



BEYOND ^{the} LAB:

Case Studies on Instilling Innovation
into Nonprofit Arts Organizational Culture

Master's Thesis
by Kelsye A. Gould
May 2017
Professor Aida Rodriguez

BEYOND THE LAB: CASE STUDIES ON INSTILLING INNOVATION IN NONPROFIT ARTS ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Over the course of the past several decades, there has been a growing interest in developing organizational capacity to address complex challenges. Since many of these new approaches are creative in nature, one might assume that nonprofit arts organizations are well positioned to adapt to this changing environment of complexity. However, there seems to be a dynamic tension between creativity in art-making and the seeming lack of creativity in arts management. With this paradox in mind, EmcArts, a nonprofit with roots in change management consulting, developed an innovation framework that builds on the tech start-up innovation lab model and draws on research in adaptive capacity, complexity, change management, and systems thinking.

This paper highlights three organizations that have completed one of EmcArts' Innovation Labs: Springboard for the Arts, the Mississippi Museum of Art, and Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and Winspear Centre. Using a case study methodology, it examines some of the motivations, applications, advantages, and challenges of implementing an innovation process within a nonprofit. It also explores how nonprofits can embed an innovative mindset and culture of adaptive change within their organizations.

Though instilling innovation looks different for each of the profiled case study organizations, several common threads have emerged, including: (1) creating a boundary of space and time in which to safely learn the innovation process and incubate vulnerable ideas; (2) establishing a shared language; (3) starting with small experiments with radical intent; (4) embracing failure as an educational opportunity; (5) promoting a culture of learning wherein individual and institutional knowledge can be shared; (6) championing change from the top; (7) encouraging energetic questioning and constructive conflict; and (8) continuously iterating and practicing.

PROBLEM SPACE

Donella Meadows' seminal book, *Thinking in Systems*, begins with a quote from operations theorist, Russell Ackoff:

Managers are not confronted with problems that are independent of each other, but with dynamic situations that consist of complex systems of changing problems that interact with each other. I call such situations messes. ... Managers do not solve problems, they manage messes.¹

In 1973, Rittel and Webber coined the term, “wicked problem” to describe these messy situations. In a paper exploring social policy through the lens of city planning, they defined wicked problems as those for which no definitive solution readily exists: “At best, they are only re-solved—over and over again.”² Similarly, over 30 years later, David Snowden’s Cynefin Framework differentiated complex challenges from three other types of problems: simple, complicated, and chaotic. Simple and complicated challenges are linearly connected through cause and effect, whereas chaotic challenges have no direct link between cause and effect. For complex challenges, however, the relationship between cause and effect continuously evolves as systems shift and interact with each other.³

Many organizations—in public, private, and social sectors, alike—are grappling with how to adapt in this increasingly complex, wicked, messy world. Burns, Cottam, Vanstone, and Winhall observe that “Traditionally, organisations [sic] have been designed for a complicated rather than a complex world. Hierarchical and silo structures are perfectly designed to break problems down into more manageable fragments. They are not, however, so effective handling high levels of complexity.”⁴

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1. Russell Ackoff, “The Future of Operational Research Is Past,” *Journal of the Operational Research Society* 30, no. 2 (February 1979): 93–104, **quoted in** Donella H. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*, ed. Diana Wright (London: Earthscan, 2008), 1.
 2. Horst W. J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, “Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning,” *Policy Sciences* 4, (1973): 160.
 3. Richard Evans, “Building a Resilient Sector: An Attempt to Debunk Myths around Innovation and Identify How Grantmakers Can Support Adaptive Change,” *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader* 24, no. 3 (2013): 6.
 4. Collin Burns, Hillary Cottam, Chris Vanstone, and Jennie Winhall, *RED Paper 01: Transformation Design*, (London: Design Council, 2006), 8.

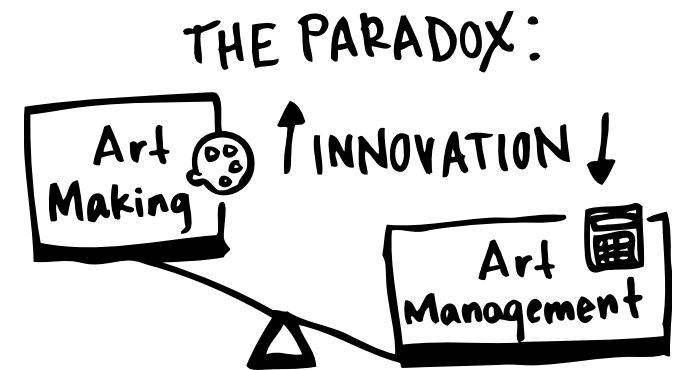
Indeed, for the past several decades, there has been a growing interest in developing the organizational capacity to address these challenges, both within organizations as a means of working more efficiently, as well as outside of organizations as a means of effectively creating market value. But to do so, requires new approaches. Numerous tools, frameworks, and theories have emerged with this very goal: innovation; design thinking; organizational creativity; and adaptive capacity, to name a few. Though they differ in their specific details, broadly speaking, these various methodologies are, in fact, quite similar. (For definitions of these, and other related terms, see [Appendix A](#).)

A Paradox of Creativity

Given that many of these new approaches involve creativity, experimentation, and flexibility, one might assume that nonprofit arts organizations are well positioned to adapt to this changing environment of complexity. For one, they tend to be highly creative and innovative when it comes to making and producing art; however, this creativity does not always cross over into the management side of arts organizations.

Richard Evans of EmcArts recounts how the Ford Foundation's growth-centric funding approach of the 1980s and '90s has drastically influenced nonprofit arts management: "As a result, organizational structures have tended to homogenize, with increasingly skilled and rigidly defined departments generating the greatest possible efficiency in maintaining and improving the status quo."⁵ As arts organizations grew in size, they managed this growth by establishing standardized processes and structures with increasingly specialized roles. However, these rigid systems had the unfortunate side effect of decreasing organizations' abilities to be responsive and adaptive in light of emerging challenges. Moreover, as arts administrations became increasingly professionalized, a wedge was driven between the art makers and the art managers. Evans argues, "We divorced the creation and production of art from the systems of delivery we built, and [we] robbed ourselves of some of our most important human resources, almost by design."⁶

This paradox created a rich space of opportunity. Building on the model of innovation labs, made popular by technology start-ups, and drawing on research in adaptive



5. Richard Evans, "Entering upon Novelty: Policy and Funding Issues for a New Era in the Arts," *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader* 21, no. 3 (2010): 2.

6. Ibid., 4.

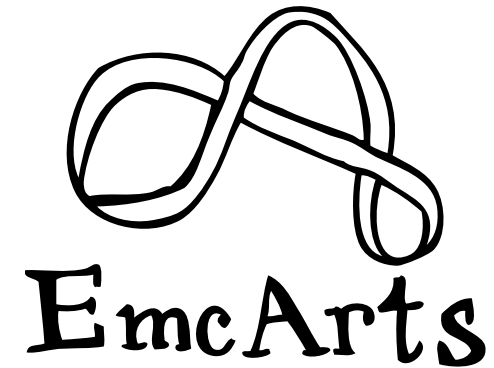
capacity, complexity, change management, and systems thinking, Evans and EmcArts set out to help arts organizations bridge this divide between innovation in art making and innovation in arts management.

Enter EmcArts

EmcArts is a New York City-based nonprofit organization that provides workshops, coaching, and in-depth lab experiences to individuals, organizations, and communities in order to “create the space and conditions to test innovative strategies and build cultures that embrace a changing world.”⁷

EmcArts was originally founded in 1999 by Richard Evans and John McCann as an LLC consulting firm with an emphasis on organizational change management. Then, in 2005, the organization was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) in order to embed innovation and adaptive change practices in the arts and culture sector. Recently, in 2014, EmcArts broadened its focus to the social sector by using the arts to inspire innovative approaches to community challenges. Since becoming a nonprofit, EmcArts has worked with over 250 cultural institutions, 2,500 leaders, and more than 12 communities to develop their adaptive capacities.⁸ In total, they have provided “innovation grants” of over \$2,800,000.

In 2008, EmcArts pioneered their Innovation Labs for the Arts program. Designed with nonprofit arts organizations in mind, the program consists of “facilitation, coaching, experimentation and professional development designed to ‘incubate’ and deliver to the public nascent artistic and organizational innovations, and to strengthen the long-term adaptive capacities of participating organizations.”⁹ The Lab began with a focus on performing arts organizations (producers, presenters, and service organizations in theatre, dance, and multi-disciplinary performing arts), thanks to a \$1.6 million grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. This grant was renewed three times over the course of eight years, for a total investment of \$6.3 million. From 2008 to 2015, 52 organizations participated in the Innovation Labs for the Performing Arts. In 2011, the



7. “[Our Work](#),” EmcArts.

8. Ibid.

9. EmcArts, *The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts Rounds 4-6 Final Report*, (New York: 2011), 1.

Lab expanded to museums when the MetLife Foundation funded three rounds of Innovation Labs for Museums through 2014.¹⁰

Then, in 2010, EmcArts launched their New Pathways program to engage a local cohort of up to 20 nonprofit organizations over an 18- to 24-month period. Like the Innovation Labs, New Pathways “moves away from traditional strategies of technical assistance, which support the improvement of existing organizational strategies, to adaptive assistance that accelerates the adoption of ‘next practices’ for the organizations and the field.”¹¹ The New Pathways program is rooted in action-learning whereby participants learn from each other’s experiences. Designed alongside the local funder(s), New Pathways may include any of the following:

1. A preliminary analysis of the organizational capacity of all the selected participants;
2. A sequence of hands-on Workshops led by EmcArts facilitators, taking place either in-person or virtually;
3. Participant-led Community Convenings or Participant Forums designed by a guiding group of program participants;
4. On-site Coaching for a selection of the participating organizations to go deeper and involve more stakeholders, as follow-up to the Workshops;
5. A Train-the-Trainer program in which local consultants are trained to deliver adaptive coaching work in the future; and
6. The opportunity for an individually facilitated “deep dive” into Incubating Innovation around a particular project.¹²

This final component, Incubating Innovation, is generally offered to a select number of New Pathways participants through a competitive application process following the conclusion of the first phase of the program. Incubating Innovation follows the same process in addressing a complex challenge as the Innovation Labs in the Performing Arts.

10. EmcArts, *National Innovation Labs for the Performing Arts and for Arts Development Agencies: Final Report*, (New York: 2016), 10.

11. “[New Pathways | Edmonton Selects Three Arts Organizations to Participate in Incubating Innovation](#),” *ArtsFwd*, Apr. 20, 2016.

12. *Ibid.*

Key Terms

Adaptive Capacity: “The resilience of people and the capacity of systems to engage in problem-defining and problem-solving work in the midst of adaptive pressures and the resulting disequilibrium,” (Heifetz, et al., 2009).

Innovation: EmcArts defines innovation in relation to organizational change: “Organizational innovations are instances of organizational change that 1) result from a shift in underlying organizational assumptions, 2) are discontinuous from previous practice, and 3) provide new pathways to creating public value and impact.” Evans differentiates organizational innovation from creativity, noting that while creative thinking is an essential part of innovation, it goes beyond that: “To innovate means to develop creative ideas into feasible strategies that organizations can actually implement,” (Evans, 2013).

Innovation Lab: “A semi-autonomous organization that engages diverse participants—on a long-term basis—in open collaboration for the purpose of creating, elaborating, and prototyping radical solutions to pre-identified systemic challenges,” (Gryszkiewicz, et al.).

See [Appendix A](#) for additional and expanded definitions.

Innovation Framework

EmcArts defines innovation as it relates to organizational change:¹³

Organizational Innovations

1. Result from a shift in underlying organizational assumptions
2. Discontinuous from previous practice
3. Provide new pathways for creating public value

Evans differentiates organizational innovation from creativity, noting that while creative thinking is an essential piece of innovation, it goes beyond that: "To innovate means to develop creative ideas into feasible strategies that organizations can actually implement."¹⁴ Additionally, he argues that innovation is a learnable skill that any organization can develop.

Accordingly, EmcArts has developed an innovation framework, used in both their Innovation Labs for the Arts and their New Pathways Incubating Innovation programs, which consists of four phases:

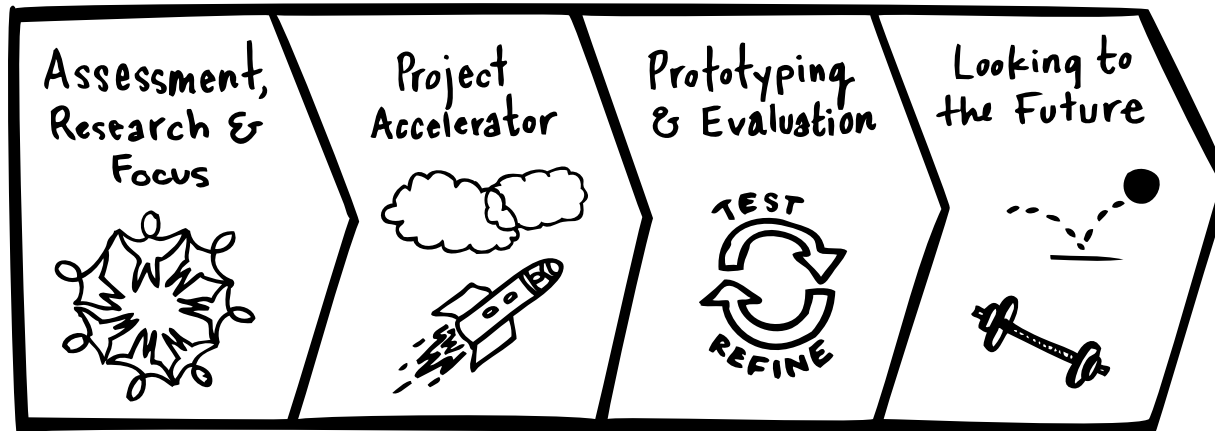
1. Assessment, Research and Focus, where the participating organization builds its innovation team and begins to narrow its focus through exploratory research;
2. Project Accelerator, which consists of a one-week intensive for the innovation team to take a deep dive in the focus area;
3. Prototyping and Evaluating, wherein the team begins to test and revise their ideas; and
4. Looking to the Future, where the team determines what will be implemented

13. EmcArts, *National Innovation Labs for the Performing Arts and for Arts Development Agencies: Final Report*, (New York: 2016), 10.

14. Richard Evans, "Building a Resilient Sector: An Attempt to Debunk Myths around Innovation and Identify How Grantmakers Can Support Adaptive Change," *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader* 24, no. 3 (2013): 3.

and how to develop adaptive capacity across their organization.¹⁵

EmcArts Incubating Innovation Framework



A key element of the framework is the inclusion of a process facilitator that works with each participating organization to guide it through the phases and provide support in navigating the process. The facilitators' expertise lie in productively managing group processes and interactions, rather than specific technical knowledge.¹⁶ Each facilitator meets with their innovation team at various points throughout the framework's four phases, including the week-long project accelerator retreat.

I was first exposed to EmcArts' innovation framework while working for Pillsbury House + Theatre, one of the participants in the 2014/15 Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts. I decided to leave Pillsbury House + Theatre to pursue my graduate studies when it was about half-way through the Lab experience, but I have been eager to learn more about the implications of EmcArts' innovation framework ever since.

15. The fourth phase was added later in the development of the Innovation Labs for the Arts to promote "continual and mindful practices of operationalizing, embedding, diffusing and systematizing adaptive responses in grantees' organizational cultures and structures." Source: EmcArts, *National Innovation Labs for the Performing Arts and for Arts Development Agencies: Final Report*, (New York: 2016), 25.

16. Richard Evans, "Building a Resilient Sector: An Attempt to Debunk Myths around Innovation and Identify How Grantmakers Can Support Adaptive Change," *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader* 24, no. 3 (2013): 6.

RESEARCH FOCUS

Throughout my graduate studies, I have been interested in the intersection of strategic design and change management. Some of the questions I have been pondering include: What are the advantages of applying a creative, cross-disciplinary design lens to organizational and community challenges? How does an organization embed creativity or innovation so that it becomes a consistent, daily way of thinking and working? And, furthermore, at what point do innovation tools and methods move beyond a specific project to become an organizational mindset or way of working?

Inspired by these questions and the dynamic tension between creativity in art-making and the seeming lack of creativity in arts management, this paper examines three organizations that have completed one of EmcArts' Innovation Labs. In doing so, I hope to uncover some of the motivations, applications, advantages, and challenges of implementing an innovation process within a nonprofit, using these Lab participants as case studies.

Research Questions

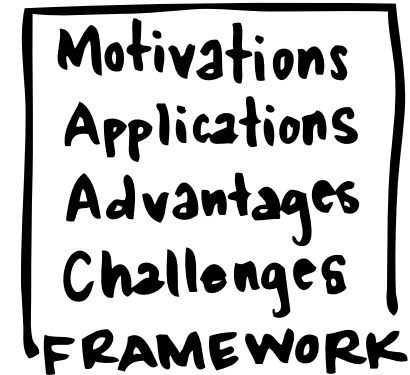
Specifically, my research focuses on the following questions:

- What did the organizations learn from participating in EmcArts' innovation lab?
- What worked? What was less successful? And what are some of the ideas around how/why? How does using EmcArts' innovation framework compare to the organizations' previous work or work-as-usual?
- How have organizations been able to embed some of the tools, approaches, or capacities that they learned and developed in the Lab, beyond the focal projects themselves?

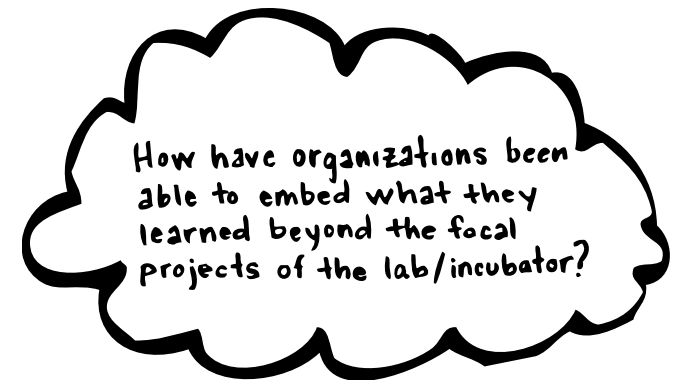
This investigation includes reflections on what organizations took away from participating in EmcArts' innovation programs, as well as how these organizations are building upon this knowledge.

Research Significance

In Seelos and Mair's 2012 article, "Innovation is *Not* the Holy Grail," they write that "although much social innovation research has explored the entrepreneurial



Motivations
Applications
Advantages
Challenges
FRAMEWORK



How have organizations been able to embed what they learned beyond the focal projects of the lab/incubator?

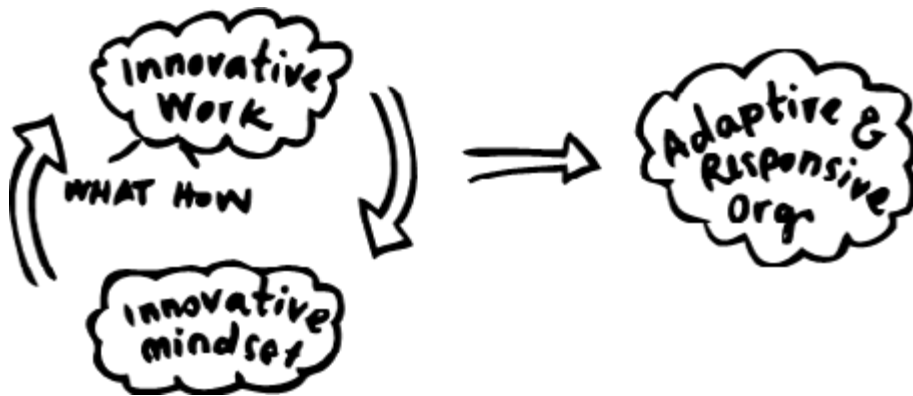
establishment of new social organizations, much less is known about the ability of already established organizations to innovate continuously."¹⁷ Similarly, Letts, Ryan, and Grossman argue, "The social sector focuses too much on innovation and not enough on innovativeness—the capacity to innovate repeatedly."¹⁸ By examining these case vignettes, I hope to begin exploring how nonprofit organizations can embed a creative mindset into their work so that they are continuously innovating.

These case vignettes will add to EmcArts' portfolio of stories, providing additional examples of their innovation framework in action. Content from these stories may be repurposed and shared on the ArtsFwd.org web site, though this is beyond the scope of this particular project.

More broadly speaking, these stories may also contribute to the collective narrative of nonprofit innovation, providing inspiration and insight for the sector and its funders.

Hypothesis

My initial hypothesis regarding my research questions was that each of the three case study organizations would have embedded an innovation mindset into their organizational cultures, though in varying ways and to varying extents. This innovation mindset, I suspected, would affect not only the work they do, but *how* they do it.



INNOVATION
↓
WAY of WORKING

17. Christian Seelos and Johanna Mair, "Innovation is *Not* the Holy Grail," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Fall 2012.

18. Christine W. Letts, William P. Ryan, and Allen Grossman, *High Performance Nonprofit Organizations: Managing Upstream for Greater Impact*, (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999), 19.

Though these organizations were by no means “un-innovative,” prior to participating in EmcArts’ Innovation Labs, I suspected that the Lab would represent a significant turning point in how the organizations considered innovation as a systematic process, much in part to the substantial investment of time and financial resources that the Lab provided.

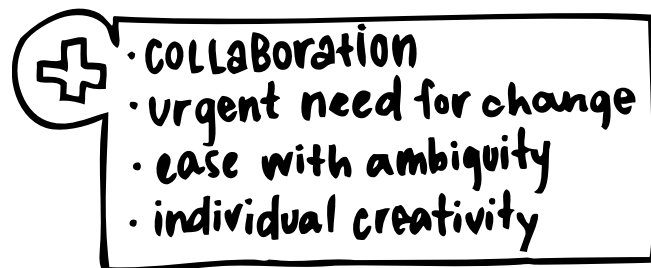
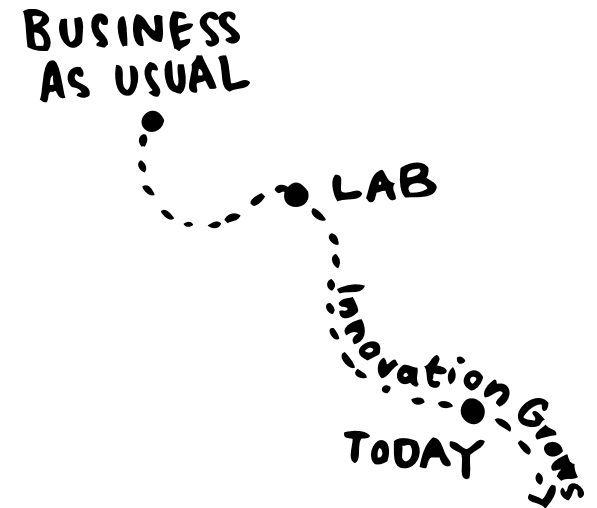
Drawing on my own experiences working in the arts sector and having partially participated in an EmcArts Lab, I postulated about what I might find.

The advantages and strengths I expected to find included:

- The creativity of individual participants and its effect on the innovation team (especially since organizations were encouraged to include artists);
- Experience collaborating and partnering with other organizations;
- An urgent need or readiness for change at the organizational level; and
- A comfort with ambiguity and uncertainty (by nature of the participants being arts organizations).

The challenges and disadvantages I expected to find included:

- Funding—especially ongoing support of both new ideas and the development, launch, and scaling of promising ideas;
- Productively managing conflict;
- The pull of habit in falling back into “business-as-usual” when times get tough; and
- Failing to make space, time, and capacity for new ideas, projects, or programs.



METHODOLOGY

For this paper, I have used a case study methodology, comprised of both primary and secondary research.

Case Selection

In consultation with EmcArts, I selected three organizations for case profiles that meet the following criteria:

- The organization has participated either in the Arts Innovation Lab or New Pathways Incubating Innovation program.
- The organization has completed all phases of the innovation framework.
- Decent documentation around the project exists.
- Access to key members of the organization's innovation team exists.
- The Lab had a "substantial" effect on the organization, meaning it was a turning point for the organization or for a specific program, process, staff member, etc.
- The cases selected represent various organizational focuses and challenges.

The selected organizations include The Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and Winspear Centre, The Mississippi Museum of Art, and Springboard for the Arts. These three organizations were selected because they represent a broad cross-section of the types of innovation projects they worked on and because each involved a broader culture change beyond the project itself. These organizations also represented an interesting mix of Arts Innovation Lab vs. New Pathways Incubating Innovation, US vs. Canada, and "success" vs. "learning opportunity," which I hoped would yield interesting comparisons.

Primary Research

My primary research consisted of interviews with innovation team members from each of the selected case organizations. I conducted a total of six phone interviews, talking with two individuals from each of the three selected case organizations. (See [Appendix B](#) for a list of the interview questions.) The interviews ranged from one hour to 30 minutes each.

case study of 3 orgs

MISSISSIPPI
MUSEUM
of ART

SPRINGBOARD
for the arts

EDMONTON
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

Secondary Research

My secondary research consisted of a review of archival records and public reports, including:

- Grant proposals and reports submitted to EmcArts by the selected organizations
- Grant reports from EmcArts to Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, one of its innovation program funders
- *Grantmakers in the Arts* articles by Richard Evans
- Blog posts on ArtsFwd.org and the web sites of the selected case organizations
- Previous impact/case studies by Jamie Gamble for EmcArts
- Relevant press releases, newsletters, annual reports, and Twitter posts from EmcArts and the selected case organizations

In addition, I also conducted secondary research on innovation and design thinking within the nonprofit sector, adaptive organizational capacity and leadership, and organizational creativity. Springboard for the Arts

□ interviews 

□ secondary data review 

SPRINGBOARD FOR THE ARTS

Context¹⁹

Based in Minnesota, Springboard for the Arts is an arts service organization working at the intersection of economic and community development. It was founded in 1978 with the mission “to cultivate vibrant communities by connecting artists with the skills information, and services they need to make a living and a life.”²⁰ Understanding the important contributions of artists within healthy communities, Springboard’s staff is comprised entirely of artists. Its programs include a variety of services for artists, including professional development workshops and business resources, as well as programs for community members looking to work with and support artists. It has both an urban and rural presence with offices in Saint Paul and Fergus Falls. Beyond its work in Minnesota, Springboard also runs a digital platform called Creative Exchange, where the organization shares toolkits and stories with artists and communities across the country, and invite others to do the same.

During the five years from 2006 to 2010, Springboard had experienced a surge of growth and transformation as it began offering services and partnering in 75 new communities across the Upper Midwest.²¹ There was a significant interest in the organization’s work, both at the regional and national levels, and the possibility of opening a satellite office in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, was on the horizon. This energy—both exciting and daunting, especially given the economic recession at the time—prompted the organization to consider the larger question of scale. “We had a lot of demands from communities outside of Minnesota for help replicating or starting programs like ours,” recalled Executive Director Laura Zabel, “and we had played around with a bunch of different ideas of how to address that demand but had not figured out exactly what path to take. We thought we needed the dedicated time and resources to explore that in



19. Unless otherwise noted, the details for this case study come from personal interviews with Laura Zabel, Executive Director of Springboard for the Arts, and Erik Takeshita, former Board Member of Springboard for the Arts.

20. “[Principles & Visions](#),” *Springboard for the Arts*.

21. Springboard for the Arts, *EmcArts Innovation Lab Seedlings/Spring Final Report*, (2011), 1.

a more meaningful way." So, in 2010, Springboard applied for and was accepted into Round 5 of the Innovation Lab in the Performing Arts with the goal of exploring "strategies for replicating its work in new communities and creating a network of arts service providers."²²

The Lab

Springboard for the Arts assembled a diverse innovation team consisting of staff, board, and community members, including a community organizer, a neighborhood artist, and a representative from the City of Saint Paul. As they began to do some research around their innovation challenge, the team was inspired by the local food and gardening movement. This went so far as to influence the words they were using to describe their project: "Our vision is to think of the Lab as a farm and our projects as seedlings."²³

During the retreat, an unfortunate situation turned into an influential opportunity. The group's appointed process facilitator, Richard Evans, fell ill and was unable to be present to the extent that he would have been normally. This meant that the group had to self-facilitate. As former board member and innovation team member Erik Takeshita recalled, "It was really awesome because it put the ownership [of the process] on the group."

Part of this process was the flexibility to explore new avenues and uncover unexpected questions and insights. From this freedom to explore, an "Aha!" moment emerged. The innovation team realized that before they could decide **what** the organization was going to do or what they were going to prototype, they first needed to articulate **how** the organization wanted to work. So, they drafted a set of guiding principles that described the "how" of Springboard's work.

In discovering the "how," Springboard came to an important realization around scaling their work at the national level. Drawing inspiration again from the local foods movement, the innovation team determined that, rather than trying to build an institution of programs and satellite offices (including the prospective one in Iowa) through which to replicate their work nationally, they were more interested in creating a systemic movement of

THE CHALLENGE

How to
Scale

22. EmcArts, "Four leading arts organizations selected for the Innovation Lab for the Performing Arts," news release, October 8, 2010.

23. "Seedlings," ArtsFwd, Feb. 6, 2013.

creative communities. This approach allowed them to maintain their local roots while building a national “network of communities that embrace and celebrate their local artists, grow their local culture and identity, and share learning with other communities.”²⁴

Another pivotal moment during the retreat was the insight that the organization had been so focused on serving artists that it had neglected the second focus of its mission: community. Moreover, creating a movement would require tapping into and developing communities’ existing assets and resources. So, on the spot, they created a new community organizer position to run the nascent community development programs that would be prototyped. Zabel wasted no time in sitting down with Jun-Li Wang, who was on the innovation team as an outside expert in community organizing, and offering her the job: “I remember sitting next to the fireplace [on the retreat], asking her if she thought she might be interested in coming to work at Springboard, and we sort of hammered out the details while we were there.”

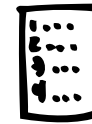
Returning to the language of gardening, the innovation team left the retreat prepared to address their challenge of scale with the goal of planting “seedlings” through a process, which they called “the spring.” The seedlings were the “permanent, locally-owned artist-led resources” that would be embedded in the communities with which they engaged, whereas the spring was the process of using their Minnesota-based programs as “demonstration projects” to “build local capacity through community engagement and local artist training opportunities.”²⁵ The group decided to prototype the seedlings/spring approach through two programs: one of which was relatively simple and lightweight, and the other of which required a deeper, long-term commitment.

The first program through which the seedlings/spring idea would be prototyped was a toolkit based on Springboard’s popular Community Supported Art (CSA) program. A variation on the community-supported agriculture model, the program engages local artists to create 50 “shares,” which are then sold to the public. Each shareholder then receives nine original pieces of art throughout the year. Springboard planned to share this toolkit with and help pilot the program in three additional communities (originally Detroit, Philadelphia, and Miami) through the support of an additional Knight

24. Springboard for the Arts, *EmcArts Innovation Lab Seedlings/Spring Final Report*, (2011), 1.

25. *Ibid.*, 1.

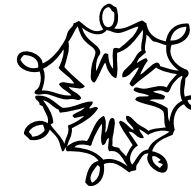
INSIGHTS



Guiding
Principles



How to be
Local & National



Community

Foundation grant. The toolkit would serve as the skeleton of the program, but the goal was for each pilot to be customized according to the unique needs and characteristics of each respective community.²⁶

The second prototyped program was the establishment of a rural office in Fergus Falls, Minnesota. Originally, the town had asked Springboard to create an artist resource center with them; however, they soon realized that their partners in Fergus Falls were expecting a cookie-cutter version of Springboard's Saint Paul programs. So, Springboard hired a local coordinator to build relationships in Fergus Falls and redirect the focus to better reflect the community's strengths and needs.²⁷

Lab Obstacles & Enablers

One of the elements of the Innovation Lab that enabled Springboard to develop its adaptive capacity was having the dedicated time, space, and trust to focus on their challenge with the innovation team. "Our big takeaway [from the Lab] was really understanding that to make that kind of big organizational change, we needed to invest in the time to be together and think it through and spend the time in the planning and in the learning of other models—and especially models outside of the arts," shared Zabel. Similarly, Takeshita echoed the benefits of taking the time to build relationships of trust before taking risks: "Change moves at the speed of trust."

Zabel also noted the importance of developing a shared language and understanding within an organization on which to build robust work. Although both prototyped programs grew into fully developed and influential pieces of Springboard's present work, the real impact of the Lab for Zabel was in how Springboard envisioned itself as an organization—as having both direct service and community development branches that, as she put it, "fit together under this umbrella of reciprocity between artists and community."

Initially, the flexible structure of the Lab allowed Springboard to enter the process with specific questions that evolved and changed over time. "Sometimes you need to go down some rabbit holes that aren't really valuable or useful," shared Takeshita, "but

PROTOTYPES



Toolkit
Sharing



Rural
Office

26. "[Seedlings](#)," ArtsFwd, Feb. 6, 2013.

27. Ibid.

sometimes they actually lead to new universes that are exactly what you need to be doing.” This permission to explore and discover within the framework of the Lab was critical to unearthing the insight that their adaptive capacity resided in the “how” of their work, rather than the specific projects, themselves.

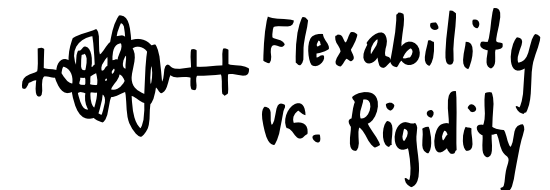
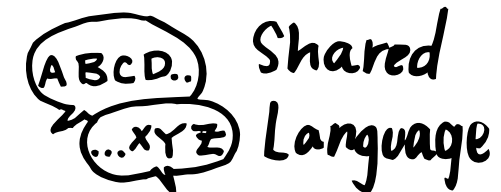
Interestingly, however, once the team had this “Aha!” moment, the remaining prototyping phase of the innovation framework began to feel overly rigid and linear with its imposed deadlines. Zabel noted that the innovation team desired additional time to explore further the ideas and principles that emerged from the Lab. Therefore, the team selected two projects to prototype that were, technically, already in the works. “We knew we were going to do both of those things already,” Zabel acknowledged, “but I think we saw them in a different light because of the Lab and were able to sort of frame them as two ends of this spectrum around how do we explore scale in a different way.”

Also, the prototypes took longer to plan and coordinate due to the complications of working with new communities and partners in multiple cities. This meant neither of the prototypes had been fully tested when the final report to EmcArts was due. Nonetheless, on their own timelines, both the rural office and the CSA toolkit eventually were tested and implemented, and both are still in existence today.

Iteration and Evolution

The CSA toolkit was the first of what has turned into a robust strategy and commitment by Springboard to create toolkits for all their programs. In 2014, the organization created a national platform, Creative Exchange, where all their toolkits are available for free download.²⁸ In addition to their own programs, Springboard has started to commission toolkits from individuals and organizations across the country. The site also features stories and profiles of artists who are engaging in this kind of creative, community-based work. Creative Exchange is directly tied to Springboard’s innovation challenge of how to build a movement around their work. “It really all stems from the success of the original toolkit and seeing that people could take the ideas and adapt them to their own communities,” recalled Zabel, “and that by sharing our work—that was actually the fastest way to do that kind of movement building.” In total, the toolkits have been

OBSTACLES & ENABLERS



28. Creative Exchange, Springboard for the Arts, [SpringboardExchange.org](https://springboardexchange.org).

downloaded over 3000 times, which, Zabel noted, is much faster than if Springboard had decided to do the work themselves in these new communities. Nonetheless, Zabel acknowledged that they have a long way to go before it becomes a true movement that shifts the larger systems of creative community investment.

Takeshita noted the radicalness of Springboard choosing to freely share its programs:

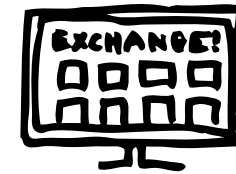
"It's somewhat counter-intuitive, particularly in the nonprofit sector that is so grounded in this scarcity mentality, but [Springboard exemplifies] this idea that, by giving things away, by being generous, you end up having more impact and, in the long run, really getting more—whether it's recognition [or] visibility—but also getting more financial return."

This sentiment is echoed in the organization's "More is More" principle, which states, "We believe interconnected communities of artists create an impact in ways that single interventions do not. By freely sharing our work and creating connections among artists and communities, we work to make substantial, system-wide change."²⁹

Springboard's rural office in Fergus Falls celebrated its fifth year in 2016. Michele Anderson, who was originally hired to open the office during the innovation lab, is now the Rural Program Director with two additional staff based in Fergus Falls.³⁰ The office houses a resource center that provides access to a digital workstation, professional development and career resources, and a library.³¹ In an open letter shared in December, 2016, Zabel elaborated on Springboard's priorities, which included "an even greater emphasis on Rural-Urban exchange. Examples of this exchange include the upcoming Rural Arts and Culture Summit and our Hinge Artist residency program in Fergus Falls."³²

The bulk of Springboard's community development and creative placemaking work has grown out of the ideas and deep relationships that were developed during the Lab experience. Jun-Li continues to serve as an Artist Community Organizer at Springboard, running their Community Development programs. Additionally, in 2011, Springboard

EVOLUTION



Creative
Exchange



Sharing Work



Rural/Urban
Community
Relationships

29. "[Principles & Visions](#)," Springboard for the Arts.

30. "[Staff](#)," Springboard for the Arts.

31. "[Springboard Resource Centers](#)," Springboard for the Arts.

32. Zabel, Laura. "[Let's Get to Work](#)," Springboard for the Arts, Dec. 2, 2016.

collaborated with innovation team members Erik Takeshita, who was working for Twin Cities Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), and Joe Spencer from the Mayor's Office in the City of Saint Paul, to embark on its largest project to date: a creative placemaking initiative called Irrigate. The partners received an ArtPlace grant (the single largest grant in Springboard's history) to train artists in creative placemaking and engage communities and businesses along the Central Corridor Light Rail line as it was being built.³³ "The project was the direct application of the 'Spring' process we developed" in the Lab, noted Springboard in their final report to EmcArts.³⁴

Beyond the Lab: Developing an Innovative Organization

Reverberations from the Lab

Prior to the Lab, Springboard already considered itself a fairly innovative, resilient, and nimble organization. Perhaps this is one of the contributing reasons for which EmcArts' innovation framework felt overly restrictive during the prototyping phase. Nevertheless, Zabel found the formalized process useful in that it supported their exiting way of working and initially gave them a more bounded structure within which to create and collaborate with diverse perspectives. The experience contrasted sharply to previous capacity building programs that Springboard had engaged in, which were much more traditional in their approach to strategy and planning. "I feel like we finally found a process that not just respected, but really valued our way of thinking and working," said Zabel.

When addressing new complex challenges or developing new work, Springboard continues to return to the concepts and frameworks they learned during the Innovation Lab. They have found that EmcArts' framing of innovation and adaptive change, as well as the language used to describe this work, has not only helped them better understand their work internally, but has also helped them explain their work—and why they do it the way they do—to people outside of the organization. Zabel pointed out that these theories give their work a deeper validation: "[We are] able to point to some of Richard's writing or other things that EmcArts has generated and say, 'No, see—this is about being an adaptive and relevant organization,' not just a bunch of artists who think they want to do everything differently from how everyone else does it."

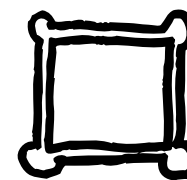
33. Brian Hinrichs, "[Can an Innovative Project Lead to a Culture Change?](#)," ArtsFwd, Jan. 15, 2013.

34. Springboard for the Arts, *EmcArts Innovation Lab Seedlings/Spring Final Report*, (2011), 2.

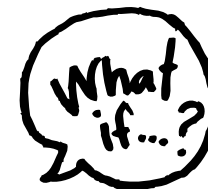
REVERBERATIONS



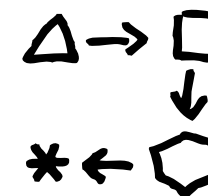
Culture already
"Innovative"



Theories
& Framing
Language



Energetic
Questioners



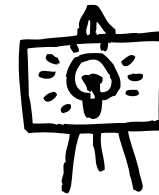
Adaptive
Leadership

One of these theories that Springboard has taken to heart is the notion of an adaptive board of directors. Zabel has found the framing and language of adaptive boards useful in explaining how their Board operates and how it is different from other boards. Takeshita expounded: "That is really a critical part of the special sauce, if you will, for Springboard, having the invitation and the charge as a Board Member to be an energetic questioner of the status quo and not holding [anything] precious." He also noted the importance of fostering innovation at the board level through intentional diversity of perspectives and expertise. Additionally, Springboard's Board Members are expected to engage with the day-to-day activities of the organization and its constituents by regularly attending organization events and activities and by reporting back to the rest of the Board on that experience.

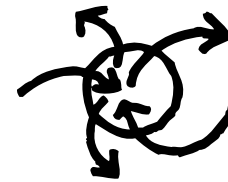
In August of 2014, on their blog, ArtsFwd.org, EmcArts explored the important role of non-profit boards in promoting an organizational culture of change.³⁵ The post asked, "What does an adaptive board look like?", and Springboard used the question to prompt a discussion at their next Board meeting. Their answers echoed the importance of board members in engaging with their constituents, supporting work "outside the box," asking tough and productive questions, being "optimistic skeptic[s]," and encouraging organizational risk-taking and learning.³⁶

Zabel notes that the whole of Springboard's work is about creatively and proactively untangling complex challenges to find the areas in which they can make a difference. For example, they are currently exploring the issue of economic opportunity as it relates to creative production and entrepreneurship. However, beyond simply addressing the question of "How do we support artists in making a living?" Springboard is also interested in shifting the larger economic system. This means engaging with the intersecting issues and structures of equity, power, agency, rural and urban exchange, and talent attraction and retention. Their hope is that, by partnering with individuals and institutions working on these intersecting challenges that are not art-specific, per se, they will begin to see how artists fit into these other systems.

STRENGTHS



Individual
Creativity



Internal &
External
Collaboration



Financial
Reserves

35. Karina Mangu-Ward, "[August Topic: What Does An Adaptive Board Look Like?](#)" ArtsFwd, Aug. 4, 2014.

36. Karina Mangu-Ward, "[Springboard Responds: This Is What An Adaptive Board Looks Like](#)" ArtsFwd, Aug. 27, 2014.

Continued Innovation Strengths and Challenges

Springboard's main strength in approaching complex challenges stems from their staff's individual creativity and their ability to collaborate both internally and externally. Being able to reach beyond their organizational boundaries to create connections in diverse sectors outside of the arts communities is a major asset.

In addition, Springboard's financial structure and the way they have been able to build up some cash reserves is hugely important in enabling the organization to innovate. For instance, the Go Fund is Springboard's take on a Research and Development fund that gives them the financial flexibility to try things. "It's not something that you have to go raise the money for, you have to sell it, and then you have to do it," explained Takeshita. Instead, Springboard is financially nimble enough to experiment.

However, as with all complex challenges, they never seem to go entirely away. "Innovation, by its nature," observed Takeshita, "is challenging and surprising." Springboard continues to grapple with the question of scale and how to create a movement that creates change at the systems level. "We can sort of telescope between trying to help an individual artist access healthcare and then thinking about how do we change the entire U.S. economy," described Zabel, "but it continues to be a challenge in that our aspiration really is at the systems change level and figuring out how a relatively small organization... can push for change enough that we actually make a difference..."

In addition, the organization wrestles with the tension that comes with being in a constant process of reinvention. It regularly toggles between focusing on big-picture innovation—the next big idea—and the more specific details of how to build internal systems and infrastructure to be able to build the next idea. Takeshita described the importance of finding the sweet spot between being thrilled and daunted when it comes to innovation and adaptive change: "There's something about that edge where you want to be pushing the envelope... far enough and as much as you can without blowing up, and where that edge is—that's where the energy is."

Innovation as a Way of Working

Nevertheless, Springboard embraces the idea of innovation and adaptive change. The guiding principles that were drafted during the retreat have become the backbone of

CHALLENGES



Systems
Level Change



Big Picture
& Details

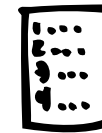
the organization, shifting the focus to how they work. Zabel recalled Takeshita saying that it's "about being tight on the mission and loose on the method." In my interview with him, he elaborated that the organization can constantly evolve because it is defined by its values and not its program: "being true to the core principles and values and adapting and adopting to whatever the community may need at that moment in time—I think that's a hallmark of organizations that are actually innovative." The principles have gone through two iterations in the past six years, but the core of them remains what was started in the Lab. They continue to inform the organization's work, transforming their business-as-usual. Not only do they provide a compass for the staff and board, but they also help Springboard explain their decisions to the external environment.

Additionally, Takeshita argued that innovation necessitates a certain sense of optimism that allows one to see the potential of change. He described Springboard's staff and Board as embodying an ethos of abundance and possibility. Takeshita pointed out that often, institutions, organizations, and programs develop a certain inertia that makes disrupting the status quo and asking whether something could work better even more difficult. "We don't ask, 'Is it being optimized? Is it actually having the most impact?'" he observed. "We don't look at the opportunity cost associated with continuing a particular activity vis à vis what we could be doing that could be even more impactful." However, at Springboard, he noticed a willingness to ask these questions and not hold anything too precious: "The goal isn't to preserve it for preservation's sake; the goal is to make it different. And if it is working, that's awesome, and if it isn't working, we should change it. It sounds overly simplistic, but I think it's actually that simple."

Looking to the Future

In the future, Takeshita hopes the organization continues to be responsive and nimble, adapting to change as it happens. "If we define an organization as a living breathing organism that is constantly evolving..." shared Takeshita, "that is how I see Springboard." Zabel envisions Springboard continuing its locally-rooted work that responds to the communities where it is situated. She also hopes the national movement will be better realized. Continuing with the agricultural metaphors, she says "I feel that there are a lot of tendrils of that [our work] and good roots that we've put down, but we're still searching for what is the necessary fertilizer to really get that to grow."

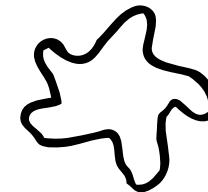
INNOVATION MINDSET



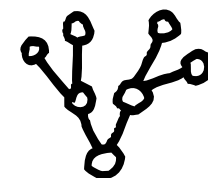
Guiding
Principles



Optimism &
Possibility



Nimble
& Responsive



Movement
Building

MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM OF ART

Context³⁷

The Mississippi Museum of Art (MMA), located in downtown Jackson, Mississippi, was founded by the Mississippi Art Association in 1978. The Association was a volunteer-run organization that had spent the previous 75 years of its existence purchasing, collecting, and displaying art in a downtown Jackson gallery. Today, the museum exists to “engage Mississippi in visual art.”³⁸ It is home to about 5,600 objects, about half of which relate to Mississippi and the American South, and the other half of which include American Art (beyond the South) and International Art. In addition to exhibiting art, the museum also offers educational programs for youth and adults, monthly programs that connect visual art with other artistic disciplines, and a variety of special events.

The MMA moved into its current space in 2007, which includes exhibition spaces, classrooms, art storage, and a café and store. The museum's permanent collection space houses *The Mississippi Story*, a rotating exhibit arranged by theme and highlighting art about the state. The second exhibition space hosts changing exhibits, including visiting exhibits featuring art from around the world. In addition, the museum shares its collection across the state through traveling exhibitions to 29 affiliates. In 2011, the MMA open its Art Garden, an outdoor, public green space with performance spaces and sculpture. The garden connects the museum with The Mississippi Arts Center, Performing Arts Hall, and Convention Complex. Both the museum building and the garden were intentionally designed to reflect the mission by establishing welcome spaces that allow individuals to connect with art.³⁹

In 2012, the museum noticed that, over the course of the past 10 years, participation had quadrupled from 50,000 people annually to 200,000. However, they noticed that membership numbers at the museum had not grown at nearly the same pace.⁴⁰ With

MISSISSIPPI
MUSEUM
of ART

37. Unless otherwise noted, the details for this case study come from personal interviews with Betsy Bradley, Director of Mississippi Museum of Art, and Julian Rankin, Director of Marketing & Communications at Mississippi Museum of Art.

38. “[About Us](#),” *Mississippi Museum of Art*, [MSMuseumArt.org](#).

39. Ibid.

40. Mississippi Museum for Art, *Application to the Innovation Lab for Museums* (2012), 3.

the hunch that the traditional membership model of museum support was no longer sustainable, the Mississippi Museum of Art decided to apply to the EmcArts' Innovation Lab for Museums, presented in partnership with the American Association of Museum's Center for the Future of Museums. The museum was accepted into Round 2 of the Innovation Lab for Museums to explore alternative membership models with the goal of finding or developing "a new model for financial participation in museums."⁴¹

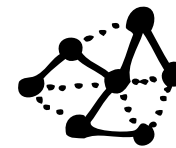
The Lab

The MMA innovation team included staff from across the organization, a board member, community partners, and a millennial museum visitor. Since the MMA's complex challenge was emblematic of a shift in the broader arts sector wherein younger generations were not supporting institutions in the same ways as previous generations, the innovation team started the process by researching alternative membership models, drawing inspiration from sectors both within and outside of the arts sector.⁴²

Innovation team member Julian Rankin recalled, "One of the things we talked about a lot when we started the Innovation Lab was how to monetize participation. That wasn't necessarily our goal because we're a free museum to walk into...but how do you value participation?" Part of this was learning more about their audience—both people who participated in museum activities and those who did not. The innovation team decided to hire a research firm to conduct an intensive data collection and analysis around how people in the community spend their leisure time: What do they do on weekends? How do they decide on leisure time activities and schedules? And how do demographics play into this? As it turned out, the innovation team learned that they did not know their audience as well as they thought they did.

During the innovation retreat, the team initially thought up a membership model and marketing campaign called "This is My Museum." In planning the prototype, however, they decided to alter it to "focus on transforming the relationships that our patrons, guests,

THE CHALLENGE



Broken Model?

INSIGHTS



Who is audience?



Importance of Data

41. EmcArts, "Three Museums Selected for Second Round of National Innovation Lab for Museums," news release, July 9, 2012.

42. Mississippi Museum for Art, *Application to the Innovation Lab for Museums* (2012), 4.

and our community has with our organization.”⁴³ Using the four primary motivations for participation that their research advisor had uncovered (financial value, experience/access, social value, and philanthropy), the team devised a low-tech membership prototype. The experiment consisted of a list of eligible activities that one could complete to gain membership loyalty points, which could eventually be redeemed for certain rewards or gifted back to the organization to support other museum programs. The MMA invited 300 people from three groups of constituents to participate in the prototype, including existing museum members, casual MMA participants (but non-members), and members from the local African American community.⁴⁴

The MMA's membership prototype was evaluated on the number of people who enrolled, the number of points earned, and the number of rewards redeemed.⁴⁵ What the innovation team learned, however, was that their proposed model was too complicated due to the number of choices involved. Rather than roll it out in full, the innovation team decided to go back to the drawing board and build on the real benefit that had emerged so far: the realization that the organization needed a lot more information about their audience.

Along with this increase in data came the realization that the museum needed a more robust database to store and make sense of the data. Previously, this information had been collected through membership demographics and observation, and was not systematized in a way that was easily analyzable. Half-way through the prototyping process, the museum licensed a customer management software and hired a new employee to fulfill the role of Membership Director and Database Manager.⁴⁶

Lab Obstacles & Enablers

One of the challenges the museum experienced had to do with the timeline for prototyping. Once they decided on a new database to manage their participant data, it took much longer to negotiate the contract and pricing, thus slowing down the whole

PROTOTYPES



43. Mississippi Museum of Art, *Innovation Lab for Museums: Mississippi Museum of Art Progress Report* (2013), 1.

44. Ibid., 2.

45. Ibid., 1.

46. Ibid., 1-2.

process.⁴⁷ Bradley's main surprise regarding the Lab process was that, after all was said and done, they still did not have the "perfect" membership solution. Rankin reiterated this, noting that innovation takes time and there is no "silver bullet." This tends to be the nature of complex challenges—they never seem to go entirely away.

Despite the challenges of time, the Lab gave the MMA the space and time to ask a lot of questions, develop their innovation skills, and consider new ideas. The overall structure of the Lab that followed a systematized, logical process, "like the scientific method," explained Rankin, influenced how easily the organization was able to develop and integrate new ideas. "I think we learned that an idea, an innovation, has so many practical considerations," recalled Rankin, "but once we were able to approach change in a prescribed kind of way that would allow us to learn from it and optimize things... [we realized that] innovation is not such a scary thing."

Iteration and Evolution

The Lab allowed the MMA innovation team to confirm their hypothesis that the traditional museum membership model does not align with Generation-X and -Y consumer behavior. However, Bradley notes that the model is not broken to the point that it is crippling to the organization. Membership continues to grow, though less quickly. Regardless, as the museum looks to its future generations of visitors, they are not blind to the reality that those who engage with the museum and attend its events are not becoming members.

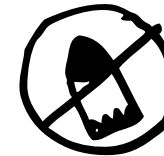
Though the museum's membership model has not end up changing substantially, the museum does have a new appreciation for data and how understanding their data can help them make smarter decisions and be more targeted in their work. "We've been very interested in keeping a research firm with us that helps us to continue to mine the data we have around the individual experience and to constantly get better at creating an environment where people find meaning," shared Bradley.

The museum continues to iterate in hopes of finding a better way. They are currently working on a revised prototype for a customizable membership model. Knowing that their target consumers are accustomed to more choice and customizable solutions, the challenge now is to figure out the most effective way to do that. This iteration delineates

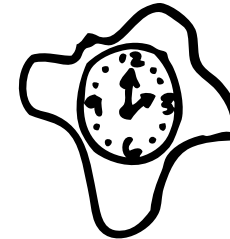
OBSTACLES & ENABLERS



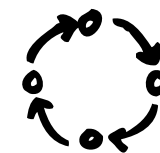
Timing



No Silver Bullet



Time & Space



Process

47. Ibid., 2.

membership categories based on individuals' participation preferences—whether that be special events, family programs, educational series, etc. Over the next few months, they plan to test it out and see how their audience responds.

Beyond the Lab: Developing an Innovative Organization

Reverberations from the Lab

During the Lab, Bradley was simultaneously participating in the National Arts Strategy Executive program which also talked a lot about innovation. “I was getting the message from both experiences pretty intensively over a period of time,” recalled Bradley, “and was able to use what I learned from them to engage the board, staff, and community in the strategic planning process that articulated a new approach to our work together.”

One of these new approaches was structuring the staff by cross-disciplinary teams rather than departments. For example, when planning upcoming exhibitions, a team is assembled with people from Art (curatorial), Marketing, Participation, Visitor Services, and Resources (finance). Beyond organizing the staff this way, Bradley noted that the team members are “very comfortable in how they feel in their obligation to challenge each other.” This encourages a productive dialogue from the various perspectives early on in the process of developing an exhibition. “Getting those questions out of the way early in the process,” said Bradley, “eliminates dangerous traps, but also increases a collaborative spirit of buy-in by people across the organization.” Nevertheless, collaboration also requires additional time and energy. “We all know it’s easier to do the job yourself than to work with other people and teach them or learn from them,” Bradley acknowledged, but she also argued that the end results are much richer than they had been with the organization’s previous siloed way of working.

In addition, Bradley noted that the Lab “taught us the discipline of asking questions and approaching this work as experimentation so that we could roll out a prototype [and] think about it for a while.” For example, prior to the lab, the museum used to offer various programs throughout the year targeted at different audience segments. However, with a renewed focus on using art as a catalyst to make connections with people, in 2015, the museum decided to try an experiment. They combined several existing and new programs into a monthly social event. Rankin described it as an organic, multi-layered

EVOLUTION



Customizable
Options



Research &
Data Mining

experience that sets the stage for art moments to happen. Called Third Thursday, this small experiment in rethinking how programs were packaged is now one of the museum's flagship events. It might include culinary dishes inspired by the current exhibit, a pop-up exhibition of local artists, contemporary music performances, family-friendly movies in the garden, installations, or other art experiences.

Rankin has also noticed that, since the Lab, staff more readily offer ideas and suggestions. For instance, during an exhibit of 50 old-master paintings, someone suggested that the museum stay open for 50 hours. "Within five minutes," recalled Rankin, "that went from just a laughable idea to laying groundwork for how we stay open during the final 50 hours of the exhibition, program every single hour, midnight tours, stand-up comedians going through the galleries, strange installations or body painters." Like Third Thursdays, this germ of an idea has evolved into an annual event called Museum 24.

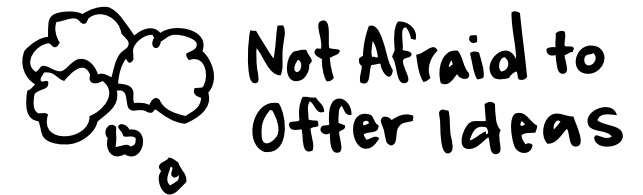
Similarly, Rankin has observed how the concepts of play and gamification that were developed during the Lab have influenced the organization: "Play has really been a useful thing for us, but it's not in the way we thought it would be. It's not, 'Let's build a game.' It's 'Let's inject play into everything we do.'" For example, breaking down the silos between marketing and curatorial, and drawing on their designer's illustration talents, the MMA has developed a comic book series based on Mississippi artists. Tapping into this playful spirit has unearthed a new medium of communication between the museum and its communities

Finally, the Lab helped to hone the museum staff's research skills and make them more attuned to the external environment. As exemplified by the comic books, Rankin reported finding inspiration in pop culture and other industries outside of the museum sector. Bradley has noticed that staff seem to have one ear to the ground, listening for what is going on in the community and with their visitors, while the other ear is listening for what is happening in other organizations and consumer behavior, in general.

Continued Innovation Strengths and Challenges

According to Rankin, the MMA's biggest challenge when it comes to innovation "is always that change takes a lot of time, and... like they say, a big ship can't shift directions in one fail swoop." While the museum's medium size allows for some flexibility and nimbleness, as

REVERBERATIONS



Bradley put it, “the art museum world is very, very slow to change, and innovation is not something that has been embraced by the art museum world.” Particularly for curatorial staff who have been trained in art history, innovation was looked upon as a threatening idea, seemingly with the assumption that innovation compromises the artistic experience. Lately, however, as more museums in the field embrace the idea of “museums without walls,” there seems to be more acceptance and energy in the museum field for shifting the way institutions engage audiences with their art. “Innovation,” said Bradley, “was a way we could get ahead of the curve in thinking that way.”

The notion of learning through experimentation has also posed challenges—especially for staff who, by profession, are trained to be perfectionists. Bradley describes it as developing a habit. Like any new habit, it can be strengthened through regular practice. To grow more comfortable with taking risks and accepting failure as a learning opportunity requires a safe and supportive space in which to experiment. Encouraging cross-disciplinary collaboration and joint decision making has been instrumental in helping some of the staff to unlearn their siloed tendencies. Nevertheless, Bradley acknowledged the fragility of new habits and the pull to return to one’s previous ways of working, especially in times of tension: “It’s my job to make sure that when under stress, people won’t revert to hiding in their office and being perfectionists by themselves... I have to get them out and make them vulnerable to hearing feedback they may not want to hear.”

One of the major challenges that MMA encountered during the innovation process—and has continued to experience since—is that of staff turnover. Though they still have relationships with the community partners who were on their innovation team, they have not had the same continuity among staff. At present, only three staff members from the original innovation team are still with the organization. The question of how to pass on the knowledge gleaned from the Lab experience and educate new employees remains unanswered.

However, at the same time, Bradley noted that this has also opened up an opportunity in how they think about roles and staffing requirements. For instance, when the museum’s Education Department experienced a vacancy shortly after the Lab experience, the leadership decided to reframe the position around community engagement. They hired a social activist artist who works with community members to address issues relevant to

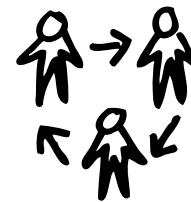
CHALLENGES



Change Takes Time



Unlearn Old Habits



How to Pass on Knowledge?



Uncertain External Environment

their lives through the lens of art, in addition to the more traditional K-12 educational programming. “I expected that person to challenge our staff. ... A community activist would make us look at plans from perspectives of others, to listen more than we talked, and to let go of complete control,” shared Bradley in an interview.⁴⁸ Though, rethinking education with a focus on community engagement has not been without its own challenges—namely that of language. “Social activist artists use a whole different language than the traditional arts educator uses,” observed Bradley, “but living with that kind of tension has been really healthy for us. It has helped us build bridges in the community that didn’t exist before.”

Rankin commended the Director’s leadership in building a team and establishing a culture that encourages risk-taking and experimentation. Having a greater capacity to innovate “comes from the top, in the way we strategically plan and the staff we have,” observed Rankin. Likewise, the museum’s mission statement, which was revamped in 2007 to focus explicitly on engagement, has provided a sense of freedom in allowing the organization to make a long-term commitment to becoming more innovative and adaptive. “The challenge was how do we approach this knowing that it’s not a six-month project, it’s not a one-year project, it’s not even necessarily a 5- or 10-year project,” said Rankin.

Finally, both Bradley and Rankin recognized that the uncertainty of the external environment—particularly with regards to funding—is both a challenge and a charge for the museum to be innovative and adaptive in its work. “I refuse to believe that innovation is really expensive,” Bradley said. Instead, she sees innovation as a way to approach the organization’s mission and effectively engage their community with art. Rankin agreed: “With shrinking budgets across the board, with more need for interpretation and conversation among people, innovation for us is necessary and is even more important than ever.”

Innovation as a Way of Working

Bradley recognized that the museum is “a different organism” than it was prior to the Lab. The idea of innovation, she said, is “much more integrated into who we are than the simple adoption of a simple practice.” Rankin agreed that the Lab was an opportunity

48. Betsy Bradley and daniel johnson, “[Museum Work as Socially Engaged Art](#),” Center for the Future of Museums, March 9, 2017.

STRENGTHS

 **Rethinking
Roles + Structure**

 **Support from
the Top**

 **Flexability
in Mission**

for a culture of innovation to begin taking root throughout the entire organization: "It's changed the DNA, to some extent, of the museum itself."

For one, data plays an important part in how the organization deals with new challenges. It helps them better understand the challenge at hand and know where to prioritize their energy and resources. They staff are better able to determine what kind of information they need, and if they don't have it, they invest in finding it.

In addition, the notion of learning through experimentation has become a mantra of the MMA. When a challenge arises, they are more apt to dig in and start learning through little experiments—even (or especially) if they fail. "As a staff," shared Rankin, "we know what it takes to make smaller, incremental innovations, and we realize that can have a longer-term impact than just trying to put it all in one basket and to solve the world's problems or our museum's problems in one." Each small experiment provides an opportunity for humble curiosity as new questions emerge and previous assumptions are revised. Keeping an open mind and making small changes can have radical effects and result in new opportunities and partnerships, as was seen in the Third Thursday or Museum 24 events.

Yet, Rankin also explained that the museum does not just change things for the sake of it. Rather, the culture of experimentation is balanced by a strategic and deliberate process of change: "When opportunities come together and coagulate around a moment, we're able to take action on that and address if it's a good idea." He went on to say, "You can always innovate more, but... we're thinking about sustained innovation."

Looking to the Future

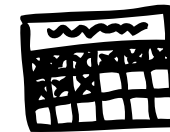
Rankin sees the museum's future as two-fold: telling stories and sparking conversations through art, as well as listening to and developing deeper relationships with its communities. "I see that as the next frontier for the museum," he shared, "to really use art and take it further than the walls." Bradley echoed this sentiment, hoping that in the next ten years, the MMA's visitors and participants better reflect their community and find value in their experience. Though she does not downplay the importance of public arts funding, she hopes that the museum matters enough to its community members that they will financially ensure its continued existence.



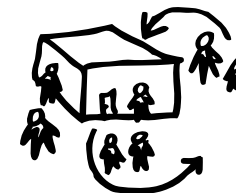
Importance of
Data: WHO



Learning Through
Experimentation



Sustained
Innovation



Deeper
Relationships
with Community

EDMONTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND WINSPEAR CENTRE

Context⁴⁹

The Edmonton Symphony Orchestra (ESO) was founded in 1952 in Edmonton, Alberta, building on the tradition of the community's orchestras in the 1920s and '40s.⁵⁰ Today, its mission is to “bring the highest quality of live orchestral performance to a broad spectrum of the community.”⁵¹ The orchestra includes 56 musicians who perform a broad repertoire. In addition, the ESO has a nationally-recognized educational program and tours across Canada with its “run-out” concerts.

In 1997, the orchestra moved into the newly constructed Frances Winspear Centre for Music in Edmonton's Downtown Arts District, where it remains today. The Winspear Centre is both a performance venue and a community facility. It is currently undergoing an expansion project to add an additional multi-purpose building that will house a child care center, a smaller acoustic hall, additional studio and rehearsal space, and educational programming space.⁵²

Though they are two separate legal entities, seven years ago, the ESO and Winspear Centre decided to merge their administrative departments and board of directors. This strategic restructuring has helped the institutions better work together through the sharing of resources. However, with this new partnership came the need to re-articulate the institutions' roles in their changing community. “We were looking for ways we could innovate internally as well as change our messaging externally about what we represent, what we do, what we offer,” recalled Associate Executive Director Meghan Unterschultz.

In 2015, EmcArts partnered with the Edmonton Arts Council, with support from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, to bring their New Pathways program to Edmonton. A cohort of

EDMONTON
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

49. Unless otherwise noted, the details for this case study come from personal interviews with Meghan Unterschultz, Associate Executive Director of Edmonton Symphony Orchestra & Winspear Centre, and Alison Kenny-Gardhouse, Director of Musical Creativity at Edmonton Symphony Orchestra & Winspear Centre.

50. “[History of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra](#),” *Edmonton Symphony Orchestra*.

51. “[About Us](#),” *Edmonton Symphony Orchestra*.

52. “[Francis Winspear Centre for Music Completion](#),” *Winspear Centre*.

20 Alberta-based organizations, including ESO and Winspear Centre, participated in the year-long process to explore “next practices” within their organizations and community. During this time, ESO and Winspear Centre honed in on the complex challenge of making traditional orchestral music relevant to the modern culture. They conducted two small experiments to engage their audience through digital media, but they ultimately learned that “setting out on an innovative path to achieve a particular objective is not enough; new challenges will continue to arise and it is necessary to weave adaptability and an innovation mindset into our organization’s DNA.”⁵³

So, following the initial program, ESO and Winspear Centre applied for and were accepted to the Incubating Innovation component of the New Pathways Edmonton program to explore deeper how to “challenge the orchestral art form and its presentation styles to become more relevant and connected to Edmonton and our communities.”⁵⁴

The Lab

ESO and Winspear Centre organized an innovation team consisting of staff, board members, and musicians, who attended the week-long retreat.⁵⁵ During the retreat, the team realized that, in order to become more relevant to their community, they did not necessarily have to change their art form outright; rather, they could instead focus on changing how they engage participants through the sharing of music. Thus, they revised their challenge statement accordingly: “To build profound relevance with Edmontonians, we must be a nexus for music that connects people to people. Every day, let’s work together to animate our human, social and physical riches to create understanding in our communities.”⁵⁶

Out of this, the innovation team came up with five ideas to prototype, which they

THE CHALLENGE



Role within
Community?



Engage
Community
Through
Music

53. Edmonton Symphony Society & Francis Winspear Centre. *New Pathways for the Arts | Incubating Innovations Program Application from the Edmonton Symphony Society & Francis Winspear Centre for Music*, (2016), 1.

54. “[New Pathways | Edmonton Selects Three Arts Organizations to Participate in Incubating Innovation](#),” *ArtsFwd*, Apr. 20, 2016.

55. The Incubating Innovation team was smaller than the number of people from the organization who had been involved in the previous New Pathways sessions.

56. Edmonton Symphony Society & Francis Winspear Centre. *New Pathways for the Arts Report: Edmonton Symphony Society & Francis Winspear Centre for Music*, (2017), 1.

grouped into three areas of innovation: internal collaboration, music's influence on health and wellness, and developing deeper relationships with their local indigenous communities. Following the retreat, the innovation team shared these prototype ideas back with the individuals who had participated in the previous New Pathways sessions, inviting them to join project teams that interested them for the prototyping phase.

One of the major barriers to innovation that the innovation team had identified was the disconnectedness between the administration, the musicians, and the board. Thus, three of their prototypes centered on internal collaboration with the goal of becoming less siloed. The first was a weekly video series called "Winspear Wednesday Weeklies," in which a musician, board member, or staff records a two-minute video that is shared internally every week via a private YouTube channel. The Winspear Wednesday series included videos introducing new staff and musicians, tours of the building—including a tour of the most boring places in building—and other topics. From the end of September to the end of February, ESO and the Winspear Centre produced 20 weekly videos, continuing even through the winter holidays. Five videos were produced by musicians, one by a board member, and 14 by staff members.⁵⁷

The second internal collaboration prototype idea was a "Lunch and Learn" series open to staff, musicians, and board members through which individuals present a peer-training or professional development workshops on any subject about which they have expertise. The project team sent out a survey to gauge interest and determine the best time to hold the first event. They decided that they wanted to start the series with a presentation by the Executive Director on "open book" management practices in order to underscore the importance of bringing the organization together to openly share information; however, due to the Executive Director's busy schedule and the overlap in project teams from the Winspear Weekly Wednesday project, the prototype has failed to move beyond this preliminary research.

For the third prototype on internal collaboration, a group of musicians, staff, and board members tested out the idea of a youth council with local junior high, high school, and college-aged students (for whom no prior programming existed). When sharing the idea of a youth council with potential student participants, ESO and Winspear Centre

INSIGHTS

 **Disconnectedness**

 **Internal+External Innovation**

57. Ibid., 2.

learned that the students did not want to be the ones having to organize the program; rather, they preferred to simply show up and participate.

The second area of innovation around which ESO and Winspear Centre organized its prototypes was music's role in health and wellbeing. Alison Kenny-Gardhouse, the Director of Musical Creativity, proposed the idea of having musicians collaborate with people who had Alzheimer's, Dementia, or Parkinson's disease. To prototype this idea, the project team partnered with the Parkinson Alberta at the Buchanan Centre. Over the course of five weeks, musicians from the orchestra worked with amateur musicians with Parkinson's in one-on-one coaching sessions, followed by a group jam session. The prototype was hugely successful and exciting for both the professional and amateur musicians involved. "These were people who struggle to get out of bed in the morning," recalled Unterschultz, "...but they found they could play their instruments again and that really started getting them involved in life."

One participant, who had stopped attending Winspear Centre events out of fear that her tremors would distract the people around her, is now comfortable calling the box office and requesting an aisle seat. She has since attended four concerts and has spoken about the project at ESO and Winspear Centre's fundraiser. In addition, the whole jam session group from the Buchanan Centre attended a concert recently and had such a good time, they stayed until the building closed afterwards. However, Kenny-Gardhouse points out that the organization also learned a lot from this experience, particularly around the experience of people living with Parkinson's.

Finally, in an effort to address ESO and the Winspear Centre's goal of re-positioning themselves as a community-focused organization, the third category of innovation had to do with developing deeper connections with Edmonton's indigenous populations.⁵⁸ ESO and Winspear Centre went into this prototype expecting to learn more about indigenous music and its role in indigenous culture; however, they were surprised to

PROTOTYPES



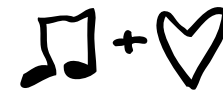
Weekly Videos



Lunch & Learn



Youth Council



Music & Health



Sharing
Concerts

58. Edmonton has Canada's second largest urban Aboriginal population, making up 5.6% of the total population in 2006. Chris Anderson, Ph.D., *Aboriginal Edmonton: A Statistical Story – 2009* (Edmonton: Aboriginal Relations Office, 2009), 15.

learn that, as they began connecting with schools on nearby reserves,⁵⁹ there was a desire for the indigenous students to learn about western classical instruments and music. The first part of the prototype consisted of inviting students from the reserves on an all-day field trip to the Winspear Centre for its Science of Sound program. For the second part of the prototype, ESO musicians visited the reserves for “sharing concerts” wherein both indigenous and western musical traditions were performed. At a recent community-wide sharing concert at the Alexander First Nation, organizers had to rush to set up more tables and chairs when twice as many people as expected showed up for the event. “We attribute that to the fact that we had had previous musical experiences on the reserve, then the kids came with their schools to the Winspear Centre, and we went back to the communities. ... So all the parents and guardians and various friends and family wanted to come out and meet all these people who interacted with the kids,” shared Unterschultz.

Following the prototyping phase, ESO and the Winspear Centre gathered all the staff, musicians, and board members together to share what they had learned through their project experiments. People then had the chance to share feedback and join the growing project teams as the prototypes continued to evolve.⁶⁰

Lab Obstacles/Enablers

One of the major challenges that ESO and Winspear Centre experienced during the Lab was the constraint of time. For the members of the innovation team, having set times on the calendar to do this work was an important first step. Kenny-Gardhouse shared, “that commitment as an organization—to be pulled out of their offices, brought in to do this work—means that time truly is being taken to wrestle the issues to the ground.” However, when it came time to engage the rest of the organization through the prototyping projects, getting already busy staff, musicians and board members to commit time and energy to additional projects became a bigger challenge. Moreover, some of the ideas which they thought would be quick and easy to prototype wound up taking more time

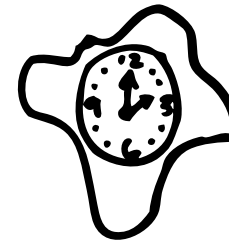
OBSTACLES & ENABLERS



Timing



Process
Facilitator



Time & Space



Relationships

59. In Canada, the term “reserve” is defined by the 1985 Indian Act as a “tract of land, the legal title to which is vested in Her Majesty, that has been set apart by Her Majesty for the use and benefit of a band.” “Indian Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. I-5),” *Justice Laws Website*, Apr. 2, 2015.

60. Edmonton Symphony Society & Francis Winspear Centre. *New Pathways for the Arts Report: Edmonton Symphony Society & Francis Winspear Centre for Music*, (2017), 1.

to put together. For instance, even though the Winspear Weekly videos are a couple of minutes, once a week, they require significantly more time and planning to create.

Given the pressure of time, the innovation team greatly appreciated the guidance it received from their process facilitator, Melissa Dibble. Kenny-Gardhouse recalled that Dibble's support "really did help all of us together communicate and push through some of the more difficult types of conversations, and the result was that it improved the overall understanding amongst a whole diverse group of departments within one organization."

Overall, the Lab experience was well received by ESO and the Winspear Centre staff. It brought together people who previously worked independently of each other, giving them a container in which to establish working relationships and partner around a specific goal. This element of the Lab was nurtured even further through the organizations' internal collaboration prototypes.

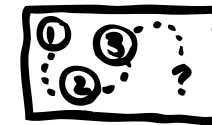
Iteration and Evolution

Since the Lab, the Winspear Wednesday Weeklies series has continued with its weekly broadcasts. The segments have evolved to become more focused on upcoming activities or program highlights, and it has become an enjoyable engagement that people look forward to watching each week. However, Kenny-Gardhouse observed that it has not been as successful as they had hoped in engaging musicians through the process. With the number of video views waning and lower involvement, the project team is re-evaluating the idea to determine what needs tweaking so that the videos remain effective. One idea under consideration is to use a similar approach or adapt some of the existing videos for an external audience.

The Lunch and Learn prototype has yet to launch, though ESO and the Winspear Centre still think it is a viable idea and hope to start it soon.

The Board Intern at ESO and Winspear Centre has stepped up to continue what was started in the youth council prototype. She is planning the program and recruiting participants, effectively establishing the organization's first youth leadership council. In addition, ESO and the Winspear Centre have revamped their discounted ticket program for youth ages 18 to 25 to encourage youth attendance.

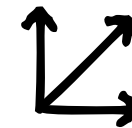
EVOLUTION



Reevaluation



Youth
Leadership



Expansion
& Investment

ESO and the Winspear Centre plan to continue offering the Jam Session series twice a year at the Buchanan Centre. They hope to develop the program further, perhaps also working with individuals with Alzheimer's or dementia. The organization is currently seeking funding sources and sponsors to build out this new program and provide stipends for the participating orchestra musicians. One possible idea is to partner with the University of Alberta in conducting research on the health effects of music. However, as the program grows, the organization will also have to figure out how to manage the demand given the orchestra musicians' already rigorous rehearsal schedules.⁶¹

Finally, ESO and the Winspear Centre are continuing to develop their relationship with the reserves. "In an ideal world," Unterschultz says, "we would love to have a permanent ongoing program that we either support or that we run out on reserve." Through their prototypes, ESO and the Winspear Centre learned that the reserves make decisions at the community level. So, developing a more permanent program will require a significant investment of time in building trust through individual relationships. The organization has started this process by acknowledging their place on Treaty 6 land, committing to include indigenous music in future programs, and helping Alexander First Nation research available funding to continue their partnership.⁶²

Beyond the Lab: Developing an Innovative Organization

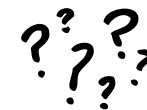
Reverberations from the Lab

"Generally speaking," noted Unterschultz, "our Executive Director, our Board, all of our Senior Leadership Team—we are all very much in favor of innovation, of ideas, of trying new things." Even before the Lab, ESO and the Winspear Centre's Executive Director, Annemarie Petrov, had promoted among her leadership team a culture of experimentation wherein failure was not to be feared or avoided—but, rather, seen from the perspective of the big picture. However, this did not consistently trickle down to the staff. The Lab provided a framework wherein both individuals and the

REVERBERATIONS



Innovation
throughout the
Organization



Comfort with
Failure



Deeper
Relationships



Ad hoc Groups

61. According to Unterschultz, the union agreement of ESO's orchestra musicians, along with their highly structured regimen of rehearsals, poses an additional challenge to finding time for musicians to participate in other activities.

62. Edmonton Symphony Society & Francis Winspear Centre. *New Pathways for the Arts Report: Edmonton Symphony Society & Francis Winspear Centre for Music*, (2017), 6.

organization, as a whole, could safely take chances and begin to shift their mindsets. Since the Lab, there is a greater openness and appetite for experimentation. There is also a greater acceptance of failure at the staff level. Unterschultz elaborated: “[Staff] felt more empowered and comfortable taking these risks knowing that whatever they did—success or failure—they’re learning from it, there was something to build on...”

For example, last December, ESO invited the public to a dress rehearsal for their *Music of Star Wars* production. Eight hundred people showed up—eight times as many as they would have normally considered as a good dress rehearsal audience size. The extraordinarily high attendance, however, did pose challenges for the orchestra to rehearse. This exemplifies how an experiment can contain elements of both success and failure, depending on one’s perspective. “We are taking the good with the bad,” noted Unterschultz, “and learning from the not-so-great things of our experiments.”

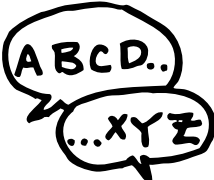
In addition, since the start of the Lab, Unterschultz has observed deeper and improved relationships between staff and musicians: “There’s a lot more sociability that we’re all colleagues together.” Prior to the Lab, the organization tended to keep its problems to itself; however, through the Innovation Lab process, people became more upfront in sharing their challenges with each other.⁶³ Individuals are more aware of when and where communications are breaking down, and they are more apt to be proactive in correcting it. This is a marked contrast to the somewhat isolated, independent way in which organizational components functioned prior to the Lab.

Related to this, Unterschultz has also noticed that new ad-hoc groups have been forming organically. For instance, Kenny-Gardhouse organized a cross-departmental group of staff to participate in the Coalition for Music Education in Canada’s annual Music Monday livestreaming event. “There wasn’t a whole planning process to it,” recalled Unterschultz, “it was just, ‘This would be a good idea. Let’s do it.’”

With the support of their facilitator, ESO and the Winspear Centre has also created what they call the Adaptive Leadership Circle, which allows staff who are either new to the organization or new to their position to discuss adaptive leadership and innovation.



Adaptive
Leadership Circle



Shared
Language



Responsive
& Adaptive

63. EmcArts, *New Pathways for the Arts | Edmonton: Preliminary Impacts and Benefits Report – November 2016* (New York, 2016), 9.

Dibble helped to guide the first three sessions, but since then, the group has been self-directed and continues to meet monthly. Each month, a different circle member leads the discussion on a topic of their choosing. Participants also devise their own small experiments within the context of their individual work or their teams, and share their learnings back with the group.

In addition, weekly team and leadership meetings have been refreshed with the language of adaptive change. Rather than follow the organization's previous meeting style of reporting on one's work, these meetings have evolved into occasions to receive input from across the organization and generate ideas as new challenges arise.⁶⁴ Some of the activities and conversation-starter exercises that Dibble used during her facilitation have also been adopted into these meetings as a way to focus people's engagement and thinking.

Recently, ESO and the Winspear Centre learned that a significant piece of funding for their building expansion project had not come through. Unterschultz noticed, however, that after a moment of disappointment, staff began coming up with new ideas such as converting artistic studios into black box theatres, revising the storage spaces to accommodate more educational spaces, or changing how they book halls. "It was really quick," shared Unterschultz. "People turned much faster than I think they would have otherwise... [and they] started to see different possibilities, as well."

Continued Innovation Strengths and Challenges

For the most part, Unterschultz noted that "people really liked this sense of freedom and playfulness that came along with [the innovation process]." However, as with most instances of change, there were a handful of people who were more resistant—something Unterschultz attributed to individuals' already busy workflows. "The push-back," she recalled, "usually came down to discomfort with something new and unfamiliar or else a feeling of hardship because it was more work."

Resource constraints—specifically, finding time to develop and prototype new ideas—

STRENGTHS

 Freedom

 Continually Reminding

64. Edmonton Symphony Society & Francis Winspear Centre. *New Pathways for the Arts Report: Edmonton Symphony Society & Francis Winspear Centre for Music*, (2017), 10.

has continued to be a challenge beyond the context of the Lab. “People come up with really great ideas and the biggest barrier to overcome is to get people excited enough that they can devote their energy to it,” Unterschultz shared. Related to this is the challenge of keeping the momentum and energy going—both as new ideas emerge and as previous ideas evolve. For the most part, however, financial constraints have not been as limiting. Unterschultz noted that, due to the organization’s relatively large size, they are able to try out new ideas without a major financial burden.

ESO and the Winspear Centre have made consistent efforts to keep innovation and adaptive change in the forefront of their board members and employees’ minds by bringing it up regularly in meetings and writing it into their strategic plan, as well as through their Adaptive Leadership Circle. In addition to support from the Executive Director, Unterschultz has become somewhat of an innovation cheerleader to ensure that resources for experimentation remain a priority. Nevertheless, without a champion to continuously bring up these conversations, the organizations risk returning to their old habits and ways of working.

Innovation as a Way of Working

Unterschultz highlighted that, prior to the Lab, ESO and the Winspear Centre were “very progressive, forward-thinking organization[s] with very innovative leaders at the helm. But going through this process has helped refine it and drive that innovative philosophy throughout all branches of the organization.”

One of the biggest takeaways from the Lab experience was the philosophy of “small experiments with radical intent.” At its heart, this mantra gives people permission to try things. The phrase is known and verbalized at every level of the organization, from the board and senior leadership to the staff and musicians. ESO and the Winspear Centre has even started trying to include the concept in their part-time staff trainings. So too has the Adaptive Leadership Circle become an important organizational container for passing on and growing a language and culture of innovation and adaptive capacity to new employees.

Moreover, ESO and the Winspear Centre learned that ideas do not have to be fully fleshed out in order to test them which, Unterschultz pointed out, “is saying something for

CHALLENGES



Finding Time



Momentum



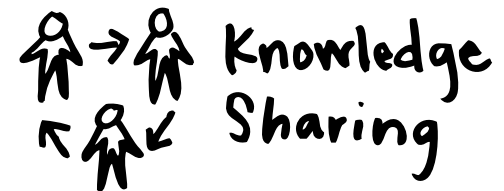
Continually Reminding

a music organization because musicians are perfectionists." Kenny-Gardhouse echoed this sentiment, noting that "oftentimes, the fast burn of jumping in and seeing what you learn is a really valuable thing." This notion of "beginning with action" has opened up a sea of potential for the organization to move more quickly and resiliently.

Related to the freedom to experiment and act is a feeling of playfulness and adventure that has emerged. Unterschultz described the sense that "anything is possible and that it doesn't matter what you do, it will always be successful if you learn from it." And, while the organization acknowledges that some ideas and projects will be abandoned in the future, they see every experiment as a chance to gain valuable insights that can open new possibilities as the organization grows. It is an iterative process of learning through small experiments and reflection that continues to this day.


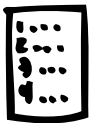

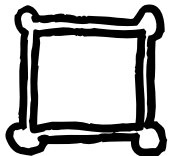


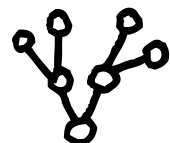
Looking to the Future

Unterschultz's dream for ESO and the Winspear Centre is for it to be a "constant hive of activity." She described her vision of their completed expansion project as an open building where everyone is welcome to learn, play, engage, and relax, and where multiple activities are occurring at once. "We will never get another cab driver who says, 'I don't know where the Winspear Centre is,' and we will be the cornerstone of the Arts District," she said. Ultimately, she sees the organizations addressing their original innovation challenge, being relevant and connected to their community.



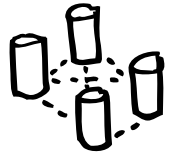
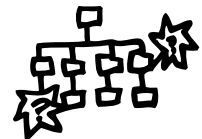





CASE SUMMARIES



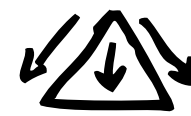
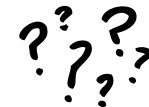



SPRINGBOARD

-  How to Scale
-  Guiding Principles
-  How to be Local & National
-  Theories & Language
-  Energetic Questioners
-  Financial Reserves
-  Movement Building

MISSISSIPPI MUSEUM of ART

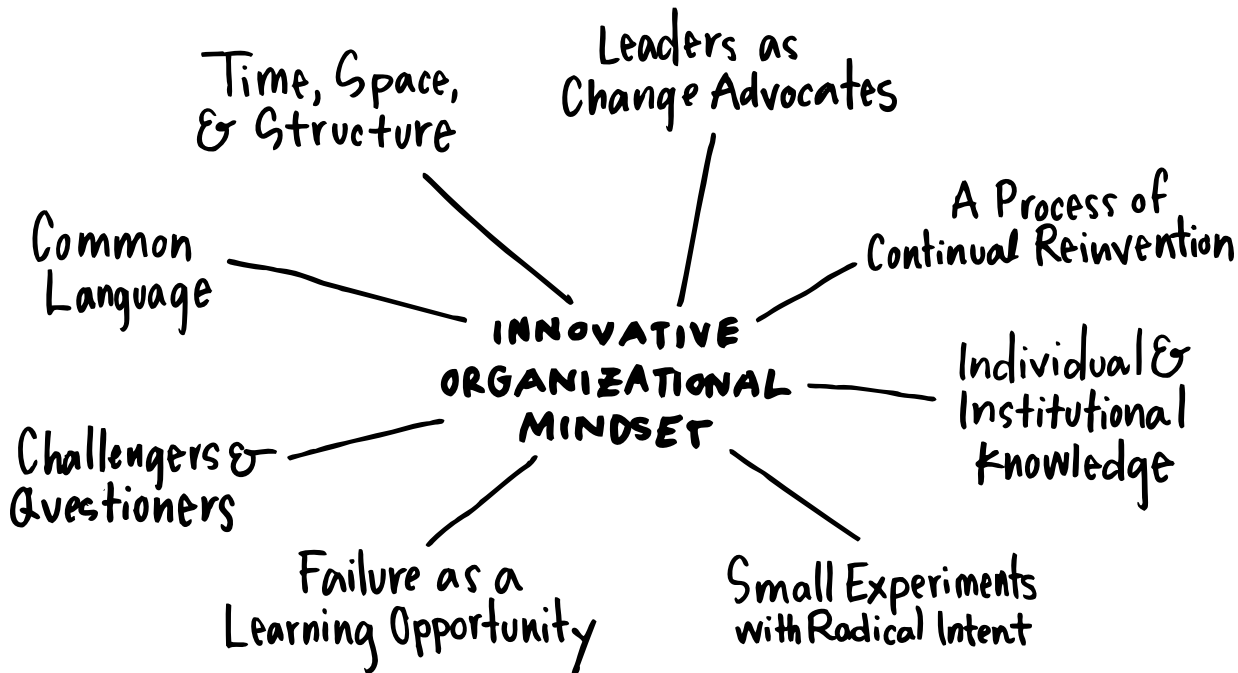
-  Broken Model?
-  Importance of Data: WHO
-  Cross-disciplinary Teams
-  Rethinking Roles + Structure
-  Permission to Experiment
-  Unlearn old Habits
-  Sustained Innovation

EDMONTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

-  Engage Community Through Music
-  Internal + External Innovation
-  Innovation throughout Org
-  Comfort with Failure
-  Adaptive Leadership Circle
-  Momentum
-  Beginning with Action

IMPLICATIONS & CONNECTIONS

Drawing on these three case studies, as well as the impact reports and case studies that EmcArts has previously published,⁶⁵ one begins to find some common threads from both the Lab experience and beyond. Following are some of the connections that I have identified with regards to instilling innovation into a nonprofit arts organizational culture:



Time, Space and Structure

One of the major benefits of the Lab as seen in the case examples was the initial time, space, and structure that the experience provided in which to work on their respective complex challenges.

In a conversation on design thinking for social innovation, Jeff Wishnie notes that, especially for nonprofits and NGOs, "The best way past the fear [of design] is to do the work. Not only do people learn that there is structure and process, but critically, the[y] experience firsthand how the process consistently and reliably hones those raw

65. See Gamble and Atlas, et al., in the Bibliography.

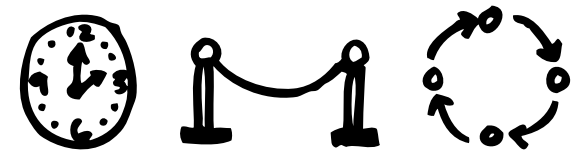
ideas (opinions) into effective programs.”⁶⁶ Similarly, the Lab served as a somewhat protected container in which participants could move beyond their fear of failure and begin to gain confidence in their adaptive capacities. This safe and isolated space was also important in allowing fragile ideas to incubate and develop before being exposed to a wider audience as a prototype.

In terms of the innovation framework, the Lab structure was, generally, very useful in guiding organizations through the innovation process and providing them with the time and space to discover, reflect, experiment, and learn. The first two phases of the framework were flexible enough to allow the organizations to organically explore their complex challenges, following unexpected avenues and venturing down rabbit holes. The retreat provided a significant opportunity of dedicated time for the innovation team to focus on its challenge at hand. In addition, each group's process facilitator was influential in guiding the organizations through this process of discovery. However, when it came to the prototyping phase, the framework's structure began to feel more rigid due to its timelines. While there is certainly value in establishing deadlines, the very nature of prototyping as an iterative process makes it more challenging to confine to a schedule. In addition, some organization, like Springboard and the MMA, focused their prototyping efforts on a few targeted projects, whereas the ESO and Winspear Centre tested a wider range of ideas. Not surprisingly, depending on the design, some prototypes required more time to plan than others.

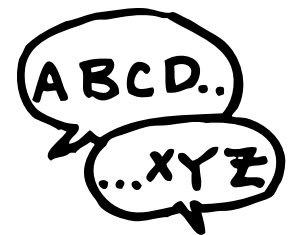
Common Language

The Lab provided a common language of innovation and adaptive change. In learning this shared language, individuals within the organizations could more effectively communicate with and understand each other. This is especially important when dealing with issues that are already complex in nature. Heifetz, et al., expand on the value of common language with regards to adaptive change: “When people begin to use the same words with the same meanings, they communicate more effectively, minimize misunderstandings, and gain the sense of being on the same page, even

Time, Space, & Structure



Common Language



66. Jocelyn Wyatt and Jeff Wishnie, “[Diving In: Nonprofits, NGOs, and Design](#),” excerpted from *LEAP Dialogues: Career Pathways in Design for Social Innovation*, Stanford Social Innovation Review, Jul. 27, 2016.

while grappling with significant differences on the issues."⁶⁷

Small Experiments with Radical Intent

By their very nature, complex challenges are continuously evolving and rarely disappear fully. One cannot sit around and devise a perfect solution to these challenges because, at that very moment, the problem will have changed. Therefore, one of the best ways to engage with a wicked problem is to dive right in and begin taking action through "small experiments with radical intent."

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky define an experimental mindset as "an attitude that treats any approach to an adaptive issue not as a solution, but as the beginning of an iterative process of testing a hypothesis, observing what happens, learning, making midcourse corrections, and then, if necessary, trying something else."⁶⁸ As seen in the case examples, an organization's ability to adopt an experimental mindset and learn by doing is an essential component of organizational innovation. The key, however, lies in the iterative process. An adaptive organization is constantly questioning, listening, reflecting, and adjusting. Yet, as the catchphrase "small experiments with radical intent" implies, these adjustments need not be major in order to be effective. Likewise, there was a common understanding among the case organizations that, by approaching innovation through a series of small experiments, it need not be prohibitively expensive. Nevertheless, as Springboard has learned, a dedicated innovation fund provides an organization with additional flexibility and freedom to experiment.

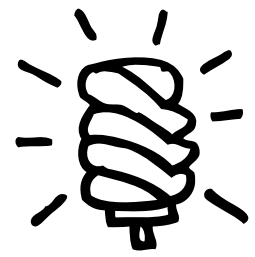
Failure as a Learning Opportunity

With any size of experiment comes the risk of failure. Robert Sutton, author of *Weird Ideas that Work*, acknowledges that "failure stinks," but "if you want to eliminate mistakes, avoid dead ends, and succeed most of the time, you will drive out innovation."⁶⁹ In order to create an innovative culture, he advises organizations to celebrate both

Small Experiments
with Radical Intent



Failure as a
Learning
Opportunity



67. Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Mary Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 9.

68. Ibid., 304.

69. Robert I. Sutton, "Sparkling Nonprofit Innovation: Weird management ideas that work," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring (2003): 47.

success and failure (so long as it is “smart” failure), while saving the reprimands for inaction, “the worst kind of failure.”⁷⁰ Viewing failure in this way requires individuals and organizations to have a sense of optimism that allows one to see potential where others may see despair. As the case examples illustrate, the freedom to experiment and learn from failure unlocks an optimistic spirit of play, curiosity, and possibility.

Individual + Institutional Knowledge

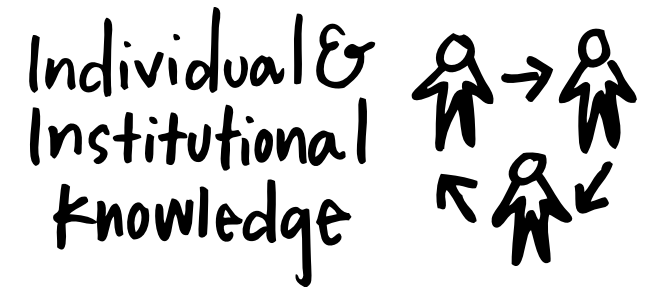
The Lab providing significant learning opportunities for the individuals involved in terms of understanding the innovation process, as well as the significance of adaptive capacity. However, the cases examined in this study had mixed experiences in sharing this individual knowledge back to the organization, as a whole. The MMA, for instance, has struggled with finding a way to pass on these lessons in light of staff turnover. ESO and Winspear Centre, on the other hand, invited people who were not on the original innovation team to dive in and learn by participating on a prototyping team. In addition, they also implemented the Adaptive Leadership Circle as a way for new staff to learn the innovation language and process. Springboard falls somewhere in the middle with its guiding principles as a compass for old and new staff, alike.

Leaders as Change Advocates

By interpreting the organization's mission and guiding its strategy according to its values, nonprofit leaders can have a huge influence on an organization's ability to be innovative and responsive. Thus, as seen in the case examples, creating a culture of innovation starts at the top with leaders, at both the board and staff level, who recognize the need and advocate for adaptive change. As champions of change, these leaders consistently invite and expect the rest of the board and staff to think creatively and question the status quo, not for the sake of change, alone, but for the sake of better meeting the organization's mission. In addition, they encourage an environment of experimentation and strategic risk-taking wherein failure is a learning opportunity.

Challengers and Questioners

The diverse composition of stakeholders on the innovation teams was also an important



70. Ibid., 47.

aspect of the Lab that helped to enable an innovative mindset. Sutton argues that nonprofits can promote innovative thinking by hiring people who “think differently, act differently, have different backgrounds, or advocate unpopular ideas,” and by encouraging productive conflict.⁷¹ Like the MMA hiring a socially active artist, or Springboard charging its Board to be “energetic questioners,” a culture of innovation can be intentionally fostered by appointing people who are constructive challengers.

In addition, the Lab provided team members an opportunity to develop closer working relationships with people they may not have worked closely with—if at all—prior to the experience. These relationships resulted in unexpected benefits for all three of the case organizations. Moreover, it laid the groundwork for increased cross-disciplinary collaboration. The collaboration among Springboard’s innovation team members on the Irrigate project, for instance, was an organic by-product of the trusting relationships they had developed during the Lab. With a more intentional focus on collaboration, the MMA and ESO and Winspear Centre created organizational interventions in order to encourage cross-departmental collaboration.

A Process of Continual Reinvention

Like the very problems it aims to address, innovation is not a linear process. Rather, it is “a way of creating conditions for emergent behavior, for ‘next practices’ to be realized.”⁷² The Lab was a major turning point in terms of shifting their mindsets and ways of working. Beyond the Lab, each of the studied case organizations have, to various extents, continued to re-examine and iterate on existing organizational assumptions and practices.

However, in order to make way for new ideas and iterations, the organizations must be willing to let go of old processes and programs that are not working well. Though nonprofits may have a rockstar reputation for starting programs, they are notoriously bad at ending them. The same could be said for organizational habits and ways of working. Yet, without letting go—or increasing organizational capacity—the organization risks burnout and the death of innovation. As ESO and the Winspear Centre learned, it does



71. Ibid., 47.

72. Richard Evans, “Building a Resilient Sector: An Attempt to Debunk Myths around Innovation and Identify How Grantmakers Can Support Adaptive Change,” *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader* 24, no. 3 (2013): 3.

not matter how good an idea is, if no one has any energy or capacity to devote to it, it goes nowhere.

Even though instilling an innovation mindset means that the process of innovation will never be “complete,” organizations can get better at it. “Innovation is a definable organizational discipline,” writes Evans.⁷³ As such, it requires regular practice to strengthen an organization’s adaptive capacity. Each of the case examples have found ways to continue to stretch their organization’s adaptive muscles, reinforcing their muscle memory so that, when stress runs high, they do not fall back into their old habits and ways of working. “The more you do it,” Takeshita imparted, “the better you get at it.”⁷⁴

73. Ibid., 3.

74. Erik Takeshita in conversation with the author, April 12, 2017.

CONCLUSION

As nonprofit arts organizations increasingly encounter complex challenges both within and outside of their organizations, they must develop the adaptive muscles that allow them to nimbly and efficiently respond to these challenges. Instilling an innovative mindset and culture of adaptive change looks different for each organization; however, through these case studies, some commonalities have emerged, including:

- Creating a boundary of space and time in which to safely learn the innovation process and incubate vulnerable ideas;
- Establishing a shared language;
- Starting with small experiments with radical intent;
- Embracing failure as an educational opportunity;
- Promoting a culture of learning wherein individual and institutional knowledge can be shared;
- Championing change from the top;
- Encouraging energetic questioning and constructive conflict; and
- Continuously iterating and practicing.

Like the very nature of complex problems, there is no single perfect recipe to instilling innovation within one's organizational culture. Rather, it is the combination of ingredients that interplay with and compound upon each other to yield an adaptive and resilient organization.

During my interview with Takeshita, he compared innovation to the practice of yoga. This embodied reference has been lingering in my mind throughout the remainder of my research. In closing, I return to this analogy as a way to understand how innovation can become a way of working: For one, both yoga and innovation are learned skills that one can improve upon through practice. Whereas yoga combines mental, physical, and spiritual elements, the innovation process combines curiosity, experimentation, and reflection. Both practices involve finding the optimal balance between flexibility and strength, uncertainty and stability. Finally, in yoga, there is a common saying regarding letting go of that which is no longer serving you. Similarly, innovation as a way of working requires creating space and time to nurture new ideas.

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

A note on language: Many terms have been used, often interchangeably, to describe similar creative processes and activities within the realms of business and management. Below, I review some of common terms and their corresponding definitions.

Adaptive Capacity

The notion of adaptive capacity comes from the study of systems' abilities to adapt in a changing environment. Heifetz, et al., define it as “the resilience of people and the capacity of systems to engage in problem-defining and problem-solving work in the midst of adaptive pressures and the resulting disequilibrium.”⁷⁵ Regarding adaptive organizations, the authors note five essential attributes:

1. *Elephants in the room are named.*
2. *Responsibility for the organization's future is shared.*
3. *Independent judgement is expected.*
4. *Leadership capacity is developed.*
5. *Reflection and continuous learning are institutionalized.*⁷⁶

Letts, Ryan, and Grossman differentiate adaptive capacity from program delivery capacity and program expansion capacity: “The first two—the capacities for program delivery and program expansion—are already familiar to nonprofits and their funders. But it is the third type, what we call adaptive capacity, that makes an organization not only efficient but also effective,”⁷⁷

Creativity

In their historical overview of organizational creativity, Christina E. Shalley and Jing Zhou note that creativity can be both a process and an outcome. Creativity as a process, they write, commonly involves “the identification of a problem or opportunity,

75. Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Mary Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 303.

76. *Ibid.*, 101.

77. Christine W. Letts, William P. Ryan, and Allen Grossman, *High Performance Nonprofit Organizations: Managing Upstream for Greater Impact*, (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999), 20.

gathering information, generating ideas, and evaluation of these ideas." Creativity as an outcome, on the other hand, generally indicates something new or novel.⁷⁸

Design Thinking

IDEO's Tim Brown and Jocelyn Wyatt describe design thinking as a process that "incorporates constituent or consumer insights in depth and rapid prototyping, all aimed at getting beyond the assumptions that block effective solutions." The process is composed of three non-linear "spaces"—inspiration, ideation, and implementation—that one moves between, though not always in a pre-defined order.⁷⁹

Innovation

EmcArts defines innovation in relation to organizational change:

Organizational innovations are instances of organizational change that
1) result from a shift in underlying organizational assumptions,
2) are discontinuous from previous practice, and
3) provide new pathways to creating public value and impact."⁸⁰

Evans differentiates organizational innovation from creativity, noting that while creative thinking is an essential part of innovation, it goes beyond that: "To innovate means to develop creative ideas into feasible strategies that organizations can actually implement."⁸¹

Innovation Lab

Gryszkiewicz, Toivonen, & Lykourantzou define an innovation lab as "a semi-autonomous organization that engages diverse participants—on a long-term basis—in

78. Christina E. Shalley and Jing Zhou, "Organizational Creativity Research: A Historical Overview," *Handbook of Organizational Creativity*, ed. Christina E. Shalley and Jing Zhou (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008), 4-7.

79. Tim Brown and Jocelyn Wyatt, "Design Thinking for Social Innovation," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter (2010): 31-35.

80. EmcArts, *National Innovation Labs for the Performing Arts and for Arts Development Agencies: Final Report*, (New York: 2016).

81. Richard Evans, "Building a Resilient Sector: An Attempt to Debunk Myths around Innovation and Identify How Grantmakers Can Support Adaptive Change," *Grantmakers in the Arts Reader* 24, no. 3 (2013): 3.

open collaboration for the purpose of creating, elaborating, and prototyping radical solutions to pre-identified systemic challenges."⁸²

Organizational Creativity

Organizational creativity is a fairly new field within the study of organizational behavior psychology. As its name implies, the study of creativity in an organizational context differs from creativity, in general, in that it focuses on creativity within the workplace—the factors that enable or prevent creativity, as well as the effect of individual, group, and organizational interactions.⁸³

Prototyping

Brown and Wyatt define prototyping as “turning ideas into actual products and services that are then tested, iterated and refined.” Prototypes are often simplified versions of an idea that allows the designer to test its viability in a “quick, cheap, and dirty” way.⁸⁴

Technical Problems vs. Adaptive Challenges

Heifetz, et al., differentiate between technical problems and adaptive challenges. Technical problems can typically be solved in a relatively short time frame, using existing solutions that draw on specific skill sets, knowledge, or established processes. Adaptive challenges, on the other hand, have no easy answers and may be more difficult to detect due to their complexity. To address an adaptive challenge effectively requires a departure from one's previous ways of working and thinking. “Making progress requires going beyond any authoritative expertise to mobilize discovery, shedding certain entrenched ways, tolerating losses, and generating the new capacity to thrive anew.”⁸⁵

82. Lidia Gryszkiewicz, Tuukka Toivonen, and Ioanna Lykourantzou, “[Innovation Labs: 10 Defining Features](#),” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Nov. 3, 2016.

83. Christina E. Shalley and Jing Zhou, “Organizational Creativity Research: A Historical Overview,” *Handbook of Organizational Creativity*, ed. Christina E. Shalley and Jing Zhou (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008), 12.

84. Tim Brown and Jocelyn Wyatt, “Design Thinking for Social Innovation,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Winter (2010): 31-35.

85. Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Mary Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 19 & 303-7.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Can you start by telling me a bit about <<ORGANIZATION>> and your role there?
2. Tell me a bit about your Innovation Project:
 - a. Why did you decide to apply for the Innovation Lab?
 - b. What was the project impetus?
3. What (if any) challenges did you experience during the innovation process?
4. What about the innovation process surprised you (if anything)? Why?
5. What did you learn from the lab experience? (If you were to do it again, what would you do differently?)
6. How did the innovation project turn out?
 - a. What does it look like today?
 - b. Have any other projects or ideas spun off from the innovation project?
7. How did the innovation process compare with how <<ORGANIZATION>> approached problems or challenges prior to the lab?
8. In what ways, if any, has the lab experience affected how you or your colleagues' work?
 - a. In what other contexts or situations has <<ORGANIZATION>> been able to apply its learnings? / Can you give an example of a challenge that has arisen in which the organization was directly able to apply your learnings?
 - b. What kinds of innovation tools/approaches/capacities has the organization incorporated?
9. If a new challenge were to arise in the future, how might <<ORGANIZATION>> go about it?
10. In your opinion, has <<ORGANIZATION>> embraced the innovation process beyond this project?
 - a. How/how not? (Why?)
 - b. What innovation challenges remain?
11. Where do you see <<ORGANIZATION>> / <<INNOVATION PROJECT>> in 5 to 10 years?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share that you have not had the opportunity to talk about throughout the course of this conversation?
13. Is there anyone else you think I should interview who could speak to the innovation project and/or its implications for the organization as a whole?

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- Springboard for the Arts: <http://springboardforthearts.org/>
- Winspear Centre: <https://www.winspearcentre.com/>

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