Creativity Inspired Community: A Practice and Process for Growing Communities through Group Creativity

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A Practice and Process for Growing Communities through Group Creativity

A Project in Creative Studies
By
David W. Eyman

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Science

May 23, 2015
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Project Advisor
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ABSTRACT OF PROJECT

Creativity Inspired Community:

A Practice and Process for Growing Communities through Group Creativity

This project explores the use of group creativity practices to support changing attitudes and the formation of cohesive communities in civic and business settings. More specifically this project explores the use of a predetermined sequence of group creativity tools to facilitate a change in participant mentality. The attitudinal shift is from self-serving to engaged and collaborative. The ultimate outcome of using the proposed framework is the bonding of incompatibly opinionated people into a solidified community that is responsible for implementing their novel ideas. Ideas formed within this process are a reflection of the individual’s personal life objectives as they relate to the mutual vision of a community. The result of this exploration is a proposed framework and related guideline materials including a case for using creativity, pedagogical underpinnings, a how-to platform, and related toolkit.
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SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work but rather, teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea,”

- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Group creativity levels the playing field and challenges the very notion of authoritative decision-making. Knowing this allows us to use the transformational nature of creativity to build or strengthen communities in the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors.

When facilitating group creativity processes, the individual strengths of the facilitator become notable. When assessing the outcomes of group creativity sessions in detail, we can see evidence of the facilitator’s abilities through a review of the volume, direction, originality, and depth reached by participants. In some cases, evidence presents itself in categories that are not typically ascribed to group creativity processes but are known to be secondary outcomes. These results fall into a number of categories such as teambuilding, level of engagement with the project, enthusiasm toward a project, deep learning about the project, and consensus among participants. Typically we ascribe the quality of the facilitator’s work to the volume and originality of outcomes. The primary objectives of any given organizational entity would likely discern an equal or greater need for atypical results. Most corporations, civic-sector, or non-profit charters would list the efficiency or effectiveness of their people as equal to the need for radical differentiation. The efficiency and effectiveness of people are often reliant on a form of community building that has its roots firmly planted in engagement, enthusiasm, team dynamic, and consensus in working toward a shared vision. In cases where there is an equal need for both
innovation and community, the innate strengths of some facilitators may be of greater value to the organization than the process that the moderator employs.

Three years ago, while facilitating a training and ideation session with a group of civic employees, I noted a difference between the process I had outlined and what happened at that moment. At that time, I could only describe what happened as somewhere between motivational speaking and facilitating with a teaching component in the mix. After further consideration, I describe this mix as “community building through the transformational power of group creativity.” In more recent facilitations, my results in the “other outcomes” as listed above were more robust than my ability to garner creative ideas from the participants. In some cases, I believe this is of importance to clients. The intention of this project is to explore further how the transformational power of creativity and community building might be described, designed into a framework, and offered as a service.

**Background of Pedagogy**

Prior to this project, I investigated the importance of “other outcomes” of group brainstorming to support the premises of a philosophy as it took shape. What underlies this philosophy is that the act of co-creation is synonymous with transformation and may be used to form collective visions resulting in a cohesion among co-creators. Cohesion then creates a community among the co-creators that leads to heightened levels of commitment, advocacy, engagement, and accountability for the successful implementation of ideas or solutions. These findings collectively form a case and construct a logical pedagogy of this body of work. Further refinements streamlined the “other outcomes” of group creativity practice into the following six beneficial outcomes:
- Consensus building: When everyone contributes ideas and feels heard they become part of the solution. When solutions reflect the contributions of each person, each person accepts that the solution is the best possible alternative for all.

- Teambuilding: A study by Henningsen and Henningsen (2013) concluded, “Brainstorming groups developed higher levels of cohesiveness in terms of desire to continue working with the group than nominal groups following an idea-generation task” (p. 42). One process that contributes to both teambuilding and successfully producing innovative solutions is an efficiency-oriented model that offers more results with less investment of resources.

- Motivation: Heightened motivation happens as a result of participants getting excited about the possibility of their collaborative ideas. Motivation carries projects ahead with a more efficient focus and expedites the pace of a successful implementation. Utilizing components of the Design Thinking process offers an emphasis on empathy for end users. More specifically this approach builds optimism about empathy based innovation (Curedale, 2013).

- The depth of understanding: Group creativity promotes depth of comprehension of the organization, the problem, and the individual’s role in problem solving. We share critical data, build on, and remember each other’s ideas. We have access to numerous stores of memories and multiple ideas to build on (Brown, Tumeo, Larey, & Paulus, 1998). Within group creativity sessions, the conversation is a divergent thinking tool that produces a robust understanding of contributing data.

- Engagement: There is direct evidence of increased levels of project engagement budding from group creativity sessions (Paulus, 2000; Sutton & Hargadon, 1996).
Project participation, job commitment, and community engagement are all outcomes that are qualitatively evident from employees of organizations that expect creativity from employees or utilize group creativity methods (Gilson & Shalley, 2004).

- Post-session ideas: One significant contributing factor to creative problem solving is a period of incubation and reflection: reflecting on the problem and gaining insights while not actively engaged in the problem. In his book *Creativity*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) noted that commercial evidence for incubation is supported in reports where after some time, the creator comes to a sudden moment of insight, the aha moment. Participants of group sessions will often emerge with ideas days or months after the session ends. These post-session ideas typically see light as something more closely resembling a solution because the person often has more time to develop the idea and consider the values of stakeholders prior to disclosure.

These outcomes of group creativity sessions present a beneficial case for the possibility of generating a framework. Such a framework and its related toolkit would allow the facilitator to predetermine outcomes through the use of, and sequencing of each related exercise. Should a client deem teambuilding as a valuable outcome of an ideation session, the session designer will then have the ability to construct a plan that supports both creative ideas and engaged teams.

**Background of Process Formation**

Processes that dismiss ideas or focus on the ideas of the leader alienate people with strong opinions that build partisanship, cliques, or opponent thinking (me-vs-them). The design of a new type of pedagogy encourages and captures even the strongest opinions. Participants are asked to view problems or opportunities from other lenses to see what suits the community as a
whole. Leadership models do not often provide this open forum or acceptance, yet the creative process does. The result is that participants become proactive members who are not afraid to speak their contribution because they trust they can affect the future. When the future is a positive collaborative vision, the members of a community become the leaders of a legacy of innovation.

Exercises must be inverted to accommodate putting group ideation at the forefront to realize this dualistic goal. Ideas of all people are brought into the group thinking process at the onset. Allowing participants to hear the opinions, hopes, and fears of others are the beginning of a transitory process that culminates in empathy towards those of differing opinions. Thus, the logic is to sequence ideation exercises as 1. Full group participation (me-thinking), 2. Small group ideation (we-thinking) and 3. An individual ideation exercise to reflect the voices of many differing opinions (us-thinking).

The potential to maximize transformational qualities of creative thinking lies in the choices of how and where to apply such a framework. Ideation sessions in the civic arena are not yet commonplace, yet offer the promise of creating communities that spread cohesion at a rapid pace because of the sheer number of people affected. Rumors among citizens of any community can drive positive change faster and more efficiently than a corporate structure or individual visioning. A framework and toolkit created for the purpose of serving civic-oriented communities also holds the potential to spill over into the corporate, non-profit, or individual sectors.

In this conversation, “community” construes not only civic entities but corporate communities such as work teams or leadership teams. Communities can also be educational concerns or non-profit leadership teams, or even giving communities in some cases.
Recognizing any particular group of people as holding the potential to become a cohesive community offers participants of a group creativity session the ability to reach levels of belonging and engagement that they may otherwise not enjoy. Holding the reasoning above as a possibility, we can organically grow compassionate communities while working toward consensus-based solutions. Both objectives run simultaneously which provides the time sensitive efficiency we seek.

One clarifying example is a common issue among the residents of a city: controlling a deer population that has reached a dangerously high ratio of deer per wooded acre or deer per capita. Such circumstances often lead to separation among residents and animosity based on the opinions of individual residents. Some residents will always feel that they are in danger because of traffic issues. Some will feel that their gardens are more valuable than the deer. Other residents will side with the deer and suggest that the lives of deer must not be disrupted by suburban development. The result of differences in opinion is often fiery, and input sessions are commonly filled with anger that may divide the community for lack of a shared vision.

If the deer control issue involves a quantitative survey, the result will leave many people’s opinions out. Such as: more people will tell you they want the deer population reduced than people who say leave the deer alone. Then the latter group of people become only angrier if a decision is based on the survey results. Quantitative surveys can result in conflict and tear communities apart when the objective is to create safety for both the deer and residents. Surveys are a democratic decision-making tool that most certainly have their place, yet are not ideal for further reaching programs or projects with multiple impact areas.

If the issue moves to a qualitative analysis such as focus group input, the result will bring a smaller number of people who voice their opinions and more people not feeling heard. In this
example, we hear both sides of the issue but no viable reasoning to make a final decision. The result brings only speculative underlying principles to back city government’s decisions. There is room for scrutinizing decisions that come as an outcome in many such cases, and this may also strain the community at-large.

If we decipher the underlying values of a community through a creative process, we have several outcomes:

- An ad-hoc quantitative analysis.
- A reliable qualitative opinion
- A deeper and broader foundation on which to base decisions.
- The added benefit of having created a community out of the people who attended the session.

The overarching theme of this outcome is a consensus of future oriented vision based on empathy for all opinions. This community will in turn spread the blameless word that they are in good hands because their ideas have tangible value. The actual idea or solution presented and the actual decision made become less relevant than the matter of the community being kept safe or a level of excellence maintained within the city limits.

In the deer population example, the result may yield the identical outcome as other methodologies, yet the participants will have compassion toward other peoples needs or opinions. Thus the group of deer protectors will leave the session with a keen understanding of how this serves the wellbeing of all instead of thinking the deer are being killed to protect hostas. The rumors they spread into the community will then be more positive.
Rationale for Selection of this Project

For the purpose of creating a harmonious life for all communities, this project holds the promise of one person’s ability to make a contribution to the betterment of the world. In communicating the results of this study to others, the benefit of beginning a conversation can be realized. Although each recipient of this information may only adopt small bits of this work, the importance of having provided a genesis of thought to those people construes a meaningful purpose to this period of this author’s life.

Historically our world cultures ebb and flow with relation to either greed or goodwill. At present, we see epidemic proportions of self-serving attitudes across the globe, and to the detriment of humanity. Initially, the United States became a country of notable comfort and security through an orientation toward the compassionate support of “us” as a whole instead of “me” as an individual. This was not a form of communism, but of goodwill toward all people (with the exception of Native Americans). Over time, our corporations came to bear the burden of providing opportunity and freedom instead of each of us individuals. Greed took hold as we build businesses on the premise of disparity instead of goodwill; corporations have to be because profit is always the end-goal. Inside of disparity is a form of attitude that promotes self-service over consensus. The relationship of self-serving attitudes to policy, governors, and social innovation is that the elite can find control and make choices that serve to maintain elitism. Too often, elitism results in lower levels of happiness for all. Small changes in attitude can reconcile our desire for a joyous life in “us” oriented lifestyles and governing decisions rooted in creative leadership. We can make these changes without threat to corporate leaders because the change ultimately happens in the spirit of growth. We have only to show employees or residents their
own potential, and allow them to see fulfilling their own personal vision as a part of fulfilling the collaborative vision.

In his TEDx Jacksonville talk (2013), Ben Warner describes the sectors responsible for self-serving attitudes and “me-thinking” as a public sector (government), a private sector (business), and a need for a third sector (Community). “What’s missing is a third sector, a sector filled full of individual volunteers and organized nonprofits who are associating together for the public good and filling the gaps in our societal needs. The ones who are doing what needs to happen in order for needs to be met, dreams to be realized, and for our community to move forward.” This is the power of civic engagement where we have the opportunity to create new ways of looking at things, new policy, and new futures for all. My rationale is choosing to make a contribution to a global change that brings the brotherhood of mankind to the forefront of our decision-making processes.
SECTION TWO: PERTINENT LITERATURE

The following literature review communicates some of the many sources that have informed the thinking of this project. To better understand the transition from self-oriented thought to empathy, I needed better to understand the mindsets associated with self-serving, small group serving, and large group serving attitudes. These are explained under the headings of the associated component of the framework: Me-thinking, We-thinking, and Us-thinking.

To better understand elements of this structure, several sources were reviewed including courses, books, articles, and websites about design thinking, civic engagement, positive inquiry, and creative problem solving. These are reviewed under an umbrella title of process design and structure.

When a complex decision arose regarding how to best position this process in any given market, there was a need to discover insights into positioning. I have garnered insights regarding positioning from a collection of personal opinions. These sentiments came from a series of personal interviews and are described with relevant or applicable facts below.

Me-Thinking

In his book *The white man’s burden* (2006), Easterly forms two conflicting yet symbiotic factions: the planners and the searchers. Planners are those who lay out maps for how to manage problems and set course for implementation. Planners are great at planning what goes into the market, yet are often unable to distinguish what the market will accept. To have a rigid plan is to dictate what may or may not occur in the realization of a process. “Planners believe they have the answers before they know the problems” (p. 6). According to Easterly, searchers are on-the-
ground people who are most capable of allowing things to proceed as they will, and in touch with the market. Often the searchers will be able to feel conditions and act accordingly. “A Searcher admits he doesn’t know the answers.” (p. 30)

During her TEDx Xavier University talk, Kate Hanisian describes one outcome of using the searcher mindset as “In our searcher mind, we are equals in the exploration.” (14:13). Having participants in any conversation or problem solving investigation reach equality supports the creation of consensus and a mindset of follow-through or commitment. “The people that are affected by problems need to be the leaders of our solutions and the collaborators in our solutions and not just the receivers of our help.” (15:05).

The proposed framework is a prototypical plan based on credentialed research and data (as a planner would produce). To propose this, or any, process, without a kinetic methodology for on-the-fly reconfiguration (searchers) would be to suggest the participants are unable to bring themselves to the conversation. Thus, the process has been communicated as a menu describing all the possible exercises that will produce results in each phase of the process. Planning the process as a list of options supports having the process act as a searcher would.

Planners and Searchers are both subject to outside influences that have as much bearing on their ability to express their creative thoughts as their capacity to think them. In her book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can’t Stop Talking*, Cain tirades about the downside of group brainstorming to support her premise of the power of solo ventures. In the end, she caps the dialog with “group brainstorming makes people feel attached. A worthy goal, so long as we understand that social glue, as opposed to creativity, is the principal benefit.” (p. 89). Cain inadvertently makes the intentions of this creative endeavor shine brightly. Logically we connect an understanding that most corporate entities and civic groups do not select radical
creativity over slightly innovative ideas (Mueller, Melwani, & Goncalo, 2011). Rather, we may employ the nature of a group creativity process to produce both creative ideas and “social glue” as the most powerful methodology possible: A solution we will all get behind and push. Devoid of the social glue, ideas cannot possibly gain the traction needed to impel social change at a mass level. This bias against brainstorming forces us to recognize the power this tool has and forms its argument in favor of continued use.

In the spirit of creative jujitsu (a Japanese martial art that uses the strength of one's adversary to disarm him), Runco must also be acknowledged for supporting the essence of this development. Runco is an outspoken critic of brainstorming, a primary tool employed in the proposed process. In his address regarding creativity in education (2011), Runco notes:

Brainstorming does not work. Thousands of studies have been done with brainstorming, and it always lowers originality. Always. Across the board. Brainstorming is a pretty good thing if you want team building and perhaps if you want students to exchange ideas and learn to cooperate, collaborate, and see other perspectives and so on. Those are all good things, and the brainstorming social setting might be good for it. (9:42)

The premise set forth in this endeavor directly asserts that the collaboration, cooperation, and viewpoints of others construe an action-oriented community that stands behind their vision for a better tomorrow. The use of brainstorming as an instrument to compel disparate opinions to develop a unanimity of thought or positive view must trump the likelihood of an individual to be self-serving. With a compulsion to envision a collaborative and cooperative future in mind, a community is born rather than an assumed team made of competing factions.
We-Thinking

A defining and insightful impetus for this project and other concerns pertaining to transformational properties of creativity came in a scene from the movie Couples Retreat (2010). In this particular scene, a couple, Joey (Jon Favreau) and Lucy (Kristin Davis) are entrenched in a jealous argument that could potentially end their fragile marriage. After they each disclose various affairs, the shouting has a random and creative interruption. Joey suggests his wife will have to go to Applebee’s (a restaurant chain) alone when she gets older unless she puts more effort into the marriage. In that very moment, they both envision the possibility of going to Applebee’s together, and they immediately transform. From a place of anger in seeing only the past and what is wrong, to a place of envisioning a healthy and happy future. They both become stakeholders in the outcome. This pure creative expression of an idea that merits consensus between two disparate, and opinionated people cause them both immediate transformation. Within a few seconds, the couple moves from anger to kissing and loving each other. A defining moment that we have all experienced and demonstrative of the transformational power of creativity. Living in the vision of a satisfying future causes them to rekindle their love for one another and allows them not only to just “be together” but to thrive as a couple.

Couples and small groups have a tendency to build on one another’s ideas and synthesize those ideas into consensus-oriented solutions. The ideas offered by an individual nourish the thinking of others and force unlikely combinations of ideas to occur. A trust and openness must be present in a relationship to allow freedom of expression. We can learn to support this tendency by exploring it and react through the design of tools, exercises, or methods.

For the purpose of creating a pedagogical model to describe transforming attitudes from self-serving to consensus-focused, the notion of we-thinking may be likened to a family or team
oriented mindset. A family is a unit that exists within the paradigm of a larger community, yet holds a cohesive set of values and strengths. This team orientation is important in understanding how unanimity can allow freedom of expression without judgment and create a culture and climate that are conducive to creative expression. Family ties or team spirit can generate the freedom to express ourselves through non-judgmental security or the security of knowing that the relationship is stable enough to withstand commentary that may put other relationships at peril. During ideation sessions, the facilitator bears the onus of responsibility for creating such security. Albeit this is a temporary state, there is such a substantial impact that the feeling of togetherness may survive the duration of any given workshop. The commonality of vision overrides vestiges of differences and may account for the survival of team spirit.

Throughout history, eminent creators have notably turned trusting relationships into rich sources of creative output. Shenk’s book *The powers of two: Finding the essence of innovation in creative pairs* (2014) explores examples of creative powerhouse teams such as John Lennon and Paul McCartney (The Beatles) or Matt Stone and Trey Parker (South Park). Shenk’s dialog explores the relationship between people as a structure for both securities in the freedom to express ideas and as a richer source of ideas. In some examples, Shenk describes an ascending ladder of ideas building on each other’s ideas in turn. Given that the laddering of ideas can lead to a shared vision, there are opportunities for exploiting such knowledge in the creation of new exercises that support consensus-oriented visioning techniques.

During ideation, a mindset of me-thinking produces very different ideas than a mindset of we-thinking. For example, we-thinking revolves around empathy for the needs, fears, and wishes of others and will result in ideas that pertain to others as well. In *Design Thinking Pocket Guide* (2013), Curedale describes design thinking empathy as “identifying and designing for the
needs of others, sometimes before they know they have a need” (p.24). Given the mindset that addresses the needs of others will generate ideas that meet the needs of others we can bring a dialog that builds this empathy to the participants in advance. For constructing such a session design, this discussion must precede any ideation and be a method of exploring the problem.

**Us-Thinking**

When a group of people form an alliance of attitude (groupthink), powerful outcomes can happen. Although there are more examples of where this can curtail creativity, the use that effects this project is in the ability to create social change. A positive attitude toward an idea or solution is what allows that solution to move forward and take shape. In some cases such as civic-oriented ideas, the groupthink outlook toward a solution can bring about positive or negative rumors surrounding any given program or project. Groupthink is thereby a result of us-thinking and gives participants the positive stories that may be carried out into a larger community that creates success for a project.

In studying the collaborative effects of brainstorming on decision making, Kramer, Kuo, & Dailey (1997) noted: “The use of brainstorming groups in organizations often serves multiple goals besides reaching high-quality decisions, such as team building, consensus building, or increasing participation” (p. 236). In an effort to maximize team building, consensus building, and participation we may assert that brainstorming on several levels will ultimately generate us-thinking through increases in these areas. To allow us-thinking to form organically consideration has been given to the sequencing of brainstorming exercises. The concluding exercise in each session is an independent ideation activity designed to collect ideas and determine the level of success or failure of the intention to create a group mentality.
During his TED talk, *The Empathic Civilization* (2010), Rifkin describes the implications of recent research in neuropsychology, brain research, and child development: “we are not soft-wired for aggression, violence, self-interest, or utilitarianism. We are actually soft-wired for sociability, attachment, affection, companionship, and that the first drive is the drive to actually belong.” (2:48). The sum of our soft wiring is empathy, and if empathy is the core element that causes group belonging then we have built a powerful force of motivation for creative change. During group creativity sessions, the formation of a future vision becomes the impetus for creating a better life together. We have only to bring about one or two participants to cause a tipping point of mirror neurons, thus creating positive group identification and commitment to a co-created vision.

Echoing this ideal overlap between creativity and community building, are Smith and Mackie, creators of the Intergroup Emotions Theory (2007-2010). In this body of research, Smith and Mackie demonstrate that “IET focuses on action toward or against groups, rather than thoughts and beliefs about groups. Emotions is readiness for action and intergroup emotion is readiness for intergroup action.” (p. 1877). In a creative team-building environment, we are enabled to pursue emotionally charging activities that may heighten the relationship of self-identity to group-identity. Allowing group participants to discover commonalities through emotional reactions may yield faster results if induced than natural occurrences. Having contributed creatively to the formation of a group initiative or solution, identifying the self as part of a cohesive group comes naturally. With IET, Smith and Mackie posit that when the individual sees themselves as part of the group, the group becomes part of the self. Thus, the individual has an emotional readiness to act on behalf of a group charter. Us-thinking is a natural result of emotional attachment, and actionable outcomes form in both group and
individual levels. The will to proceed grows through a commitment to the group as a whole or responsibility to the other members.

**Process Design and Structure**

In an effort to design ideational exercises that support active community building, several processes were reviewed. The methods include Design Thinking (Leidtka & Ogilve, 2011; Curedale, 2013), Creative Problem Solving (Puccio, Mance, Switalski, & Reali, 2012), Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2008), Deliberative Dialog (McCoy & Scully, 2002), and civic engagement strategy processes (Block, 2008). During this examination, I discovered that there are others who have recognized the need to alter a framework to suit their particular needs.

In her SlideShare presentation titled *Local council’s innovation framework review tool* (2014), Munro has adapted elements of the design thinking process in an effort to build efficacy within a local government setting.

*Figure 1. Adaptation of the Design Thinking process framework for use in local government. (Munro, J., 2014).*
Munro has synthesized her process into a series of steps that incorporate prototyping, testing, and evaluating ideas. This stage is suggestive of a longer term engagement that requires public input and some form of consensus. Her steps are as follows:

1. Understand the key issues, underlying problems and the strategic context (including politicians’ views and ambitions; service users’ and citizens’ needs, priorities, and aspirations).

2. Agree the outcomes you want to achieve.

3. Generate creative ideas for tackling the issues.

4. Select the most promising ideas, right for the organization and the strategic context.

5. Test, prototype and evaluate these ideas. Learn from what does not work.

6. Choose the best idea(s) to implement.

7. Develop and implement the idea(s), addressing barriers, persisting, adapting and learning, until they work in practice.

8. Evaluate how successful the innovation has been, over time, against your ambitions.

9. Build on and spread successful innovations, learn from failures, and disseminate the ideas and learning to others.

For major innovations involve politicians, frontline staff, service users and citizens, partners and others at key stages in the process. In practice, innovation processes may move backward and forward between the different phases (Munro, 2014).

The implication from Munro’s work is that there is potential to form a longer term strategic process that includes a consultant in many stages of the civic innovation strategy. Long term engagements contrast the opinions gathered during the interview process, yet holds greater potential for successful implementation of solutions.
One reality that both facilitator and client must confront is that short-term engagements are preferred by participants, especially when they are volunteers. To maintain quality and accommodate short timeframes, we can incorporate intentional design elements in session planning. Short timeframe design features are based on evidence of what supports rapid transformational shifts in participants on many levels. Vietan, Amorok, & Schlitz (2006), find that six factors help convert a short-term experience into long-term change:

1. Being a part of a like-minded social network or community
2. Having a language and context for the experience
3. Continuing to access new information or teachings
4. A daily mind-body practice to both reinforce/reconnect with the experience
5. Creatively expressing or manifesting the experience through action
6. Daily reminders such as wearing or intentionally placing symbols in one’s environment

To reflect the above factors:

- Increase the bonding of a social network through fun and satisfying experiential tools.
- Use specific language such as “Probletunities” (a me-we-us tool to convert problems into opportunities) and “me-we-us.”
- Have participants add an email address to increase readership of communications.
- Ask participants if they are willing to take action.
- Have participants make their promises public on handouts, and custom printed gift items (notebooks, pens, clipboards, etc.).

“Results of our analysis suggest that altruism and compassion arise as natural consequences of experiences of interconnection and oneness.” (p. 915). To successfully produce
the altruistic nature we desire, we may intentionally create heightened levels of interconnection within the design of our experiential ideation work. The sum of these intentional design nuances is to maximize the collaborative community building aspects of our sessions within a short timeframe.

Civic Engagement

In the public sector arena, there is presently much concern surrounding the ability to generate social innovation. There are many strategies for social change including civic engagement that holds the promise of helping communities to envision a consensus-based future for themselves. In Civic engagement and the restoration of community (2007), Block proposes a method of six distinct conversations. These six conversations are intended to allow participants to keep their opinions intact throughout the session, yet build empathy through togetherness in the form of small groups meeting to discuss issues. “To state it more precisely, the book is about the methodology for creating a future for our community that is distinct and not predicted by its past.” (p. 1).

Block invites us to see that creating a future is different than naming a future. He asserts that envisioning a future is great, but it takes citizens to bring this into being. Block posits that the leadership, regardless of how powerful they may be, cannot alone make the future a reality without the citizens doing the work. In this scenario, leaders are created by the people and for the people and a future is created by disconnecting from our stories of the past.

Then there is an invitation to create social change: “Our narrow view of how things get done must change to have big-picture change happen. If we focus on milestones and measures, we will ensure the continuance of the past. If we focus on language, relatedness, and a purpose, then the future will be separate from the past, and big-picture change can happen” (p. 7). This
tenet supports a dialog that connects exercises in group creativity sessions with the community building aspects. This framework must account for an amount of semi-scripted and highly charged dialog. There is no call for a lengthy discourse, yet the motivational aspects that lead to community building must be inherent. In essence, this is the facilitator saying the things that are typically unspoken, and an invitation to participants to say many things they would otherwise not say. “Civic engagement is the pursuit of accountability and commitment through a shift in the language and conversation we use to make our community better.” (p. 9)

“We ask questions like “How do we hold people more accountable?” and “How much money will it cost and where do we get the money?” These questions cause us to try harder at what we have been doing in the past. To move forward, we must ask questions that engage people with each other, confront people with their freedom, and invite them to co-create a future.” (p. 12).

To produce this type of dialog seems counterproductive when looking at a future-oriented and constructive conversation, yet asking participants to name issues and offer their opinions will suffice. Given the nature of short workshops, this might be accomplished through a mind-mapping exercise at the onset of a session.

Block refers to his small group meetings as “gatherings” to avoid the implications of “civic-input sessions” or “public forums”. In asking people to give three to five hours of their time for a meeting, one must choose words wisely or risk participants simply not showing up. During the course of this project, several wordings are being tested to streamline the invitation success rate. “Gathering” is intended to create mutual ownership and suggest that participants hold a level of power by being there and has proven successful thus far.
Block disagrees with “Telling the story of how we got here” (p. 18). In the initial design of this framework, a problem statement was assigned as “What do we love about ___?” The intention of this short exercise was to generate positivity in the room and disclose assets available. Based on this dialog, the question has been reconsidered. The logic of only looking forward to avoid the “more-better-different” pitfall holds more promise for generating community. Sessions must contain what’s possible as opposed to what should be fixed.

A pivotal conversation takes place in *Civic engagement and the restoration of community* where Block describes how possibility replaces problem solving. For this to occur in the creative process, we must position problem statements always as possibilities. For example “What might we do with this derelict building” becomes “what might serve the community in this location?” While I appreciate Peter’s premise, I also appreciate that the average citizen may only have the capacity or will to see things in terms of “better, more, or less.” As a facilitator of this type of session, the challenge then becomes taking the past out of the mix, yet retaining all requests for change that have bearing on people’s ideas. The nuances of such decisions must be made on a per-project basis and cannot be written into the framework.

**Six conversations that matter:**

1. The invitation: The intention is to bring people to the gathering anticipating that they are self-enrolled and have the choice or freedom to commit to whatever suits them.

   “Transformation occurs through choice, not mandate” (p. 18). *Invitations are being tested during the course of this project.*

2. Possibility: This conversation is specifically described as “not problem solving, but a conversation about the future.” (p. 18). Declaring a possibility creates the transformation.
I have created an introductory comment from this conversation and is included in the framework document.

3. Ownership: The conversation that invites participants to be responsible for the outcome.
   “People best own that which they create, so co-creation is the bedrock of accountability.
   It is the belief that I am cause, not effect. This is the question that really confronts people
   with their freedom.” (P. 19). An exercise called “Table-writing” has been created from
   this conversation and is included in the framework document.

4. Dissent: If we do not have space to say “no” then our “yes” is diminished in value.
   When each person is allowed this space, then we can move into a conversation for
   commitment. To say no is to find one’s place and meaning in the overall strategy. (P. 20).
   An exercise called “No cards” stems from this conversation and is included in the
   framework document.

5. Commitment: A promise to our peers that we will contribute and be accountable for the
   outcome of our free will. Leadership is invited to dissuade people who do not
   authentically choose to be committed to the outcome. (P. 20). Commitment is requested
   during a wrapup conversation and falls under motivational speaking as needed and
determined by the facilitator.

6. Gifts: We often overlook our gifts and focus on deficiencies. This conversation is
   designed to confront people and invite them to realize their own potential contribution.
   (P. 21). An introductory comment has been designed to reflect this conversation and is
   listed in the framework document. (Block, 2007).

Block’s primary tenet in civic-engagement is the development and creation of “A Small
Group” (ASG) formatting. Permeating much of his writings is the message that in a small
group, everyone’s voice is heard, and everyone’s opinions matter. Taking this into a
creativity based programming structure, I can see where this builds associations, alliances,
friendships, and allows all participants to feel valued. When each person adds an idea, they
become part of the overall solution by confusing their creative self-efficacy with their ideas.

Small group ideation has been integrated into this framework in the form of three exercises;
Scenarios, Shark-Tank, and the Indy-Walk.

Insights Into Market Selection, Development, and Targeting Specific Stakeholders:

When confronted with how this program may be applicable to businesses or civic entities,
a new set of issues arose. A cautious decision needed to be made and supported by the opinions
of stakeholders. Interviews were conducted to help my decision-making process and generated
empathic insights with relevant parties. The participants were selected as either would-be
stakeholders or advisors with experience in each market segment. Since the interviews were to
be conducted as a fact-finding inquiry, another layer was added that would allow insights into
empathy concerning how communications could be tailored to speak into the listening of the
potential stakeholders.

Interviews with Pertinent Stakeholders

City Manager’s office of Dayton, Ohio

During this interview, a representative responded favorably to the use of new tools,
especially innovation tools, in the civic engagement process. She focused her suggestions on
establishing effective pathways that word-of-mouth connections could be made. Consultants in
their office were almost always selected via personal experiences and relationships. Upon
hearing that one intention of this project is to speak at a conference, the representative interjected
“That’s your best option to get the word out. Without an official seeing what you can do, they would never just hire you to do an engagement even if you’re process was the best in the world.”

City Manager’s office, Kettering, Ohio

From this interview, I appreciate that a best-use of this type of study is openly to share the findings, tools, and ideology with city planners who are presently using other techniques for civic engagement. Since this office has a comparatively large team including two city planners, the need for outside services in this area is rare. Insights from this interview suggest to improve the abilities of planners rather than only offer the services of a facilitator. There was an optimistic attitude about using group innovation methods in the civic sector, especially in smaller cities that do not have planners on staff. Local government was described as being creativity-averse, therefore they recommend only to refer to this type of work as “innovative” or “social innovation”. The interviewee’s preference is that the working title for this work be: “New tools for new types of civic-engagement”.

A Well Established Professor of Creativity

After a thorough explanation of the pedagogy and underpinnings that have led to the creation of this project, the interviewee intentionally challenged the direction of this project. “So what - who cares?” was a generous reaction that forced a rethinking of how I had positioned the process. His immediate caution was to eliminate some of the terms that were intended to make this program business-ready. His comments meant a challenge that would stretch me to improve the quality of this work by changing the paradigm to looking at it through the lens of an indifferent viewer. What the professor imagined is that the case for this body of work be presented as an antidote for some missing component in the way we presently conduct our inquiries.
Another comment forced a reconsideration of the short and long range needs of communities. “Millennials don’t care to know their neighbors. They are temporary in a living community so maybe this is better suited for businesses. If you can make it look like companies will profit from this program, you’ll have something big.” (personal communication, February 17, 2015).

The professor also contributed to the conversation about including the very heart and soul of healing and helping rather than attempting to be something that this creative consultant can never be. He advises that I am the product here, so just being myself is key. A comment echoed on many occasions by other friends.

**President, and CEO of a Civic Engagement Firm**

The subject firm is a civic entity specializing in civic engagement, conflict resolution, and public awareness. In his TEDx Jacksonville talk (Warner, 2013), the interviewee described a need for tools that break down expectations. Highlights from this dialogue (personal communication February 5, 2014) include that the metric of civic engagement or conflict resolution sessions is to validate that participant’s a. Learn something, b. Contribute something and c. Walk away feeling the meeting was better because they were there. The subject firm has formulated a method that has each person bring themselves to the meeting by not asking them to change their beliefs even if they hold prejudice toward others. On the topic of creativity or innovation, they suggest that this process not be talked about as such because participants “would feel like they have to hug each other” during the session. Rather they suggest to focus on the low-risk and high results.
Past President of the International City Managers Association

As an experienced consultant in the civic sector, the interviewee suggested that I articulate the positioning with a more palpable or easily recognized title. Possibly using “Generating other outcomes in interactions with residents” as a phrase that local officials might accept. Her experience in developing relationships with officials is that the use of outside consulting services is a direct result of relationship based use. In such, she suggested that disclosing this in full at conferences would be a well-formed entry point. While providing contact information for several people in the conference arena, she recommended I consider a webinar, articles, or a combination of an article to precede the webinar. She has seen that webinars outperform conference attendances in both numbers of people reached and the effectiveness of delivery.

As a result of this decision-making process, two separate framework documents will be produced: The first is intended to use the meweus thinking process to strengthen working communities while improving the innovation culture within for-profit organizations. The second will focus on civic leaders and employ the principles to strengthen living communities while solving public problems, envisioning community futures, or discovering a deeper level of understanding of the residents in living communities.

Speaking the Language

Over coffee with Peter Block, an expert in the field of civic engagement, Peter suggested that I speak all communications with the language intended instead of shrouding the intentions of this program in business jargon or buzzwords. “Just say it. If you mean compassion, then say compassion. Don’t use “love” because that’s overused, but say what you’re saying to me. The
people you want to work with will understand and the ones you don’t (want to work with) will never bother to read your materials.” (P. Block, personal communication, February 3, 2015). As a result of this conversation, a few of the words have been altered to reflect Peter’s suggestion.

The language of my communications must be more concise, lower level, and results oriented to engage early adopters in the for-profit sector. In a spontaneous interview with the Vice President of Human Resources at a large international corporation, I was advised to change a few terms. The term “case studies” could become “examples”, “community” be “building effective relationships at work and in your neighborhood”, and “public engagement” become “community building process”. He also course corrected the presentation of this process by asserting that nobody will read a hundred-page document. He advised that I might make it a few succinct pages that can be integrated with proposals. From this commentary, two smaller documents have been created, and the master framework document is being abridged.

One of the objectives of this immersive exercise was set forth as learning the particular vernacular of the civic arena. The interviews above have informed the dialect used in all communications produced within to the degree of projecting expertise in the field.

**Literature Reviewed**

In addition to the prior mentioned materials and interviews, other materials were consulted or influential in the formation of this project. Although these materials had less direct impact, they may be beneficial to others who undertake similar programming challenges:

Kretzmann, J. & McKnight, J. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets*. Available at: http://www.abcdinstitute.org/publications/basicmanual/


SECTION THREE: PROCESS PLAN

Outcomes and Product Deliverables

Improve the Process.

Improvements come as a result of reviewing group creativity sessions and synthesizing the pertinent literature. Each session will be written as a short case study to demonstrate the use of each of three specific applications and showcase past successes. These short case studies are intended to accompany information about how this process works. The improvement deliverable will be communicated in the form of a process guideline booklet, and submitted as an addendum to the final document.

Problem Solving Session(s)

At least one problem solving session will be completed to demonstrate the effectiveness of the creativity inspired community process. There are several upcoming opportunities for implementing, testing, and altering this process, most of which will occur during May and June following the final submission of this paper.

During the terms of this project, I will create an opportunity to do an idealized test and reflect on the sessions that were run prior. In this session, I will test a shorter timeframe to reflect the prior feedback of how four hours is just too long. All six prior sessions occurred within a few months of this project. Each session employed tools associated with this project, therefore I feel this is a valid analysis for the purpose of improving my skills and process.

Short-Form Communication

A brief brochure to communicate with potential customers and workshop attendees. This handout will serve to enhance my core competency for years to come. I will conduct at least one interview with a potential client to discern how to communicate this core competency.
Mastermind Group

I will assemble a team of advisors or mastermind group that supports my project through experience with the public-sector work and large-scope projects. The group will meet monthly to support each other in creating our futures collaboratively. The group will survive the term of this project.

Experiential Tools for Workshops and Sessions

To further embody the principles of this process, I will design workshop exercises and refinements to existing tools. More specifically, tools that directly pertain to each step of the transformational programming will be developed and communicated in the framework document.

Presentation of the Framework and Principles

Discoveries made throughout this exploration will be used in the creation of a co-presented workshop or webinar. This presentation is intended to put the thinking behind this project into a public domain where others may progress implications of this body of work.

Personal Learning Goals for the Project and Process

- To develop expertise in public-sector creativity.
- Clarification of a philosophy regarding the transformational nature of creative experience.
- Enrich my ability to design exercises and tools.
- Learn to support my personal mission of improving lives through creativity.

Developing Expertise in Public-Sector Creativity

Through the facilitation and articulation of this process, one aim of this project is to grow my abilities in this field. Presenting the success story to civic leaders will establish my capabilities among the contingency that I wish to address.
Clarification of a Philosophy Regarding transformation and Creativity

This description will form as a result of experimenting and refining a process that holds the power to solve several issues at once. Absorbing information and experience with other processes will contribute to demonstrating the power of group creativity as a means to develop compassionate communities.

Elevating My Ability to Design Exercises and Tools

Gain expertise in exercise design through prototyping, testing, and developing activities or a more thorough exploration of other available workshop toolkits.

Improving Lives through Creativity

There is so much to learn about group dynamics and the psychology behind co-creation of community that this project is merely a launch pad. This project term will begin a journey of learning that may take a lifetime to develop. This project is set forth as a contribution to the global momentum toward acceptance for all people and learning how to contribute.

Project Timeline

Project Timeline: Deliverables and Estimates

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### Specific Evaluation of Results

- Participants satisfied that they had contributed toward a solution?
• Participants delivering (wish cards) with responses that reflect we-thinking.

• Is the client satisfied that they have contributed to the formation of the community?

• A positive response to the proposed process by potential customers.

• Peer approval will be solicited from the mastermind group as a part of our meetings.

Self-assessment criteria:

• Do the deliverables demonstrate a deep understanding of the materials learned over the course of study as part of a Master of Science in Creativity program at Buffalo?

• Do the deliverables validate the use of creativity practices as a life enhancing strategy?

• A POINt worksheet will be completed near the end of this project term to evaluate the project.
SECTION FOUR: OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

Overview of Outcomes

There are four primary intentions of this project: 1.) Design a methodology and process that will enhance community relationships while generating ideas; 2.) Gain proficiency in the use of this process; 3.) Gain expertise in the public sector; and 4.) Prepare myself with a new professional core competency. In addressing each of these facets, the project deliverables were designed such that the outcomes could be immediately put to use. Ultimately the outcomes were designed in the spirit of sharing with others, yet the learning and thinking behind this project were still the most significant aspect to me. To market this work, I was compelled to reconsider how to position the programming in a confusing and flooded marketplace. At the onset of the project, I had anticipated being able to communicate the outcome potential simply, thereby the program would likely be accepted in the market. As I progressed, I found that this was not realistic. I made a significant revision, and redirected my efforts toward teaching how creative thinking tools can be used to support building community among people. Teaching this program to those who may be my clients in such a way that they may use this theory and associated tools in their own way took precedence. Also of note, I found that the vernacular, or language differences of those people I wished to communicate with was vastly different than my own. The result of these mid-project findings allowed for the redirection toward creating communicable artifacts and teachings that will help people with a ripple effect more than helping myself. In such, I have embodied the me-we-us program through creatively solving the problems associated with the project along the way. Initially, I was thinking of my professional development. At the conclusion of this project, I have foremost, served the needs of others while developing expertise.
Outcome 1: A New Framework

Initially the notion for a framework was to use design thinking tools, creative problem solving tools, and positive inquiry mindset in a public sector environment. This would allow people to solve problems while enjoying the other benefits of group creativity as listed in section one of this paper. As the project progressed into building case studies, the sequencing of tools became the most notable contributor toward the successful community building aspect or outcome. Full group brainstorming was to be placed in the introduction so as to bring differing opinions to the surface even before delivering critical data. Most importantly, a framework would need to be articulated rationally and include steps that would logically connect creative thinking with generating enhancements in relationship building and group development. Figure 2 describes how a five-step process looks in diagrammatical form. These five steps are a synthesis of both design thinking and creative problem solving methods yet specifically includes ways the facilitator can bring community development theories to the session design.
Figure 2. A five stage framework including relationship building methods.

The five stages are derived from the methodology shown in Figure 3, which fully describes all steps that bring participants to an “us-thinking” mindset while using creative thinking techniques to solve a problem. During the interview process, these steps were discussed, and interviewees felt the complexity was overthought and unnecessary. A (full size) simplified version is included in a short-form framework document (Appendix A).
Figure 4 shows how the process is described verbally. The verbal definition is intended to connect the graphic depiction to the process for those people who lost interest in the visual representation. There are many people who do not care to hear the details. They want to hear what they will be doing as opposed to the theories that underlie the exercises. Primarily these people want to hear the outcomes first, and then what the events will look like.
Outcome 2: A Framework Process Guideline Booklet

An instructional and informational document is a prerequisite for sharing. This report was built to represent the academic underpinnings as a pedagogy and to describe how an experienced facilitator can facilitate the process. As the descriptions expanded, this work became unnecessarily long. A substantial edit left 35 pages including a background, a case for using creativity, definitions, and examples of when to use the process. The complete booklet can be seen in Appendix A. Highlights from the document are exemplary of how this outcome was produced, and are included in the following descriptive figures:
Figure 5. A menu of tools that allows selection of the most appropriate exercises to complete each stage of the process and ensure both innovative ideas and a collaborative community emerge. Tools can be selected based on the specific needs of any given challenge. Please refer to Appendix C for legible copies.

Figure 6. The me-we-us process explained.
Figure 7. How to shift attitudes in this method.

Figure 8. An explanation of the emotional state of participants as they enter civic-enquiry sessions and as they continue through the process. This diagram describes how creative thinking provides a transformative experience that causes a transition from me-thinking to us-thinking orientation. The development of this diagram is detailed later in this paper under the heading of Key Learnings.
Figure 9. A description of how this strategy allows deeper insights into the overlap between local government leaders (policy), residents, and the lifestyle that residents live.

Figure 10. When to use this process. Without this description, there are difficulties in communicating with civic leaders. Giving clarity around when to use this, along with examples of the outcomes was well received by interviewees.
The following section of the framework guideline booklet contains the tools. Each tool is either verbally or diagrammatically communicated such that others may use them. These pages are designed to be used as handouts for workshop or conference participants.

Figure 11. How a dialog tree is used to narrow the project scope and help form challenge statements. Using this tool builds empathy for other participants needs prior to ideating.
Figure 12. A printable 5W+H template that supports divergent thinking.

Figure 13. Assisters and resisters printable worksheet.
Outcome 3: Positioning this Process in a Target-Market

During the development of this program, there was an opportunity to direct the outcome toward a specific target market. In choosing a core competency for my practice, I considered the scale and reach of this programming in several possible markets. The following outline helped me to weigh the pros and cons of each market and compare the potential reward against the efforts extended. This exercise isolates each potential market and describes what must be accomplished to direct the efforts in that route:

A. Corporate
   a. Cultural shift through group creativity process and meweus. Give a specific vernacular for creativity to continue the dialogue. Create tools such as “play with your food” to support ongoing cultural improvements. This may result in
increased cross pollination of ideas through more interactions among employees.

b. Amplifying the teambuilding properties through exercises.

c. Include the additional benefits from the whitepaper written in Fall 2014.

d. Include the “Emotional state and will to create” model from Fall 2014.

e. Exercise for improving climate. Climate differs from culture in that a healthy climate for creativity will provide the emotional freedom to bring forth ideas. The exercise will involve senior leadership to insure change can happen.

f. Include Problem solving tools.

g. Include empathy tools from Design Thinking.

B. Civic-sector work

a. Improve framework.

b. Must find opportunities to build case studies.

c. Include one method of conflict resolution such as race relations.

d. Create a new form of consensus building tool using group-creativity.

C. Education

a. Create empathy for individual student needs.

b. Culture and climate in the classroom.

   i. Ekvall for the classroom exercise.

   ii. Empathy tools customized.

   iii. Heuristic challenges and how-to format for teachers.

   iv. Experiential models demonstrated and taught.

c. CPS / design thinking training exercises
For each of these core competencies, there must be a separate framework document, case studies, and a marketing tool such as a brochure or web page. With marketing as a commonality among each possible market sector, the following decisions were made:

- Corporate. Since corporate work is the most readily available, the decision to include a business model was an important step for the sustainability of my business. Building a corporate workshop will require a significant time investment, yet the return will provide me with the workflow that I need to pursue my efforts in other fields of interest.

- Civic work. Through the interview process, I discovered that civic-sector work is available yet presents a number of marketing challenges. The rewards of civic work are most gratifying as the impact is immeasurable. For this reason, civic work was selected as a primary focus of this body of work. This project was inspired by and intended to maximize the potential of my impact. Thereby I made a decision to proceed with an acknowledgment of the hardships that I will encounter in the marketing process.

- Education. An education focus appears to lack sustainability because a return on investment is challenging to demonstrate with only a few case studies. From discussing this possibility with others, the lack of consistent funding appears to pose financial hardship on this model. Should opportunities arise, an education focus will be considered.

**Outcome 4: A Short-form Version of the Framework Document**

When the draft framework document was complete, it was sent to a few people for peer-review and comments. The majority of responses were that the text was overly academic, too
long and that people would not read it for those reasons. A need for a short-form document arose to serve those that might like to learn about this work. An abridged and synthesized report has been designed in such a way that it may be included (in part) with proposals or given to any interested parties. The short document contains three case studies: One city, an alliance operating under the auspices of a city, and one non-profit organization. The first version of this document is for public-sector and non-profit entities. From this, a version was edited for corporate entities including wording changes and the use of for-profit case studies. Appendix A shows a full copy of the civic-oriented short-form document.

Outcome 5: Tools

Another intention of this project is to gain experience in the design of workshop exercises and tools that deliver on the learning objectives while differentiating my work from others. During the course of this project, several such tools formed:

- Wish cards or “No! I don’t agree cards” are individual (one person) ideation tools. These tools invite each person to express themselves anonymously while providing the deep level of insights needed by clients. Index cards are distributed, and participants are invited to complete the prompt: “After all I have heard today, my wish for (the project) is that ______.” In some instances we may use a dissent oriented version with the prompt “No, I don’t agree with ______”. On the back of these cards, they are to complete the prompt “So we might consider______.” The backside prompt involves an us-thinking orientation that sends participants out of the room satisfied that they have contributed. Participants voice the opinions they might not ordinarily bring to the group as these cards are privately written and anonymous.
This exercise is the last in the proposed sequence to allow the participant to express their present thinking state. During sessions, I have seen the people who are most interested in carrying the initiative forward bring their cards to myself or the project leader. Those people are asked if they would like to contribute. After the session the cards are examined to tally the number of times “I”, “We”, or “us” are used in their replies.

For the “Wish cards” variation, see Figure 15:

![Image](image_url)

Figure 15. Wish cards exercise.

- The “Indy-walk” (see Figure 16) is an empathy exercise that allows individuals to gain compassion and understanding prior to small-group scenario building. Small groups are asked to take a walk (through the project if possible) while diverging and converging their ideas. When they return, the small groups give presentations to the larger group. The walking portion of this exercise is based on a Stanford study by
Marily Opezzo and Daniel Schwartz (2014) that concludes “Walking opens up the free flow of ideas, and it is a simple and robust solution to the goals of increasing creativity and increasing physical activity.” (p. 1142).

Figure 16. The Indy-walk.
New shark-tank rules for leadership teams (see Figure 17). The original shark tank exercise (See Appendix C under tools section) is a game played by small groups. In this game, groups are asked to present a comprehensive solution in the form of a tour guide script, sales pitch, or unique presentation. The balance of participants are asked to challenge the solution at every detail. Ideas are recorded, along with the challenges because the challenges typically come in the form of ideas that build on the ideas that were presented. This new variation adds a complex dimension to a small-group scenario building exercise. In this variation, organizational concerns are broken into individual units prior to ideation. The result is to add another overlay (organizational development) to existing layers of creativity and community building.
- Use of empathy map as roleplaying tool to deliver more community building than traditional empathy mapping.

*Figure 18. Empathy mapping.*
Table-writing for personal accountability (Figure 19) is a process by which participants can support their unique personal goals and vision while working toward the goals and vision of the large group.

- Closing remarks (Figure 20) This dialog outline serves as a reminder to use particular language and conversational structure in support of building a cohesive action-oriented team.
Figure 20. Closing remarks plan.

- Designed dialog tree that inspires group participation invites personal opinions into the group and demonstrates how a group can reach consensus as a way of serving everyone. (Figure 11).

- Consensus tool for conflict resolution oriented challenges:
  
  o Two sheets of facts (partisan oriented) are presented. These data is fact-checked and relevant.

  o Dialog to enter: No whining. Let’s be grown up and actually to do something about this issue instead of complain. What we will do today is look for resolution, not listen to each other bitch. Here are the facts. These have been checked for accuracy, and I ask that you *listen* to them without thinking of what you will say about them, blocking them out if you don’t like them, or judging them. They are simply facts. *Read them aloud*. These are empathy building, and empathy isn’t about touchy-feely, in this case, it is simply a way
to understand the whole problem better as opposed to understanding a unilateral viewpoint.

- In some cases, it may be beneficial to brainstorm how each stakeholder sees the problem. For example, identify two or three primary stakeholders and point out how they will view the problem. For example, if the problem is deer population, you may wish to see how an amateur photographer views the issue versus how a gardener sees it, or how a young driver views this issue. Choose examples from the ends of the spectrum of opinions.

- Ideate for both sides. Create small groups and ask them to each stand by a board where they will use Post-it’s to generate as many ideas as possible about the problem. Typical brainstorming rules apply.

- Invite the teams to converge from both sides and carry the most important ideas back to their tables

- Invite the teams to use all of those ideas to formulate a solution that works for everyone. Each group gives a presentation of their vision to the room.

- Presentations and debrief.

**Outcome 6: Mastermind Group**

The peer group includes one professor of creativity, a senior officer of a college (in the field of creativity), a popular creativity author, a creativity practitioner who is an ICSC alum, and myself. This group is outstanding. We meet monthly, and will continue. We are each given a block of time to present whatever we want to talk about. The group then takes turns talking about the issue and offering support, connections, research, or whatever is needed.
Outcome 7: Case Studies and Success Stories with Quotes from Clients

The case studies (Figure 21) are easy to read colorful pages. A one-page communication provides the readers with only what they need to know, and pictures to explain the process and outcomes. In most cases, a quote from the client was included to show how the program yielded both ideas and community growth.

Figure 21. Example of a case study.

Outcome 8: Public Sector Presentation

This outcome is a workshop to share this work with local government officials, planners, and public sector consultants. Lynn Tetley, City Manager of Wyoming, Ohio collaborated on the development of this presentation. Ms. Tetley has been the client throughout the process, and has a deep understanding of what creative thinking techniques have to offer her fellow City Managers.

I reached out to several people in different local government organizations before finding the President/COO of the Alliance for Innovation. The Alliance is the recognized leader in local government innovation and serves 350 local governments with approximately 10,000 staff
members. Surprisingly, she responded and had her assistant set up a meeting for us. We were invited to present this work to her leadership team via GoToMeeting, and were joined by two other senior leaders in the industry. They loved the presentation with only a few small changes. We were asked to provide a few more case studies, and told that we will have an opportunity to make a presentation at an upcoming venue. There are three possible places to show this work. The most likely (and best possible) one is a small conference called “Big Ideas” in October (Fort Lauderdale). Historically this conference is where city managers discuss the most innovative practices, so this is both daunting and flattering. If not there, we will either give a webinar to the members or present at the largest conference, the International City Manager’s Association conference in September, 2015 (Seattle, Washington). The decision will take a few months, so we have time to run at least three more workshops in Wyoming, Ohio.

See Appendix B. for a full copy of this presentation.
SECTION FIVE: KEY LEARNINGS

The retrospective view of key learnings led me to a surprising discovery: I learned as much about people, personalities, and interactions as I did about the processes that I studied so intensely. I learned as much context as content when content was the initial goal. Rather than segue into the psychology behind my learned insights, I choose only to tell my story and discuss only the content as it pertains to the project scope. The balance of my newfound knowledge will be applied in other ways, and to all areas of my personal and professional life.

Outside of the learnings from pertinent literature, the learnings that matter most to my development are those that have occurred as insights into my expertise. This experiential learning has been the result of talking to people about this project, sharing parts of the project, and openness to hearing the criticism required to make improvements. Prototyping, testing acceptance, and iterative change has led to both results and education. As the knowledge grew, I recognized a need within myself to find some outlet. I am recording these perspectives as written musings that I will compile into some form of written communication. For the purpose of sharing within the context of this reporting structure, the following key learnings are discussed under headings that pertain to important aspects of this project.

Key Learnings Regarding Me-We-Us

In an effort to develop community, there are a number of challenges to overcome during sessions. One such challenge is that people have a natural tendency to jump to immediate diagnoses, and solutions. Some people are predisposed to convergence because they prefer the comforts of finality or closure. To be effective in allowing others to contribute, the group must stay open to change throughout the session. Each group was advised that the expected outcome
was ideas, not solutions. The comment “ideas, not solutions” was reiterated at several points throughout.

In their design thinking book, *Solving problems with design thinking* (2013), Jean Liedtka, and Andrew King discuss reconfirming ideating over solution-forming as “Get comfortable with emptiness. Leave space for others to contribute.” (n.p.). Since we have been conditioned to reach conclusions in the fastest and most efficient way, we lose some ability to naturally allow our ideas to grow, especially as a result of others. The challenge for a team-building and creativity facilitator is to mind the openness of any group and remind the participants to stay open to this ambiguity while ideas are contributed. For the purposes of this project, an occasional reminder that these are all ideas; not solutions has proven somewhat successful. Moving forward, a reminder of the emptiness or leaving space may be integrated into the room graphics or banners.

One outcome of the Meweus thinking process is that solutions begin to resemble consensus where segregation once stood. Consensus is not a compromise, but a collective vision that results from so many contributing factions having their opinions present. The use of group creativity tools for visioning is essential and differentiates this program structure from other methods. When we are in a session, and things look even remotely like the consensus is forming, that is the moment where the facilitator must speak out the community vision and look for smiles forming on faces. If there are smiles, a creative future is born, and we can begin to move toward ideas for implementation.

Questions can lead or direct our thoughts in many ways. Positive use of such ability to lead participants includes the ability of the facilitator to support people in transitioning from me-thinking to us-thinking by her choice of words in questioning. Challenge questions establish a
mindset or paradigm and elicit attitudinal changes. For example: What might be all the ways to___? How Might I___? The precise and calculated use of these statement starters has an impact on participants thinking. By placing “I” in the opening round of ideation, contributors are invited to share their opinions from a personal point of view. When we put so many differing opinions in the room, people are encouraged to consider the needs of others; thereby creating empathy from the earliest possible exercise. The use of “I” challenges begins the transformation process. The use of “How to___?” in the second round moves participants toward a more global mindset. The use of “How might WE___?” in the second and third ideation exercise brings individuals to a universally serving ideation mindset. The ideas that come as a result of this phrasing will ultimately be more consensus-oriented.

From facilitating several sessions, I have learned many things including the difference between consensus and compromise. Consensus is more of a realization that others exist like empathy and generates the resolve to do something that supports the whole group. People feel pride in helping others, and that also contributes to a heightened willpower. That said, we all strive to help others at heart, and this type of session becomes an opportunity for personal growth through problem solving.

Choosing Participants and Managing Rumors

“There are three types of people in this world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen and those who wonder what happened.” - Mary Kay Ash

An interesting learning from experience is how rumors hold the potential to direct community contentment. In any community oriented session (corporate or civic) the meeting will produce stories among those who do not attend. As these rumors can bend public opinion, we then have the opportunity to use this for the betterment of community or life experience. I
suggest cherry-picking popular or active members of the community to be effective in producing positive stories that will spread. The proposed process culminates with a positive dialog to ensure the participants leave with a good story to tell.

In designing a process we have the ability to generate the type of thinking that serves us best, and can (in part) have participants actively become the type of people who make things happen. To accomplish this transition, we must offer them a personal and meaningful participation. Making personal meaning will have “what matters most to the individual” mirror the meaningful vision of the group. The closing remarks (see Figure 20) and the final ideation exercise (see Figure 15) (Wish-Cards) were both structured to support applying personal meaning to the betterment of the group vision. In facilitating the most recent session, wish-card instructions included the prompt: “What I might say about this project to my neighbors to gain their support of our vision?” This prompt was intentionally designed to spread positive rumors that will in-turn add to resident satisfaction.

**Transitions and Transformation**

“So far a thought, and you reap an act; Sow a habit, and you reap a character; Sow a character, and you reap a destiny.”

- Charles Reade

While my personal philosophy surrounding creativity and transformation has been developing, I have been slowly collecting evidence to support my thoughts. Though the majority of this evidence is supported by scholarly resources, personal experiences provide the background and case for pursuing this line of thought.

I took a phone call from a friend. She was in the throes of parental despair. Her child was rebelling against homework and lesson. This issue posed a sizeable upset in the parent-child
relationship because my friend was in the position of having to set the rules and enforce them. She was clearly suffering from the dilemma and the emotional stress this situation causes. She gave a background and the painful moans subsided. I simply asked what her options were. She diverged for a few minutes until she saw a valid and executable option. At that moment, her suffering from the past experiences turned to elation as she saw how things might look in the future. The vision was compelling enough that she realigned her thinking toward a detailed list of what she must do over the coming few days. She thought of things she would say, actions she could take, rewards and kudos she could offer. In looking back in time, we see only upset and recurring issues. In creatively envisioning the future we see only good things and what we see ourselves doing to make the vision a reality. This moment is the core of transformation, and creative thinking is the direct route.

The same applies in group creativity.


Once a set of alternatives has been developed, the team should not argue about the merits of each solution. To do so encourages a conflict based on positions. Instead, the team should develop ways of evaluating the benefits of the alternatives. The focus should be on analyzing the alternatives to aid selection, rather than on the politics of getting an individual position adopted. This often leads to a final solution containing elements from multiple alternatives. (p. 211)

The most recent test run of this community building process experimented with what we could accomplish over a two hour window. Previously, volunteer participants balked at the four hour timeframe designed for earlier sessions. One important aspect of success is to provide a
real and lasting transformation of participants; an aspect that I examined within this two hour test.

At some levels, transformation may construe a modest change of mind, and at other extremes this may be a permanent change in lifelong beliefs. Typically this involves a commitment to a newly formed community and implementation of the outcome. In programming this short session, several refinements were made including the implementation of the “Indy-walk” tool (see Figure 16). The alterations are made in the spirit of maximizing community building aspects while minimizing time investment. One of many learnings from this short session is that: As the timeframe shrinks, the facilitator must increase the quantity of motivational speaking and literally tell participants they are making this transition. At present, I suggest three hours as the minimum timeframe, yet there is value in the inclusion of a motivational speaking component in all sessions.

**Design and Learnings from a Two Hour Test Session**

![Figure 22. Partial results of two hour session.](image-url)
As previously discussed, a two hour window was given for this test session. The design was within the guidelines as seen in Appendix C, yet compressed to remove any time consuming conversations. The design can be seen through the results as chronologically listed below.

1. Abridged introductory conversations: See left side of (Figure 22).

2. Mind-mapping exercise with prompts and intentional dialog (see the center of Figure 22). This exercise allowed participants to bring out their preexisting opinions. In hearing the opinions of others, compassion toward a consensus feeling begins to form. Opinions were later dissected to garner insights about public opinion.

3. Share statistics with the group. These data were intentionally withheld until after round one of ideation for the purpose of generating a compassionate mindset first. Had this vital data been given earlier, the statistics might have been interpreted as “what’s wrong” instead of “what might we do to help these people.” Withholding key data is of particular interest to this program sequencing. This session had been designed to disconfirm both the theory of community building and establishing connections within a two hour timeframe. Withholding the data was verified as a primary factor of how affinity for such projects can be formed in a short timeframe, thereby confirming prior notions of how relationship building may be accelerated.

In this particular case, the statistics included occupational data which resulted in a connection to the next stage of ideation. The group was intrigued by a statistic regarding the unusually high number of foodservice people among residents. One of the most impressive ideas to come of this session was to farm an existing brownfield and create a community specific annex for a local college that teaches culinary arts. In this building, people could be trained in organic agriculture, food service, and cooking. The training
facility could be a 501c3 and serve the locals, which statistically have a staggering rate of foodservice professionals among them.

What matters most in this type of session is the collaborative enthusiasm toward an us-thinking idea. If the group gains an overwhelming support for an idea, the likelihood that they will continually contribute toward the outcome grows. In this example, the one idea of farming a brownfield became a north star. Over the week following this session, I recognized the ability to form a task force that would work toward actualizing this idea.

5. Scenarios based on each team having been assigned a cluster to work with (See Figures 23-25 for outcomes of small group ideation). Each team was given 5 minutes to present their vision to the group.

*Figure 23, Scenario outcome group A*
Figure 24, Scenario outcome group B

Figure 25, Scenario outcome group C
6. Distribute the wish cards with a small thank you gift. Instructions were to fill out the card as a wish, beginning with “After all I have heard today, my wish for Lockland is to___.” Results were tabulated to decipher the level of we-thinking or us-thinking that remained in the room. This exercise will be repeated to build quantitative data that can be used for further development and to share. To date, there are seven us-thinking responses, three neutral responses, and two me-thinking responses.

**A Diagrammatical Explanation of how Creative Process Causes Transformation**

The transformative nature of group creativity underlies the soul of this project. While transformation was a primary choice of study for me, it was also the aspect of creativity that I learned most about from personal experience. Experiential learnings culminated in a diagrammatical model that is intended to help explain both why creativity is an ideal process, and how transformations occur during sessions. Noting the emotional state of participants as they enter and leave a gathering speaks to civic leaders as they are very aware of who comes to engagement sessions and in what mood. Figure 26 is the first draft of a model. In this model, the left-most circles depict the emotional state of participants as they enter a session. Typically people attend civic engagement sessions because they are obligated to be there (apathetic), are curious about how a city works (happy), or are angry about some particular issue (angry). Following the model from left to right discloses how contributing ideas and being a part of the creation of a future causes a transformation in people; all of whom end up happy at the end of a session.
The second iteration, seen in Figure 27, adds that the will of participants is responsible for a motivated community to take a possibility and make it a reality. Without willpower and the resolve to continue, ideas and solutions have no future. This map shows how creative process and group-creativity process can build a willpower that survives the duration of a single meeting. After discussing Figure 27, the mastermind team felt that the use of “happy” as an outcome was unbecoming and requested a redesign.
Learnings from this exploration and peer discussions (inside the mastermind group) led to a third iteration (Figure 28). This model reflects how the chronology or sequencing of the process is used to yield the results we desire: Strengthened communities, good ideas, a will to proceed, and transition of attitude for all participants. The emotional state of participants is noted for comments that they may be thinking or saying. The diagram (Figure 28) includes ideation as a box titled “why continue.” During ideation, one essential element of transitioning from me-thinking to us-thinking is a group brainstorm with all participants contributing. When ideas are introduced to the room, others will inevitably build on these ideas. If an apathetic participant feels that her idea has merit, her attitude is likely to shift toward intrigue or interests. If an annoyed or angry person introduces an idea to the room, and sees that idea being accepted by others it is likely that person’s annoyance will wane. The group acceptance draws angry people toward interest in a possible outcome. A reminder for facilitating this type of session is to recognize those participants at either extreme of emotional state, and make special appropriations
that will bring their ideas into the open. Upon convergence, all ideas are considered thereby providing personal meaning to every participant. In other civic engagement and cultural development programs, some ideas are left unconsidered. This diagram is intended to disclose a primary feature of the using group creativity practices for the purpose of building a community.

Figure 28. Final transformational sequence model.

**People Fear Change**

Ultimately the outcome of civic or social sector innovation practice is change. I have witnessed countless residents confronting the notion of changing their trusted and beloved living environment. From these experiences, I can say without hesitation that the thought of change creates fear to a noticeable extent. A semi-scripted component has been developed and added to the introduction of these sessions to manage fear. In the talk, we discuss how change is necessary and is all done in the spirit of maintaining excellence. Without change, we become irrelevant to those who might join our community in the future. Over time, we fail without change. The discussion provides examples so participants can see the need for continuous improvements. In his 1954 article, Carl Rogers set forth conditions that foster the ability to
generate the type of creative envisioning that this process relies on. The conditions are:

Internally we must have an openness to experience, an internal locus of evaluation, and the ability to toy with elements and concepts. Externally, we must have psychological safety and freedom to elicit our creative tendencies (Rogers, 1954). One challenge that must be anticipated is to create this psychological freedom and safety within a short timeframe and with participants that are not acquainted. To reach this optimal state we must take precautionary measures. These conditions have been integrated through the literal dialogue and the tools that this process relies on:

- **Openness to experience**: written into the script as an invitation to be open to the group’s ideas without concern for authority, status, gender, etc. We are all equalized by the creative process.

- **Internal locus of evaluation**: Leaving convergence until called for and saying any and all thoughts that come to mind with reckless abandon.

- **The ability to toy with elements and concepts**: Discussed as the difference between ideas and solutions. In these sessions, we are called on to generate ideas. Leadership will form solutions from these ideas and the insights that compelled the group to disclose their thoughts.

- **Psychological safety**: Inviting participants to disregard judgment. The moderator giving off-the-wall suggestions to build an understanding of how such inane ideas can generate new thinking. In one example, I suggested that an underutilized plot could be used for the purpose of storing resident’s hot air balloons. Though the idea seemed ridiculous, that idea triggered a new conversation about how the community could use a cultural icon that defines them, and how this plot might support it.
Psychological freedom: In all ideational exercises, freedom is constructed on a foundation of a non-judgmental environment. Freedom is emphasized at the onset of each exercise, and the moderator must maintain vigilance toward enforcing the no-judgment atmosphere.

The tools are professional, yet contain an element of joy. In his book *Creative Intelligence* (2013), Bruce Nussbaum supports the emotional freedom and joy connection:

> When people are playing, they take risks they would not ordinarily take. They experience failure not as a crushing blow but as an idea they tried that didn’t work. Play transforms problems into challenges, serious into fun, one right answer into many possible outcomes. (P. 125)

In most cases, we can generate the environment by example in how the moderator is presenting the exercise. If the moderator is habitually requesting more radical ideas and demonstrating joy, then the atmosphere of psychological freedom emerges.

**Making a Case for Creativity**

As I reviewed the needs of the business community I began to note that the approach I was using to make a case for the use of creative process was really more validation of my own thoughts. My words were not speaking to the specific needs of the intended audience. There was evidence of a gap that required attention, and I set to reconcile that difference through learning about the audience. The first written case (see Figures 29 and 30) was no more than an academic defense for brainstorming. While conducting interviews, a need for a different discussion emerged. Interviewees had no direct relationship to creativity, thereby suggesting an insight into what they needed to hear. In fact, some considered creativity and social innovation to be a significant risk to their positions. These people understand that residents fear change and
government typically responds by avoiding change altogether. What local officials need to hear is simply that the process yields comfort with change, ideas, and a heightened level of resident awareness/engagement. A need for the rigorous pedagogy and academic underpinnings still exists for myself and a few interested parties. Therefore an extensive version of this framework document was produced using an alternative case-building structure. In versions of the framework that will be shared directly with business or civic leaders, an abbreviated version will suffice.

Figure 29. First case for using the creative process in civic engagement.
Why creativity? (continued)

A legacy of contribution arises from listening to people, and implementing their ideas. Since not all ideas can be implemented, we choose the process which combines, culminates, and builds on everyone’s input. Processes which dismiss ideas as “bad ideas” alienate people with strong opinions which build partisanship, cliques, or opponent thinking (me- vs.-them). Our design allows, encourages, and captures even the strongest opinions. We then ask that participants view problems or opportunities from other lenses to see what suits the community as a whole.

Leadership models do not often provide this open forum or acceptance, yet the creative process does. The result is that participants become proactive members who are not afraid to speak their contribution because they trust they can affect the future. They can, and when the future is positive the members of a community become the leaders of the legacy.

Using both research and our experience, we have created a kinetic model that addresses the needs of most initiatives. The culmination of our experiences in both the creativity arena and community-building allows us a prescriptive approach with a kinetic model. We are uniquely able to modify programming to suit the attendees through planning and again, during sessions.

Our vision is to use the most effective tools possible to produce the best results for our specific clients.

To use group creativity processes to build stewardship, accountability, consensus, and team thinking.

For a deeper understanding, please request our white paper on the topic: Are the Other Benefits of Group Creativity

Figure 30. Case for using the creative process in civic engagement continued.

During the process of reconsideration, logic was redirected towards a solutions based approach. The logic is to offer a simplistic view of how creative process can support creating a more cohesive and committed group of people. The group will be working toward a collective vision, and do so in a shorter timespan than other methodologies. One approach to delivering this message was to build a case through comparison of all available methods. A contrast would clearly articulate that the creativity based approach can achieve more results in less time than other methods. This comparison would require data and research to back, and I do not have enough client work to conduct the study. A more positive, approach is to review the outcomes of
group creativity and demonstrate that the use of this method provides better value. I chose the latter for ease of translation and it reads as follows:

A 50+ year history of research supports the use of group creativity and innovation practices for the purpose of both strengthening working / living communities and generating innovative solutions. Researched and proven outcomes of these practices include higher levels of consensus, teambuilding, motivation, depth of understanding, engagement, and bringing in good ideas over the forthcoming weeks. Research demonstrates that participants are more satisfied with the outcome of group process than individual work (Kramer, Kuo, & Dailey, 1997; Sutton and Hargadon, 1996; Sawyer, 2007; Faure, 2004). For serving clients most efficiently, we are typically looking to produce creative ideas that bring groups together and build excitement. When interviewed, participants of group creativity processes say they had more ideas, better ideas, and are more excited about pursuing the ideas as a cohesive team (Faure, 2004). This mindset is precisely what is needed to generate communities filled with engaged, committed participants. In the majority of initiatives, there is a need for engagement that far exceeds the need for radically creative ideas. In fact, most groups often do not want a far-reaching radical idea (Mueller, Melwani, & Goncalo, 2010), they want ideas they can get behind and support. In short, we want growth, improvement, or the preservation of excellence. We want a shared vision that strengthens our community.

Creative Process Compared to Other Methodologies

One alternative program structure, the Deliberative Dialogue process (McCoy & Scully, 2002), utilizes small group interactions with analysis and reasoned argument (p. 124). In so doing, we effectively bring people to the point of emotional stress or potentially anger. The Deliberative Dialogue process leaves people with heightened emotions without a co-created
future. Without clarity of future vision we are left with a group of dissatisfied participants who
do not have a clear path toward resolution. Positive attitude toward change can only be caused
by a shared vision of a better tomorrow. In figure 28, a model to describe the proposed
(Meweus) sequence of process, we see that a heightened emotional state is an effective
motivational instrument to cause ideational thinking. Co-creating ideas acts as an inspirational
force to act on the new ideas. Simultaneous inspiration and motivation is not only possible, but
normal during co-creation. There are many appropriate opportunities where this may be
supportive to producing the desired results, yet the intentions of the meweus process are clearly
in favor of group commitment. Having one person trying to cause civic-change is possible, yet
less efficient than building a committed community working toward a consensus motivated ideal.
SECTION SIX: CONCLUSION

In Retrospect

This project has been a roller coaster of experiences for me. Initially, I set out to enrich a core competency for myself as a consultant and practitioner, and the project led me into areas that I may not have accessed otherwise. Respected professionals first told me this work is not ready for sharing and changed their opinions as my communication strategy developed. The body of work has passed the testing acceptance stage, and will be improved as I carry on. In addition to the project deliverables, a few doors opened along the way: The ability to author a document that can be shared, the ability and confidence to turn this effort into a workbook, speaking at a civic sector conference as an expert, accessing those that I previously considered untouchable. Most importantly I was able to experience a conversion of attitude firsthand. I was given the opportunity to witness people shift from me-thinking to we-thinking to us-thinking. With firsthand evidence, I feel I can add something of value to the lives of others. From here, I have only to continue collecting evidence to support my words.

As IDEO CEO Tim Brown (2008) wrote in a Harvard Business Review article: “The need for transformation is, if anything, greater now than ever before. No matter where we look, we see problems that can be solved only through innovation.” (n.p.). These problems seem to be expanding as our world citizens have fully transitioned to the technology age. There is a generation of newcomers who think very differently about how they relate to others as a community. The direct learnings from this project allow me to contribute to the growth of relationships and community at a scale that would not have been possible without doing this work.
Next steps

In an effort to progress this work, I will have the opportunity to do several things:

1. Introduce this work to more people. Based on the responses to the first presentation, we will have the opportunity to present at one of the largest local government conferences: the International City Managers Association conference in September of 2015. Prior to that, we may be invited to develop part of this work as it pertains to racial inequality and race relations to be delivered at a smaller yet more prestigious conference called “Big Ideas.” We will be notified by July. The conference presenters are by invitation only, and this would certainly be the most valuable way to disclose this work.

2. Do the work. Marketing myself and maintaining a client base in the public sector and private sector alike. A branding refresh is due, and marketing materials prepared to a new standard.

3. Create a longer term engagement strategy where this process is only one component of a larger social innovation strategy. I will include coaching services, program management services, and support for master planning teams. I will have the opportunity to explore this through an upcoming project opportunity, and will track the project as an effort to create this strategy as a competency.

4. I now have the opportunity to formally articulate and share a philosophy around creativity (as a verb) and transformation. Through this process, I have become acutely aware of the power that a co-created collaborative vision holds. I believe that creative thinking as a process, yields a clear vision of the future and can back my personal philosophy with scholarly materials I have come across through this
program. Future vision has the power to change attitudes, emotional attachments and heal some of the world’s self-righteous prejudice caused by differences in opinion. I believe this is my indication to step up into this important role.

5. Create a sustainable pathway to success. To keep myself in a growth mindset and learning mindset I will need to establish a pattern of rotation between actualizing the work, and developing iterations. This project exemplified self-initiated growth that I would like to maintain while working at the level that I feel comfortable with.

6. Create a corporate workshop to deliver this material to for-profit entities in a dynamic and engaging way. I have outlined a workshop that combines a past hobby of mine with the principles of this work. The working title is “Sacred Geometry: Creative thinking skills that wow in three dimensions.”

A Journey Ends and Begins Here

I had a meeting with a very dear friend. She read my document thoroughly and when we set down to talk about it the first thing out of her mouth was the most challenging question that came up during this process. I rate this among the most perplexing request I have heard in years. She said she had read the document word by word and could not find a trace of David in there. “I’ve worked with you off and on for almost 20 years. This is a business thing that speaks business language. You’re a healer and emotional person, not a business guy. I’m wondering how this is you?” This comment confronts me because I see myself as a bridge between the emotional, creative faction and the business community. I thanked her for this later and in her response she said, “Keep your own beauty and don’t succumb to the rules of commerce.” Her words sent me further into a tailspin. These borderline psychic comments left me with questions that I can’t answer. So I explored the problem: If I’m to put myself into this work then I must
first define myself. I set off to work in the only way I know how. I went to the whiteboard and drew Venn diagrams including parts of myself such as healer, teacher, workshop guy, father, husband, troublemaker, change maker, and somewhere along the line “leader” came up. Seeing the word on my board caused a visceral tightening of my being from muscles to soul. I went from laughing at myself for drawing reflective diagrams to outright fear. I was fearful because I understand that the project really has turned into something different. This is not about a process, the project is about me as a thought leader in the field of growing happy contented lives. It’s a conversation that I’m adding to a larger world of conversations, but a new conversation, and that’s leadership in a way that I don’t recognize.

When I was in the product design field, I discovered something I do well. I was always the person to put the first sketch on the wall, and I did so knowing that others would point out everything wrong with the idea. A few hours later they would proceed to fix, adapt, or improve the idea into something better. The same holds true when I’m in a group, and the group leader asks for a volunteer. My hand is usually the first in the air. For me to put this conversation into the world, I have to understand that this is merely the first sketch. The preliminary documents were an attempt to see this is a finished project, and that’s not who I am.

That word “leader” keeps coming up and in this process I changed my perception of what a thought leader is. The word puts a little drop in the corner of my eye every time I type it so I know there is work to be done offline and outside of this project. Just when I think I’ve arrived is the moment I see how far, long, and deep the journey is. In the past, the word thought leader was daunting and the title reserved only for my heroes. But the fact is we only have to tolerate the risk and say what we know to be true to provide thought leadership. I need to remind myself that others will see the results of this project as nothing more than a first sketch for them to
develop in the way they know how. And so the project took a philosophical U-turn. The outcome has changed from a shiny new product into just speaking what I know to be true. In the speaking I can only hope that some people might use the transformational power of group creativity to heal broken communities, build relationships among disparate thinking people, or uncover depth in their knowledge of the people they serve. I have always been a risk taker, but this project tripped me up time after time after time. After some incubation time and several pots of stronger coffee than I’ve ever eaten with a spoon, I resolve to provide the seeds of ideas with hope that others may see them fit to sow.
References


Appendix A: Short-form Framework Guideline.

/mē-wē-əs/ thinking:
Group Creativity for engagement, civic solutions, vision building, and consensus in working and living communities.

A framework for transformation + innovation

Employing group-creativity strategy and its transformative nature to build compassionate communities that contribute to fulfilling a vision or their own making. This unfolds through identifying, culminating, and designing for, the communities hopes, dreams, and fears.

What is engagement really about?
Transitioning from me thinking to we thinking while creating an innovative future.
Engagement is bringing a group of people with differing opinions together to form solutions while growing a healthy community or relationship toward one another. A community can be either a working or living community and is an ecosystem where people maintain autonomy while using their own abilities to contribute to a larger vision that serves all.

This process is rooted in group creativity, and supports a group of people become a cohesive community while envisioning a new future, contributing to solutions, or updating leadership on changes that have happened.

During these sessions, the individual participants show a transition from self serving attitudes to offering solutions that serve the greater community.
Why use group creativity practice?

Our research demonstrates that group creativity and innovation tools offer a rapid transformational path and beneficial outcomes. With this, we can organically grow compassionate communities while working toward consensus-based solutions. Both objectives run simultaneously which provides the efficiency we seek.

Group creativity tools offer:

Consensus building: When everyone contributes ideas and feels heard they become part of the solution. When solutions reflect the contributions of each person, each person accepts that the solution is the best possible alternative for all.

Team building: A study by Henningsen and Henningsen (2013) concluded, “Brainstorming groups developed higher levels of cohesiveness in terms of desire to continue working with the group than nominal groups following an idea-generation task” (p. 42). One process that contributes to both team building and successfully producing innovative solutions is an efficiency-oriented model that offers more results with less investment of resources.

Motivation: Heightened motivation happens as a result of participants getting excited about the possibility of their collaborative ideas. Motivation carries projects ahead with a more efficient focus and expedites the pace of a successful implementation. Utilizing components of the Design Thinking process offers emphasis on empathy for end users. More specifically this approach builds optimism about empathic innovation (Cuevas, 2013).

Depth of understanding: Group creativity promotes depth of understanding of the organization, the problem, and the individual’s role in problem solving. We share critical data, build on, and remember each other’s ideas. We have access to multiple stores of memories and multiple ideas to build on (Brown, Tumeo, Lavey, & Paulus, 1986). Our conversation is a divergent thinking tool that builds a robust understanding of contributing data.

Engagement: There is direct evidence of increased levels of project engagement building from group creativity sessions (Paulus, 2000; Sutton & Hargadon, 1996). Project participation, job commitment, and community engagement are all outcomes that are qualitatively evident from employees of organizations that expect creativity from employees or utilize group creativity methods (Gillison & Shalley, 2004).

Post-session ideas: One significant contributing factor to creative problem solving is a period of incubation and reflection; reflecting on the problem and gaining insights while not actively engaged in the problem. In his book Creativity: Mind, Chaos, and Creativity (1990), noted that commercial evidence for incubation is supported in reports where after some time, the creator comes to a sudden moment of insight, the aha moment. Participants of group sessions will emerge with ideas days or months after the session ends.

Processes which dismiss ideas or focus on the ideas of the leader alienate people with strong opinions which builds partnership, cliques, or opponent thinking (me-against-them). Our design encourages and captures even the strongest opinions. We ask that participants view problems or opportunities from other lenses to see what suits the community as a whole. Leadership models do not often provide this open forum or acceptance, yet the creative process does. The result is that participants become proactive members who are not afraid to speak their contribution because they trust they can affect the future. They can, and when the future is positive the members of a community become the leaders of a legacy of innovation.

How creativity transforms attitude:

We demonstrate that group creativity brings most people to the point of commitment through offering, hearing, and building on the creative ideas of others. Creativity levels the field, has all voices heard, and generates solutions that everyone can feel good about. Regardless of how participants come into the room, they all contribute and become part of a community at a faster rate than other processes.
Results-oriented in both private and public sectors:

Our results-oriented process is a careful blend of design thinking, creative problem solving, and appreciative inquiry. This strategic platform enriches a community in a number of scenarios:

When to use this process: Toolkits for each of these three specific client needs are available.

Discovery
Uncovering hopes, dreams, and fears of the people to best serve them. A deeper understanding of what motivates people to love their working or living community. When something has changed and leadership could benefit from a more comprehensive view.

Envision
Strategic planning tool for creatively envisioning an innovative future. Pre-work that creates a collective vision for new services, projects, or assets. Discovering what’s possible, not making things bigger, better, or more.

Problem Solving
To address specific problems such as “what do we do about ___”, “it would be great if we ___”, or “I wish we could ___”. We seek consensus and empathy before imposing mandates.

How our process works:

1. Understand: An introductory conversation that delivers a foundational understanding of the objectives, the process, and how the individual becomes part of the whole.

2. Informed ideation: Ideation begins with the larger group and uses specific questioning to prompt a deeper level of understanding. A second round of ideation with small groups begins the transfer to personal accountability and empathy. A final ideation on an individual level has participants responsible for the well-being of all. The result is that all participants become a part of, and responsible for, the outcome.

3. Converge — Ownership and consensus: All voices are heard in support of an ‘us’ culture. We see a transformation in the voices, the smiles, and the compression of strong feelings. People vent in non-verbal ways such as writing “No, I disagree with ____” index cards anonymously. When complete, we have refined raw ideas into something more closely resembling a solution based on creative or transformational leadership theories.

4. Prototype and exploring acceptance: Through group activities, games, and experiential tools, we take ideas to a level that can be assessed by participants. Reactions are noted as insights into how well the ideas actually solve the given problem. Solutions are a direct outcome of the group.

5. Implementation planning and support: Customized solutions. Per client needs.
Envision process outline

As an adaptable process, the following is a sample menu of tools that we draw from in our program design. Facilitation of successful sessions sometimes requires the ability to discern when tools, experiences, or conversations can be integrated to the programming for achieving the desired outcomes.

For an inclusive understanding of this process, feel free to request a copy of our comprehensive framework manual.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understand</th>
<th>Informed ideation</th>
<th>Converge and develop</th>
<th>Prototype and acceptance</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives for today</td>
<td>Describe a possible and create worksheet. Empathy component. This may be integrated to specific questions and written in script. Have what you want to get done and work backwards. Other times go straight to ideation tools. Break from the past. We are not improving. But explaining something entirely new. Excursion to space (ask if they are still improving instead of existing). Reframe the problem Brainstorm for WBS; HWW statements test #1 Brainstorming / Brainwriting</td>
<td>Improve cards Story fork Dissent cards—ADL Not-a-box Wall activities abcs like long-range future narratives Role playing Experience maps Cards—what promise am I willing to make (block)</td>
<td>Sketch a landscape with targeting exercise Your guide: empathy. At tables allow dissent by prompting participants to kindly speak for everyone in the community or organization. Card sorting or priority making Thank you's and wrap-up</td>
<td>Reporting structures: S Photo, list, and story. S Simple with insights SSS Extensive with master-plan ready initiatives and data to support recommendations. Add value to scope. Exploring acceptance with survey and interviews to determine success of consensus and iterative refinements. Implementation coaching for leadership roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Discovery: Case Study (City of Wyoming, Oh)
Understanding the soul of a community.

City council understood that things have changed in the community, yet were unable to articulate exactly what changed or how that may affect leadership decisions in the future. Four sessions (100 participants) yielded insights into the changing demographics, their future wishes, and how we may make decisions that positively affect the next twenty years. Our Process was to extract insights, create a visionary future, and spread a newfound love of the community among residents through grassroot conversations that would take place after our involvement. A set of tools was designed to reflect the changing needs of residents, and implemented into the daily decision making of leaders as well as the master planning process.

“We talk about these sessions almost every day (at city hall) because we know what the new residents and future residents will want.”
Lynne Teter, City Manager.
Envision: case study: (Springfield Township Arts Alliance):
Examples of building a community of commitment while generating innovation.

The township appointed a task force to envision a new arts center and develop the project for master plan integration. In an effort to envision “what is possible” this was the ideal arrangement to also develop a community of advocates. Around 30 people gave their time and ideas to the workshop, and all left with the satisfaction that they had contributed something valuable, that they were able to contribute more, and a dialogue to spread through the greater community. At the onset, participants brought their own visions for the center, and at the end they supported a plan that would include filling the needs of the next generation of patrons.

“I think we have a bigger team of people that will make this happen than we ever thought we could, and lots of ideas too.”
Kimberlee Ramm, Council Chair

Problem solving: case study (Ronald McDonald House Charities)
Strengthening a leadership community while generating innovation pathways.

Ronald McDonald house of Cincinnati serves over 5,500 families and 830 meals a year. Unfortunately, they turned away 1,271 families last year for lack of capacity. Wanting to grow to serve these families presents a new set of challenges as the house is reliant on more than 400 volunteers who view the house as a family business. A shift in scale means a shift in culture which could potentially disrupt the volunteers perception of what they donate their time to. We were asked to assist the leadership team in discovering new innovative ways they might grow capacity without disrupting the culture they have grown to love.

“I’m so happy we had the entire management team in this brainstorming session. We came away from it like we’re all on the same team again and working together better”
Jennifer Goodin, Executive Director
References and citations:

Uniting valid and reliable research with our experiences, we have created a model that can be adapted to provide solutions for most public and private sector initiatives. The culmination of our experiences in both innovation and community-building allows us a perceptual approach that yields real results.

For a deeper understanding, please request our white paper on the topic: Are the Other Benefits of Group Creativity Practices Just as Important as Good Ideas?

Appendix B: Workshop to Share this Work in the Civic Sector.

Contents include building a case for using creative thinking methods, how-to and hands-on methods, tools (handouts), and a project report. In the Meweus process, this report is a case study of the use of Meweus for discovering deeper insights and compassion for others. Contents have been modified for publication.
Deeper insights into the residents hopes, fears, needs, and wishes.
A series of sub-visions.
Resident backing and involvement.
To spread positive rumors to gain citizen led, grassroots momentum.

We needed:

How might we ___?
What might be all the ___?
What are all the issues with ___?
What might be all the things we love about ___?
What might be all the things you might like to change?

So we asked residents in a creative way:
Section two: Why creativity?

Outcomes:
- Deeper insights into the residents hopes, fears, needs, and wishes.
- A series of sub-visions.
- Resident backing and involvement.
- To spread positive rumors to gain citizen led, grassroots momentum.
Where innovation fits:

People don’t live in a bubble. There are several factors that influence their well-being and the sustainability of positive life including their own commitment to excellence, the lifestyle they live or process they work with, the physical and emotional environment, and the influence of leadership.

Delivering innovative results in the overlapping areas between individuals and their lifestyle, aspects of their environment, and the role of community leaders.

Why creative process?

Creativity is transformational.
Creativity challenges authority and gives voice to all.
Creativity builds compassion and empathy.
Creativity builds community.
Creativity builds community through
- Building a collective vision
- Collective vision bonds people
- Showing people their own potential

Creative ideas yield:
Depth of insights
Qualitative data
Quantitative data

“If I'd asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses.”
Henry Ford never said this.

The residents expressed ____.
Our decision was to ____.
Which is aligned with resident wishes because ____.

Mining the ideas for deeper insights
Section 2.5: The MeWeUs thinking process

How creativity transforms attitude:

We demonstrate that group creativity brings most people to the point of commitment through offering, hearing, and building on the creative ideas of others. Creativity levels the field, has all voices heard, and generates solutions that everyone can feel good about. Regardless of how participants come into the room, they all contribute and become part of a community at a faster rate than other processes.
**GROUP CREATIVITY FOR COMMUNITY BUILDING**

**Discovery**
Uncovering hopes, dreams, and fears of the people to best serve them. A deeper understanding of what motivates people to love their working or living community. When something has changed and leadership could benefit from a more comprehensive view.

**Envision**
Strategic planning tool for creatively envisioning an innovative future. Pre-work that creates a collective vision for new services, projects, or assets. Discovering what’s possible, not making things bigger, better, or more.

**Problem Solving**
To address specific problems such as “what do we do about ___?” “It would be great if we ___” or “I wish we could ___.” We seek consensus and empathy before imposing mandates.

**How this process works:**

1. **Understanding the opportunity:** project or task.
2. **Understanding my relationship to the project:**
3. **Ideation:** Whole group, small group, and individual.
4. **Prototyping and exploring:** solutions.
5. **Implementation planning:** customized solution.

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**Discovery: case study** (City of Wyoming, ON)

Understanding the soul of a community.

“We talk about these sessions almost every day now (at city hall) because we know what the new residents and future residents will want.”
Lynne Taylor City Manager
Problem solving: case study (City of Wyoming, OH)

Strengthening a community of social entrepreneurship while generating innovation pathways.

An adjoining community has a high rate of crime, low income, conflicting demographics, and forced the residents of Wyoming, Ohio, to become a part of the City of Wyoming. The community is working to revitalize the area, and we wanted to find out what the issues are, who is_weekly to work on, and sustainable solutions to whatever the issues are. Residents are surprised as we walk into the area, not having enough ideas, but we make life better for the neighbors. This method is greatly cost-effective and will form a greater organization.

"The session was a blast, and I’m looking forward to being on the committee when you’re ready. Keep me posted and I’ll be there."

John Y. Resident and participant

A sample program report.

Section four: outcomes

Thank you for the opportunity to share our passion for creative thinking and innovation in the public-sector!

For a deeper understanding, please request our white paper on the topic: Are the Other Benefits of Group Creativity Processes Just as Important as Good Ideas?

Or an abridged version of our framework guidelines.

References and citations


Appendix C: Framework Guidelines

/mě·wē·əs/: From me, to we, to us.

Meweus thinking:
Group Creativity for civic solutions, vision building, and consensus.

A framework for transformation + innovation
Written by David Eyman

Our primary objective is to use group innovation strategy and it’s transformative nature to create compassionate communities that contribute to fulfilling a vision or their own making through identifying, culminating, and designing for, the communities hopes, dreams, and fears.
How to view this framework

The following document describes our framework in stages, phases, and a listing of suggested tools we may use during facilitation. Because all groups have differing needs, we are offering the foundation of these processes and inviting you to see how your specific process is built from the ground up.

- stages
- steps
- tools

Definitions:

**Design Thinking** is about creating empathy for a specific group of people, and solving problems with a human-centered approach.

**CPS (Creative Problem Solving)** is using intentional creativity to solve specific problems in group settings. This builds consensus, team mentality, enthusiasm, engagement, and success.

**Civic Engagement** is about creating a legacy of attentiveness within a disparate group of people and creating community stewardship.

**Community** is a group of people using their own strengths and committed to a common vision. This can comprise a business team, a non-profit leadership or board of trustees, or residents of a neighborhood.

The following process culminates the above with experience to do something unique: Use group innovation strategy and its transformative nature to create compassionate communities that contribute to fulfilling a vision or their own making through identifying, culminating, and designing for, the communities hopes, dreams, and fears.
Meweus thinking

The meweus process is designed to make wonderful things happen: change, support, and accountability.

When we enter community conversations we often want to be served.

When we leave this particular conversation we want to be served as a member of a larger community or to serve others in-turn.

We call this community, and the process community building.

Our process is rooted in the transformation of attitude from “me” to “we” to “us”.

It’s all about me and my opinion.

Picture a department in a company, a family inside of a city, or your favorite team inside of a league.

In favor of equality, service for all, and global viewpoint.

Where participants become committed to making innovation happen.
# Ideation process

Ideation exercises are designed around principles of both generating novel ideas and generating community. The exercises are sequenced to generate community alignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Exercises that use “How might I ___?”</th>
<th>2. Exercises that use “How might WE ___?”</th>
<th>3. Exercises that use “What might be all the ways to ___?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With a full group ideation to:</td>
<td>With small group ideation to:</td>
<td>With individual ideation to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elicit all opinions to be brought to the room for consideration.</td>
<td>Use the empathy gained to build consensus oriented ideas.</td>
<td>Use the consensus gained to create ideas that come from the individual, yet benefit all.</td>
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<tr>
<td>This creates an opening for empathy through building on, and understanding other’s viewpoints.</td>
<td>This creates ideas that are meaningful to participants, and each group becomes supportive.</td>
<td>This creates ownership, advocacy, and community</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Where participants become committed to making innovation happen.

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How creativity transforms attitude:

We demonstrate that group creativity brings most people to the point of commitment through offering, hearing, and building on the creative ideas of others. Creativity levels the field, has all voices heard, and generates solutions that everyone can feel good about. Regardless of how participants come into the room, they all contribute and become part of a community at a faster rate than other processes.

Participants enter the session | Group ideation | Response | Result

Angry

Annoyed participants feel they want to be heard and to reconcile injustice. Collaborative ideas are expressed in the room causing a shift towards consensus and solutions.

Intrigued

Participants find they want to continue this positive momentum. These participants find themselves contributing and shift toward intrigue.

Support of leadership

Participants feel heard and find they have a voice to contribute toward a positive future.

Support of all stakeholders

went into something that works for all of us.

Community

A compassionate, friendly, clan, or family working toward a common vision. Stewardship, commitment toward making things happen.

Intrigued participants feel they are able to contribute and are eager to help solve problems.

Support of all stakeholders

Apathetic participants feel they are required to contribute, yet have no personal interest.

Apathetic

We demonstrate how this helps.

Will produce “We-thinking” ideas; We are all part of the solution.

Annoyed

Will produce innovation.

Intrigued

Cooperation

In sessions, people will:

People come to sessions in different states of emotion ranging from apathetic to anger.
Pedagogy and underpinnings:

A 50+ year history of research supports the use of group creativity and innovation practices for the purpose of both strengthening working / living communities and generating innovative solutions. Research and proven outcomes of these practices include higher levels of consensus, teambuilding, motivation, depth of understanding, engagement, and bringing in good ideas over the forthcoming weeks. Research demonstrates that participants are more satisfied with the outcome of group process than individual work (Kramer, Kuo, & Dailey, 1997, Sutton and Hargadon, 1996, Sawyer, 2007, Faure, 2004). For serving our clients most efficiently we are typically looking to produce satisfaction and evolutionary (not revolutionary) ideas that bring groups together over solving problems. When interviewed, participants of group creativity processes say they had more ideas, better ideas, and are more excited about pursuing the ideas as a cohesive team (Faure, 2004). This perception is precisely what is needed in generating communities filled with engaged, committed participants. In the majority of initiatives there is primarily a need for these outcomes that far exceeds the need for radically differentiated ideas. In fact, most groups often do not want a far-reaching radical idea (Mueller, Melwani, & Goncalo, 2010). They want an idea that everyone can live with and that benefits everyone. In short, we want growth, improvement, or the preservation of excellence toward a common vision while strengthening the efficiency of our communities.

Outcomes of group innovation practices:

Consensus building: When everyone contributes ideas and feels heard they become part of the solution. When solutions reflect the contributions of each person, each person accepts that the solution is the best possible alternative and express their commitment through consensus.

Teambuilding: A study by Henningsen and Henningsen (2013) concluded, “Our brainstorming groups developed higher levels of cohesiveness in terms of desire to continue working with the group than nominal groups following an idea-generation task” (p. 42). One process that contributes to both teambuilding and successfully producing innovative solutions is an efficiency oriented model that offers more results with less investment of resources.
**Motivation:** Heightened motivation happens as a result of participants getting excited about the possibility of their collaborative ideas. Motivation carries projects ahead with a more efficient focus and expedites the pace of a successful implementation. Utilizing components of the Design Thinking process offers emphasis on empathy for end users. More specifically this approach builds optimism about empathic innovation (Curedale, 2013). Optimistic empathy building not only provides motivation to direct one’s efforts toward reconciling the needs of others, but also an intrinsic motivation to succeed at innovating for the benefit of others.

**Depth of understanding:** Group creativity promotes depth of understanding of the organization, the problem, and the individual’s role in problem solving. We share critical data, build on, and remember each other’s ideas. We have access to multiple stores of memories and multiple ideas to build on (Brown, Tuneo, Larey, & Paulus, 1996). Our conversation is a divergent thinking tool that builds a robust understanding of contributing data.

**Engagement:** There is direct evidence of increased levels of project engagement arising from group creativity sessions (Paulus, 2000; Sutton & Hargadon, 1996). Project participation, job commitment, and community engagement are all outcomes that are qualitatively evident from employees of organizations that expect creativity from employees or utilize group creativity methods (Gilson & Shalley, 2004).

**Post-session ideas:** One significant contributing factor to creative problem solving is a period of incubation and reflection: reflecting on the problem and gaining insights while not actively engaged in the problem. In his book *Creativity*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) noted that commercial evidence for incubation is supported in reports where after some time, the creator comes to a sudden moment of insight, the aha moment. Participants of group sessions will emerge with ideas days or months after the session ends.

Processes which dismiss ideas or focus on the ideas of the leader alienate people with strong opinions which builds partisanship, cliques, or opponent thinking (me-vs-them). Our design encourages and captures even the strongest opinions. We ask that participants view problems or opportunities from other lenses to see what suits the community as a whole. Leadership models do not often provide this open forum or acceptance, yet the creative process does. The result is that participants become proactive members who are not afraid to speak their contribution because they trust they can affect the future. They can, and when the future is positive the members of a community become the leaders of legacy of innovation.
Combining valid research with our experiences, we have created a kinetic model that provides solutions for most initiatives. The culmination of our experiences in both the creativity arena and community-building allows us a perceptive approach with an adaptable model. We are uniquely able to modify programming to suit the attendees through planning and during sessions.

For a deeper understanding, please request our white paper on the topic: Are the Other Benefits of Group Creativity Practices Just as Important as Good Ideas?

References and Citations


Where innovation fits:

People don't live in a bubble. There are several factors that influence their wellbeing and the sustainability of positive life including their own commitment to excellence, the lifestyle they live or process they work with, the physical and emotional environment, and the influence of leadership.

Our intention is to work with each contributing factor, and in the overlapping areas to positively use the power of creativity toward creating sustainable contentment.

Delivering innovative results in the overlapping areas between individuals and their lifestyle, aspects of their environment, and the affective roll of community leaders. To support positive results in the iterative model above, we have combined the best of several processes into one framework.

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1. **Understand**: An introductory conversation that delivers a foundational understanding of the objectives, the process, and how the individual becomes part of the whole.

2. **Informed ideation**: Ideation begins with the larger group and uses specific questioning to prompt a deeper level of understanding. A second round of ideation with small groups begins the transfer to personal accountability and empathy. A final ideation on an individual level has participants responsible for the wellbeing of all. The result is that all participants become a part of, and responsible for the outcome.

3. **Converge — Ownership and consensus**: All voices are heard in support of an "us" culture. We see a transformation in the voices, the smiles, and the compassion of strong feelings. People vent in non-verbal ways such as writing "No, I disagree with..." on index cards anonymously. When complete, we have refined raw ideas into something more closely resembling a solution based on creative or transformational leadership theories.

4. **Prototype and exploring acceptance**: Through group activities, games, and experiential tools, we take ideas to a level that can be assessed by participants. Reactions are noted as insights into how well the ideas actually solve the given problems. Solutions are a direct outcome of the group.

5. **Implementation planning and support**: customized solutions Per client needs.
When to use this process:

**Discovery**
Uncovering hopes, dreams, and fears of the people to best serve them. A deeper understanding of what motivates people to love their working or living community. When something has changed, leadership will benefit from a more comprehensive understanding of people.

**Envision**
Strategic planning tool for creatively envisioning an innovative future. Pre-work that creates a collective vision for new services, projects, or assets. Discovering what’s possible; not making things bigger, better, or more.

**Problem Solving**
To address specific problems such as “what do we do about ___”, “it would be great if we___”, or “I wish we could ___”. We seek consensus and empathy before imposing mandates. We discover innovative possibilities through time honored techniques, and build advocacy among communities.
To reflect a full consideration of the robust nature of each contributing process, the five stages of this process have been broken down into steps. Each step has a tool or exercise affiliated to accomplish the intended result.

Stage 1 (Understand) includes a dialogue to have participants understand the project, and a separate dialogue to have participants see themselves in relation to the project.

Stage 2: (Ideation) has three specific tasks that are designed to invoke a community oriented result or to solicit ideas that support consensus among a community.

Stage 3: (Converge and ownership) includes a convergent thinking skills exercise and a separate exercise to invite participants to continue to add their ideas to the mix. In so doing, participants begin to see themselves as responsible for the outcome.

Stage 4: (Prototype and explore acceptance) includes one exercise to have participants turn their ideas into a rough prototype of a solution. When the prototype is shown to the group there is a moment of truth in which we can explore acceptance through the reactions to the prototype.

Stage 5: (Planning and implementation) is intended to support leadership in processing ideas and developing solutions. These tasks are designed specifically in response to the needs of each client.
Toolkit for success:

1. First a dialogue about the project, why we are here, and the expected outcomes. Topics are variable but include a short review of key data from all stakeholders point of view, a description of how participants are involved, and an invitation to be part of the solution by contributing ideas.

2. Whole group brainstorm, break. Small group brainstorm with Shark-tank, break. Individual brainstorm with Indy-walk.

3. Ideas assembled offsite and grouped into clusters. Clusters are restated as statements, HMW questions, or tangible attributes.

4. Ideas are formed into a preliminary solution, and offered to others for review. Input is used to both refine the solution and build ownership among stakeholders.

5. A plan for implementation is developed, and a strategy for accountability is included. With large groups of stakeholders this plan may take many forms including regular check-in sessions or online tools.