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THE ART OF CO-CREATION

A GUIDEBOOK FOR PRACTITIONERS

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Bryan R. Rill • Matti M. Hämäläinen

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Preface

Co-creation is a trendy term used across the disciplines of business, design, and marketing to indicate new modes of engagement between people in order to either create shared value or unleash the creative potential of diverse groups. Its wide appeal has led to a proliferation of "co-creative" programs, yet an integrated perspective on how to design and facilitate such programs remains lacking. This book addresses this need, clarifying co-creation as an operational concept and providing a set of guidelines for professionals in design, education, and organizational change.

Our guidelines derive from the action research of the Co-Creation Initiative (CCI) at the School of Design, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, as well as practical applications in the School of Design, the Aalto-Tongji Design Factory in Shanghai, and in our design consulting practices. The primary author, Dr. Bryan Rill, founded the CCI in 2014. CCI has since evolved from a research initiative to an ongoing open source platform that aims to explore various aspects of co-creation.[1] All of our collaborators and participants openly share their experiences, philosophies, and best practices. Herein, we purposely contrast the industry standard of trademarking and protecting a toolkit for commercial gain. Instead, we share everything we have learned and continue to develop in the spirit of creative positive change. Co-creation is a powerful framework, and we want to give that to the world.

After several years of inquiry, our goal is to translate our learnings into an evocative and pragmatic "how-to" guidebook that enables professional working in their respective fields to design and implement co-creation. Given the right tools, skilled leaders and facilitators can utilize this

approach to unleash the creative potential of their organizations. The principles herein integrate deep practical wisdom from some of the world's best designers, educators, and organizational change facilitators. The result is a co-creative framework for designing the space between (a field of collective knowledge) and the capacities (collective intelligence) that engender breakthrough insights.

As practicing professionals, we expect that our readership will understand many of the core concepts in this text. Given this, our aim is not to explain the fundamentals of design or facilitation, but rather build upon existing knowledge to help practitioners more effectively tap into the potential of the teams they work with.

We imagine two different pathways for reading this book. One is for professionals who are new to designing for and leading collective creativity. These readers will benefit from reading the book front to back, learning first how to prepare the conditions for co-creation and then how to implement it. Other more experienced readers may already have their own methods and be searching for new ones to add to their toolkit. These readers might jump straight into Part II, which focuses on facilitation (the *How*). Another audience will be veteran facilitators who have more techniques than they know what to do with, and they are looking for answers to questions they have been pondering for years. "Why do my techniques work in some contexts and not others?" "What processes underlay effective change initiatives?" "Is there something that makes sense of all?" We are familiar with these questions because they have been put to us many times, and this book answers them all. The short answer is that there is an underlying process architecture for co-creation. This book reveals and explains it, as well as how to organize techniques for optional flow and efficacy.

The guidelines in this manuscript will be valuable for business professionals who see design thinking as integral to innovation and culture change. Additionally, in the field of participatory design, there is a lack of facilitation training. Great designers are intuitively good at facilitation, but rarely are they self-reflective. As such, this book will be of particular value for designers who wish to improve upon their processes. We see the manuscript as the foundation for new educational programs in facilitating co-creation.

Although we do our best to explain co-creation with a conceptual model, in truth a large part of it is tacit knowledge. Because tacit knowledge is situationally dependent, it is difficult to put into language and

transfer it to another person via written instruction. Thus a book is not the best medium to transfer tacit knowledge. You do not learn to play the violin or master archery by reading a book about archery or how to play the violin. Meetings do not change for the better if everyone reads a book about meetings. To develop tacit knowledge, you must go out and practice. The theory and guidelines herein point out the way, but it is up to each of you to walk it if you truly desire to master the art of co-creation.

On Creativity

We are about to take you on a journey into the creative process. For many, creativity is a mystery, a special talent that people have in different measures. Exemplary figures such as Albert Einstein and Hayao Miyazaki stand out and, as such, are studied in an attempt to figure out what makes them so special. While it is certainly true that some people are recognized as being more creative than others, we take the position that creativity is not an inborn trait that only a few people have. It is something that can be trained and designed for.

Children are an excellent example of creativity. Take any six-year-old into a craft room and you will find a wellspring of ideas. Some will make sense to an adult, while others seem pure fantasy. At eight years old, my two nieces were showing me how to build a spaceship out of cardboard and duct tape, and they still regularly run circles around me in terms of creative output. What happens to us as we grow up? The answer, unfortunately, is education. We enter into learning models that emphasize mastery of content with very specific learning outcomes. While creativity is encouraged, creative writing in college is quite different from a kindergarten classroom where play is still encouraged. Education is about developing skilled, disciplined workers in society. And we are very good at it. Either by the time we get into the workforce or shortly after, most people have been neatly molded into productive citizens. If they are not, they lose their job. Just ask the Japanese, who have a saying "The nail that sticks up gets hammered down." While their society allows for great creative freedom throughout university years, once a person enters the workforce, they must adapt quickly to a very structured system.

Structure can facilitate or hinder creativity. Our educational and work systems are structured in ways that transform creativity into productivity.

This is not a bad thing in and of itself. We need productivity. But we can no longer sacrifice the chaotic, fantastical creativity of children on the altar of success. We need to bring it back if we are to innovate, and there are structured ways of doing so. Design, for example, encourages creative play and has developed spaces and practices that bring it out in adults. Here we will go further and introduce gamestorming, presence, and other techniques to help recover the creativity we all once had. We look specifically at how to cultivate and unleash *collective* creativity—a special experience that requires a nuanced understanding of creativity. Our core approach is that creativity always resides in action. Imagination, acted out, is creativity. Therefore, co-creation can be considered to be a special form of collective action, the act of creating something together.

Within this text we use the metaphor of art to refer to creative processes, with the practicing/performance of this art being a journey. Art also refers to a set of skills that cannot be perfected, but only improved upon, implying that there is no "right" or "wrong," only "better" or "worse." Journey refers to an isolatable performance of this art, which results in improvement of your skills in addition to reaching your goals. The journey is the center of co-creation, the experience through which collective potential can be realized.

Outline of the Text

The first two chapters look at the value of co-creation and offer a definition of the term. The aim of these preliminary chapters is to illustrate the relevance of co-creation and to present a clear understanding of what co-creation is and is not. In Chap. 1 we focus on the *Why*, for without a clear purpose there is no point in attempting co-creation. In the second chapter, we introduce our models for co-creation. Taking a human-centered rather than process-oriented perspective, we argue that experience design separates true co-creation from other forms of collaboration and design thinking. Our focus on experience design for creative teams takes into account the knowledge and emotional aspects of the creative journey, as well as the importance of team dynamics when working with groups. It is attention to all three aspects that harnesses the full creative potential of teams.

The remainder of the text is laid out in three parts. "Part I: Preparing the Conditions" unpacks our *Space Between* model into its three compo-

nents: People, Environment, and Process. This part focuses on the *What*, the raw ingredients needed for co-creation.

Part I also explains *Why* certain ingredients are needed and *Where* to place them in the overall experience design. We unpack our *Co-Creative Journey* model, the process architecture that helps create flow among program piece and maximizes the potential for creative breakthroughs. There we introduce the container, the felt environment of a creative team, and how to "set" a strong enough container to handle the dive into the Unknown. We also explain the intangibles of co-creation, the qualities in people and process that amplify creative output.

The guidelines offered in Part I focus on the design and planning of co-creative processes, from the intangibles to more observable aspects of program design such as the creative brief and gamification. Throughout we stress the need for the *Why* of any creative program to integrate with the needs of the larger strategic and cultural context. Without designing specifically for growth opportunities and integration of needs, co-creation easily loses its potential impact.

"Part II: Performing Co-creation" is the *How* of co-creation, putting theory into practice with a focus on facilitation. We illustrate the overall process and the knowledge, emotional, and interpersonal aspects of the experience that people go through, offering guidelines on how to create the impactful programs following our process architecture. Throughout Part II we refer to two stories that, while given fictional names and actors, derive from real-world scenarios. These stories, one of success and one of failure, highlight touchpoints that can make or break co-creation. By drawing attention to these touchpoints, we hope to improve the ability to recognize key shifts in a creative program and how to harness the potential of these moments. By the end of Part II readers will have all the guidelines necessary to design and implement co-creation.

"Part III: The Perfect Play" introduces resonant co-creation, the ideal to which we strive. Resonance is the product of a harmony among three elements: experience design, facilitation, and talent development. When and if resonance occurs, creative potential is amplified. Resonant co-creation is highly conducive to strategic innovation (breakthroughs) because it specifically designed to break through existing worldviews and ways of interacting, establishing a powerful collective intelligence from which truly innovative ideas can emerge.

We close the text with an Epilogue that raises questions about the future and the impact co-creation can have, leaving the reader an invitation to engage our community of practice. Here we consider the potential for co-creation as a centerpiece of inclusive work cultures, as a nuance upon design thinking, and as a force for social change.

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NOTE

1. We welcome participation in this community of practice. To learn more, please visit www.cocreation.world

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the Brains on the Beach community, Wisdom Peak, Khalsa Consultants, Bridge Fellowship, the nowhere group ltd., the Hong Kong Polytechnic University School of Design, the Aalto Design Factory, the Institute of Cultural Affairs, the MIT Ideation Lab, and all our other colleagues and friends for allowing us to observe and engage you in the creation of this guidebook. Special thanks go to Prof. Cees de Bont, Dean of the School of Design. You gave us the impetus, wisdom, and resources to make this happen. Deep gratitude also to the CCI team— Benjamin Butler, Max Willis, Kyulee (Kim), Liang Tan (Ricky), Yunan Zhang (Echo), and the MScMET students who volunteered their time and energy. Large or small, your contributions helped make this happen. Thank-you also to all our friends and colleagues who have been patient with our social experiments and endless questions. Without your support, this would not have been possible. We welcome continued dialogue and engagement in activities in the years to come. Finally, we could have never made it without the love, patience, and guidance of our better halves, Lisa and Meri.

The Art of Co-Creation was developed by Dr. Bryan Rill and Matti Hämäläinen at the Co-Creation Initiative. In the spirit of co-creation, we maintain an open source philosophy regarding our materials. Please feel free to use them. Our only request is that credit be given where it is due, and *no trademarking!* Co-creation is for everyone.

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Why Co-creation?

We are in a time of great rehabilitation. For a century, the workforce was designed around the concept of production with predictability, reliability, efficiency, and control being central values. In contemporary office spaces, the design of factory floors has neatly translated into square spaces filled with cubicles, each its own little production unit. Through education we have prepared the population for these environments, naturalizing them to the point that many people like their cubicle and personal niche within much larger systems. As long as they do what they were hired for, they have security, and there is no need to step outside that box. Or so the myth goes….

This business model works, especially for producing many of the products and services that our world runs on today. The problem for the people in this system is that it reduces the beautiful complexity of being human into something less, something along the lines of performance metrics and human capital. That, in turn, reduces human creativity. Herein lies the rub. It is no secret that innovation is the Holy Grail of business. Some would argue that innovation is the sole differentiator left in a global economy where it is easy to replicate the latest and greatest business strategy. Innovation is sorely needed to address the global challenges we face today, from food shortages to environmental destruction. Simply put, we are in a time of "innovate or die."

Many innovation models in business are excellent at producing incremental innovations, improvements upon existing products. The next iPhone will include the latest tech and a couple of new features that meet

or shift the desires of consumers, but the concept of a smartphone is well established. This is not what we need, and it is not what companies and social entrepreneurs are calling for. What we need is strategic innovation—ideas that break the mold, chart entirely new territories, or find elegant solutions to complex problems. What we need are the ways and means to meet hopes and dreams. That is what this book is about.

Our answer to the innovation challenge is co-creation. It is based on one simple principle: harnessing the collective potential of groups can lead to breakthroughs wherein every participant is empowered. Collective creativity is a difference that makes the difference.

This book is meant to be a guide for practicing professionals who wish to implement co-creation into their design teams, organizations, or learning platforms. Throughout we will lay out the *What*, *When*, *Where*, and *How* of co-creation. Here we want to focus on the *Why*.

The *Why* is straightforward. We need people to be creative so that we can innovate. The tricky part is figuring out how to cultivate creativity in workspaces that, in general, kill it quite effectively. The good news is that we are recovering from industrial systems that stripped away the invitation to be fully human in the workplace. In many places workplace well-being is now a major factor in talent acquisition and retention. Companies like Steelcase and Herman Miller have entire research divisions focused on designing furniture that supports these spaces. Innovation labs, start-up commons, and DIY workspaces are filled with funky, comfortable furniture designed specifically to improve upon sense of well-being and inspire new ways of working. Books on spatial design focus on social interaction, flexibility, and other principles that fly in the face of the neatly ordered cubicles and desks. We will be discussing these principles to help you design your own creative spaces later in this book.

Creative spaces alone, however, are insufficient. The innovation landscape is littered with the remains of creative workspaces that go unused, or worse, reordered into neat rows. I encountered this phenomenon first-hand when teaching in the School of Design for the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Our classroom had Steelcase Node chairs, rolling self-contained desks that can be easily configured into any or no arrangement. Due to the famous architect Zaha Hadid's design of Innovation Tower, our building had no square rooms. One might think this a dream come true for a design school. After all, designers pride themselves on being able to reinvent space. The reality was quite different. For months upon moving into the building, every elevator conversation contained talk

of how inefficient the building was, with both teachers and students lamenting on how challenging it was to arrange the rooms "orderly." In my classroom students did their very best to arrange the Node chairs into lines in a grid. Every day I would force them to rearrange, and it took several weeks for them to understand that I was challenging the psychological structures that informed them of "proper" class formations.

While educators carefully evaluate content delivery in classrooms, *how* that content is delivered is actually the real lesson. When a class, or business meeting, is arranged with a teacher or leader at the head of the space and everyone else in front of them, the message is one of control and followership. Starting in schools, people learn how power works and what they need to do to wield it—that is, become the expert or boss. We continue this pattern throughout life, ever working longer and harder to climb the ladder to a position where we are the ones in control. This pattern, for good or bad, is deeply ingrained in how we understand "proper" educational and work spaces. It is not something we think consciously about, and when given a choice most people will default to it because it is comfortable. When a space violates the norm, people often feel uncomfortable, and least at first. This simple conditioning is why so many innovation spaces are left unused. What is needed is a set of practices, or a process, that encourages people to use space differently. Enter design thinking.

Design thinking is reshaping the landscape of innovation across multiple sectors, from business to education. As Tim Brown from IDEO states in his book *Change by Design*, "Design can help to improve our lives in the present. Design thinking can help us chart a path into the future."[1] Design thinking is a thought process and iterative pathway that brings structure to creativity with demonstrable outcomes. For businesses, "Design thinking can do for organic growth and innovation what TQM did for quality—take something we always have cared about and put tools and processes into the hands of managers to make it happen."[2]

Design thinking is an iterative, experimental learning process. It employs empathy, entropy, and creative reframing of spaces and ideas to shake up existing knowledge and shake out new ideas. Human-centered design, or co-design, is particularly salient for supporting creative teams because these approaches focus on people and their needs. In short, design "rehumanizes" the work of innovation.

The focus on the human experience as a starting point contrasts the analytical, economic logic of business. Reality, for the business manager, is precise and quantifiable. "Design assumes instead human experience,

always messy, as its decision driver and sees true objectivity as an illusion. Reality, for designers, is always constructed by the people living it."[3] These two perspectives on reality are equally essential for innovation. As Ogilvie and Liedtka argue in *Designing for Growth*[4]:

> The future will require multiple tools in the managerial tool kit—a design suite especially tailored to starting up and growing businesses in an uncertain world, and an analytic one suited to running established businesses in a more stable one—not two opposing sets wielded by warring groups of people who can't communicate with each other.

Companies that have adopted design thinking create or send teams to spaces wherein the rules of normal offices are suspended and teams can interact on completely different premises. In these spaces teams often turn to design thinking processes such as those provided by Stanford, IDEO, or the Aalto Design Factory as a way of working. Design consultancies can also be hired to work with a team in either a design studio or a dedicated project space within the client organization. In both cases teams enter into physical and psychologically "other" spaces with the hopes that the processes in there will translate into innovative ideas that can be enacted back in the "regular" world. This oscillation between the known, controlled world or organizational life and the unknown, chaotic world of creativity is working to generate innovations large and small. It seems then that the combination of creative workspaces and design thinking is an answer to the innovation challenge. So why write this book?

If reality matched the argument I have just laid out, then there might not be a need for another book that praises the value of design thinking. Yet reality has a way of being difficult, and what works in theory often fails in practice. This is just as true for design thinking as for anything else. While the reasons are many, one of the main ones is the fact that humans are not robots. As Neil deGrasse Tyson aptly notes, "In science, when human behavior enters the equation, things go nonlinear. That's why Physics is easy and Sociology is hard."[5] Humans simply don't conform to mathematical models. That trait can frustrate the systems engineer, but it is also a source of our creativity.

An equally important factor is that the conditions of every project are different. Because the context and human elements of any project cannot be predicted, no formulaic implementation of a process will maximize creative outputs. In business, for example, the adoption of design thinking

has led to strategic innovation, but often this occurs only when that process is facilitated by a gifted design thinker. What is it about that individual that makes or breaks a project? What are the attributes of the successful design lead and their process that set them apart? As much as design talks about understanding the user and designing *with* rather than *for*, a black box remains as to *how exactly* to do that well. Here we pose co-creation as an answer that can advance design thinking and its application to innovative projects across sectors.

Stories of Co-creation

Over the years we have learned that trying to explain co-creation conceptually can be quite challenging. It is better to show through example what it can do. To that end, we have chosen a cast of characters to illustrate co-creation throughout the text. Each of these we have either worked with closely or been inspired by, and we want to give credit where credit is due. The cast includes the Eliad Group and their program iLead+Design, the nowhere group ltd., the U.Lab and corresponding Theory U initiatives, the Presencing Institute, Brains on the Beach (BoB), the Institute for Cultural Affairs (ICA), Social Artists and the Building Creative Communities conference, the Stanford University d.school, IDEO, the Aalto-Tongji Design Factory, and our peers in and around the School of Design at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in Hong Kong. This book exists only due to their amazing work, the relationships we have developed through our research and beyond, and the spirit of co-creation from which we have all operated. We are grateful.

It is through the exemplary work of these individuals and groups that we can answer the question, "Why co-creation?" In the spirit of "show don't tell," what follows is the first of our stories of co-creation.

iLead+Design by Aaron Eden

Building the iLead+Design program with my co-founders was one of my first consciously co-creative experiences. I've been intentionally developing co-creative spaces ever since. iLead+Design, now in its fifth year of operation, is a summer intensive program for high school age youth I started with co-conspirators Bob Cole of Middlebury Institute of International Studies and Sean Raymond of York School. The program brings together two or three small teams of participants, each with a

dedicated coach. The teams explore social innovation and design thinking by working on real problems brought in by community partners. The program balances time between experiential workshops on relevant co-creative skills with on-problem work time and weaves team space and group space together to form a lattice of co-creation at multiple scales.

A unique aspect of the co-creative environment, and one that is often missing from our professional lives, was an explicit understanding of the importance of safety of expression and of iteration on ideas, regardless of origin. This is one of the most important aspects of co-creation, I believe, and one I have carried with me whenever trying to replicate the conditions of the iLead+Design container: a willingness to be vulnerable and to play with ideas regardless of how crazy they may seem, without judgment. Design thinking language such as "Yes, and." (rather than "no, but…") and "How might we?…" help keep creativity flowing and buffer against taking things personally.

Equally important, and similarly absent from most work environments I had previously inhabited, was an explicit understanding that process is as important as content. In other words, how we discuss things is as important as what we discuss, and being willing to reflect on and alter process at any given moment is as important for quality outcomes as discussing what the outcomes should be. For example, when offering ideas on how to meet a goal, if someone is attempting to evaluate each idea as it comes out, it was explicitly okay to say something like: "I wonder if we could try to get all ideas out before evaluating them, so we are sure to make it to those "leftover" ideas that sometimes prove extremely creative?" And similarly—and explicitly!—acceptable to suggest reasons for not doing that.

Finally (although not exhaustively, for the list could go on), there was continuous and purposeful reconnection to *Why* we were building what we were building. When a decision would come before us on how to shape the program, we would try to remember to evaluate the option based not only on what we were trying to build, but why we were trying to build it. Critically, the "Why" question was not only used in terms of why our "customers" would want it or benefit from it, but why we wanted it to exist in the world. Why were we there? What did we care about? Often in business endeavors, there is an unstated understanding that we leave our personal lives at home. While there are many aspects of our personal lives that do not enhance our endeavors while engaging in our work, why we do what we do can only be personal. If we leave that out of the picture, and only adopt the "Why" of the customer, or of the business we are

working for, we block off the greatest source of drive and creativity we possess. We therefore explicitly referred back to our individual "Whys" as part of our process to help us make decisions collectively. In doing so, we routinely contacted to our individual drive, reinforced our connection to and understanding of each other, and enhanced the quality of our output.

To this day, as I build or support others in building co-creative containers, I look to ensure the presence or creation of these characteristics:

- having the right people in the room, to ensure sufficient autonomy;
- a feeling of safety to express all ideas, and a shared lexicon in service of that goal;
- an explicit understanding that process is equally as important as content and is similarly subject to discussion and improvement;
- and ultimately that everyone there understands why they show up each day and feels supported in checking in with that foundation to shape our understanding of each other and of a shared "Why" that we can calibrate output against at every stage of development.

With this culture of engagement permeating what we do, iLead+Design gets better every year, no matter who joins the fun.

End

It was through an iLead+Design program at the Green School in Bali, Indonesia, that we met Aaron Eden, the beginning of a relationship that opened our eyes to the power of co-creation in learning.[6] Aaron uses co-creation to transform education as we know it. It is the means to shift from command and control to self-directed education, a movement wherein parents and teachers partner with children to collectively imagine and realize their dreams.

In educational contexts, co-creation can transform learning processes while simultaneously driving social innovation. This is what we were part of at the Green School, bringing our design students from Hong Kong down to work with their K-12 students on social entrepreneurship projects throughout Indonesia. We helped teams redesign trash bins, address deforestation and the pollution created by palm oil plantations, build a mobile application for the biodiesel school bus, and more. The students

benefited by being able to learn the capacities and skills needed to be entrepreneurs while working on real-world issues. The communities benefited from the results of their efforts. It was a win-win scenario.

At a larger scale, the ICA has been working co-creatively for decades on some of the most pressing challenges faced around the world. Their publication *Winds & Waves* highlights several cases annually, showing how transformational co-creation can be in community development and organizational change projects.[7] In 2016 alone, ICA Nepal built a new Disabled Service Center in Kathmandu to replace the facility destroyed by an earthquake. In Chile the ICA is developing programs for leaders and organizations to work with disabled people, including a School for Participative Leaders that builds the capacity for co-creation. In Peru a community development project is underway to co-create an entirely new economic system in the mountains.

The ICA's work with communities was so sought after by business that they developed the Technology of Participation (TOP), a training series that teaches leaders and facilitators ICA methods. When we first sat down with Larry Philbrook, who runs the TOP training at ICA Taiwan, there was an immediate recognition between their methods and those we had developed in the Co-Creation Initiative, our research program in the School of Design. TOP *is* co-creation, albeit from an organizational change perspective rather than design.

The ICA continues to work with communities and organizations to build the capacity for co-creation, and their facilitators work behind the scenes of many United Nations and NGO social innovation projects. Their work demonstrates how co-creation empowers communities and organizations to become agents of social change.

The role of co-creation in social change became more evident when I experienced it first hand at the 2017 Building Creative Communities conference in Colquitt, Georgia, USA. Colquitt is a tiny country town, known only for its peanuts, murals, and folk theater. It was a town that almost disappeared due to economic downturn, but was saved by the arts. Richard Geer, the inventor of Story Bridge, came down to Colquitt on the invitation of a very active community elder by the name of Joy Jinks.[8] Together they sought and received an Endowment of the Arts grant, which they used to fiscally support the growth of a unique art community. All around Colquitt are beautiful painted murals of farming life, and every year thousands of people from Georgia and North Florida flock to Colquitt

to see Swamp Gravy, a Story Bridge performance. Swamp Gravy is a play co-created and acted out entirely by members of the local community. It gives them a voice, encouraging the community to write their own story and own it. Story Bridge has grown from these humble roots to become a community empowerment technique, and it can be used equally effectively in organizations to build and express culture.

The Building Creative Communities conference is the three-day event when Swamp Gravy is performed.[9] There Story Bridge is one of two frameworks that people experience and learn from to become agents of social change. The other is Social Artistry, an approach developed by Jean Houston.[10] Social Artistry is a model of consciousness and methodology to build capacities for creative leadership, with several useful techniques that we will explain later in this text. At BCCC Jan Sanders, an ICA and Social Artistry trainer, holds workshops and a train-the-trainer series for those interested in learning. Social Artistry is not co-creative in itself, but the capacities developed through it support co-creative leadership.

BCCC 2017 was held one week after the US Presidential election, and many of the participants came directly from the Women's March in Washington, DC. They were emotionally charged, and they found great inspiration in what Story Bridge and Social Artistry could do for them as agents of change. They came to learn tools and ways forward, and the community there became instantly co-creative to that end. It was a special moment that I will never forget, for I found myself in the midst of a newly forming civil rights movement. The air was charged with passion and commitment, and everyone praised co-creation as the vehicle for a new future.

The Co-creative Difference

These vignettes illustrate the fact that there is something special about co-creation that sets it apart. Whenever someone asks me what co-creation is, I respond by evoking a memory that most of us have. "Think back to a time when you were working with a few other people on a challenge, and you had a collective breakthrough. What was that experience like?" I then probe for what made that moment so special. "What made that possible? And how does that compare to other collaborative efforts?" These questions draw out some key characteristics of breakthrough experiences.

Foremost among answers is the sense of synergy among the collective, complemented often by trust and authenticity. Second, people felt like they were part of something larger than themselves, and that what they were doing mattered. This gave them a particularly strong drive to carry things forward. Lastly, people talk about emergence—the feeling that new ideas or solutions manifested out of thin air. Emergence is often complemented by a sense of joyful surprise—the "eureka" moment that accompanies an epiphany.

If you evaluate these statements carefully, what becomes apparent is that most of them are emotional. It is rarely the case that someone, when asked these questions, replies by commenting on the quality of the outcome. They focus on the quality of the *experience* that leads to great outcomes. Our team has been fortunate to have witnessed and participated in co-creation across several contexts. Indeed, it was participation in experiences like our colleagues' examples that inspired our inquiry. Being part of the process, we realized that the experiential aspects of collective creativity are really the key to fostering breakthroughs. Thus began our exploration of how to design for such moments.

As many readers of this text might relate to, we came to use the term co-creation only after having a profound experience of it and wondering how it occurred. The terms we use are our way of conceptualizing and sharing a process of fostering collective intelligence and then tapping the potential of that collective. Our ideas are not entirely novel, but rather part of a growing trend. In the September edition of Harvard Business Review, Anthony Scott suggests that the business world is shifting from the Third Era of Innovation (driven by venture capital) to the Fourth Era (driven by corporate catalysts in large companies).[11] This article paints a very interesting picture for established companies, as it suggests that we can unlock much more creativity, innovation, and therefore profit with *internal* creative processes. How to do that has been the subject of much interest, with consultancies like IDEO, Deloitte, Bain & Company, and others coming into companies and helping restructure or create an environment conducive to internal creativity.

The animated film company PIXAR is an exemplary illustration of collective creativity. PIXAR was founded on the premise of co-creation. They are campus based, and the founders have done an excellent job of establishing and preserving an environment that continuously generates creative expressions. If we imagine creativity to be a frequency, as Nick Udall

from the nowhere group argues, then we might say that PIXAR "optimizes the frequency at which their organization operates."[12] We enjoy the "creativity as frequency" metaphor, for it suggests that we can tune ourselves and our teams to it. We call the optimal expression of collective creativity "resonant co-creation." Resonance, as we will explain in Chap. 12, is a harmonization of three "frequencies"—or elements of co-creation. When an experience design, its facilitation, and talent development harmonize with each other (play off and build upon each other perfectly), then the amplitude (creative potential) increases. PIXAR is one of the very few organizations that has made this part of their everyday working environment—an example to be lived up to.

Most organizations do not have their own campus-based model like PIXAR. Large organizations are more often robust systems that strive for maximal predictability, efficiency, and reliability. Success in these contexts requires more than just a good process with innovative results. It needs a good story to connect with potential users and cut through the organizational inertia that so often meets any change initiative. Strong narratives reach and engage stakeholders, facilitating the desire to adopt something new. In his explanation of the power of story, IDEO co-founder Tim Brown explains.[13]

> An experience that unfolds over time, engages participants, and allows them to tell their own stories will have resolved two of the biggest obstacles in the path of every new idea: gaining acceptance in one's own organization and getting it out into the world.

Brown highlights the fact that high levels of engagement (created by the story) and mutual empowerment are essential drivers for organizational innovation. These are both outcomes of co-creation, and in fact we do not consider a process co-creative without these experiential dimensions to the creative process. Co-creation is a vehicle to build empowered, creative teams with the capacity for breakthrough innovations that connect with the broader ecosystem and inspire change.

Co-creation can be a process led by an external consultant, and it can also be integral to a culture of innovation. One of our favorite quotes is "Culture eats strategy for breakfast." The quote is a play on the common misunderstanding of the relationship between culture and strategy. Culture is the broad set of relationships, beliefs, behaviors, and artifacts (tangible

representations or products) shared among a group of people. In organizations, culture is the bedrock that everything else is built upon. Strategy may be a compelling vision and means to enact it, but strategy always occurs in a relationship with the larger culture. As Nick Udall notes in *Riding the Creative Rollercoaster*, a common challenge is that "strategies get lost in translation, as they are only seen and understood through ingrained cultural filters." Moreover, "most strategies are born out of the dominant culture, and in so doing replicate their self-limiting beliefs and patterns."[14] Thus, while a great amount of resource and attention is given to developing new strategy,

> The irony is that cultures of innovation are the only source of true and sustainable competitive advantage. Breakthrough strategies, therefore, emerge from an ecology of creative teams and are brought to life through cultures of innovation.[15]

Embedding co-creation as a way of working within an organization is an effective way to establish the ecology of creative teams needed for competitive advantage. Frederic Laloux's popular text *Reinventing Organizations* speaks specifically to this point.[16] His approach is co-creative and supports our argument for resonance as a key differentiator in strategic innovation initiatives.

Scharmer and Kaufer's text *Leading from the Emerging Future* contains many examples of organizational transformation and strategic innovations resulting from applications of the Theory U framework[17]—itself a co-creative process. Among these include the IDEAS Indonesia project, which resulted in a new form of governance by Bupati Suyoto; the Bronx Cooperative Development Initiative (BCDI), which employs an inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue to drive development; and an initiative called the Global Well-Being and GNH Lab, aimed at improving well-being worldwide. Each of these was a strategic innovation in that they required abandoning existing models and co-creating entirely new ways of addressing challenges.

OUR VALUE PROPOSITION

Co-creation is a meta-level process that enhances collective creativity. Co-creation can fuel innovation, drive culture change, and harness the full creative potential of any team. Strategic innovation (breakthroughs)

revitalizes organizations and can create entirely new markets. However, focus on pragmatism, control, and efficiency in businesses tends to stifle creativity. How then can businesses generate the types of innovations needed to thrive? The answer: co-creation.

Co-creation adds a nuance to design thinking that can evolve how it is understood and employed. That nuance is the focus on experience design for the creative team itself. In the field of design, teams are often assembled to create new products or services. Our argument is that we get the most out of our teams by designing growth experiences for them and integrating techniques from facilitation and leadership development. Throughout this text, we argue for the value of facilitation and capacity training programs in user-centered, co-design, and participatory design practices. IDEO's courses on design thinking are an opening to this exciting new area of development.[18] Building up on that, we pose co-creation as a framework that can improve upon design outcomes.

In the next chapter we will tease out what co-creation is and is not, offering our own research-based definition that brings more operational utility to the term. We argue that co-creation is an art rather than a science, and like art it involves practice and performance. Also, like the great actor or musician, the co-creative experience designer benefits from certain qualities that transcend process. The secret of the art lies in weaving together process, environment design, and human factors to establish the space between from which insight emerges and the collective intelligence to harness it.

There are many places where one can learn aspects of co-creation. Facilitator conferences, practice-centered conferences on social innovation, leadership development programs … in each of these you can hear about or train in one or more of the philosophies or tools related to co-creation. Here our goal is to bring these together into a cohesive framework that is held together by the metaphor of a great artistic performance. The art lies in the weave, which we have found to be a nearly universal grammar, or process architecture, that underlies many trademarked approaches to innovation. In the next chapter we present the Co-Creative Journey and the Space Between models as the framing upon which many different facilitation techniques can be placed.

Notes

1. Brown and Katz, *Change by Design*, 150.
2. Ogilvie and Liedtka, *Designing for Growth*, Kindle Locations 169–171.
3. Ogilvie and Liedtka, *Designing for Growth*, Kindle Locations 290–294.
4. Ogilvie and Liedtka, *Designing for Growth*, Kindle Locations 451–453.
5. Neil deGrasse Tyson (@neiltyson) Twitter Post, Feb 5, 2016, https://twitter.com/neiltyson/status/695759776752496640?lang=en.
6. Learn more about the Green School at https://www.greenschool.org.
7. Institute of Cultural Affairs International. Winds & Waves. Vol 6. No 1. April 2016. www.ica-international.org.
8. More information on Story Bridge and its training is available at https://www.storybridge.space/training.
9. Learn more at http://bc3-colquittga.com.
10. http://jeanhoustonfoundation.org/social-artistry/.
11. Anthony, *The New Corporate Garage,* 44.
12. Udall, *Riding the Creative Rollercoaster,* Kindle Location 1503.
13. Brown and Katz. *Change by Design,* Kindle Location 136–137.
14. Udall, *Riding the Creative Rollercoaster*, 1548.
15. Udall, *Riding the Creative Rollercoaster*, 1556.
16. Laloux, *Reinventing Organizations.*
17. Scharmer and Kaufer, *Leading from the Emerging Future: from Ego-System to Eco-System Economies.*
18. IDEO offers several courses online at https://www.ideou.com/products/hello-design-thinking.

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