



## Journal of Organizational Change Management

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### Article information:

To cite this document:

Bryan Rill , (2016), "Resonant co-creation as an approach to strategic innovation", Journal of Organizational Change Management, Vol. 29 Iss 7 pp. -

Permanent link to this document:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-01-2015-0009>

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## Resonant Co-Creation as an Approach to Strategic Innovation

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has* –Margaret Mead

The above quote, now common currency in think tanks and innovation labs, reflects that fact that innovation often begins with change initiated by co-creating within groups. In turn, the success of change initiatives is largely determined by the worldview of those who design the initiatives (Doppelt, 2010; Sharma, 2000; Senge et al., 2005; Scharmer, 2009). Recognizing the relationship between worldview and innovation, within organizational consulting there is a growing trend that integrates co-creative practices with mindfulness training, reflexive dialogue, and other approaches to worldview transformation (Mandl & Mandl, 2014; Turner & Udall, 2008; Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013).

This trend has emerged out of a perception that “many of the complex challenges leaders face exceeds their ability to perceive, understand, and adapt to them with their current schemas” (Kegan 2009, p. 5). As leaders seek organizational transformation that will generate the innovations needed to meet pressing concerns, they look to new innovation strategies. Compared to an incremental approach to innovation that manifests in new products or services, what is needed is strategic innovation, which Markides calls “the strategy of breaking the rules” (1997, p. 11-12). Strategic innovation is when organizations create new approaches and competencies that break from the rules of their industry (Hamel & Prahalad, 1994; Markides, 1997).

Jacobs and Heracleous note that “fundamental strategic innovation, and the substantial organizational changes it entails, requires that organizational actors' mental maps of their industry, strategy and organization undergo a shift so that they can see things in new ways unconstrained by history” (2005, p. 338). Their account would suggest that worldview transformation is integral to contemporary innovation platforms such as co-creation. Yet when placed in the larger historical scope these ideas are only recently gaining traction in organizational leadership, and they are largely absent in Asia. They are novel in that they offer an innovative approach to innovation itself.

While both co-creation and worldview transformation are the focus of several writings in organizational leadership and design journals, there is a paucity of academic literature that focuses specifically upon the interrelationship of the two constructs. In this article I call for a clarification of and nuance to the definition of co-creation. This nuanced approach, which I call *resonant co-creation*, is an approach to strategic innovation wherein new ideas emerge from highly present collective engagement. In resonant co-creation, the transformation of worldview—the combination of beliefs, attitudes, and values that structure experience—generates new conceptual and interrelational space among participants conducive to strategic innovation.

Herein I provide an overview of the cultural and theoretical foundations to this approach. Following this I introduce a grammar of facilitation and specific techniques that shift worldview and create a space for strategic innovation. This presentation can benefit coaches, facilitators, and leaders who wish to implement a co-creative organizational culture or improve outcomes of co-creative programs.

This argument is relevant to design and organizational management, as it poses a framework for cultivating innovative environments through designed practices and spaces. Resonant co-creation is a needed nuance to the very generalized notion of co-creation spread throughout organizations today. The conceptual framework offered herein brings conceptual clarity to specific approaches to and applications of resonant co-creation to achieve strategic innovation. By linking theory to practice, this article can help leaders and change agents justify and implement resonant co-creation within their organizational contexts.

### *Defining Co-Creation*

Co-creation has taken the design world by storm, and the term is spread across domains from industry to education. Unfortunately, popularity has a tendency to dilute semantic clarity. “Co-Creation is everywhere,” says Francis Guillard in his 2010 blog entitled “the Co-Creation Effect.” Providing examples from Sony to the cities of London and Copenhagen, Guillard illustrates the co-creation trend. Indeed, at the 2014 Business of Design Week in Hong Kong, co-creation was printed on over half of all the brochures. Co-creation is so widely used, in fact, that it is at risk of being a construct so general that is essentially meaningless. Given this, it is worth defining how most people understand the term. First defined by C.K Prahalad and V. Ramaswamy, co-creation is “the practice of developing systems, products, or services through collaboration with customers, managers, employees, and other company stakeholders” (Ramaswamy & Guillard, 2010, p. 4).

Guillard argues that co-creation is a

“theory of interactions. It involves changing the way the organization interacts with individuals, including employees, customers or any stakeholder. More specifically, co-creation involves setting up new modes of engagement for these individuals – platforms, in the jargon – that allow these individuals to insert themselves in the value chain of the organization. The idea of co-creation is to unleash the creative energy of many people, such that it transforms both their individual experience and the economics of the organization that enabled it” (2010).

Patrizia Bertini, a LegoSeriousPlay facilitator, adds

The etymology of the word already highlights the key features of co-creation, which are the social, reciprocal dimension and the act of coming into being, creating, that is much more complex and abstract than production. The mix of those two words add another meaning, which is not only creating collectively, but creating something that has a value, for a mutually beneficial goal (Bertini 2014).

In design, co-creation is a new gloss on the established practices of participatory and human-centered design. What separates co-creation from crowdsourcing or other forms

of end user involvement in the design process is the *type of interaction*. Co-creation requires direct group engagement, putting the major stakeholders (designers, consumers, managers, employees) into the same ideation space and collectively working together (Ramaswamy & Gouillart 2010). While crowdsourcing and mass collaboration do open up innovation by bringing in a wealth of ideas, what they lack is the experience of innovation with participants that co-creation provides. Successful programs such as the Nike +, My Starbucks Idea, and ITC's farming initiative in India created entirely new engagement platforms between the company and community, and continually learn from the engagement experiences among all participants (*ibid.*)

This article concentrates specifically on co-creation facilitated within organizations, but the same focus on engagement applies. Today many innovative organizations enact co-creative principles internally by creating specific spaces and times for open, free-form conversations. According to the text *The Co-Creative Meeting*, "In some schools of philosophy they've been called 'Dialogue', in management they are called 'Team Learning', and in engineering and social sciences one talks about 'Interpretive Conversation' (Mandl & Mandl 2013, p. 11). The authors emphasize the movement of knowledge creation from individual to a team-based activity. Particularly in the business sector, educational systems continue to evolve from lecture intensive knowledge transmission to active learning approaches. Forms of engagement such as "open spaces," "brainstorming," "world cafe," and "six hats," equally involve the collective to share knowledge and innovate. In each of these formats dialogue between participants is "a means past the skilled incompetence and defensive routines that characterize most meetings" (*ibid.* p. 10). Mandl & Mandl identify several core characteristics of a Co-creative Meeting: "Participants are expressing their opinions openly; they are sharing their thinking to interpret information; they are acknowledging the wealth of divergent perceptions in the group; they are working through disagreements; they are challenging assumptions; and there is a deepening sense of connection, commitment, and participation within the team" (*ibid.* p. 12).

### *Co-Creative Spaces and Applications*

Co-creation is embodied in both spaces and activities designed to tap into the collective potential of the group. In face-to-face interactions, co-creation utilizes the circle, the only shape with the potential to make everyone an equal participant. That is the first and most essential step in co-creation. Yet equal spaces must be complimented with the right practices. Even with circles it is common for one person to take the lead, or for debate to ensue across the circle. In these cases the circle is no different than the conference table, with established roles and relationships dominating the discourse. The most creative meetings lack a power center. Creativity emerges from the collective, the space between, rather than any point.

The egalitarianism of the circle manifests in more than the physical circular arrangement of chairs. A good facilitator uses the physical circle as a central space to reinforce decentered collaboration in the mindset of the people who engage co-creation. Thus, when in certain practices people break out from the circle into talking groups that may or may not hold to the circle formation, they can maintain the psychological perspective established in the initial form. Open Spaces (Owen, 2008) and World Café

(2015) are two examples of this. In Open Spaces a large central circle is used for overall group meeting times, but then people move freely between breakout discussion groups where there is no set physical form. They may take a walk, go to lunch, or use a classroom, but in each of these power positions are rendered unimportant in the face of the issues discussed. If someone does not like the way a conversation is going, they are free to leave and listen to another. In World Café groups sit at circular tables, but orchestrated movement among groups enables a cross-fertilization of ideas and another means to destabilize power relationships.

Open Spaces and World Café operate on somewhat different principles, but they both attempt to draw out the best ideas by placing people in a very different workflow from what they are used to. Another approach to this is the IDEO framework. In the short film *The Deep Dive* (Koppel & Smith, 2003), ABC News introduces IDEO's design workflow and a space that emphasizes creativity, play, and co-creation. IDEO's approach is to fill the design room with people that have very different skills and allow the best ideas to establish leadership, regardless of seniority or expertise. While chaotic for sure, no one can argue that IDEO has been unsuccessful in innovating. IDEO's approach brings to light a second important aspect of the co-creative space – diversity. Co-creation is rather uneventful in a room full of people with the same ideas and background. There tends to be too much agreement and perhaps too much bickering over small domain specific points that don't amount to much in the end. While such meetings may lead to important outcomes, rarely are they strategic innovations. The reason for this is that strategic innovation, by its very definition, requires a break from the system in which it operates. For that, outside opinions are quite valuable.

For many organizations, the points just made are enough to put together an activity and call it co-creation. All that is needed are circles, diverse people, and a topic. As Gouillart's examples show, this methodology does work in practice. Many consider co-creation to be part of 'Best Practices' in design, a point clearly articulated by the prevalence of co-creation sessions in the 2014 Business of Design Week in Hong Kong.

Compared to the traditional format for classrooms and business meetings, co-creation is a disruptive social technology. Done well, it breaks down organizational hierarchy and creates a space for authentic and open collaboration wherein everyone benefits. However, because it is disruptive, for co-creation to be more than just a workshop it must be supported throughout organizational culture. "Innovation *per se* cannot be designed, but can be designed for, where the conditions fostering innovation can be put in place" (Jacobs & Heracleous, 2005, p. 341).

Ramaswamy and Gouillart identify a wide range of organizational conditions to foster co-creation, and at the heart lies a "capacity to learn, nurture, share, and deploy knowledge across traditional boundaries (both personal and institutional) (2010, p. 252). It is up to leaders to identify opportunities for new modes of engagement and then cultivate an ecosystem where co-creation can develop from initial seeds.

Fry *et al.*, (2011) describe this organizational environment as "spiritual leadership." Spiritual leadership is a term that refers to a collective space rather than the actions or character of individuals. It is not related to religious beliefs, but rather the sense of the "spirit" of a place or team—an expression of the character of an organizational environment. This environment is the confluence of the following tenets:

- 1) Altruistic love- a sense of wholeness and harmony produced through care and concern for the wellbeing of others.
- 2) Hope/Faith- desire with the expectation of fulfillment and a certainty that hope will be realized.
- 3) Vision- a picture of the future with a commentary on why people should strive to achieve it.

Citing a comprehensive review of workplace spirituality in *The Leadership Quarterly*, Fry *et al.* argue for "a clear consistency between spiritual values and practices and leadership effectiveness" (2011, p. 261). They hypothesize that spiritual leadership is an emergent phenomenon that positively predicts the sense of calling and membership they identify as integral to spiritual well-being. A positive sense of workplace spirituality in turn, leads to beneficial personal outcomes, improved productivity, and higher levels of organizational performance. Organizations that can cultivate this ethos are enabling co-creation by engaging and empowering stakeholders.

Co-creation, as I have outlined herein, incorporates several widely known aspects of collective ideation such as group sharing, empathy, working through disagreements, and building trust. This model of co-creation is widely sought and can bring instrumental change and innovation. The reality, however, is that co-creative meetings often do not go as imagined. Many attempts at co-creation bring suboptimal results because the people or organizations utilizing them do not understand what is required for it to work, or they fail to create the necessary ethos. As a result co-creation is at times no more than lip service to a nice idea with brand appeal, while in operational terms it is business as usual.

Although it is possible for anyone to implement co-creation as a set of practices to facilitate collective ideation, what is left unsaid in the co-creation branding trend are the necessary conditions for truly fruitful interactions to occur. How people *engage* co-creation conditions the difference between co-creative outcomes and compromise. This engagement is framed by how the facilitator creates and holds the social space, and by the mental/emotional state of the participants. Therein lies the difference between the received notion of co-creation and a more nuanced version that integrates worldview transformation. The latter, resonant co-creation, focuses not only upon the tapping into collective intelligence, but also attention to developing the personal qualities necessary to co-create. In other terms, resonant co-creation focuses on transforming the space *within* people to tap into greater collective potential.

### *Resonant Co-Creation*

*"You can't solve a problem on the same level that it was created. You have to rise above it to the next level." - Einstein*

Einstein's quote reminds us that strategic innovation requires a shift in worldview. Resonant co-creation is a process that accomplished this by shifting the level of consciousness of individuals and in interactions. Resonant co-creation can be applied to any attempt to innovate by groups, and is most often applied in design and organizational change contexts. Its core principles and techniques can improve upon product and service design, as well as transforming business processes, leadership, and organizational culture.

Participants in resonant co-creation are often the key stakeholders in an organization and or service chain, and the outcomes sought are aligned with the needs of these same stakeholders. Examples of organizational changes include restructuring vision and culture, adapting to disruptive market changes, developing or improving on communication channels, and leadership training. In design the focus lies in coming up with breakthrough innovations that create new markets or revolutionize existing ones. Innovations of this scale are strategic in that they require fundamental shifts in thinking and often result in radical restructuring or novel approaches.

The roots of resonant co-creation lie in the push by several scholars and change catalysts to transform leadership and innovation capacities (Cook-Greuter, 1999; Harrison, 1990; Torbert *et al.*, 2004). Recent texts such as *Leading with Spirit, Presence, and Authenticity* (Schuyler *et al.*, 2014) suggest that cultivating spirit, presence, and authenticity are essential to address global systems challenges. Change begins with leaders, who “must learn to cultivate and transform themselves. This self development results in enhanced internal capacities such as deeper intellectual understanding, perceptual capacity as well as a greater ability to innovate, self-manage, and self-direct” (Hunter & Chaskalson 2013, p. 6).

There is a body of evidence supporting the idea that developing these key skills does lead to greater insight and innovation (Brown, 2011; Hunter & Chaskalson, 2013; Senge *et al.*, 2005; Scharmer, 2013; Schlitz *et al.*, 2010). In one of these studies, Brown (2011) interviewed several leaders and concluded that tremendous potential for strategic innovation lies in a worldview that he calls a “post-constructivist action logic.” This type of action logic (i.e. worldview) is characterized by willingness to let go of old paradigms, intuitive insight, and adaptive design management. While Brown uses different terms, his argument echoes that of Peter Senge (2005), Otto Scharmer (2009, 2013), Laloux (2014), and Turner and Udall (2008), scholars and organizational consultants who situate themselves as the forefront of what they see as a large scale consciousness transformation in management and leadership. Senge and others argue that profound worldview transformation cultivates the prosocial beliefs and behaviors that underlie creativity and innovation. Presence, authenticity, and empathy lie at the center of this transformation.

The choice of the term “resonant” stems from Schlitz *et al.*’s model of the five developmental levels of social consciousness (2010). Resonant consciousness is an expanded awareness that leads to prosocial experiences and behaviors, “in which people report a sense of essential interrelatedness with others – a field of shared experience and emergence that is felt and expressed in social groups” (Schlitz *et al.*, 2010, p. 23). Resonant consciousness requires shared attention, good feelings (such as trust and empathy), and synchrony (Tickle-Degnan & Rosenthal, 1990), all of which are essential skills in co-creation.

Resonant co-creation rests on a particular perspective on human consciousness. It accepts first that human consciousness is not an accurate perception of reality, but rather is a filter conditioned by biology and human experience. “Most of us think that what we perceive is the whole story, ‘reality’ unmitigated. It screens, deciding which perceptions are significant and which are useful to the task at hand. It’s only when we realize this and intentionally open ourselves to the wider picture that we begin to actively focus our attention.” (Mandl & Mandl 2013, p. 10). That wider picture is an intersubjective,

*interintentional* space. David Bohm, from whom many schools of dialogue derive, said (1991 in Mandl & Mandl, 2013, p. 10)

Genuine judgments should come out of an act of perception rather than out of a reflex. But this will not be possible unless the reflexes of thought and feeling are suspended. Because the reflexes are so habitual, however, it is very hard to be aware that they are acting. Such awareness requires serious attention.

Bohm summarizes a core principle of resonant co-creation - the suspension of reflexive, conditioned thought and being present, or mindful, to the dynamics of the entire space. This requires setting aside the personal ego and its motivations temporarily and developing an awareness that can be described as an expansion of consciousness. Thus, although it builds upon the received notion of co-creation, and in fact it can occur in the very same activities, resonant co-creation requires the people involved have keen observation skills, empathy, and mindfulness. The Presencing Institute captures this sentiment well, stating, “The quality of results produced by any system depends on the quality of awareness from which people in the system operate. The formula for a successful change process is not “form follows function,” but “form follows consciousness” (2014).

When and if co-creation participants interact with awareness and sensitivity, creative ideas emerge from the interintentional “field” of collective consciousness in which all interactions occur. Given the different engagement, it follows that ideas that emerge from the collective will be different from the typical brainstorming session where one or two people tend to dominate and others compromise. Resonant co-creation renders Bertini’s definition of co-creation possible, wherein every participant finds value and mutually benefits from the process. As Ruth Benedict once said about patterns of culture, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” In resonant co-creation innovation is an emergent property, which in turn relies upon carefully constructed environments and practices that facilitate and hold the “space between.”

### *Technique Foundations*

*“Every profound innovation is based on an inward-bound journey, on going to a deeper place where knowing comes to the surface.”* - Brian Arthur, Santa Fe Institute

The techniques to facilitate resonant co-creation derive from millennia old cultural traditions ranging from Native American myths to the Vedas of India. Facilitators, or catalysts, often have decades of experience training in different spiritual traditions. Transcendental Meditation, Zen, and Vipassana are common contemplative practices found in most approaches. Exercises derived from these contemplative traditions are combined with organizational leadership and change management practices that stem from the humanistic tradition, positive psychology, emotional intelligence, and integral theory (Bohm, 2004; Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1959; Goleman, 2011; Wilber, 1997). These philosophical foundations posit that transformations in worldview engender an expansion of social consciousness—the awareness and sensitivity to the interconnectedness of people and their environments. This in turn leads to more effective



leadership, creativity, and ultimately innovation (Berman, 1997; Schlitz *et al.*, 2010; Laloux 2014; Zimbardo, 2007).

There are two qualities of awareness essential to resonant co-creation. The first underpins Bohm's approach to dialogue. "Suspension of thoughts, impulses, judgments, etc., lies at the very heart of Dialogue. Suspension involves attention, listening and looking and is essential to exploration" (Bohm *et al.*, 1991, p. 5). Based on suspension, Bohm defined a new approach to dialogue wherein open group reflection upon the aspects of human perception and ego are brought to the fore, rendering it possible for people to see and understand their internal biases and filters. In the Dialogue Proposal, the authors state that

Dialogue is a way of observing, collectively, how hidden values and intentions can control our behavior, and how unnoticed cultural differences can clash without our realizing what is occurring. It can display how power is assumed or given away and how pervasive are the generally unnoticed rules of the system that constitutes our culture. But it is most deeply concerned with understanding the dynamics of how thought conceives such connections. (1991, p. 3).

In more recent organizational change literature, Bohm's approach is called reflective dialogue. Jacobs and Heracleous argue for reflective dialogue as an instrumental means to achieve strategic innovation. Their justification draws attention to mental models, noting that (2005, p. 342),

Owing to their internally coherent nature, confirmatory bias and selective perception, mental models are relatively stable and persistent over time and within communities-of-practice. Ample disconfirmatory evidence and a crisis are often required before existing mental models are challenged and critically examined.

Dialogue brings internal mental models to light in conversation and makes it possible to create new mental models. "By rendering visible the taken-for-granted causal linkages, the managers' understandings can be mapped out and understood in order to explore alternative perspectives, relationships, opportunities, threats and actions" (*ibid*, p. 343). When used as part of a co-creative approach, dialogue is an integral tool for collective ideation. The intersubjective inquiry will "gradually build enough common understanding to allow the collective thought process to surmount the individual thought process" (Schein, 1999, p. 203). This makes possible the type of creativity where new ideas emerge from the space between rather than individuals. In that dialogue encourages authenticity and shared vulnerability, it also tends to engender more positive interpersonal relationships.

The second essential quality of awareness is presence. Being present means being conscious and fully aware in the immediate moment. It includes suspension, creating a quality of mind that is best described as still or quiet. As John Kabat-Zinn explains, "if you bring a certain kind of open, moment-to-moment, nonjudgmental awareness to what you're attending to, you'll begin to develop a more penetrative awareness that sees beyond the surface of what's going on in your field of awareness" (Kabat-Zinn *in* Senge

*et al.*, 2005, p. 719). This is mindfulness, and it is from this interior space that good dialogue operates.

Kabat-Zinn points to another layer of presence, that of deep listening, or shedding preconceived notions and historical patterns of understanding to sense a larger field of potential change. When presence is combined with attention to potential, the combination is what Senge *et al.* call “presencing” (2005).

The word Presencing means to sense, tune in, and act from one’s highest future potential—the future that depends on us to bring it into being. Presencing blends the words “presence” and “sensing” and works through “seeing from our deepest source.

Senge *et al.*’s definition draws attention to the source of action. They state,

All learning is about how we interact in the world and the types of capacities that develop from our interactions. What differs is the depth of the awareness and the consequent source of action. If awareness never reaches beyond superficial events and current circumstances, actions will be reactions. If, on the other hand, we penetrate more deeply to see the larger wholes that generate “what is” and our own connection to this wholeness, the source and effectiveness of our actions can change dramatically (2005, p. 200).

In presencing, action arises from a place of internal quietude wherein the stream of consciousness is silent and awareness connects with intuition. This model of intuition, wherein creativity emerges from deeply connecting with ones own or a group’s purpose, is a central principle behind the mindful leadership. According to Senge *et al.*, it is seeing past our mental models to a future whole that can emerge through us (*ibid* 1271). The Presencing Institute’s U Theory of leadership “suggests a different stance of “cocreation” between the individual or collective and the larger world. The self doesn’t react to a reality outside, nor does it create something new in isolation—rather, like the seed of a tree, it becomes the gateway for the coming into being of a new world. (*ibid*, p. 1296).

While certainly metaphysical in nature, Senge’s perspective on the source of intuition has deep roots. Tracing these ideas to their origins requires looking far back into history. The *Tao Te Ching*, a sacred text in Taoism dated some 2500 years ago, is arguably the first book to eloquently state the relationship between still awareness and creativity. According to Taoism, we all are creative. “The task is to tap into that creative ground of Originality at the root of our Being” (Dance 2011, p. 3). How one does that is by cultivating *wu wei*, or non action.

...in this non action nothing is left undone. We are encouraged to create an attitude of responsiveness in lieu of over-assertiveness, which leads to effortless action. *Wu wei* requires a posture of non-contention and behavior that minimizes conflict by reducing the friction that accompanies an aggressive approach to a single preferred outcome. These conditions require a psychological state of creative quietude (Dance 2011, p. 4).

*Wu wei* implies that a person's heart is so quiet and silent that it will not be disturbed by outside world. In everyday life people are influenced by many elements, including social pressures, attractions, and the ever-busy work schedule. A Japanese friend, CEO of an import export company and lay monk, called this "noise." *Wu wei* is the stillness away from that noise. The emptiness of mind enables recognition that is rational and without bias. That is the mind Bohm found so essential to good dialogue. It is also the place of stillness that presencing takes one to and from which creativity and vision emerge. Senge and Scharmer call this emergence "letting come" (2005, 2013).

*Wu Wei* should not be mistaken for placitude or neutral observation. Huston Smith explains that *wu wei* is the "pure effectiveness that comes by combining within seemingly incompatible conditions: *supreme activity* and *supreme relaxation*" (in Dance 2011, p. 4). The activity is the readiness and ability to act as needed. The relaxation is the mind empty of noise and capable of seeing things clearly as they are. *Wui wei* is thus the perfect concept to capture the state of being that underlies resonant co-creation.

The challenge faced lies in the difficulty of cultivation qualities such as presence and *wu wei*. Studies demonstrate the resilience of normative patterns of thinking (Dunbar *et al.*, 2007; Freeman, 1995; Turner and Whitehead, 2008). Human beings assimilate new experiences into preexisting models. Too much change upon the system meets with resistance. Given this, transformation of worldview requires techniques that focus on transcending—literally "crossing over"—our culturally and biologically conditioned worldviews.

Recognizing this fact, a small but growing sector of consciousness-based consultancies has developed techniques that explicitly claim to transform worldview. Examples include Apotheosis, the Presencing Institute, People Brands, Nowhere, and Sally Anderson. Signature toolsets have been developed from research at interdisciplinary research centers such as the Institute of Noetic Science Future Centers, the Conscious Business Institute, the Maharashi University of Management, the Co-Creation Initiative, and the Esalen Center for Theory and Research. Communities of practice such as Conscious Capitalism and the Society for Organizational Learning support the growth of this paradigm.

The task catalysts face is to first create the right context and facilitate the emergence of creative ideas from a deep inner source. "Only when people begin to see from within the forces that shape their reality and to see their part in how those forces might evolve does vision becomes powerful. Everything else is just a vague hope" (Senge *et al.*, 2005, p. 1852). Catalysts then help organizations move from ideas to action. The Presencing Institute refers to this as crystallizing intent.

Crystallizing intent requires being open to the larger intention and imaginatively translating the intuitions that arise into concrete images and visions that guide action. ...that's what entrepreneurship is all about—creating that compelling vision and force" (*ibid*, p. 1864-1875).

Crystallizing intent is a process of convergence that moves a group from open-ended ideation to more focused actionable constructs. These action items derive from a collective ideation space where the group applies mindfulness, dialogue, and other skills training to explore the field of possibilities from new vantage points. In that they are

engaging the subject from a different level of consciousness, new insights can and often do emerge.

The shifting of worldview to a resonant social consciousness opens up a new space for innovation to occur. Given that strategic innovation requires a break from the known, it is only from the unknown that new potentials can manifest. Highly engaged, present participants are more able to leave behind existing models and sit in the space of the unknown, a space that many find uncomfortable because they are outside the expertise of their established worldviews. The capacity to do so increases the odds of coming up with truly breakthrough ideas. For this reason resonant co-creation is more than a workshop. It is an art, requiring both practice and performance.

### *The Art of Resonant Co-Creation*

Resonant co-creation is a format wherein skilled catalysts integrate coaching with facilitation to accomplish the entire movement from cultivating authenticity, awareness, and sensitivity through to emergence of new ideas from the collective. Based on two years of action research, a comparative analysis of the trademark toolkits among independent organizational change and innovation agents reveals an underlying structure, or grammar, for facilitating resonant co-creation. It begins by setting a core question and/or challenge to frame the activities in dialogue with key stakeholders. This framing question/challenge must be compelling enough to engage all stakeholders and participants in co-creation. High levels of initial engagement are necessary for participants to take on the challenge of worldview change that underlie this approach to innovation.

Resonant co-creation emphasizes exploring the unknown and challenging existing structures. Due to this, the process can be perceived as a threat to established systems and power relations. Resonant co-creation thus requires a safe space for collective ideation. The hosting organization and facilitator must establish trust and authenticity in that space. A colleague at the Green School in Bali does this by giving permissions to students to speak out and challenge the instructors. In organizational consulting, setting and managing expectations is crucial to “creating a container” wherein participants can open up and take risks.

A key part of creating a container is setting “fuzzy goals” rather than concrete outcomes. Cambridge researcher Alan Blackwell states that a fuzzy goal ““motivates the general direction of the work, without blinding the team to opportunities along the journey” (Gray *et al.* 2010, p. 7). Fuzzy goals consist of three components: emotional, sensory, and progressive. They must be important to the people participating, engaging their emotions as well as their thoughts. They must be sensory, tangible enough to share with others. And they must be progressive, changing over time as the iterative design process unfolds.

Creating a container also involves preparing the participants. Prior to any program, key participants undergo coaching in the core capacities for resonant co-creation. Toolkits differ among facilitators and coaches, their techniques most often deriving from their own personal training. Reflective dialogue, for example, has several variations from appreciative inquiry to relationship coaching. Mindfulness can be taught

from multiple perspectives as well, from Kabat-Zinn's well known MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) to more business-oriented courses taught as leadership development. Forthcoming case studies illustrate how consultancies develop their own trademark that combines coaching, stakeholder dialogues, and program, facilitation to drive change.

Facilitation of a co-creative program resembles a theatrical play composed of three acts, and can take place over several days. The first act, opening, is an input stage aimed at opening up people's minds with new information. In their text on gamestorming, Gray *et al.* give this stage a keyword of "divergence" (*ibid.*). The driving principles are knowledge transmission and team bonding, with the latter being equally important. Co-creation is an emotional rollercoaster. Strong interpersonal bonding in the beginning enables the team to navigate the unknown better, and often leads to prosocial behaviors in the workplace long after the program.

Act II is exploration, reframing the subject from different perspectives. It is a journey into the unknown, a space of creative potential. Act II is when serious games, presencing, dialogue, and other techniques shift understanding from received notions to new ideas. Among facilitators there are a wide range of possible activities to use. Some facilitators prefer to keep the group in dynamic motion from one activity to the next, tapping into energy and creative tension using gameplay mechanics. Others concentrate on identifying and deeply exploring each aspect of the problem and the posed solutions. Co-creation is successful when the conditions for it (respect, trust, engagement, awareness) are set correctly and the energy of the group is managed to meet the best possible outcomes for the program. These outcomes may or may not be what the program was designed for, depending upon what came forth as important while exploring.

It is in Act II that seeds of collaborative potential first manifest, and the keyword is "emergence." What emerges depends on a combination of people, environment, process, and to some degree chance. Here the differences between co-creation and its more resonant form lie in the state of mind participants are in, the quality of facilitation, and resultant changes in the field of interaction. Resonant co-creation creates the potential for insights and interactions that are more deeply aware, empathetic, and mutually engaged by all.

Act III is the movement towards outcomes, with keyword "convergence." It focuses the collective energy towards initiatives that engage and mutually benefit all of the participants. It is the prototyping stage, in which designs and action plans are formed. Act III brings clarity to whether the process has been co-creative or not. Co-creation is evident when all of the members of a team remain engaged and take collective ownership of an idea. Not everyone will be happy with everything, but ideally everyone understands and is committed to the way forward. In resonant co-creation Act III requires a tremendous awareness from the facilitator, maintaining group energy as participants move through the highs and lows of the creative process. It is his or her job to ensure collective participation and ownership, while managing time and process to deliver valuable outcomes.

To summarise, resonant co-creation brings together diverse stakeholders in an attempt to tap into collective potential and come up with potentially breakthrough innovations and/or change. Resonant co-creation is useful for any co-creative enterprise, but it can be especially effective for transforming organizational culture and leadership to

engender strategic innovation. The CEO of Apotheosis, an organizational change consultancy, states: “There is a place for linear thinking in business, but it is not for new creative breakthroughs and insights. This is the realm of delving into the chaotic unknown and allowing new things and ideas to emerge” (Apotheosis, 2014). Without a combination of trust, respect, empathy, and freedom in that space, resonant co-creation can spin off track and will likely fail. For this reason it is not enough to set up a collaborative space and facilitate gameplay that reframes the challenge. The container must be set correctly, for it is within this space that participants go through a developmental journey to cultivate a deep inner knowing and a meta-awareness of the contextual factors that shape collective innovation processes. When this is achieved, collectively, the results can be profound.

### *Case Studies*

To illustrate this model, let us now look at practical examples of resonant co-creation and some outcomes of their work. The first case is the Theory U framework developed at the Presencing Institute. The U is a central infograph that depicts a journey, and over the years the U has taken on several layers of symbolism. The overall symbolism is the movement from observation to reflection, and then to action. That process can be further broken down into sub stages: Co-Initiating, Co-Sensing, Presencing, Co-Creating, and Co-Evolving (Scharmer, 2009). The Presencing Institute and MIT teach how to facilitate this journey in their MOOC course U.Lab: Transforming Business, Society, and Self (EdX 2015). The course takes its students through the U over 8 weeks, with each week consisting of watching lectures, group dialogue activities, and personal journaling. As a blended learning module, Theory U requires students to create circles and practice the techniques of dialogue and presencing in relation to personal leadership or organizational challenges. The source book accompanying the course contains tools that students can then use to facilitate similar journeys for clients.

In this model reflective dialogue is part of the sensing stage, the movement down the U. Scharmer defines reflective dialogue as empathetic listening, making an emotional connection and seeing through the eyes of others (2009). This step occurs immediately before presencing, which occurs at the bottom of the U. Presencing is the point at which individuals and organizations are supposed to connect with intuition and a deeper sense of purpose. From there they move up the U by focusing their intuition into a plan of action, or crystallizing intent.

As this model indicates, co-creation is integral to the Theory U approach. The Theory U model parallels resonant co-creation in that presence is a necessary precursor to co-creative engagement. Resonance—the sense of an interconnected field—is generated by dialogue exercises that connect people to each other through sharing and identifying a common purpose. Presencing further strengthens the resonance by helping people connect to their own intuition and the collective sense of a shared potential—the “emerging future” as Scharmer calls it.

Scharmer and Kaufer’s text *Leading from the Emerging Future* (2013) contains many examples of organizational transformation and strategic innovations resulting from application of the U framework. Among these include the IDEAS Indonesia project, which resulted in a new form of governance by Bupati Suyoto; the Bronx Cooperative

Development Initiative (BCDI), which employs an inclusive multi stakeholder dialogue to drive development; and an initiative called the Global Well-Being and GNH Lab, aimed at improving well being worldwide. Each of these was a strategic innovation in that they required abandoning existing models and co-creating entirely new ways of addressing challenges.

The Presencing Institute is an example of an organization that makes their framework highly visible. Their website has links to the entire Theory U framework, and offers tools for facilitators to apply. A different model is that of the private consultancy. An example is Nowhere Ltd, a UK based global consultancy. Founded in 1998, Nowhere consists of, “creative-catalysts that travel the world building cultures of innovation and developing breakthrough strategies, through the power of creative teams and evocative leadership” (Udall, 2014). Nowhere’s clients are large, often multinational, companies in a diverse range of industries from oil and gas to cable and telecoms. Nowhere focuses on strategic innovation for companies. This could be to help catalyze a company in coming up with a new purpose, create new products or services, formulate a strategy for a new product, or deal with the merging of different cultures after a merger.

Nowhere’s approach draws from the Earth Wisdom traditions of Native North America and the Chan, or Zen, tradition of East Asia. Their exercises rest on two interrelated constructs: the wheel and the power of questions. The wheel is similar to the Native American concept of a medicine wheel, but adapted to the modern business world. Each of the eight directions of the wheel represents an energy—a particular direction that people focus their thought and resources upon. An example is inspiration. Nowhere, through the visual representation of inspiration on their wheel, asks people to reflect upon what inspires them. To guide their reflection, Nowhere also provides a question with each direction on the wheel. These questions are modeled upon the Zen concept of a *koan*, thought exercises designed to lead students to enlightened wisdom. For inspiration the question is, “What is my unique purpose?” Nowhere exercises then guide participants to concentrate upon each question and the related energy. Nowhere also offers “microskills”— exercises that people can practice in their everyday life to further aid their development.

In all, there are eight directions, each with an energy and a focusing question. In their text and in workshops they help participants understand the Nowhere model and how microskill exercises can lead to personal and organizational transformation through continued practice. In workshops Nowhere also creates and holds the space required for emergence of new creative ideas. In these spaces Nowhere purposefully alters the nature of person-to-person interrelationships among the participants of the workshops. These alterations, combined with the insights gained from their other exercises, are central to Nowhere’s approach to organizational transformation.

In practice, Nowhere’s consulting consists of phone calls and meetings, combined with concentrated batches of 3 or 4 days where Nowhere brings teams together for exercises. Some exercises are dialogues designed to address the balance between the rational mind and the intuitive or creative mind and bring participants closer together so that they can tap in to the group consciousness, or the “space in between.” By establishing a collaborative consciousness, or “thinking together collectively, group participants can examine their preconceptions, stereotypes, and prejudices, as well as a more general movement of thought” (Schlitz *et al.*, 2010, p. 29). The space that Nowhere

creates is one of resonant co-creation, in which new innovative ideas spontaneously emerge.

Other activities are geared towards self-knowing and leadership development. Exercises might include specific questions for individuals to “hold” in their consciousness, or charting out a life history to get a greater sense of who they are and where they are going. This is done on both the individual and organizational level, with the end result being a much clearer sense of place, purpose, and connection to others in the larger system that is their organization.

Nowhere is an illustration of consulting that designs transformative journeys for participants. Nowhere depicts the journey as a creative rollercoaster, a ride that can result in profound change and innovation. They work intensively with clients over days, weeks, or even months to facilitate sustained change. For Nowhere, like the Presencing Institute, cultivating awareness, or mindfulness, is the keystone to organizational change. Nowhere claims that their experience is a journey from the known into the unknown—a movement into the space of collective intelligence. This bears great resemblance to Scharmer’s concept of “sensing.” In both frameworks, presence is the prerequisite to tapping into potential. Realizing that potential, which both Nowhere and the Presencing Institute label “emergent,” requires a worldview transformation. Leaders at least must adopt a model of intuition wherein creativity arises from a collective, interintentional field. One client testimonial captures this well, stating, “What Nowhere really does differently, to me, is it taps into that other side of the brain, the creative side, which is actually where real genius and innovation come from” (Nowhere 2015).

### *Conclusions*

The examples herein illustrate different approaches to co-creation and dialogue from countries spanning the globe. Each embodies the ideals of resonant co-creation in that they create spaces wherein a high level awareness (presence) engenders deeper engagements between participants. Present, or mindful, engagement has potential to open up new spaces for creativity and communication, which in turn engenders shifts in thinking that underlie breakthrough innovations. In that “the people involved in redesigning work imagine new, positive experiences for themselves and develop interactions that did not exist before,” co-creation can lead to enduring changes in organizational culture and business processes (Ramaswamy & Guillard 2010, p. 11). Such change requires more than the occasional workshop or consulting. It mandates a leadership that creates and holds the space for authentic engagement between all stakeholders. Resonant co-creation adds emphasis on cultivating meta-awareness of internal and external factors that influence collective ideation. Cultivation of such awareness enables perception and action from a place still alertness, increases empathy, and taps into intuitive modes of thinking from which new ideas emerge.

In this article my goal has been to introduce resonant co-creation as a model towards strategic innovation. I have outlined co-creation and called for a semantic nuance wherein worldview transformation is an integral aspect of the co-creative process. Through a short exegesis of the practical and theoretical roots of this approach, I have shown the premises upon which resonant co-creation operates and offered cases to illustrate my argument.



These illustrations demonstrate the interrelationship between resonant co-creation and innovation. If the bannermen of this new approach are correct, then resonant co-creation will bring enduring changes in organizations, both external and internal (Brown, 2011; Kegan & Lahey 2010; Senge *et al.*, 2005; Scharmer, 2009, 2013; Turner & Udall, 2008). External changes may be achievements, innovations, or new organizational practices. Internal changes include a new capacity for action, rooted in shifts in awareness and understanding. Action arising from connecting to deep intuition can empower and transform organizations.

For research, the construct of resonant co-creation establishes a frame for inquiry into the generative processes underlying and leading to strategic innovation. For practitioners, it is beneficial in the orientation and design of specific practices to facilitate change. Conceptual clarity enables change makers and managers to better justify and implement resonant co-creation within their organizational contexts.

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### **Acknowledgments**

The author would like to acknowledge The PolyU School of Design.

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