often nontraditional players, engaging them all authentically and committing to the principle of "people and process before product." Embedded in these principles was a strong expectation of what residents can accomplish beyond what society had typically expected for them.

Our biggest questions about The Storefront are, What will it take to sustain it beyond any one person's leadership? Are the conditions in place to sustain the emergent nature of this work beyond Anne Gloger's tenure? Gloger understands systems, and she is not shy about confronting complexity. She admits to being energized by the unknown, and she embraces challenges as opportunities to learn, convene, and mobilize collective leadership. She has created the conditions for emergence, including working actively with staff, community residents, and agency representatives. "People and process before product" guides everything The Storefront does.

So what happens when Anne Gloger leaves? To what extent do emergent initiatives survive the departure of such a leader? Even with all the emphasis placed on building trusting relationships, truly engaging the community, and empowering residents to solve their own challenges, Gloger admits that transition could be a challenge. "The managers collectively hold the whole from an on-the-ground perspective . . . but no one manager has all the pieces of all the initiatives," she admitted. But the supports are in place: "We have a strategy coach, an evaluation consultant, our architect, our business advisor, and several others who are holding enough of the whole that if I disappeared, they could support a transition to a new leader," Gloger explained. Residents concur. "We may not know everything she knows," Colleen Bone said. "But she has people in place that would be able to continue on."

More than anything, the principles that have made The Stor front what it is today are likely to help it sustain and grow over time.

Appendix: Interviews and surveys

Interviews

- Carol Armstrong (community resident and steering committee member, The Storefront), interview with the author, May 19, 2017.
- Colleen Bone (community resident and steering committee member, The Storefront), interview with the author, May 19, 2017.
- Wendy Fanfair (community resident and volunteer, The Storefront), interview with the author, November 10, 2016.
- Paul Dowsett (principal architect, SUSTAINABLE.TO Architecture + Building), interview with the author, November 23, 2016.
- Anne Gloger (principal, The Storefront), interviews with the author, summer 2016 through summer 2017.
- Janice Simmons (manager, early years programs and services, Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough; member, The Storefront Steering Committee), interview with the author, September 21, 2016.
- Jillian Witt (former senior project specialist, Tides Canada), interview with the author, September 22, 2016. Witt was a liaison between Tides Canada and its projects. She had daily contact with The Storefront and was also involved in the Neighbourhood Trust project (which is no longer in existence).

Survey respondents

- Anne Gloger, Principal, The Storefront
- Tabish Surani, Lead, Program Delivery, Youth Opportunities Fund, Ontario Trillium Foundation
- Lisa Watson, CEO, Strategies for Social Impact

Promising Case:

The Charleston Illumination Project

Heidi Sparkes Guber, *Fourth Quadrant Partners*

The Charleston Illumination Project, in Charleston, South Carolina, was the city's response to the shootings at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church on June 17, 2015. This year-long initiative to engage a shocked city in deep conversation using polarity mapping was the crisis-driven extension of a process that had been started in 2010 by Police Chief Greg Mullen—first to teach polarity thinking to the police department and, beginning in 2013, to extend training and listening sessions across the city. The initiative originally involved more than two hundred Charleston citizens in working together to create a safe environment where late-night activity next to longstanding neighborhoods was becoming increasingly volatile and polarized. After the church shootings, and with a one-year grant from the Charleston Police Fund, in 2015, the city expanded the process—using polarity thinking and listening sessions across the community to increase trust between citizens and police.

More than thirty local facilitators have been trained to facilitate the listening sessions. In 2016, with local-sponsor funds of $120,000, the Illumination Project developed a citywide strategic-planning effort to engage communities in addressing local issues of safety for citizens and police. While this current form of the initiative is in its early stages, the project's members have been surprised to see such a rapid and widespread change in behavior and attitudes.

The project has continued beyond the crisis it served. The City of Charleston now houses and funds the project at $25,000 a year to scale the results citywide. The organizing team now goes into high-poverty and high-crime neighborhoods where it helps identify polarity tensions and local action steps that address issues a neighborhood cares about. In thirty-three listening sessions in 2016, the project identified five goals and eighty-six strategies, sixty-six of which came from ideas and comments provided by more than 850 citizens. The ten strategies for implementation at the top of the priority list included the continuation and topic expansion of listening sessions; these small-group, facilitated discussions were the heart of the project.

The number of strategies being tracked in official city reports is interesting, but what impressed the 4QP research team was new activity happening at the edges that appear to have been generated by the listening sessions. Our interviews surfaced new activities emerging from the relationships and trust that had been cultivated in the original effort. These include a community leadership program and a faith-based book club studying the history of the city, which hosted a conference on criminal justice reform in November 2017. The conference came out of the relationships among clergy who met one another in listening sessions. The conference attracted two hundred attendees, showcased ten local agencies doing criminal-justice reform, and received 160 commitments of support in the form of donations and volunteer service.

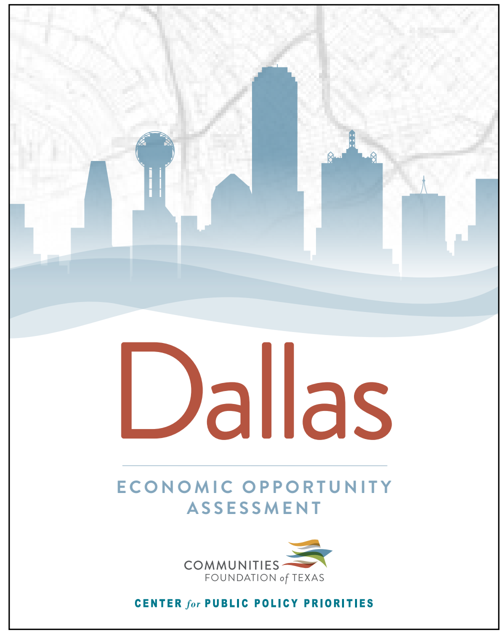
This emergence of new activity leads us to question whether results that are unanticipated by the core initiative team in a more centrally designed and managed initiative can gain the recognition they may deserve. From the perspective of emergence, these outliers, if they are acknowledged and learned from, can be the early indicators of a whole being created that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The Illumination Project is now expanding to a national level with a team of stakeholders, key organizers, and community leaders from the Charleston project. Illumination-related initiatives are being planned for three cities in Colorado (Boulder, Fort Collins, and Colorado Springs) and for national agencies in the Washington, DC, area, with the National Law Enforcement Museum in partnership. The plan is to eventually offer an online shared-learning site that allows learning across initiatives inspired by the Illumination Project.

Promising Case:

D3 Institute and Working Families Success Network

Heidi Sparkes Guber, *Fourth Quadrant Partners*

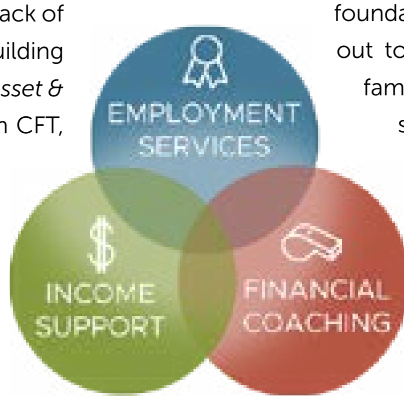


The Data Driven Decision-Making (D3) and Working Families Success (WFS) initiatives were started in 2012 after the board of trustees of the Communities Foundation of Texas (CFT) saw that economic conditions were shifting. The board committed to economic stability for low-income families as a strategic priority for the foundation and began looking at innovative ways to achieve greater and more sustainable results.

The D3 Institute was designed to help local agencies develop an up-to-date shared understanding of the needs of the working poor on the basis of available data. Selected agencies participate in monthly workshops, receive coaching, and participate in a learning community.

In the WFS model, which is based on a program-service model created by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, nonprofits provide an integrated, or bundled, set of three core services—financial support, financial coaching, and employment services—with the goal of helping clients to improve their household economies and build assets. WFS is integrated into a nonprofit's existing programs, staffing, and client base.

When CFT began its strategic focus on economic security, one of the gaps it wanted to address was a lack of data on economic opportunity and asset building for Dallas and the North Texas region. *The Asset & Opportunity Profile for Dallas*, a study from CFT, introduced to the Dallas community the concept of asset poverty, a measurement of poverty defined as not having the financial means to support a household for three months at the federal poverty level should the household lose its main source of income. Not only does financial insecurity destabilize families but it also jeopardizes the long-term vitality of cities and local economies.

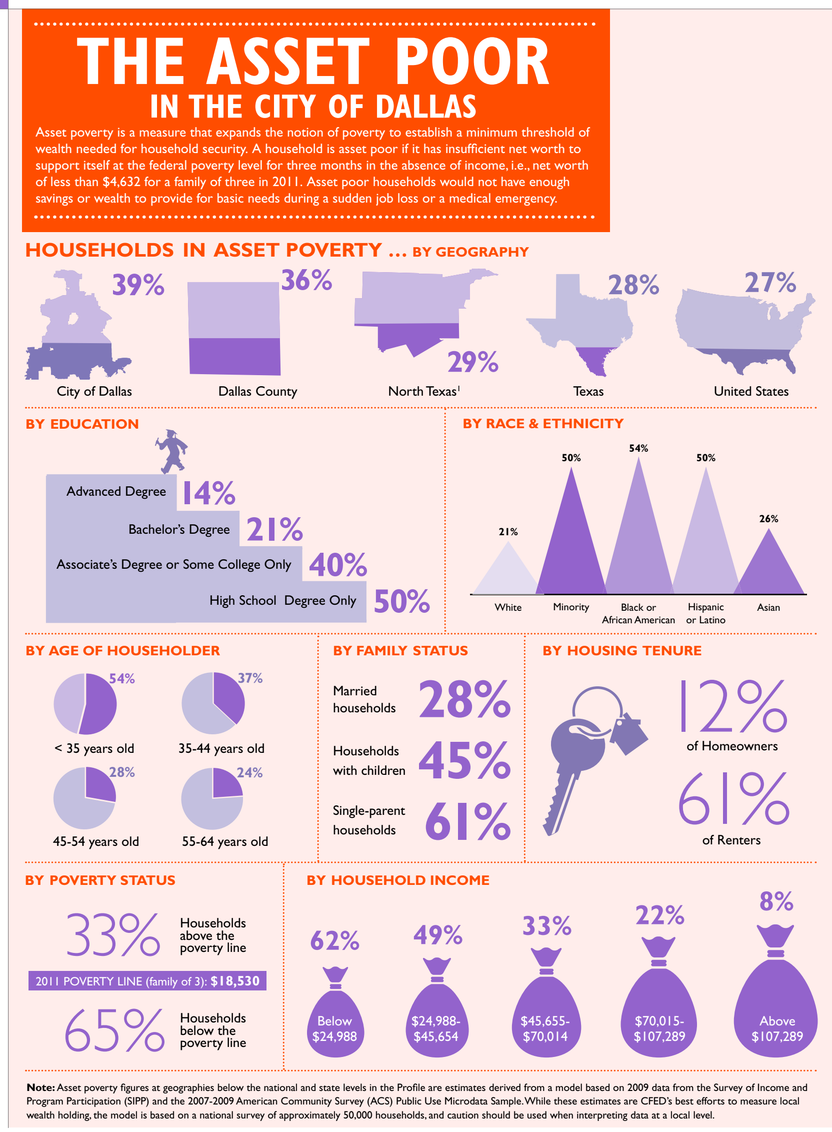


The study found that 39 percent of all Dallas residents are either living in or at risk of asset poverty, debunking the prevailing belief that the city and the surrounding North Texas region is filled with people earning comfortable incomes. With the study's findings in hand, and a value on, as the foundation put it, "learning our way in,"[1] CFT set out to improve the financial stability of working families. It brought together the nonprofits that serve working families to learn about the issues facing this population, as well as to develop the capacity within these agencies to use data strategically. And so the Data Driven Decision-Making Institute was launched.

1 Wende Burton (community philanthropy director, Communities Foundation of Texas), interview by Heidi Sparkes Guber, January, 2017.

By designing the D3 initiative in a series of year-long cohorts, CFT was able to learn from and refine its approach from year to year. It accepted fifteen agencies into the first D3 cohort, in 2012, and hired data coaches to work with the cohort. In the next round, in 2013, CFT's Wende Burton, community philanthropy director overseeing CFT's economic security projects, started the coaching process later in the year and extended coaching beyond the end of the cohort, which was then repeated in the last cohort, in 2014. D3 was built with a specific focus on seeing the cohort as a learning community for the members and for CFT. Cohort members were tracked for up to twelve months after the cohort ended to see how well the learning from D3 was manifesting and taking root. The annual cost for CFT to run each D3 cohort was approximately $150,000, or about $30,000 per agency, which covered the cost for the training and coaching, plus a $20,000 grant awarded to each agency on the basis of active participation. Results from D3 were recognized not only by CFT but also by other funders, who could see a shift in how cohort members were approaching their work and in their impact. Burton said, "Investing in capacity building through D3 was a great investment. If we had just given them each $30,000 as a grant, none of the forty-six participating agencies would have accomplished what they have since, either individually or as a group."[2]

Later in 2014, and again learning their way in, CFT launched the WFS initiatives, using a similar cohort approach. Selected agencies work closely with CFT for six months, learning the model and redesigning their own program-service model. Additionally, each agency creates a prototype, testing a portion of the WFS model, which provides them with valuable learning and insights to support their transition from learning to full implementation. Thus, there is learning happening throughout the system—for CFT and for its cohorts and its growing network of WFS agencies. As Burton describes it, "We see ourselves as partners with the agencies, learning alongside each other, with a common goal of improving the economic lives of low-income individuals and families. We are not passively funding, but rather working closely with agencies, coaching them, and supporting their learning and implementation process."[3]



2 Burton, interview.

3 Burton, interview.

Promising Case:

Letsema Gender at Work

Heidi Sparkes Guber, *Fourth Quadrant Partners*

The Letsema Gender at Work initiative is a lovely illustration of "this sense of much coming from little,"[1] John Holland's description of the hallmark of emergence. With only two years of funding, Letsema set the ambitious goal of eliminating gender-based violence in a region of South Africa experiencing challenging circumstances.

Letsema is the Sotho word for women and men coming together to work the soil. The soil of this initiative is the Vaal—a large urban area south of Johannesburg, South Africa, which is an important economic hub with a range of cultural beliefs and practices. It is the home of steel, iron, and coal processing, infamous for air pollution and lung disease and suffers from high unemployment.

The Letsema initiative was started in 2012 when the non-governmental organization Gender at Work was selected for a global grant from the Dutch government's Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW) program. The intent was to apply an action-learning model to ending gender-based violence in Sudan, Palestine, India, and South Africa. The original budget for the two-year South African program was $150,000, and it included funding for a participatory evaluation in 2015. The team received an additional $20,000 for a writing workshop and a subsequent book of Letsema stories, ***Our Hearts Are Joined***, and for an additional participatory evaluation in 2016 and 2017.

The core initiative team originally intended to do all its work, as it had in previous Gender at Work initiatives, through local partner organizations, using its two-year action-learning process. But after two steering committee meetings, it became clear that expecting partner organizations to anchor the process was unrealistic. This forced the organizers to shift their approach to focus instead on building relationships and the capacity for generative conversations and storytelling among community members. The team used participatory methods that were uncommon and somewhat radical for the community. "As far as we know, this is the first time that liberating structures such as the World Café and Open Space have been used by activists working on overcoming GBV [gender-based violence] at a grassroots community level . . . . It is also one of the few collective impact initiatives globally that is so thoroughly led by ordinary community members."[2]

Facilitator Michel Friedman said, "We knew very little about what we are doing . . . and that was unusual. . . . We as facilitators were barely one step ahead of the participants, and they all experienced the freedom to follow their passions . . . and came to understand how important it is to work on the question of what you really care about."[3]

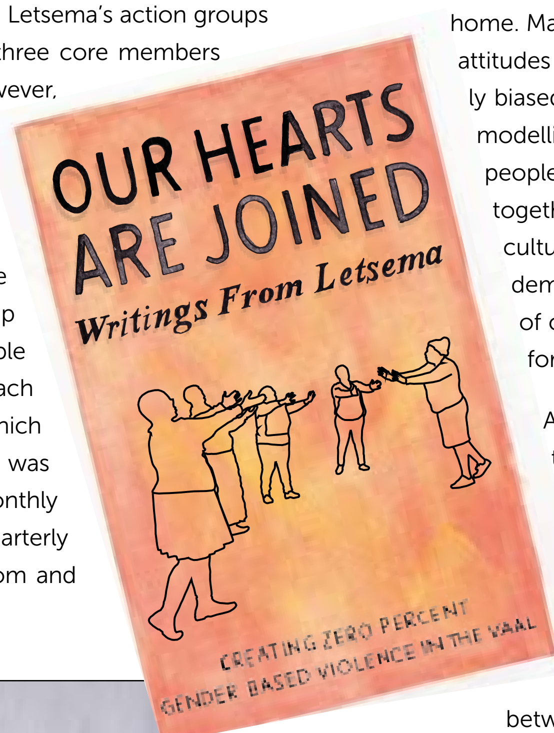
1 John Holland, *Emergence: From Chaos to Order* (New York: Perseus Books, 1999), 2.

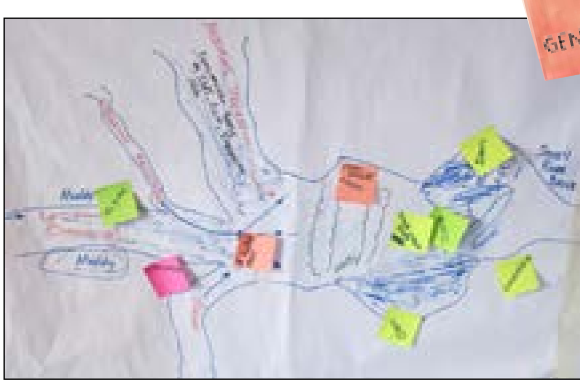
2 Nina Benjamin, application to Joint Gender Fund, September 2016.

3 Michel Friedman (facilitator, Letsema Gender at Work), interview by Heidi Sparkes Guber, March, 2017.

At the culminating open space meeting of these initial participatory sessions, five action groups were formed and organized by community members on the basis of their interests, with the support of the Labour Research Service and Gender at Work facilitators and coaches. These groups are ongoing, and each is guided by the goal of achieving zero gender-based violence. The five groups include the Sports Group, the Dialogue Group, the Vegetable Garden Group, the Traditional Healers Group, and the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Group. (A sixth group, the Men's Calabash Group, was unable to sustain itself and fell away after about six months.)

These action groups are self-organized and self-directed. The FLOW funding that was used to start Letsema covered only the initial world cafes, an open space meeting, the reflection meetings, and the work of the coaches and facilitators. As described in the evaluation, Letsema's action groups differ in size, the smallest having three core members and the largest having ten. However, all groups work closely with others in their community, so the regular participants in action-group activities extend beyond these members. Most groups have experienced changes in membership since they started, with new people coming in and others leaving, but each group has a few core members, which allows for continuity. When funding was available, team coaches met monthly and all the action groups met quarterly in a reflection meeting to learn from and with one another.





Here is an excerpt from the 2016–2017 Letsema evaluation:

The Letsema process has influenced participants to address culturally biased norms and address women's leadership, influencing the wider community. . . . Many of the community members have found the courage to address abuse in their personal lives and to reflect on their own practice and how it might be contributing to the conditions supporting violence. . . . Family members were more willing to discuss GBV [gender-based violence], adolescents and adults had more open communication about sex and sexuality, and women reported an increase in the ability to talk about abuse in the home. Male participants demonstrate changing attitudes in relation to understanding culturally biased norms of GBV. Letsema itself is role modelling a different culture for how diverse people can think, plan, strategize and work together. They are learning how to sustain a culture that supports collective work, have demonstrated ownership of the process of change, and shown enormous energy for citizen action.

As with other emergent initiatives in this research, much of what happened was not visible to outsiders. Facilitator Michel Friedman was surprised by the forward movement that the evaluation revealed. She pointed out that even in the evaluation, she sensed the dynamic tension between the fullness of what actually happened and how to write about it. "What's sustainable is people's ownership and commitment, but they can't do a lot without funding. Donors will give money to action groups. . . . [But] are they willing to fund the reflection that inspired the remarkable response we've witnessed?" She is hopeful that the community will continue to embody the freedom to experiment: "It's creating the space, holding the whole, that's a lot more difficult."[4]

4 Friedman, interview.

Promising Case:

The Story Garden

Heidi Sparkes Guber, *Fourth Quadrant Partners*

ATD (All Together in Dignity) Fourth World is a movement that gathers people from all backgrounds to think, act, and live together differently. The ultimate goal of the Story Garden—an initiative of ATD Fourth World—is to create "a world without poverty, a society where each person is respected."[1] ATD Fourth World believes that people in poverty have unique knowledge and experiences that can lower the barriers separating people from their communities.

The Story Garden was established in 2012 at the weekly flea market in Gallup, New Mexico. The flea market is a popular gathering place for hundreds of low-income people from the region, some of whom travel for as long as four hours to attend and make a living there. The Story Garden is simply a small space where the community's children explore books, art, games, and crafts and are cared for while their families work at or visit the market. But the way in which the organizers hold this simple space has made it a launching pad for much deeper and broader results, many unanticipated. Karen Stornelli, National and New Mexico Director of ATD Fourth World, said, "We have children, vendors, visitors to the flea market; family members, flea market staff, and management; us permanent facilitators and guest facilitators from within the community—all as the main actors involved in this whole dynamic, and we're all changing through the process. We're all learning and all growing in different ways. . . . This isn't about targeting a community and improving something for them; this is about all of us changing together in a positive way." [2]

A core practice of the Story Garden staff is weekly reflective writing about every interaction. These interaction reports are shared not only locally but also internationally, through an archive, where observations and lessons learned are available to the whole ATD community. The Story Garden team considers the learning that comes from this weekly practice of making

meaning to be fundamental to the integrity of the program. From the perspective of emergence, it demonstrates a remarkable attention to returning learning to the system.

Stornelli described the importance of living and modeling themselves the values they hold for the Story Garden. When asked whether she was concerned about the sustainability of the Story Garden when, or if, she leaves, Stornelli said that, in the participatory evaluation, she heard people "reflect back things [about the Story Garden] that we had never said and even thought we had never shown."[3] She saw that many in the community had come to own the project, and that they, too, lived and modeled the spirit that will sustain the initiative.

This emergent approach to community engagement, through reflective practice and inclusion of the most marginalized people, has evolved over more than sixty years. In 1956,

1 "Our Vision," ATD Fourth World, http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/who-we-are/vision/.

2 Karen Stornelli (National and New Mexico Director, ATD Fourth World), interview by Heidi Sparkes Guber, March, 2017.

3 Stornelli, interview.

The Story Garden

ATD Fourth World, the Story Garden's parent organization, started its work in the slums of Paris, France, and now has active projects in thirty-two countries worldwide. Supported financially and spiritually by this global organization, the Story Garden organizers had the freedom to get to know the local community for a year and a half before initiating any program. This allowed the initiative to emerge out of what the community wanted most: improved safety, education, and quality of life for its children.

Funding for ATD Fourth World International comes mostly from individual donors worldwide. Internationally, ATD Fourth World also enjoys support from governments and nongovernmental organizations—for example, UNICEF, which is funding initiatives in Africa. The five ATD centers in the United States, comprising two directors and about nineteen employees, are largely dependent on international ATD funding, with additional funding from small family foundations and a network of individual donors in the US. Its US annual budget for the US is about $1 million.


Independent

Story Garden:

Fun, education, socialization and crafts

How Complex Systems Learn and Adapt

Marilyn J. Darling, *Fourth Quadrant Partners*

This article was written to accompany a report on research conducted by Fourth Quadrant Partners (4QP): A Whole Greater than Its Parts: Exploring the Role of Emergence in Complex Social Change[1]*. Its purpose is to give a fuller explanation of complex adaptive systems (CAS) theory that lies at the foundation of this research project. The article provides a layman's description of what CAS researchers have discovered about how complex systems learn and adapt, and provides an example to help readers see how the theory plays out in a social change context.*

John Holland was a complexity scientist who devoted his career to answering the question: *What is the difference between those complex systems that adapt relatively quickly and those that do not?* He is credited with launching the field of complex adaptive systems (CAS) theory. He and his colleagues have studied everything from natural ecosystems to immune systems to human organizations to cities and economies.

Holland opened his 1998 book, *Emergence: From Chaos to Order*, by telling the story of how, in the 1950s, his colleague, Arthur Samuel, programmed one of the earliest digital computers to play checkers. Holland describes in great detail how Samuel was able to create a learning procedure that allowed the program to learn, through iteration, not only how to play checkers, but how to beat Samuel and, ultimately, to win against champion players.[2] (See sidebar: "CAS theory and deep learning.")

Holland started his discussion of emergence with the story about a computer learning algorithm because it illustrates what he observed through his research about how complex systems learn and adapt.

In complex adaptive systems, individual actors—referred to as *agents* in CAS theory—interact with each other and their environment as they seek to achieve a goal. As experience accumulates, they begin to notice patterns in their interactions. The more diverse the agents, the more diverse are their experiences. The more frequent the interactions among these diverse agents, the faster patterns become evident. Once a pattern has been discovered, it gives agents a way to begin to anticipate how their environment operates and develop hypotheses about cause and effect.[3] Agents can use this information to help them achieve their goal, even when everything else about the environment remains, in Holland's words, "perpetually novel."[4]

CAS theorists refer to these discoveries about cause and effect related to patterns as *building blocks*. Building blocks allow agents to learn to navigate hugely complex environments that are never the same twice. By collecting and experimenting with how to use combinations of building blocks, agents get better over time at consistently achieving their goal, even as conditions change. The more often a person travels internationally, the easier it becomes to navigate airports in different countries, with different procedures, even when she does not know the language.

Using building blocks like this gives us a platform to begin to understand other aspects of the system in a new way.

1 This research project was made possible by the generous support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Thanks also to Jillaine Smith, Heidi Sparkes Guber, and Ray Gordezky for their input. Readers may also want to read our article, "Emergent Learning: A Framework for Whole-System Strategy, Learning, and Adaptation" for an explanation of the difference between adaptive and emergent strategy.

2 John Holland, *Emergence: From Chaos to Order* (Perseus Books, 1998), 64.

3 Holland, *Hidden Order: How Adaptation Builds Complexity* (Perseus Books, 1995), 87-90.

4 Holland, *Hidden Order*, 34.

CAS theory and deep learning

Using today's massive computing power, Alphabet's subsidiary, DeepMind, created a "deep learning" program in 2014, AlphaGo, which started with a database of thousands of human Go games and a learning algorithm akin to Samuel's checkers-player program from the 1950s. Though Go is an infinitely more complex game, AlphaGo was able to beat champion players in 2015 and 2016.[5] Meanwhile, DeepMind, created AlphaGo Zero, which simply started to play the game randomly against itself, without the benefit of a database of previous games.[6] Counterintuitively, without the benefit of this large database of games, AlphaGo Zero was able to begin winning games within three days. Within 40 days, it had surpassed the skill of all of the previous versions of AlphaGo. Most recently, DeepMind launched Alpha Zero[7], which learned to master three *different* games (Shogi, Chess, and Go), outperforming existing game-playing programs within 24 hours.[8]

Holland asserts that the discovery of building blocks paves the way for innovation. He describes, for example, how the building blocks of a language—alphabets, punctuation, rules of grammar and syntax, "yield a never-ending flow of innovations."[9] Using what I know about the English language, I can say something that has never been uttered in the history of humankind and anticipate that I will be understood by someone who also speaks English. Another powerful example:

> Over the years, using real-time data, meteorologists began to see patterns in ocean temperatures, upper-air pressure centers, wind, and solar radiation. They began to study how these patterns interact, which led them to discover a powerful new building block: the jet stream. They began to observe how it behaved and hypothesize how it might affect weather patterns. This exploration became a platform for discovering new patterns and led to a level jump in their ability to predict local weather and longer-term forecasting of weather patterns, such as El Nino/La Nina cycles, drought and hurricane seasons. It has also become an important building block for aviation planning.

How does this relate to complex social change? Imagine an annual national conference on childhood literacy, in which change agents from across the United States and Canada who care about literacy—teachers, parent activists, nonprofit leaders, funders, clergy, school administrators, lawmakers—convene to hear the latest findings from researchers and presentations from their peers on how to increase the number of children who are reading at grade-level by the end of third grade.

If we asked individuals in this community of change agents what patterns they have observed in their work, they might name school issues such as classroom size, time constraints, school mandates, summer slide, or need for more innovative literacy programs and reading coaches to address learning styles; or more endemic social issues affecting early childhood development such as nutrition, effects of poverty and family stress, the number of parents in the home, early exposure to language and access to books, and other patterns that they hypothesize are predictors of literacy. Many could cite research data that validates these patterns and the cause-effect relationship they have on third grade literacy.

Yet childhood literacy remains an elusive goal. It's a nonlinear problem. The many factors that contribute to a child's being able to read at grade level interact in complex ways. Participants at that conference likely would not agree with each other on which patterns are most important, nor on their hypotheses regarding the most important actions to take to boost literacy. Speakers at the conference might advocate for their own discoveries and some participants might come away inspired to try a new approach to improve literacy in their own sphere of influence.

But what if the organizers of this annual conference explicitly used CAS theory to help improve the adaptive capacity

5 For more about AlphaGo, visit https://deepmind.com/research/alphago/, accessed April 4, 2018.

6 Described in detail in David Silver, et al., "Mastering the game of Go without human knowledge," in *Nature*, vol. 550 (19 Oct 2017); https://tinyurl.com/ybde9dcr

7 DeepMind Technologies Ltd., "AlphaGo Zero: Learning from scratch," (undated); https://deepmind.com/blog/alphago-zero-learning-scratch/, accessed April 4, 2018.

8 Samuel Gibbs, "AlphaZero AI beats champion chess program after teaching itself in four hours," in *The Guardian*, 7 Dec 2017, https://tinyurl.com/y88mhml5, accessed April 4, 2018.

9 Holland, *Emergence*, 214.

of this whole ecosystem of change agents? What difference might it make in the rate at which the entire ecosystem learns about how to increase literacy across North America? As we describe CAS theory below, we will use this conference to explore how these ideas might relate to complex social change.

The process we describe below is not unusual or new. As productive human beings, each of us is exquisitely skilled at learning about complex phenomena *as an individual*. We learn how to use language; how to drive a car; how to raise children; how to navigate the politics of the organizations in which we work. The challenge comes when we try to navigate these complex environments *together*.[10]

As Samuel's checkers-player program suggests, CAS theory focuses on what it takes for a whole system to learn and adapt primarily through the actions of individual agents within the ecosystem, rather than being guided by external design. This is not to say that external input impedes emergence, but that, as our research cases suggested, on an ongoing basis it is too cumbersome and expensive to serve as an ongoing source of direction in a multitude of places, all trying to respond to their unique challenges and opportunities.

As individual agents go about trying to achieve a goal (e.g., learning how to use a language to communicate), they formulate tacit if/then hypotheses: **If** I say "dada," **then** the big person in the room will pick me up. Over time, these hypotheses accumulate into what Holland refers to as an internal model.[11]

This tacit process works well for an individual. But for the larger system, the process needs to become more explicit or overt. Holland asserts that "when the model is tacit, the process of discovering and combining the building blocks usually proceeds on an evolutionary timescale. When the model is overt, the timescale may be **orders of magnitude** shorter."[12]

If Holland's proposal is true, this has huge implications for our conference organizers. How could they help the field of childhood literacy accelerate their progress by "orders of magnitude"?

Using building blocks as an organizing principle

As described above, as we navigate our perpetually novel environments, we begin to recognize and learn how to use patterns to navigate the complexity. Holland gives the example of getting a flat tire while driving on the highway.[13] We deconstruct this entirely new situation into familiar parts—how to slow down and move to the side of the expressway; where to find the spare tire; how to jack up the car (or, in the author's case, how to call AAA).

When the model is tacit, the process of discovering and combining the building blocks usually proceeds on an evolutionary timescale. When the model is overt, the timescale may be orders of magnitude shorter.

Our capacity to discover and then learn how to navigate these patterns is a critical component of learning in complex environments. Using massive computer power, a game-playing computer program can learn through rapid iteration. Living systems cannot iterate so quickly. CAS theory suggests that the more agents in living systems interact—the more they compare notes, so to speak—the faster these patterns become evident and useful; the more innovations they generate. Comparing the experiences of many diverse agents working towards the same goal is akin to running through many iterations of an experiment simultaneously. By comparison of many instances, we can also test to see which patterns are more common across contexts and which might be coincidental and unlikely to recur, so that we avoid learning the wrong lesson from a single success or failure.[14]

10 This is one way to think about the distinction between adaptive and emergent strategy. Adaptive strategy sets the stage for an individual organization to learn and adapt. Emergent strategy sets the stage for a whole ecosystem to learn and adapt.

11 Holland, *Hidden Order*, 57-60.

12 Holland, *Hidden Order*, 37. Emphasis added.

13 Holland, *Hidden Order*, 51.

14 Holland, *Emergence*, 242.

But how do we make this explicit, so that we can learn together? One obvious answer is that our conference organizers could design the conference around some well known and emerging building blocks: what are we learning from all of our experiences about the hypothesized relationship between classroom size and literacy? Between nutrition and literacy? Between the effects of poverty and literacy? What have each of us tried to do to mitigate challenges caused by large classrooms? Poor nutrition? Poverty? What has worked well to increase literacy and what has not? What does this tell us as an ecosystem of change agents about where we are today and what to try next?

Exploring multiple hypotheses

In human affairs, we have a tendency to favor consistency. CAS theory favors *diversity* of thinking. It suggests that consistency, in fact, impedes a system's ability to adapt by slowing down the process of discovering and learning about building blocks:

> The usual view is that the rules amount to a set of facts about the agent's environment. Accordingly, all rules must be kept consistent with one another. If a change is made or a new rule is introduced, it must be checked for consistency with all the other rules.
>
> There is another way to consider the rules. They can be viewed as hypotheses that are undergoing testing and confirmation. From this view, the object is to provide contradictions rather than to avoid them. That is, the rules amount to alternative, competing hypotheses. When one hypothesis fails, competing rules are waiting in the wings to be tried.[15]

CAS theory relies on the experience of a diverse set of individual agents working independently to achieve a goal; exploring their own hypotheses, but interacting with each other as much as possible. "Communication among agents can have a profound effect on the behavior of a complex system. The ability to communicate expands the behavioral repertoire of agents, introducing a variety of new opportunities...Communications can radically alter the performance of a social system; for example, ants leave pheromone trails that allow the colony to self-organize into a coherent mass for more efficient hunting."[16]

Comparing the hypotheses and results from a whole range of experiences helps the community of change agents accelerate its ability to develop more powerful and nuanced hypotheses to inform their next set of actions.

Coming back to our conference organizers, in a session on nutrition and literacy, this suggests reducing the space taken on the agenda by expert presentations and giving more opportunities for all of the change agents in the room to share their own experiences, discoveries, and hypotheses related to the connection between nutrition and literacy. "Here's what I see happening in our community; here's what I am trying; and here's the results I am getting. What about you?" In our report, *A Whole Greater than Its Parts,* we refer to this as *returning learning to the system*. The bee comes back to the hive and does a dance to communicate where it found nectar-rich flowers. Comparing the hypotheses and results from a whole range of experiences helps the community of change agents accelerate its ability to develop more powerful and nuanced hypotheses to inform their next set of actions.

Learning by credit assignment

CAS researchers share a challenge experienced by funders and evaluators: *attribution*. How do we know that the actions we took among all of the many interacting variables contributed in any way to moving the needle on a complex social change? In the example we started with, how does the game-playing program know that any given early move in a game of Go contributed to the program's win or loss?

Samuel's checkers-player program used credit assignment: after each game, each move (hypothesis) in a winning game received a small credit. If the program lost, each move lost a small amount of credit.[17] As the program continued to play games, some hypotheses gained a higher credit score than others. The hypotheses were listed according to their scores. (Holland described these lists as *bulletin boards*.[18])

15 Holland, *Hidden Order*, 53.

16 John Miller and Scott Page, *Complex Adaptive Systems: An Introduction to Computational Models of Social Life* (Princeton University Press, 2007) 242.

17 Holland, *Hidden Order*, 42.

18 M. Mitchell Waldorp, *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos* (Simon & Schuster, 1992), 185-193.

A hypothesis with a higher score signified that it was more useful to the system and those hypotheses rose to the top—"a progressive confirmation of hypotheses . . ." as Holland describes it.

Credit assignment relies on being able to recognize success or failure. Importantly, a computer program doesn't get invested in victory; it's not afraid to admit a failure. It also doesn't get invested in proving its favorite hypothesis. In our human systems, all of us have observed how easy it is to glorify a success and ignore a failure, especially if it threatens a hypothesis that we have invested in using and promoting. CAS theory sheds a new light on the implications of this human tendency, which leads to over-crediting the hypotheses that may have contributed to a success and to not challenging the hypotheses that may have contributed to a failure. When this happens, the credit assignment 'bulletin board' can't do its job. *It slows our ability to learn and adapt.*

For our conference organizers, this reinforces the importance of talking about failures as well as successes, as honestly as possible, and about what participants think may have contributed to their results, for better or worse. Panel discussions that compare failures and successes among a series of literacy initiatives could give members of the audience an opportunity to develop their own more robust takeaways than presentations about a single success story.

Complex systems can't wait until the game is 'over' to progressively confirm their hypotheses.

Ultimately, the goal of the conference would be to accelerate the process of exploring the most important building blocks and discovering the most promising hypotheses, based on honest data from the field. But then what? What does CAS theory suggest about what needs to happen over the course of the year between conferences to accelerate learning across this ecosystem of diverse agents?

How does a complex system learn when the game never ends?

The essence of the learning process Holland describes is to continually improve the ability of a system of agents to recognize patterns and make predictions, based on hypotheses, about which move to make in a particular situation to move closer to a goal—absent an external designer or strategist. "Prediction makes improvement possible, even when there is no referee to distinguish 'right' from 'wrong.'"[19]

Computer games are an opportunity for CAS researchers to demonstrate what's possible. But let's summarize the differences between computer games and other kinds of complex systems and draw implications for our conference organizers and this ecosystem of change agents working on literacy.

Credit assignment is fairly straightforward in a game of checkers, chess, or Go. The game comes to an end when there is an obvious winner or loser. In many of the systems CAS researchers study, the goal is more complicated and long-term, primarily because the 'game' never ends. The goal of an immune system is to protect the identity and health of the living system. The goal of an economy is to allow agents in a community to use the diverse resources of the community to support a good life (however the community defines that).

Complex systems can't wait until the game is 'over' to progressively confirm their hypotheses. It would be akin to a sports team waiting until the end of a season to review its game films to figure out why it didn't win the championship. Complex systems need to be able to make predictions based on the available data that is "good enough." As Holland describes it, "when we face complex situations, our objective is almost always to 'do it better.'"[20]

In complex human systems, the connection between cause and effect is often distant in time and space, and data about results may be inconclusive or difficult to obtain. The goals themselves might not be clear or shared. On the flip side, human beings can do more with available data than simply assign a hypothesis a small credit. We can ask follow up questions and look for confirming or contradictory examples to test the meaning we make from our results. We can challenge our measures of success and reflect on and adjust the learning process itself. The more honest we can be about recognizing success or failure as we go about making meaning in the context of our ongoing work, the faster we will learn and adapt.

19 Holland, *Emergence*, 76.

20 Holland, *Emergence*, 216.

In this hugely complex and messy environment of social change, even without crystal clear data about results and what contributes to them, we still have to make decisions on a daily basis. Input from research and evaluation can get us started, but CAS theory suggests that anything we can do to make the real-time learning process explicit will help to accelerate our adaptation.

Coming back to our ecosystem of change agents working to improve childhood literacy, after the conference is done and everyone goes home is when the real work of this learning ecosystem gets started. Cause-effect relationships validated by research and evaluation can be a good starting point, but because of the complex and interacting variables, our community of change agents needs to experiment with how what they heard in the conference could be used to improve literacy in their own local environments.

CAS theory predicts that the more explicit these experiments are—naming and testing hypotheses about building blocks and being honest about assessing the results—the more they will accelerate learning and results in these local environments. Inasmuch as it is within their purview, our conference organizers can help the larger ecosystem learn and adapt by helping to return the learning to the system—perhaps by spreading news of the results of these experiments along with new research and evaluation data across the ecosystem; or holding webinars around the role of nutrition or reading coaches, or small regional gatherings to learn what new building blocks are being discovered related to low-income communities and literacy, what new hypotheses are being tested, and what results change agents are achieving; or organizing communities of practice around access to books or dealing with family stress.

Imagine how this might affect the conversations that happen at *next year's* conference. It might be akin to the first conference of meteorologists the year after the jet stream was discovered. The room would be a buzz with newly discovered patterns; new questions being asked; more nuanced hypotheses being put forward.

This article has just skimmed the surface of what we can learn from complex adaptive systems theory. The seven cases the 4QP research team studied in *A Whole Greater than Its Parts* offer ideas about what promotes and what impedes adaptation in the complex systems these initiatives were targeting. The research team invites readers to continue to submit examples of emergence in complex social change here. What we said at the end of the report bears repeating: There is much more to learn . . . always.

There is much more to learn . . . always.