

## Opening the Tide Gate to Practice-Based Innovation

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on how people who form, participate and embody experience and practice-based communities address complex issues. To improve the understanding of the social dimension of organizational learning in context of practice-based innovation, we propose an aesthetic perspective on change which draws from art and creative practices to foster innovation. The paper explores collective learning as a self-regulated emerging transformational process. A Finnish and Canadian cases are presented to support and illustrate the study.

### **Key Words**

Practice-based innovation; collective learning; change; emergence

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## **INTRODUCTION**

When the challenge is to foster radical innovation, practices from the past are not appropriate to design future practices. Where incremental innovation can be designed from current knowledge embedded in practices, frameworks, tools and methods, radical innovation is more likely to require to break away from the regular building-up of experience-based knowledge. In other words, knowledge from the past does not appear to be fit to design the future, or to sustain and nurture a process which has not yet been sketched out. Collectively, if learning from the past is not relevant, how can a group of people acting as a learning community rely on its future? If the question seems counter intuitive at first, it is nevertheless a path to explore in order complex situations where the expected innovation not only is the outcome but the leading process itself.

In this paper, we explore how learning communities learn and change their social practices. Looking at this situation as a transformational process of relying collectively on the future, we draw from Scharmer's Theory U (2007) who proposes that the future is already present in the collective intelligence of a community, and accessible through a shift of mind, an opening process of letting pre-conscious or intuitive knowledge in.

### **1. THE CHALLENGE**

The research question explores contexts where people learn and change their learning practices in the social system of their organization or community. As such, changing practices are seen not as problem-solving processes, but as social practices which enable a group to experiment an enlightening awareness process through which the collective body becomes able to shift to a higher level of complexity and harmony.

This alternative approach to change questions the current change management paradigm by posing that planned processes, often linear, with explicit outcomes do not lead to success, as many studies have shown. For instance, a 2001 study showed that in a survey interviewing 210 north-american business managers, 75% of them described their experience of change as failure (Mourier and Smith, 2001, in Collerette, Schneider and Legris, 2001). Many other examples have been documented which lead to admit the limitations of this type of change. Rather than planning and controlling change, the idea of letting it emerge in a collaborative flow is put forward. As such, collaboration is seen as depending largely on social skills, the ability and the will to share knowledge, leadership skills, and the aptness to act collectively in synergy, contributing to the knowledge flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

The idea of letting knowledge emerge from a collective body sensing situations and reacting to them organically is not new and Varela's work on the gestures to embody in order to becoming aware (Scharmer, 2000) have shown its potential. This flowing process depends on the perceptual acuteness possessed by each participant, i.e. the ability to feel, anticipate, and adjust (Mahy and Zahedi, 2010).

Despite the habit of managing change with a strong will to control this flow, evidence from various community guiding principles shows that people actually come together around meaningful questions, wicked problems, messy problematic situations and through alternative processes of letting go and letting come of knowledge, they create innovation in the making. In other words, many abandon the social, political, economical institutions and their normative prisons to create learning communities acting as hosts and social

containers for emerging change. As core principle, emergence also calls for alternative organizational behavior and governance. By doing so, they actually innovate in creating the conditions for innovation to emerge.

This shift in organizing for innovation can be seen as a movement of constant *becoming* or innovating on an ongoing basis. This model of organizing in constant emergence creates clashes with change seen as planned and managed. With regards to power, despite the social pressure for more democracy and participatory decision processes, two governing models stand in opposition. We argue that one is creating the conditions for collective intelligence to emerge from a community, while the other is still managing HR based on individual contributions with decreasing success, with regards to motivation and loyalty. The first model relies on emerging change while the second relies on planned change. The limits of planned change show that radical innovation requires different organizational contexts and governance, or Ba (Nonaka and Konno, 1998) that would foster inspiration and creativity.

Considering this, how could collaboration, collective intelligence and wisdom be sustained, nurtured and fostered? This paper sheds light on the empowering processes that transcend and support the movement of shifting complex social fields from a hierarchical organization supporting planned change to a more democratic and participative paradigm of emergence. Results from the study on which this paper is based report on the collective transformation.

## **2. AN AESTHETIC PARADIGM**

Considering social systems as complex bodies, we explore ways of fostering inspiration and creativity by drawing from aesthetic and artistic methods (Strati, 2009) as natural unfolding approaches to complexity, harmony and collective transformation. The underlying assumption is that art and playfulness act as triggers or openers for shifting states of mind and consciousness. Momentarily shifting the focus from rationality to sensuous knowledge also create space for imagination to act as empowering lever.

The aesthetic paradigm and discourse on organizations reveals the qualities of a *rapport* to the world nurtured by sensitivity and emotions (Strati and Guillet de Monthoux, 2002), including the researchers'. The cases presented here are inspired by an empathic – aesthetic approach (Strati, 2004; Leavy, 2009) where the researcher chooses a concern and a field, with regards to his/her aesthetical sensibility to the actual concerns, actors, places, etc. and unfolds his/her intervention, data collection – analysis and results approach accordingly. As a collective process, this creative research design becomes a conversational place in itself, where the goal, the means and the aesthetics are shared, contribute and take part in the collective intelligence. Collective artwork narratives are created, performances, like participative theatre are created and played and poetic documentaries are produced and offered back to the participants as traces and fragments of their experience, bearing witness poetically. According to Strati et Guillet de Monthoux (2002), because it provides a rich perspective on an organizational reality, aesthetics actually becomes a lense through which one can discover aspects of the experience otherwise considered superfluous (sources of joy), as well as essential aspects (survival issues), and facetious aspects (playful ruptures of the organizational routine, elegance impossible to limit to a rational analysis). One can also discover what is considered serious (work, revenues, production, competition, growth), or artistic, as well as scientific... Encompassing such a broad spectrum, this aesthetic

perspective becomes paradigmatic, rooted in phenomenology, arts, participative action research and learning. It also reflects, translates and convey postmodernity by its poetic grammar, through the fragmentation - stratification and patchwork– or collage – approach to reality. This *bricolage* process leads to creating collective, polyphonic narratives through ha deconstruction – redconstruction endless creative movement.

### 3. THEORY U

Compared to adaptive change, i.e. when the system adapts to its environment, transformational change is often referred to as a the letter ‘U’, due to a curved shape that best represent the description authors give of these change processes. This ‘U’ shape actually follows the natural transformation stages found in society, cultures, organizations, groups, and individuals<sup>2</sup> when change is not superficial or adaptive but profound and transformational. A recent contribution to the field of organizational change and collective learning, Theory U (Scharmer, 2007) proposes a relevant framework to guide and sustain the flow of change in complex collective dynamics. Scharmer’s theory is used to guide the steps toward collective intelligence.

Influenced by Varela’s work on introspection, phenomenology and contemplative traditions, Scharmer (2000) describes the ‘U’ process as a series of inner movements of the Self. It can connect to a larger field of perceptions by a process of letting-go and letting-come that establishes *‘a subtle connection to a deeper source of knowing. The essence of presencing is that these two selves — our current self and the future Self — meet at the bottom of the U and begin to listen and resonate with each other’* (Scharmer, 2007). Scharmer adds that there is no turning back on this bridge toward consciousness: *‘Once a group crosses this threshold, nothing remains the same. Individual members and the group as a whole begin to operate with a heightened level of energy and sense of future possibility. Often they then begin to function as an intentional vehicle for an emerging future’*<sup>3</sup>.

The key principles guiding this perspective question the way human beings collectively learn, either by (a) reflecting on the experiences of the past, or by (b) learning from the future as it emerges. Reflecting on the experiences of the past (a) relates to Bateson’s level 1 learning. This view refers to a process that unfolds like follows: act first, then observe and reflect on what has been noticed, afterwards plan and act based on what has been learned.

Learning from the future as it emerges (b) refers to entering a inner state of *presencing* or, in other words, the inner place from which we operate and from which it becomes possible to let come to one’s consciousness, emotions, feelings, images, ideas that are waiting to be perceived. This learning *from the future* is the underlying principle of the theory U (Scharmer, 2007).

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<sup>2</sup> Carle, Paul in collaboration with Isabelle Mahy (2009). Inventaire de quelques processus de changement non linéaires exprimables sous la forme de courbes en U, réflexions sur la réactivité et l’intervention dans de telles situations. Unpublished study in which we have identified more than 40 different U curves, theories and processes, from the AAs -Alcoholics Anonymous- curve to the homeless reintegration process and Wallace’s cultural revival process. All have the U shape of a transformational change path.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.presencing.com/research-publications/summaries.shtml>

When current solutions are not useful to solve problems, which are new, complex, or when innovation is required, the organization's spontaneous response, which tends to refer to knowledge from the past, becomes a limitation to its ability to solve the problem. When problems are different, as Watzlawick (1986) suggested, solutions do not reside only in the experience of experts but also in the intuition of each person or, in other words, in ideas, feelings and emotions that lay in pre-conceptual states of the mind, not accessible to oneself through rationality. What Scharmer suggests is that the movement of letting go from the past will open the access to pre-conceptual ideas that have emerged but are not yet perceived by the conscious rational mind.

For Varela (Scharmer, 2000), the most critical challenge of the XXI<sup>st</sup> century is society's underdeveloped collective capacity to do something with experience in order to learn collectively, from mistakes, from aspirations and from practice. Through introspection, phenomenology and contemplative traditions, he explored the core process of *becoming aware*, from the first, second and third person experience. He questioned current research methodologies that turn knowledge into solid objects, where more fragile ontologies would keep a quality to experience that resonates more with the improbable and brittle nature of the way the worlds unfolds.

These traditions were all considered useful for they all shared the inner process of developing one's sensibility and consciousness through *becoming aware* in order to access experience. Varela saw this as a three steps process of the mind which would start with: (1) suspending judgment, (2) redirecting the mind (3) letting go of all thoughts that clutter up the mind, in order to start exploring in a unfocused way. This openness and sensible listening are suggested to be the appropriate state of mind to find the source of presence and innovation (Senge *et al.*, 2004).

This process deploys itself in 5 stages along the 'U' that are supported by relevant collective practices: (1) co-initiating, or the uncovering of the common intend, stage that requires to stop the inner discourse and start listening to others; (2) co-sensing, or observing where people and places connect and start sensing the system as a whole; (3) *presencing* where we connect to the source of inspiration and will; (4) co-creating where we collectively sketch and prototype new ideas and solutions; (5) and co-evolving where we embody the innovation in the eco-system. This theory of transformation, also referred to as '*Social Technology of Freedom*' by its author in earlier versions, may seem ethically fastidious to enact and disruptive by its asserted humanistic engagement, but the statement is clear: '*In all four levels—personal, group, institutional, and global—shifting from reactive responses and quick fixes on a symptoms level [...] to generative responses that address the systemic root issues [...] is the single most important leadership challenge of our time*<sup>4</sup>'

Among others, assuming its humanistic epistemology of complexity, this theory calls for enaction practices that are consistent with its claim, i.e. practices that act as relevant containers which provide the appropriate conditions to facilitate the emergence of innovation. Collective art-based practices constitute a appropriate choice, as they tend to mobilize sensuous knowledge, invite and support expression and creativity, and they are all

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<sup>4</sup> Scharmer, C.O. (2008). Executive Summary, Theory U. p.5. <http://www.presencing.com/research-publications/>

nurtured by the same insights : the topic, subject, idea or knowledge discussed and shared emerges from the group because it is the one that is meaningful for the group.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

To explore the research question, a participatory action research design has united two cases of emerging change leading to social innovation. This two fold Finnish and Canadian study shows the use of narrative (stories, poems and play writing), performative (theatre, dance) and visual (video, photos, drawings, sketches) methods used as creative means for participants to express their experience of *becoming*, through ‘letting go and letting come’ of rational and sensuous knowledge.

The Finnish case focused on co-operation between practitioners from the primary health service and practitioners from services for persons with intellectual disabilities. During the research, 155 practitioners from different backgrounds and worldviews searched for the sense of belonging to a community from their own experiences and their patients’ experiences. Organization and community development were facilitated via art-based and creative techniques i.e. research-based theatre – method (Boal, 1995;1996;2000, Mienzakowski and Morgan, 2001, Leavey 2009, Clark, 2008) Analysis showed that actors with different interests found they had few abilities to listen, share and reflect.

The Canadian case focused on a collective learning process gathering 45 undergraduate students and young professionals from different backgrounds and worldviews. Many of them were facilitators acting in various organizational contexts. During the research, they questioned and explored their roles and worldviews, and experienced a transformative journey through the ‘U’ of Scharmer’s theory. A practice-based workshop was designed for them to act and reflect on their role, their life and their *becoming* in the world. Over a weeks time, they proposed new understanding of their work and projects, based on their inner and collective journey. The process was facilitated via collective art-based and creative techniques, i.e. poetic video documentary artwork. Analysis showed that the participants experienced the inner state of presence and belonging and discovered their inner quests.

### **5. THE FINNISH CASE OF THE REGIONAL CENTER**

#### **5.1 Theatre And Sensuous Knowledge - Letting Go Of Knowledge And Bringing In Innovation**

The Finnish case focused on understanding the social dimension of organisational learning (Gherardi, Nicolini and Odella 1998) within a public organization.

The Regional Center for health and social services began its operations at the start of 2007. The organisation has approximately 700 employees, who operate in addition to management and administration in five different product areas, namely: promotion of health and well-being, social services, home and living services, healthcare services, activity and rehabilitation services. The Regional Center went through a major change process over a two years period, between 2007-2009. The Regional Center was part of the national reorganizing of the social and health services in Finland. One challenge was to organize employee-driven learning processes among members of different units.

The director of the Regional Center invited members from the primary health service and practitioners from services for persons with intellectual disabilities, as well as researchers and artists to discuss co-operation. Researchers and artists were interested in discovering the possibilities of Augusto Boal radical theatre (1995, 1996, 2000) in action research, as a collective learning process. Together, over several meetings the participants decided to organise a collective learning process, and the director invited artists to facilitate the process.

The invited members of organization defined a learning target which was to increase co-operation and common ground between practitioners from the primary health service and practitioners from services for persons with intellectual disabilities. They had noticed blind spots in their co-operation, and wanted to improve their practices. The artist and researcher suggested that learning could be triggered from a customer's point of view. The customers were a specific group of intellectually disabled persons.

The co-creation started in January 2010. Collaborative research actors were 1) practitioners from special services (which offer services for persons with intellectual disabilities) and 2) practitioners from primary health and social services (which offer services for all population) as well as their 3) inter-organizational network partners from other organizations.

## 5.2 Case Research Design

A participatory action research design of this study resonates with Alvesson and Ashcraft's (2009) transformative redefinition of organizational research and art-based research methods (Leavy, 2009). Actors of this research process were motivated to understand the social dimension of organizational learning in context of renewing practices. Members of the organization were interested in sharing their knowledge, and to investigate 'blind spots' of their practices. The artist was interested to find out how practitioners made sense their practice through art-based interactions. The interactions took place in the artful framing of Augusto Boal's radical theatre. The researcher was interested in exploring the connection between practice-based innovation and the improvement of the practice. In this context, Boal's (1995; 1996; 2000) radical theatre was considered to be a useful lever to facilitate 'the process of discursive exploration, release and political action' (Clark 2008, 404). As such, it could help expressing, reflecting and re-writing alternative scenarios of action. In this case, from an aesthetic perspective, we focused on working with sensuous knowledge and to see how it informed Scharmer's (2007) idea of collective intelligence and collective wisdom.

The use of creative means translates aspects of Strati's (2009) and Leavy's (2009) aesthetic approach to organization research. Therefore, in the different phases of the action research processes, several narratives (stories, poems and play writing), modes of performance (applied theatre, dance) and visual (video, photos, drawings, sketches) methods were used as a creative means for participants to express their experience of what was happening between the different units of the organization. The organizational learning process was facilitated and supported by a research-based theatre – method. For the case purposes, the artist and the researcher focused on one specific theatrical scene which is drawn from Augusto Boal's theater practices. To find the appropriate attitude and behavior, the facilitators drew from, and referred to Timothy Clark (2008) who crystallised the use of

theatre in an organisation as a resource and technology. He defines a typology for theatre depending on its participatory and adaptative dimensions; namely, corporate theatre, radical theatre, organisational theatre and situational theatre (Clark, 2008). Each of these applications of organizational theatre puts the artist in a new professional and societal oriented role as an actor of social change (Lacy, 1995; Jacob, 1995). Along with Clark, the facilitators considered Boal's questioning of existing ideologies, interest and power relations. His critical reflection on existing circumstances as well as his intend to changing oppressive circumstances into empowering ones were key principles which guided the facilitators action.

### 5.3 At the beginning of the learning process

When the process started in January 2010, we found out that the practioners had different interests and goals. They shared the idea of common need with regards to redefining and reorganizing the service processes offered to people with special needs. *"The system is so complicated even we, professionals, can't make sense of it. I do not wonder why our customers are so desperate. We need a coordinator, someone who organizes services from a perspective of the customer."* The artist using applied theatre pointed out that based on her visits in a care unit *"There seemed to be lots of information and tacit knowing among practioners from services for persons with intellectual disabilities, and they are not able to articulate their knowing across units to those who doesn't that knowing."* Based on this consideration, we decided to use narrative, performative and visual methods in different phases of the study. All the material played and performed in theatre were originally initiated by the customers and health care practioners themselves. The learning process was a mixture of several applied theatre forms, rather than a replica of Boalian theatre practices.

However, practioners from the Regional Center also shared the need to make sense of the system at the local level (in different units). They appeared to have totally different views on what was important or not for customers (also refered to as patients). The following discussion held during our meetings (see table 1) shows the diverging concerns. This dialogue took place just before the research team started storytelling sessions with intellectually disabled people.

- *Resarcher*: What would be the proper expression for this customer group, are we allowed to use the concept of 'retarded'?
- *Practitioner* from services for persons with intellectual disabilities (SPID): Maybe not, you could use a concept of 'intellectually disabled'?
- *Artist*: What about 'people'?
- *Practitioner* from primary health care services: We call them 'patient'! They are ill when they come to us.
- *Practitioner* from SPID: Ok, to us they are 'customers' because they are not ill from medical perspective when we take care of them, to us they are normal.
- *Resarcher*: Ok, shall we call them 'normal people' then?
- *Artist*: It might be confusing. What about 'intellectually disabled people'?
- *Resarcher*: How would you advise us to act with intellectually disabled people during storytelling sessions?
- *Practitioner* from SPID: Just be normal, and behave how you normally would behave.

#### 5.4 Just to be normal

At this point, the artist did not dare to question whether participators were able to write. So, with a huge confusion in mind, the artist and the researcher started to design their first storytelling session. They discussed that maybe the advice given to them inviting to just ‘be normal’ was probably relevant. It appeared to them that the practioner from SPID did not know how to articulate how they were doing their everyday work. During the storytelling session, the artist and the researcher-faciltator noticed how talented and skilled practioners were with their customers. Practioners seemed to be able to communicate holistically with their customers. A short dialogue held after the storytelling session illustrates the tacit and embodied dimension of the practioner’s knowledge.

- *Artist*: How do you do it?
- *Practitioner*: To do what?
- *Artist*: That everything you just did during session. You knew all the time what to do.
- *Practitioner*: I did just normal things.
- *Artist*: But they are not normal or familiar to me.
- *Researcher*: Perhaps you (from SPID) have knowledge we others do not have.
- *Practitioner*: Maybe our knowledge is rooted into our bodies, so we don’t even realize it.
- *Researcher*: Yes, that might be something to share with practioners from primary health care services?
- *Artist*: Maybe practioners from primary health care services are as confused as I was at the beginning of session or during my first visit in care home. I did not know how to behave “normally” in a situation which wasn’t at all normal to me.
- *Practitioner*: Oh, it is embodied routine to us! But not to you?
- *Artist*: Or practioners from primary health care services?

#### 5.5 Lessons learned

After the storytelling session, two artists and the researcher-facilitator analysed all the narratives, finding that practioners as well as their customers, had showed few abilities to listen and share their ideas or problems related to practices. Practioners and their customers pointed out meaningful questions, wicked problems and described messy problematic situations in their narratives. However, they seemed to lack spaces for reflection and idea generation forums. In that sense, practioners had taken a step back from their everyday practice, questioned their roles and point of views. Considering Scharmer (2007) change model, we could identify this event as the starting point of a transformative journey. One of the artists pointed out that letting go of knowledge is also a process of ‘letting go’ of power and control. According to one artist, the process of ‘letting go of what we know’ is similar to the artistic flow and the experience of chaos. She highlighted that experiencing this ‘unknown’ zone is essential to art. Perhaps the process of ‘letting go of knowledge’ encourages innovation as the tide flows in when the gates open, transforming the inner landscape. This artist’s point of view resonates with Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) idea of collaboration as a dialogue. The lesson learned at this stage was that perhaps one fundamentally important element of learning and becoming is the processes of letting go of knowledge.

**5.6 Theatre session – Hidden thoughts**

Wicked problems and messy problematic situations, scripted from practioners and their customers narratives, were played back in a session facilitated by six artist and a researcher-facilitator, to 155 practioners from Regional Center and their partner organizations during a 4 hours theatre session. During the session practitioners shared different views and questions related to changing the social system of organizing SPID and their families. Practioners shared their knowledge of their work during the theatre session. Dialogue took place in an interactive way, two artists playing the role of practitioners, and the researcher- facilitator played the role of an interviewer. The scene was titled “Hidden thoughts”. Role characters were doctor Erkki from primary health care services and Maija, from SPID. The idea was to make visible what kind of attitudes and preconceptions practitioners had of each others. Next table illustrates collectively revealed hidden thoughts.

Erkki’s thoughts about Maija	Maija’s thoughts about Erkki
Uncertain	He does not respect my professional skills
Maija’s work is not so important	He thinks that intellectually disabled person is not so important than others
I don’t respect Maija as a person	
Moron, who do not have enough education	Erkki is academic how does not undersand anything about real life
Ou my god, I am so confused about this situation	Erkki could have explained better his actions during operation
Maija thinks so much of herself, and she seems to believe that she knows everything of everything	
She doesn’t even help me	He does not encounter his intellectually disabled patient, he talks to me not to his patient Does not dear to touch his patient
Erkki thoughts about himself that he could and should have asked help from Maija	Erkki is such a nice person, and he is an expert in his profession

Table 1. Collectively revealed hidden thoughts during the theatre session

Despite this serious discussion, the spirit was light, due to a carnivalistic drama staging. Practitioners managed to laugh of themselves. Artists reflected that they sensed a feeling of collective joy during their interactive presentation.

### **5.7 Lessons learned – How to survive in organizational chaos**

The lesson learned at this stage was that an aesthetic approach helped practitioners to share their fears and preconceptions and created a space where it became possible to discuss sensitive issues. Aesthetics and theatrical settings generalized the situation into becoming universal, so that practitioners were able to address organizational and local problems. It appeared that they created together a temporary space for democratic dialogue and reflective thinking. Despite different professional backgrounds, they tried to make sense and to understand each others points of view by creating a common ground for “*how to survive in an organizational chaos*”. Referring back to Scharmer’s model, practitioners collective learning process had again some similarity his idea of collective intelligence and collective wisdom whereby changing practices were seen to translate into an enlightening awareness process.

## **6. THE CANADIAN CASE**

### **6.1 Learning by letting go and letting come**

During the fall of 2010, more than forty young undergraduate students and a few practitioners from Université du Québec à Montréal, enrolled in a one week full time 45 hours workshop on emerging change and innovation. Most of the participants were studying communications and social intervention, and many of them also enrolled in other programs. Beside their studies, many were working part or full time and interested in learning through an experiential process.

The workshop was designed following Scharmer’s U process, in five stages, each corresponding to the 5 days of the week. One day was added at the end, and held one month after the end of the week, as a moment to wrap up the learning experience and for students to gather and present their projects.

Scharmer’s model being a theoretical framework, the workshop design drew on collective practices that become powerful containers from which collective reflection can emerge. The assumption being that practice-based radical innovation through collective thinking processes can help sketch tomorrow’s governance, managerial rules and sustainability, experience shows that it also shakes the roots of the organization balance of power.

Practices like Open Spaces (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 2000), World Cafés (Brown and Isaacs, 2005), Future Search (Weisbord and Janoff, 2000), Dialogue Circles (Pauchant, 2005) or Appreciative Inquiry (Harrison, 1997) have proven to be relevant containers which provide the appropriate conditions to facilitate the emergence of innovation. Collective, non-control based and creative, these practices are all nurtured by the same insights : the topic or subject discussed is the one that matters for people; the persons who come are the right persons; what is shared is what needed to be shared and people take out what they need to take out. In this context, the facilitator becomes a *host* and the content that emerges from such a container is *harvested* and brought back to the group. These hospitality and gardening metaphors become powerful tools to change the spirit of the moment. Instead of spending time in a war room, a task force summoned to attend a crisis summit will become integral individuals who are invited by a host to share their knowledge and insights to their community so that it can be enriched collectively. By doing so, the gesture becomes a way to welcoming back and caring for the common good.

The agenda of the week unfolded as follows, each stage of Theory U associated with every day of the workshop. At different moments during the week, short lectures on theoretical aspects of the process were given by the researchers-facilitators and reflective moments punctuated the week.

<i>Day Stage in Theory U</i>	<i>Practices supporting the U process, experienced by the participants</i>
Monday <i>Co-initiating</i>	opening circle, individual written exercise on personal journey, first open space
Tuesday <i>Co-sensing</i>	collective dance, social dreaming, second open space, world café
Wednesday <i>Co-presencing</i>	collective dance, social dreaming, dialogue circle, wandering journey to feel the space, lunch with unknown persons ; dialogue circle
Thursday <i>Co-creating</i>	collective dance, social dreaming, marshmallow challenge in teams, small group project development
Friday <i>Co-evolving</i>	collective dance, social dreaming, small group project presentations, community lunch, closing circle and evaluation
One month after	presentations of final projects, presentation of the poetic documentary

Table 2. Canadian Case -Workshop Agenda

These practices are worth examining in action, to know what lessons can be learned from their enactment. The scope of this paper doesn't allow for an in-depth description of each practice<sup>5</sup>. We will rather focus what happens when they are posed as a learning container from which innovation can supposedly emerge. What is at stake when such practices become the learning process instead of the more traditional teaching mode of relationship between the experts and the neophytes? What are the challenges and issues the learners are faced with when invited to become a learning community? What are the changing roles of the actors involved and what are the opposed resistance? What do the participants actually learn about change and innovation? Is the 'U' process actually leading to innovation and if so, it is radical? The purpose of this case is to illustrate the various aspects of these questions with regards to the complexity-based practices enacted during the week. The research being in its very early stages of analysis, preliminary and limited results from a subset of a larger data case are presented, focusing on reflective content from personal diaries. Based on these limited results, we provide an initial understanding of the transformational dimension that Theory U brings to collective and individual change.

## 6.2 Case Design

Based on a lewinian, thus engaged, Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach (McTaggart, 1989), the research design called for the researcher to act as facilitator –or host- of such containers and as a harvester, along with a team of artists participating in facilitating the workshop by guiding and supporting collective dance, visual art, graphic

<sup>5</sup> Information on the practices is available in the references at the end of this paper.

recording of conversations and dialogue, social dreaming and other creative and artistic activities embedded in the workshop. Data was gathered by collecting –harvesting- visuals and text-based as well as by individual interviews done during the week with some students. Content from the collective logbook and from personal diaries were also included in the analysis, along with the production of a poetic documentary of the experiment.

### 6.3 Key Findings

To show the unfolding of the reflection during the week, the contents are presented following the five stages of Scharmer’s ‘U’ process, based on a small sample (approximately one third of all available data) from the diaries.

<i>Day / Stage in Theory U</i>	<i>Results</i>
Monday  <i>Co-initiating</i>	<p>I feel vulnerable and fragile. I am afraid to be wounded.</p> <p>I am puzzled. I question my own position in this course. I don’t like to ask myself questions, I don’t like the introspective questioning.</p> <p>I feel well in my own comfort, I like not to be disturbed by all this. I’m not touched by the idea of this course. I don’t like to be forced into the ‘U’. I am afraid nothing extraordinary will happen until Friday.</p> <p>In the opening circle, I found people interesting, profound, full of creativity and imagination. I had forgotten to say what I was offering the group : I bring my authenticity. I want to be true and fully live this experience.</p>
Tuesday  <i>Co-sensing</i>	<p>I never felt so tired in my life. When I come back home at night, I am completely empty, with no energy. I noticed that also after lunch. I never felt that before. Is this resistance? Am I trying to flee?</p> <p>I don’t understand what is happening. I am fed up of asking myself the why and the how of everything.</p> <p>I chose to avoid putting make up on. I look strange but it is natural. Without a mask, I chose to be ‘ME’. It’s only the second day and I have learned to look and see something else than my puffed eyes and my tiredness.</p> <p>I don’t know if it is because I am so tired or because of the exercise we did on ourselves but I bursted into tears. In the exercise I noticed that I always want to control everything in my environment and when it doesn’t work, I panic and everything seems impossible to overcome.</p> <p>I am totally disturbed by the course, as I am disturbed outside of the course. This evening, I bursted into tears, it had been a long time since I cried like that.</p>
Wednesday  <i>Co-presencing</i>	<p>In the circle, many said that they don’t understand the foundations of this experience, they feel they are wandering and meander. They are courageous to share their worries.</p> <p>What I understand is that it is a state of mind, an inner state of being, with oneself and the others.</p> <p>This morning, I have had a quite intense experience during the social dream. Today was very different from the previous days. People shared experiences, dreams, much more intimate glimpses of life and I</p>

	<p>don't know why but I shared a part of my life which is very personal and which made me suffer a lot when it happened... I am so surprised by the openness of the group.</p> <p>The dialogue circle was very difficult for me. It was too much emotions for me. I felt uneasy. The walk we took outside, afterwards to wander around and discover, helped me a lot.</p> <p>I feel it is totally normal to feel lost, unstable, because the course is like a space outside of time, that we created for ourselves. When I step out of it to enter 'the real world', I feel that stress, pressure to perform, and obligations, take over.</p>
<p>Thursday</p> <p><i>Co-creating</i></p>	<p>During the social dreaming, I felt in a transe, it's like if everybody felt the same beat. I would have liked if everyone had participated but we can't force that on people.</p> <p>I feel a little better, I am less anxious and less rushed. Physically, I also feel better, my body is thanking me.</p> <p>The artist gave us a white square of cloth. It can become the beginning of whatever we want.</p> <p>'To be you must act'. I saw this sentence on a lady's bag in the bus and I thought it was interesting, we have to be in action in order to feel alive and not passive, looking at the parade without us.</p> <p>It's about us. It's not about a fixed concept that we should put on a pedestal. It's about us, 'we' are society. Everything is related, when we think about it. To learn to let oneself be guided, to take the time, to observe, to be able to offer our voice, to build it in a better way. Create spaces for encounters, dialogue, not to analyze everthing or to debate but to share.</p> <p>I trusted my team mates and it led to success. I think I will try to be in this state of mind more often, it gave me a feeling of freedom. I had fun and moreover, I succeeded. I realize that creativity and performance can go together!</p> <p>The marshmallow challenge, why have we done this? To show the challenge of collaboration.</p>
<p>Friday</p> <p><i>Co-evolving</i></p>	<p>During the collective dream, there was a much lighter mood, maybe it's because it is the last day.</p> <p>Sometimes, we see better with our eyes closed, we express ourselves better without words.</p> <p>I don't want to live in the past anymore. I want to go ahead and make new choices. I live here and now and I listen carefully.</p> <p>I really took a break during this week, through many introspective moments. I asked myself lots of questions, on my personal relationships, with my lover, my friends, my roommate, my job,...</p> <p>It's already our last day, it's incredible I have the impression of having learned so much, I have grown. I feel sad to leave this ship, full of souvenirs and discoveries.</p> <p>It is surprising that only by living together, sharing feelings and taking part in common projects, it create bonds between us that are unique.</p> <p>I know what I don't want anymore. I know what I want but overall, I know who I am now.</p>

<p>In the four following weeks</p>	<p>I grab this disorganized space, now and I can see myself acting in it as if it was through a mirror. Human beings are always changing, without necessarily noticing. I feel somewhat freer today but still confronted with dilemmas and mental concepts. To let go of this image of super hero I have been attached to for so long is like trying to slowly deconstruct to see what is left, to love what is left and to understand who I am.</p> <p>I remember one morning, there was a short video with music. I knew the music. It was from a cd titled 'The failure of the material world'. It was inspiring and exhilarating. I should have known the song but had never really listened to it. The song title was 'Related'. Now, this music is in my memory, it represents the workshop, what has been lived there, and I can see the images. I see something powerful, touching, something meaningful.</p>
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Table 3. Canadian Case - Subsets from the diaries

This partial but quite evokative initial picture of the experience lived by the participants shows inner turbulence, fear, curiosity and resistance in the first days of the workshop. This anxiety and attitude of self-protection is slowly taken over by emotional tiredness and a movement of letting go of the overflowing emotions, ending a familiar resistance to experiencing feelings consciously. This encounter with the inner Self acts as an opening gate to the discovery of what has stayed hidden, forbidden, unaccessible, unthinkable even, until then. This free space to let go, to learning by wandering around is an actual discovery of non linear change as a way of life. Slowly, the 'Other' appears, with considerations of the complexity of collaboration, based on trust and freedom. The disappearance of time, the importance of silence and the need for meaningful conversations appear along the process, along with energy, playfulness, a feeling of connectedness, the sense of being part of a community based on trust and hope. This process of learning to innovate from an inner place appears to be transformational, in the sense that the intent -or the source- from where action is initiated does shift during the process.

## 7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results show that both cases created spaces for dialogue and reflective thinking. The shifts in the participants' perception also had transformative effects on the social field, as everyone participated in collective reflecting, creating and designing of the future.

Grounding the research on Theory U and aesthetics – i.e. sensuous knowledge embodied in participative arts and creative methods- constitutes an audacious proposition which challenges the mainstream functionalist change management paradigm. The results show that alternative models grounded in complexity theory and collective intelligence prove to be empowering approaches to organizational and social transformation, as it is to personal inquiry.

### 7.1 Specifics of the Finnish Case

Goal of this study was to improve understanding of social dimensions of organizational learning through action research in practice-based innovation. From that view point we

found that aesthetic approach (Strati, 2009; Leavey, 2009) and applied theatre can be identified as an unfolding approach to complexity, harmony and collective transformation. In this study we illustrated a perspective that sees collective learning as a self-regulated emerging transformational process.

However, transformation between order and chaos as well as rational and sensuous approach of learning, is ongoing in a context of renewing practices and perhaps it will always be so. Public sector organisations are desperately seeking new possibilities and they are lacking innovation i.e. how to reorganise health and social service in future. Despite the rational anthem of organizations, the idea of learning in an innovation process is not to succeed to rule process, but to invite people to come together around meaningful questions, and to share their wicked problems, and experiences of messy problematic situations. This invitations to sharing is a similar to Scharmer's (2007) process. Sometimes during collective and artful sharing practioners discover something which can be utilized by organizations, and sometimes not. This sensuous knowledge embodied in participative arts and creative methods constitutes an audacious proposition which challenges the mainstream functionalist change management paradigm. Further, we argue that organizations need permanent non-rational approaches, and we suggest our study as an example of non-rational approach. This resonates with Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes's (2005) ideas about organizational learning, in terms of organizational becoming, and in a context of innovation.

## **7.2 Specifics of the Canadian Case**

Where as the Finnish case deals with the organizational and group level, the Canadian case deals with the group and the individual level. The community created during the five days can be sen as an emerging organization. The case shows that change is also rooted individually, as an inner process which is made of turbulence and resistance, chaos and once the tide gates open, the flow of different and sometimes new feelings and ideas cn become part of what is then learned. In that sense, according to Scharmer (2007), learning is not coming from the past but from the future. Table 3 shows that when learning is transformational, it is not trivial or without consequences. The change is actually profound and the reflexive thinking of the participants show that they have actually experienced something important in their life by stepping out of their confort zone. The process is not an easy one. The Finnish case was addressing this by refering to the artists discovery process. Here, we see young human beings in their discovery process, at a turning point of their life.

The workshop can be seen as a countainer from which it becomes possible to search for the unknown, to wander around, to discover what we are not looking for. Such a context must be prepared with great care as the ethical dimension of such an experience requires to be considered seriously. Without describing all in detail the ethics certification such a workshop requires to be offered to students and the community, let's mention its design, which also needs to be thought with caution, to provide secure nets and support. As it is a discovery, not everything should be explained from the start, but facilitators know that they move inside what they would like to be a safe sandbox, but that sand storms are frequent and as we know, the dunes are moving. As it is not a therapy, everyone must have the possibility of stepping aside or drop off at any time, as well as getting help if needed from the facilitators. All these behind-the-scene activities are actually part of the workshop design.

If we cast the manager's role as a facilitator working with this hosting and harvesting framework, we could propose that he / she be in charge of creating the conditions for learning and transformation to happen.

### **7.3 Global Results**

Results show that from a Theory U framework, with an aesthetic paradigm, art-based methods and collaborative practices, the spaces of conversation created did help to initiate innovation. The aesthetic and artistic practices brought into create appropriate conditions for innovation to emerge actually fostered participants to encounter dissonance, tensions, surprises, curiosity and make discoveries. However, while this series of practices help raise awareness, they only offer a first experience of thinking and acting from another source or an inner place. It is a first step into innovating, but to become part of an alternative thinking process, this learning should be embedded in regular practices. As such,

Where the first case shows the interaction process and the discovery of very different mental models surfacing during the storytelling activities, the second case shows the unfolding of the discovery process over time, and the steps of the transformational change process.

In both cases, we saw that learning took place, and that through various activities, sensuous knowledge helped to connect with a state of presence that acts like the source of innovation. With regards to the nature of the change, be it adaptive or transformational, we saw differences between the first and the second case, the Finnish one involving organizational members and the Canadian one, students and practitioners, all enrolled on a personal basis. We propose that with regards to engaging in a change process, participants will first consider the power they have or not to make changes in their social system. Whether members of the organisation have the authority to take initiatives and make decisions implying change, and whether these change actions are encouraged or facilitated by managers will make a difference. It may eventually make a difference between the decision to engage oneself into the journey of transformational change or to protect oneself by maintaining status quo.

How is the state of presence key to shift field and enter a state of creativity? Sensuous knowledge, like the embodiment of feelings, physical experience and metaphoric images are the sources from which we can be informed of how presence can be felt. For instance, in the Finnish case, after storytelling sessions, artists reflected and highlighted that the authentic moment of presence compares with an oasis. In that oasis, the past and the future are connected and there is not need to worry about neither of them. The notion of letting go and letting come, as well as emergence are key to presence. The idea of presence is the shift into the space of unknown, into the uncontrolled moment. It is the feeling of being in the moment, in the now. From this state of mind, body and will, the tide gates wide open let feelings, intuitions, images and ideas not yet conceptualised present themselves to consciousness. It is the playfulness with which one welcomes them that initiates what can become a creative moment.

What does all this tell us about how practice-based learning should be designed to create the conditions to foster innovation, or, stated differently, how can we learn from the future? The cases showed that learning activities ought to be contextualised, the 'ba' or nurturing conditions should consider that collective learning and collaboration always happens at a

specific time and place, between people, and that participants may have different interests which are articulated but not controlled. Dissonance and diversity can be used positively to trigger learning, practice can be investigated and different points of views can emerge.

## 8. CONCLUSION

We explored how learning communities learn and change their social practices. Looking at learning situation as a transformational process of relying collectively on the future, we draw from Scharmer's Theory U (2007) who proposes that the future is already present in the collective intelligence of a community, and accessible through a shift of mind, an opening process of letting pre-conscious or intuitive knowledge in.

Social practices are an important part of innovation, but they are quite often ignored. Many organizations are faced with the problem of being trapped within their own world view, so that they remain behind closed doors. In order to open the door, the enacting organization must be able to reconceive not only its physical and technical space but also its own social and cultural space. Our case examples illustrate social practices, related to innovation in the making, which enable a group to experiment an enlightening awareness process. This awareness process is situated; it happens between people who are involved in the process, and it also happens between them and their organizational practices. The new knowing, which gradually emerges through interactions and interpretations, is collectively shared and has a tacit nature. It could be defined as a collective tacit knowing, because it is collectively embodied and rooted in a specific event or situation of practice.

This type of emerging knowledge is not conscious at first and it cannot be disembodied or untied from its context. The learning processes of our cases were of transformational nature. The artful and playful framing played a fundamental role in the learning process as it allowed people to open their mind by entering the play, even as they were dealing with serious matters. People who were involved interpreted complex social and hierarchical events with the help of aesthetic lenses. They actually collectively operated a mindshift through the emotional and intuitive description they made of the past and of the possibilities they could feel for the future. By asking different questions, by seeking different sorts of explanations, and by looking at issues from different points of view, different answers and world views may emerge. In the Finnish case, a description was done via several art techniques, which allowed intuitive knowledge in. In the Canadian case, collective art was created by the participants as metaphors or images of their experience. In both cases, art acted as a generative learning container. We understood this learning process as a collective transformation.

This study also presents limitations. An aesthetic approach and artful techniques require that all participants be in a position where they have the will and power to change existing practices. If the employees, managers or customers do not engage in the experience because they do not believe change can happen, the very idea of transformation will be subdued in the organization and artful practices will end up reinforcing, rather than changing, the power relationships. Similarly, at the individual level, when the belief is that change is impossible, one will not engage in exploring the possibilities offered to him / her and .

The study finally leads to proposing that organisations as communities would benefit from constructing a creative, reflective, critical and safe environment for socialization. This translates into responsible and sustainable practices, and in this perspective, it would

become essential to recognize and respect alternative world views, practices and ideas distributed throughout the organization and among people, and to bridge functions inside and between organizations. A transformational process is a process of encountering the world and all its diversity. Such a standpoint also allows organizations to see themselves from different angles and to gain in reflexivity. This in return allows for creating alternative interpretations of reality. The premises for innovation are thus the existence of different world views and approaches, and they are materialized in the process of dialoging, reflection and imagining.

To our view, the challenge of future studies is to find out how to cultivate transformational processes in organizations, and among groups and people, processes that strive for effectiveness, tight-coupledness, orderliness, shared world views and the development of nurturing management strategies which could sustain both creativity and responsibility.

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