

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a person's face, specifically their eyes and nose. A semi-transparent red filter is applied over the entire image. In the lower right portion of the face, a hashtag "#N!U" is visible, likely a reference to the National Indigenous Movement (Milenio) in Mexico.

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# **PARTICIPATORY DESIGN METHODS OF THE DISPLACED.**

by Rodrigo Barreda

Submitted to OCAD University in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Design in Strategic Foresight and Innovation.  
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## Abstract

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The primary question guiding this research is:

*How might social service agencies create viable organizational cultures of innovation?* This research looks at recent innovation design experiences of social service organizations in Toronto.

It describes the context in which these projects are pursued and acknowledges some of the current criticisms of an emerging social innovation industry.

This research is exploratory and proposes perspectives for an agency-driven framework for innovation work. These perspectives are rooted in concepts from three fields of study and practice—Systems Thinking, Participatory Design and Traditional Knowledge.

Creative outcomes of this research look to contribute to envisioning an Indigenizing approach to participatory design. One that acknowledges, engages and empowers some of the most resilient, innovative and resourceful—yet displaced individuals—in co-creating social programs and services as well as imagining possible futures.

## Acknowledgements

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I would like to acknowledge and thank my ancestors, the land on which I was born, and the land on which I stand today. I am grateful for the opportunity to study and work on this land, which I understand to be the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, the Huron Wendat, the Anishinaabe and the Mississaugas of the New Credit.

I would also like to give thanks to the many people in the academic and social services sector who supported me through this project.

The agency staff who generously shared with me their knowledge, experiences and feelings regarding their lived experiences of design, the important work they do serving our communities and their relation to the innovation space. A special thank you to research charrette participants and to agency Executive Directors Bill Sinclair, Maureen Fair, Elizabeth Forestell, Shelley Zuckerman and Lee Soda.

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I would also like to thank those who nourished and loved me throughout my time at school, my family. Thank you, Tamara, Camilo, Tomás and Amaya for your patience, your trust and your ability to show me — through simple words and gestures — the importance of being present.

Thank you, for without your contributions, this process and resulting work would not have been as meaningful.

## Dedication

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I would like to dedicate the work of these past few months,  
this research paper and its outcomes to those who inspire me to learn  
and from whom I have much to learn from. To those working arduously  
to improve the lives of others around you, whether this takes place in the  
frontlines of social service agency work or in the “primera linea”  
seeding new systems in the streets of Chile.  
For you, who have always led the way.

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**Figure 1:** 2019-2020 Uprising in Chile.  
Photo by Susana Hidalgo.





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# Preface

I was born into a lab, at a time when two experiments clashed. Two imaginaries throwing all of us—Chile, my family and I—into a deep rupture from which we are still attempting to recuperate fifty years later. One imaginary looked to the experiences and challenges inflationary economies presented capitalist development in post-war Europe<sup>1</sup>. Another looked to local experiences and proposed a systemic transformation of society based on democratic rule and the participation of citizens and workers in decision-making processes. These opposing worldviews pinned multinationals against national interests, the quantifiable of economic development against the qualitative of social development, the fast-paced efficiency of financial experts against the slow consensus building work of grassroots organizations.

*“I don’t see why we need to stand by and watch a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its people. The issues are much too important for the Chilean voters to be left to decide for themselves.”<sup>2</sup>*

— Henry Kissinger, U.S. national security advisor.

The outcome was not decided by Chileans, it came from those who held sufficient economic and military power to impose their interests and will. In the case of Chile, this meant the interests of multinational corporations based primarily in the United States, with the support of its political administration, its military and secret services—primarily the C.I.A.<sup>3</sup> Since its beginnings on September 11, 1973, both the military coup and the piloting of extreme forms of neoliberal economics characterized the seventeen year-long U.S.-Pinochet military dictatorship. During this period, Chile experienced the complete dismantling, persecution and prohibition of social and political participatory institutions. This included the National Congress, workers and student unions, political parties and community organizations. Constitutional reform was designed to legalize the privatization of all natural resources and transferring their management to foreign and national private business conglomerates. This world-view of radicalized neo-liberalist economic adjustments could not have been imposed without the effective use of what has been termed “shock doctrines”<sup>4</sup> in both the economy and with regards to the mental and physical security of people in Chile<sup>5</sup>. In this process, thousands of Chileans were murdered, tortured, disappeared, imprisoned, exiled or forced to seek political refuge in other countries. This heightened and continuous intolerance has been the cost of efforts to redirect the economic model in Chile to this day.

*“In order to maintain freedom, you had to have free markets, and that free markets would work best if you had political freedom.”<sup>6</sup>*

— Milton Friedman, economist.

Economic, physical and cultural displacement has affected each and every aspect of our personal and national lives, since Chile became a lab dedicated exclusively to piloting Milton Friedman’s economic policies. You can reference a long list of material that provide a clear assessment of Chile’s neoliberal socio-economic model and the positive and negative consequences it has had on people’s lives<sup>7</sup>. In this paper, I focus on the concept of displacement as one of the consequences of neo-liberal economics and understood as the loss of awareness of ‘self’ in relation to others.

*“Neoliberalism was born and will die in Chile”<sup>8</sup>*

— Anonymous.

After forty-six years, and as I write this research paper, the most displaced people in Chile have begun to question and revolt against this system. To them it is no longer about the innovative improvement of public transit, better pay or working conditions, they are demanding change in the political and economic system(s). They are demanding what they conceive as ‘a new social agreement’. They have no political leaders or demands because they are against the entire political structure and its representatives. They do not wish to negotiate and there is no one person to negotiate with on their behalf. The movement is broad, diverse, decentralized and autonomous. It is the continuation and reemergence of the participatory democracy principles and ideals that fueled the hearts and minds of those who were in the front lines in the fight against the dictatorship in Chile decades before.

I became a designer during these struggles and for a great part of my career, I have worked with grassroots and social service organizations both in Chile and in Canada. I have seen firsthand, how people working in the sector have been excluded from conversations and decision-making processes that affect their day-to-day activities. This marginalization is also real when it comes to academic work exploring participatory design methods within social innovation.

With these sentiments and ideas in my own heart and mind, I stood before a group of thirteen agency frontline and manage-

ment staff who I had invited to participate in a “research charrette”. My goal was to connect with them and request their insights, input and feedback to some of the ideas and thesis I was exploring for this research. After I welcomed them, my own biases kicked in. Experience has shown me that I have felt most excluded when others have undermined my participation and opinions by not providing me with any context or background information before consulting me on an issue or project. And so, I began the charrette speaking to participants, focused on providing them with as much information as possible. I tried to provide them as much context and background to where I was coming from with these at times very abstract ideas. I paid little attention to established protocols, or issues of my own positionality or language and I just ploughed through information. Unwillingly and recklessly, I talked and did not listen, I explained and answered, but I did not acknowledge those present. And of course, participants were quick to remind me of my errors. A couple of them quickly began to question and oppose not only the ideas that I was presenting, but the facilitation methods, the terms I was utilizing and the lack of acknowledgment of sector specific practices and contexts. It felt like we had gotten to a point in which there was nothing that I could say that would not be challenged. Communication had shut down.

The following charrette session was marked by acknowledging these conflicts, contradictions and experiences head on. In the remaining two sessions, I simply stopped providing information and began to practice the ideas that are key to this research. I began by acknowledging others expertise and the reasons why I had invited them to the research charrette. I also put into practiced the values that were important to me as a person and gave thanks to my ancestors and the land on which we were meeting. I drafted terms of engagement, which helped establish how we would respectfully hold space for each other. I worked on handing over control of what would be talked about to the participants themselves and focused not on exposing my ideas and thesis for feedback, but on attempting to create space for a fluid and richer discussion to take place, and took on the role of recording what agency frontline workers wished to say and express. In essence, I used the protocols I have learned in the social services sector and the values that I hold most dear to me.

***“There are three problems with freedom:  
Things often don’t turn out precisely the way we hope.  
Resolution takes too long. And we might fail.”<sup>9</sup>***

— Seth Godin.

This experience was emotionally and intellectually draining—on me, as well as on participants—especially those who I had made to feel unacknowledged. While the majority of the charrette participants (thirteen out of fifteen) continued to be engaged and provided valuable insights into the work agencies do in the innovation space, the criticisms of those who decided to withdraw from the research resulted in important lessons as well. For one, this experience brought to the forefront the growing divide and tension between agencies and the emerging “social innovation industry”.

In somewhat of a therapeutic interview conversation with Zahra Ebrahim, she offered me the following analogy. “Imagine I come to you and say, I want to help you by taking care of your kids. Don’t worry, I will take care of them, I will cook and entertain them. It’s all great, but I do not ask anything about your family. I don’t know if your kids have allergies, I don’t know how you do things at home, nothing. Help without a deep understanding of context doesn’t necessarily constitute support. It’s on my terms, not yours. So, this is about knowing what comes with the landscape and I don’t think we do that enough when we work with the social services. If you were a frontline worker in the social services sector and you are offered this type of support, wouldn’t you feel insulted?” Of course, and I expressed to her that “I have both insulted and felt insulted”. While concurring, Ebrahim adds “Yes, and that is the work in the new design paradigm. The design world I want to live in, is a world where we are careful, thoughtful, equitable and we are honest. And I just don’t think design is as honest as it could be. I think it makes claims that it cannot deliver on.”

I also came to realize and accept that—despite my intentions—I had recreated the same designer stance and reinforced the expert mind-set I have come to see and oppose in current social innovation practices. These practices are most often rooted in Western perspectives of anthropology, social science research and design. As such they have played a key role in processes of colonization. Thus, in this process I acknowledge myself as both colonized and as settler, with the power to reproduce the

dynamics that contribute to the on-going project of displacement. Acknowledging that these processes are complex and can be mined with errors is the first step to accepting failure as a necessary part of the process of evolution and change.

Furthermore, there is little objectivity in academic research. It happens in a specific time and place, and is the result of hundreds of micro decisions informed by personal circumstances, understanding and beliefs. From this perspective, consider that this paper is being written in a span of seven months in which we have seen massive popular uprisings against neoliberalism in many parts of the world including Lebanon, France and Chile, as well as the burning of great extents of the Amazonian rainforests and wildfires in Australia and California. We are experiencing the emergence of broad-based movements that bring issues such as women's rights, Indigenous rights, climate change and the environment to the forefront again with renewed urgency and force. And we confront an unprecedented health crisis with COVID-19, which is turning our lives and our priorities on its head. Everything needs to be reimagined. The way we work, the way we study, our social interactions, our economies, our food production, and our relation to the earth. Everything is in need of re-definition.

This research paper—like any other—is in part a reflection of our times as well as the result of my own lived experiences. It is the result and confluence of my reflection of the past and present, the macro of what has happened to us all, and the micro of the day-to-day and personal, the rational of academia and the sensorial of all that is creative and propositional.

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# Introduction

Before going back to school and starting graduate studies I reached out to Daniele Zanotti, President and CEO of United Way Greater Toronto and expressed to him that I would be interested in working on a project that would be of use to United Way member agencies, while at school. Daniele put me in touch with the Executive Directors of two United Way member agencies, which were doing interesting work in the social innovation space. Through Bill Sinclair and Maureen Fair I met Elizabeth Forestell, Shelley Zuckerman and Lee Soda.

Prior to beginning work on this research paper, these Executive Directors and I held one on one conversations and group meetings, which were then followed up with exchanges with agency managers and front-line workers. These conversations provided me a sense of the rich history local community houses and agencies funded by United Way have in community building, social change and organizational adaptation work. As Bill Sinclair would say, “Our social service sector is not new to disruption, change and innovation. We were born out of that and our programs and initiatives today, reflect that reality.”

Between September 2018 and February 2020, I had the opportunity to learn about these organizations’ experiences in fostering innovative thinking within their staff, and we worked together to identify the major challenges they have confronted and are still confronting in their “innovation journeys”. This led us to acknowledge the great divide between the social service agencies and the emerging social innovation industry. This divide is ideological in nature and is fueled by the use of differing interests, motivations, methodologies, frameworks, lingo, stances and approaches, which further accentuate the polarization. But this difference is both a challenge and an opportunity. An opportunity, which we need to seize by bringing together the diverse ways of thinking to the work of solving the complex social issues we are currently facing.

Why is this question important? Well, because the level of recurrence as well as the impact of changing factors on the work of our local social service agencies requires a proactive and systemic re-understanding, rethinking and re-imagining. The complexity of social issues as well as of the disruptions is such, that they require an openness to learning from each other and of collaborative work in the search for solutions, which we have not proactively searched-out before.

## Research question

The research question explored in this paper: “*How may we create viable organizational cultures of innovation?*” is the result of these previously mentioned conversations and collective inquiries that took place with agency Executive Directors. The concepts and ideas explored in this paper seek to inform a theoretical framework that may guide the implementation of a networked innovation effort among United Way member agencies.

## Audience

I have chosen to write this research paper with agency frontline workers and management in mind. They are my primary audience. Their rich experience in community development, their struggles in a narrowing social services sector, and their incredible day-to-day work to improve people’s lives has been inspiring and has been a key component in guiding this research.

## Primary Research Methods

Four research methods were used in this research paper. These included a literature review, semi-structured interviews, group consultations and a design journal.

### *Literature review*

Literary sources used in this paper expand three primary areas; Systems Thinking, Participatory Design and Traditional Knowledge. These have been used to substantiate the principles, ideas and concepts brought forward. Secondary literature included reports, magazines, online sources and



**Figure 2:** Research Charrette participants. Photo by Nicholas Jones.

historical literature. They have provided data points and have helped contextualize the research in relation to historical events.

#### *Semi-structured interviews*

Interviews with subject matter experts in the fields of social services, philanthropy and participatory design were held. This method was used to collect valuable insights as well a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Due to the advent of the COVID-19 health crisis and its impact on the social services sector, some of these took the form of phone interviews while others had to be cancelled.

#### *Group consultations*

These group consultations took the form of “research charrettes”. Charrettes are essentially in-person crowdsourcing sessions in which participants are briefed on a design challenge. Constraints are discussed and ideas collected by the charrette organizer/facilitator. This format was used to introduce participants to main ideas and concepts being explored in the research, discuss and collect feedback and/or critique.

#### *Design journal*

During the duration of my studies in the Strategic Foresight and Innovation Master program —

including my participation in the Indigenous Intensive at UBC Kelowna in July 2019 and the research phase of this MRP—I have sketched, jotted stories, impressions and notes. These have informed the ideas, narratives and design work presented in this paper, including the four illustrations that introduce the chapters titled Viability, Displacement, Inversion and Transformation (Conclusion). In these pages, music, images, text and symbols literally illustrate the layering of information and experiences becoming knowledge.

#### **Research participants**

Many individuals have informed this research. It incorporates the ideas and opinions of leaders in the charitable and social services sector through conversations with members of United Way Greater Toronto’s Senior Executive Team; Daniele Zanotti, President and CEO, Ruth Crammond, Vice-President, Community Investments and Development and Nation Cheong, Vice-President, Community Opportunities and Mobilization, as well as Toronto Foundation’s Director of Philanthropy, Aneil Gokhale and advisor, organizer, and professor Zahra Ebrahim. An indispensable perspective on “innovation” in the context of the sector has been generously provided by agency Executive Directors, including; Bill Sinclair of St. Stephen’s Com-



munity House (SSCH), Maureen Fair of West Neighbourhood House (WNH), Shelley Zuckerman of North York Community House (NYCH), and Lee Soda of Agincourt Community Services Association (ACSA). Other subject matter expert consultations have involved frontline workers and management staff from some of the above-mentioned organizations. This took place in the form of a series of “research charrettes”—participants included; Rommel Asuncion, School Settlement Worker (NYCH), Janice Bartley, Dorset Park Safety Engagement Coordinator (ACSA), Jennifer Chan, Innovation and Experimentation Coach (NYCH), Awo Dirie, Trustee Hub Peer Leader (SSCH), Hui Geng, Program Manager (NYCH), Jonathan John, Manager Community Initiatives (SSCH), Natalia Kachan, Settlement Worker (NYCH), Diana McNally, Training and Engagement Coordinator (SSCH), Vish Persaud, Manager Community Initiatives (ACSA), Kelly Ryan, Contract and Training Lead, Conflict Resolution & Training (SSCH), Matthew Taylor, Coordinator and Senior RECE, School-Age (SSCH), Angela Tucci, Drop-In Operations Worker (ACSA) and Kristen Wilson, Food Bank Assistant (ACSA).

### **Three fields of study and two approaches**

The concepts and ideas explored fall within three fields of study and practice—Systems Thinking, Participatory Design and Traditional Knowledge. While these three fields provide a structure to how the paper is thematically organized, you will also perceive the use of two distinct voices differentiating chapter one from chapters two, three and four. Chapter One: The social services sector and innovation, provides a general description of the sector in Toronto and contextualizes the research’s primary question. In Chapter Two: Viability, I introduce concepts that provide a systems lens to creating organizational culture through the examination of Stafford Beer’s Viable Systems Model. Focus is placed on the concept of viability and of autonomy in contrast to bureaucracy and as key requisites for innovation. Chapter Three: Displacement, provides an interpretation of the concept and its positioning within the context of prevailing tendencies towards a radicalization of the socio-economic model of neoliberalism in the form of populist, right-wing movements. In Chapter Four: Inversion, I propose a perspective that may allow us to begin to proactively shift current expert-mindset driven social innovation efforts within the sector to participatory-mindsets and approaches that are embedded in the way we manage organizational operations.

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# Chapter 1.

## The social services sector and innovation

### Toronto and the GTA

The Greater Toronto Area is home to approximately 5,928,040 people<sup>1</sup>, or approximately 15 percent of Canada's total population. It is a geographical region that comprises twenty-four municipalities surrounding the city of Toronto, from Burlington in the West, Georgina and Brock in the North and Clarington to the East. This region is one of Canada's most important economic drivers<sup>2</sup>. As such, Toronto is a barometer of socio-economic prosperity, and of the most pressing social issues which the country must face, for Toronto is considered the 'income inequality' and 'child poverty capital of Canada'<sup>3</sup>.

### 1.1 The sector

Social issues—such as income inequality, homelessness, domestic abuse, racism and homophobia—have no boundaries. They are complex, multi-causal, constantly changing, they lack definition and solution. These wicked problems cannot be ended or solved, they can only be mitigated. Across this region and throughout time, people have come together to establish organizations that provide services to help themselves and others mitigate the effects of these complex social issues. This is how the social services sector came to fruition. It is grassroots and self-organized, and as such, holds an incredible wealth of knowledge, experience and history in community development, adaptability and change.

Today, the social services sector in the GTA is comprised of hundreds of institutions creating a broad and diverse network of agencies. Some serve specific communities or provide services that mitigate the effects of a specific social issue, while others are multi-service. These operations and services are funded primarily by the public sector. This is municipal, provincial or federal government agencies, which contribute an average of 70% of overall funding<sup>4</sup>. Additional funding comes from the private sector though individual donors, foundations, corporate donations and United Way—the largest private not-for-profit funder. This funding—whether public and increasingly more so private—is granted to agencies to deliver on a specific service and within pre-defined and pre-determined parameters, which may include constraints of time, demographic of service users, geographical region, pre-determined protocols, policies and processes to be in place, and outcomes. Funding is also conditional i.e., funding is tied to quantifiable measurable service performance and deliverables that are periodically evaluated.

### 1.2 Neighbourhood Houses and Community Associations

Neighbourhood houses and community associations share characteristics that distinguish them within the larger network of social service agencies. They were funded by community members and residents and are rooted in specific neighbourhood-based efforts. They have grown in their reach and scope, serving multiple communities across the region and expanding their activities to include research, advocacy, prevention, community development and trusteeship. Their histories are rooted in the ways of being and doing of disenfranchised and displaced communities and have acquired a rich experience of adapting to constant change. While maintaining a service-driven focus, agencies have incorporated approaches and frameworks from adjacent fields, such as public health, Indigenous knowledge, psychology, trauma-informed practices, and mental health, providing an important perspective on social innovation, which is seldom acknowledged.

### 1.3 A STEEPV Analysis of Disruptions in the sector

#### *Economic Factors.*

Research shows that a growth in income inequality in Canada constitutes one of the primary challenges in creating opportunities and ultimately equity. United Way's Opportunity Equation Report (2015) found that income inequality had grown the fastest in Toronto than in any other major city in Canada, 31% over the past twenty-five years. An important aspect of inequality in the GTA is that, where you live matters. From 1980-2005, average household income in the poorest 10% neighbourhoods increased by 2%—compared to incomes in the richest 10% of neighbourhoods that rose by 80%<sup>5</sup>. Linked to the issue of income inequality is equity. Aneil Gokhale, Toronto Foundation's Director of Philanthropy, depicts this challenge with one of many examples "You can talk about Toronto being a green city or a place where people have access to green spaces. Top-level data says that 30% of the city is covered by a proper tree canopy, but when you dig one step deeper you find that in a community like Rosedale it's 61% while in other neighbourhoods, it's as low as 6%. On average, the neighbourhoods with the highest percent of tree coverage also have higher average real estate values and incomes. So, what does this mean? Not all people are experiencing the same city and this has an impact on areas like your health, your well-being, options for transit and overall poverty".



### *Cuts in Government Funding.*

As in most other sectors and industries, economic disruptors are the most impactful. In the social sector, they are characterized by a decrease in direct government funding to not-for-profit organizations and by the in-direct consequences of public funding cuts to education, health services and medical research, the arts and government agencies<sup>6</sup>.

### *Amalgamation.*

In an effort to deduce government spending there is a growing interest in cross-sectorial work in both management as well as the delivery of integrated services that address issues from prevention to follow-up. Some have signaled that this carries the risk of transferring the administration of such services to private-for-profit businesses or conglomerates, paving the way for the privatization of social service delivery<sup>7</sup>.

### *Political Factors*

Socio-economic measures are taken in the interest of fulfilling political agendas. One of the most significant signals of the predominant political shifts taking place is the rising popular support and election of proponents of radicalized neo-liberal economic measures at all levels of government.

### *Social Values*

In turn, political phenomena such as this, is the result of people's changing social values. United Way's Daniele Zanotti reflects on the recently released 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer<sup>8</sup> report and states "It is as if there's a shift in mindset. According to the Edelman 2020 report, Canadians' trust in NGOs has gone down by 4%. In the report, trust is broken down to: do I think they can deliver on the promise they make? and that's where I think we are falling. If you have been donating to charities and don't see change, then you might think, I will just give \$50 to some person in GoFundMe who is doing something for such a cause." From a social-values perspective what we are seeing is an increased sense of citizenry and social conscience, diminishing incomes and patience for abstract measures. People are looking for direct participation, influence and tangible change.

### *Technological Factors*

Most of the current disruptions we are experiencing are technology driven. In the case of organizations like United Way—the region's largest funder second only to government—technology has had a huge impact on their workplace annual campaign model. A growing gig-economy and changes in how a new generation of donors and volunteers wish to participate in addressing the world's most critical social issues—among other many shifts and disruptions—are pushing the organization to quickly adapt and explore new ways to use digital technology to expand its offerings and maintain viability as well as relevance.

At the agency level technology is also changing the landscape of who is inserting themselves in the social services space and how. A generation of professionals that are socially engaged and tech-savvy—inspired in the B-Corp, social purpose and spiral business models and principles—are looking for ways to bring technology, business and social accountability together, usually in the form of start-ups. It is important to note that this is also generating a negative counter-reaction or response from some in the social services sector to anything termed "innovation" or assuming social innovation (change).

### *Environment Factors:*

While there are only a few agencies with important projects that speak to environmental issues, most services are indirectly affected by environmental factors. These factors may include environmental migration and their impact on immigration and settlement programs. As well as the impact of government environmental policy on infrastructure preparedness for example.

## **1.4 Challenges and opportunities specific to the sector**

At times the factors mentioned above may tend to feel abstract, but they represent very concrete challenges for agencies on the ground. These challenges are diverse and are interconnected.

### *Dependency on Public Funding*

Considering current trends to decrease public funding, agencies will be forced to cut services or look for ways to lower their dependency on government funding. According to an Ontario Non-Profit Network's Report<sup>9</sup>, 30 percent of responding organizations said their budgets have decreased as a result of the 2019 Ontario provincial budget. Fifty per cent do not have the bare minimum of three months reserve funds and 23 per cent anticipate having to pay out of pocket as a result of the 2019 budget and related policy decisions. This is the situation were already in prior to the COVID 19 health crisis. During the crisis agencies are having to pivot budgetary priorities to meet the most urgent needs of the community, laying-off staff from programs that are underused while having to invest in others which were less pressing before the crisis.

### *Changing Funding Mechanisms and the Possibility of Privatization*

With changes in government come changes to public spending and funding for social services. Agencies have had to periodically adapt to such shifts. This is nothing new, but what is new is what we are seeing today in the form of revisions to funding mechanisms. This is the case with the creation of the Ontario Health Agency and recently introduced pilot programs in employment services delivery<sup>10</sup>. These changes may have important implications for agencies.

First, they may incentivize innovation as Bill Sinclair explains; “They (government) specify the outcomes and you (the agency) have to come up with solutions. And so, I believe it is going to be hugely rich in innovation. It is also going to be hugely rich with risk, in that you will also be outcome funded. So that in fact, if you don’t get the outcome, you don’t get the funding.”

Second, these changes are accompanied with reforms to service supply-systems, that are perceived as clear signals from government to open up service management and delivery components of the system to private, private-public-social partnerships. While these may result in increased efficiencies they may also further an already growing tendency to private sector incursion into social services. To date, this has taken the form of food companies moving into the health and nutrition space, or corporations creating their own charities and public benefit arms-length organizations for example. Several social sector leaders reflected on this issue and noted that it is usually the most established and financially viable services, which seem attractive and run a higher risk of being taken over by private businesses. These include childcare services, mental health services and language classes.

#### *The Sector’s Changing Value Proposition*

While we do not refer to agencies as businesses, agencies exist within systems which determine their business models and define them as not-for-profit organizations. An important aspect of these models is their value proposition cemented on providing services to those who cannot access them through the private sector. A value proposition that is being disrupted by organizations—private, public, B-Corps., start-ups—entering the social services sector, either as service providers, but most significantly as funders and catalyzers of change and adaptation. As Daniele Zanotti states, “The social sector no longer holds a monopoly on caring and so the boundaries of the ‘social services sector’ are blurring. What is the social sector in this changing reality and perhaps most importantly, what should it become?” Nation Cheong, Vice-President, Community Opportunities and Mobilization is looking at how these current challenges are affecting individuals, agencies and funders alike and working closely with them to develop new ways of seeing and working. “The challenges our communities are facing demand that we work differently. Through initiatives such as the Golden Mile project, in collaboration with BMO and community partners in Scarborough, we are more present and active in the communities we serve like never before, but these new partnerships and ways of working also demand that we invest and grow in new internal capabilities. This may mean embedding innovation capacity in our organization more systematically, applying research in new ways, or hiring people with special skill sets like a background in city planning.”

### **1.5 Looking to harness innovation**

According to agency Executive Directors and staff, there is a direct link between agency funding models and their ability to innovate. While change and adaptation is nothing new to social organizations and agencies, the latitude and freedom agencies are granted by funders to ideate, propose, pilot and implement possible solutions to complex social issues has reciprocated shifts in funding models. These have ranged from ones in which funders would ask agencies to conceive possible solutions and consequently financially support their implementation to funder-designed, regimented and regulated programs and solutions in which agencies have little space to innovate. This scenario has lead agencies to either not being able to develop innovative capabilities or innovation happening at the margins of an agency’s work. This is within precariously funded programs or programs that have had the opportunity to receive seed funding.

#### *Vernacular Practices*

As I’ve noted, agencies are organizations that have grown from grass-roots community initiatives, with a high-level of self-organization. As such, agency services and programming not only reflect the local needs of a specific community and its members, they also reflect their lived experiences of design, their epistemologies and methodologies. This is how, since their creation—in some cases close to one-hundred years ago—agencies have acquired a rich and diverse array of knowledge and expertise in vernacular practices.

In early 2019, I had the opportunity to work on the creation of a short video showcasing examples of innovative initiatives at St. Stephen’s Community House. As part of this project I got to learn of several programs such as their Integrated Model of Care, The Trustee Hub Program and the Peer Leadership Program. These programs run the gamut of innovation, from core to adjacent to transformative. While these programs were conceived to meet the immediate needs of community members, they developed to defy preconceived notions of innovation having to be primarily transformative in nature. St. Stephen’s Integrated Model of Care for example evolved out of an after-school drop-in program created in 1990. As youth gathered to hang-out with friends, access technology and have snacks, they began to express a diverse array of unique needs and challenges. These were embraced as opportunities to expand and integrate services to include clinical and mental health and access to a nurse practitioner. Furthermore, these services are open to all youth, regardless of immigration status, having to register and or other common barriers to participation. Within a span of five years this after school drop-in program evolved into an innovative way of working with youth. In 2014, St. Stephen’s Integrated Model of Care was adopted by the City of Toronto and replicated in ten other youth centres across the city. The same could

be said of the Trustee Hub and The Peer Leadership Program. While some may characterize these as examples of core innovation as “tweaks” to how agency staff go about implementing their programs, it can be argued that these innovations are also transforming what we understand the role of the social services sector to be in addressing complex social issues. During the research charrettes, while discussing the Viable Systems Model a participant noted “it should be said that the operations can also affect and change the environment”. This is true, these three programs are a great example of such potential change at a systems level.

As mentioned before, this change is rooted in understanding the importance of community involvement in informing and designing programs and services. Lee Soda, Executive Director of ACSA for example reflecting on the agency’s planning work stated, “We are in the midst of developing a Community-Building Framework for the agency in which the community needs are placed at the centre of everything we do within the organization. In order for us to be relevant we need to continue to listen and empathize with community members and residents”. As it is for ACSA, listening, responsiveness and accountability to community is at the core of agency mandates, and their frameworks, methodologies and tools reflect this reality. Throughout the years, these frameworks have in turn been complemented and enriched by concepts, ideas and methods from other fields, such as social work, public health, Indigenous knowledge, mental health, social science research and trauma informed practices.

This is why many tools and ideas used within the emerging social innovation industry seem neither novel, authentic nor applicable to the social services sector. In fact, at times much of the recent innovation work feels more like gimmicky exercises in re-appropriation of concepts and practices that have existed in the social services sector for years. At times, there is nothing new about this form of innovation, only that social practices are more consistently being co-opted and commodified by the private sector and by innovation consultants, only to be “sold back” to the social sector in the form of social innovation.

#### *Agency Driven Innovation Initiatives*

Agencies have implemented a series of initiatives spanning from Board committees and Task Forces to working directly with community members in co-designing solutions to specific problems. Initiatives have included financial and seed funding, such is the case of the Big Ideas Fund established by The Neighbourhood Group to foster the generation of innovative ideas from staff in conjunction with community members. Others have opted to focus on providing workshops and other learning and skill development opportunities to their staff, some of which are made possible through partnerships with educa-

tional institutions, such as George Brown’s Institute without Boundaries and OCAD University.

#### *Working with Innovation Consultants*

Another modality pursued by agencies has been to work with innovation consultants. These initiatives have been made possible thanks to foundation and private funding. As such these opportunities have been limited in time and scope, but have been important in exposing agency front-line staff and management to service design methodologies, tools and practices being used in the social innovation industry.

The hiring of consultants in social innovation has garnered conflicting results. Most importantly it has opened a discussion, sometimes constructive, others not—about the boundaries between practices empirical or vernacular to the social sector and practices from the world of social innovation and design. These boundaries are marked by perceived differences in motivations, mindsets, language and stance.

In addition, several agency staff expressed they were challenged by the unnecessarily presumptuous and unaccessible “innovation lingo”, including the term innovation itself. Innovation tends to denote newness as opposed to acknowledging the existing sector experiences and looking at ideas as evolutions from these practices. Other insights included feeling that innovation—despite an inclusive discourse—continued to be practiced, from an expert-mindset and a hierarchical (top-down) perspective. That proponents of social innovation tend to be more interested in the abstract and macro versus the day-to-day and operational, which may have greater impact in people’s lives and be of greater interest to front-line staff. Lastly, that innovation practices tend to be proprietary in nature, i.e. concerning with who creates, owns and profits from the tools, frameworks and methodologies being used in the social innovation space.

### **1.6 Orthodoxies Challenging Innovation**

An important part of this research was to build on some of the great work that other’s— such as Zahra Ebrahim, who shared the board’s Innovation Task Force at St. Stephen’s Community House’s—had done around looking at existing organization orthodoxies that influenced staff’s approaches to innovation.

The following four primary orthodoxies are consolidated in a list, resulting from my own findings in this research.

*One: Innovation is a fad.* A common perception contrasting the belief that it is the way organizations may maintain relevance, adaptability and change in a context of constant change and disruption.



*Two: Innovation projects are one-off exercises* limited by available time and financial constraints, versus looking at innovation as a cyclical progression and evolution, which requires constant systematic thought on behalf of all involved.

*Four: Innovation is transformational*, and that changing the way you perform day-to-day tasks is not innovation, it is “tweaking”. This is an orthodoxy which is also promoted by people external to the sector. Unfortunately, it has been internalized and has begun to shape the way agencies approach innovation. It is a conceptualization of innovation that is limiting and does not consider your radius of influence and capacity to innovate that would allow an agency to support core, adjacent and transformative forms of innovation<sup>11</sup>.

As research began to inform and provide a more defined sense of the context and opportunities in which innovation

Thus, the research question that drives this major research project was informed by the research itself and resulted in the following articulation; **How might social service agencies create viable organizational cultures of innovation?**



# Viability<sup>1</sup>

We must bring together all science  
before patience runs out  
of millions that await  
bread and justice in this land



**Figure 4.**  
Photo by Lynn Murray.

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## Chapter 2. Viability

The goal of this research is to explore how agencies may move from one-off innovation projects—usually defined by time and budgets—into creating organizational cultures of innovation. Changes in culture imply a transformation in the ways of understanding, being and doing. In this case for ones that foster the creation of cultures of innovation. It is important to consider that this organizational culture change needs to take place within existing models and systems, therefore requiring of any new ways of thinking about cultures of innovation to address if these will be organizationally and financially viable.

In this initial chapter, I will explore the concept of viability and other concepts from the field of systems thinking, which help us approach organizational culture as a resulting output of organizational management. These concepts and approaches also provide a systems lens to how we understand the agency organization, its relation to the broader network of agencies and the social services sector as a whole (system). As well as its relation to the multiple disruptions impacting its operations. The last research charrette took place on Tuesday, March 10th, 2020. As charrette participants reflected on concepts such as “variety”, the “environment” and such, we also talked about possible disruptions to the work of agencies and examples tended to be quite abstract. In the days following our charrettes our world would be turned on its head. The day after (March 11th), World Health Organization director-general, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, declared the COVID-19 crisis a pandemic. On Thursday, March 12th the Government of Ontario announced that public schools would shut-down for three weeks, an order which was later extended. On March, 16th the federal government announced plans to close Canada’s borders to international travel. And on March 17th, Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced a state of emergency in the province of Ontario and ordered the closure of many businesses and the prohibition of gatherings of 50 people or more. In a matter of seven days the environment in which social service agencies operate had changed dramatically. The concepts that we will explore in this chapter may also help us understand some of the ways in which the sector has responded and could respond to future unprecedented disruptions.

In the current scenario of the global COVID-19 health crisis, the GTA’s social services sector has quickly adapted in order to continue providing essential services. It has looked for new ways of working. The creation of “Community Cluster” tables are one great example. These have allowed it to leverage and coordinate social, public and private sector resources, knowledge and expertise in response to the changing, varied and immediate needs of community. While crucially important, meeting immediate essential services and community needs is only half the battle in this crisis. On April 3rd, 2020, Toronto Mayor John Tory announced that the City of Toronto was losing an approximate \$65 million dollars a week during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>2</sup>. The pandemic will also have long-lasting social, economic and political effects, which will need to be addressed in the coming months and years. The viability of the social services sector and its organizations is no minor concern in this battle. Some of the concepts explored in this chapter may help us begin to revise the way we may leverage and foster of innovation within agencies in this fight.

### 2.1 Defining Viability

Viability is usually confused with sustainability, these terms are used alternately, but they are not synonymous. Sustainability refers to the ability to sustain a certain level of progression.

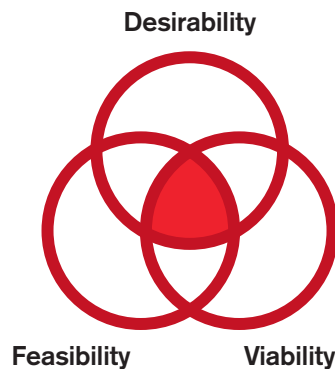
This can be a positive progression such as the natural growth of flora and fauna in a rainforest or it can be a negative progression, such as the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest, but it is nevertheless a progression, which may reach limits i.e. to become unsustainable in time. Viability on the other hand stems from the Latin “vita” meaning life, and so viability refers to the ability to exist separately or independently. In this context, we can interpret a “viable culture” to be “a culture, which exist—separately or independently—within another culture”. It is important to acknowledge that independence is a nuanced concept, and not necessarily a true or real aspiration in that

nothing is completely independent, especially not from a systems thinking perspectives.

#### *Financial Viability and Organizational Viability*

In the field of innovation design, there are two primary approaches to viability. One comes to us from the business world through Design Thinking and refers to financial viability. From a business perspective financial viability is described as a requirement for business success, allowing a product or service to survive in the market. In IDEO’s innovation sweet-spot matrix, viability is in fact considered one of three key conditions of an innovative idea. In summary, from a business perspective viability relates to financial independence of a product or service.

**Figure 5.** IDEO's "Innovation Sweet-Spot" is described as the intersection of three requisite conditions for innovative ideas: Desirability, Feasibility and Viability.



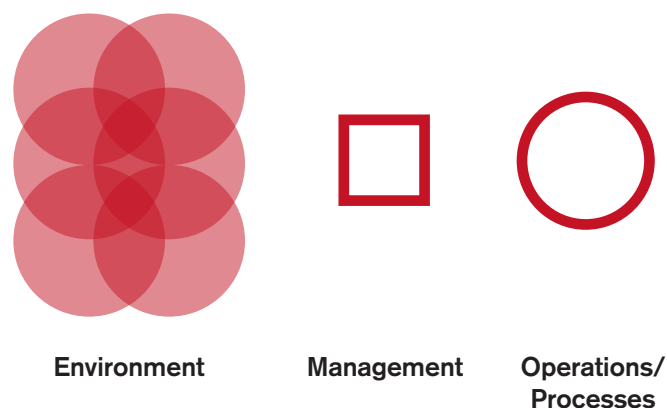
A second approach to viability comes to us from systems thinking and the field of cybernetics—this is “the scientific study of communication and control in the animal and the machine<sup>3</sup>”—as it has been applied to operational management. This approach places the focus on organizational viability or that which allows an organization to exist independently from the levels of disruptions in the environment surrounding it. Here is where I would like to begin our exploration of viable cultures of innovation, by introducing a systems lens to the agency organization via Stafford Beer's<sup>4</sup> Viable Systems Model.

## 2.2 A Systems Lens to Organizations

### Systems

Stafford Beer describes systems as being composed of an 'Environment', 'Management' and 'Operations', and its primary function to be the management of a process within an environment.

**Figure 6.** Systems are composed of environment, management and operations.

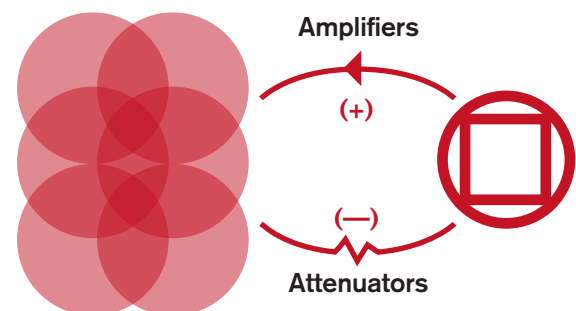


A system fulfills this function by managing “variety”, meaning the diverse and fluctuating possible states of a system. From a systems perspective, what an organization—let's say a food bank—manages, are inputs in the form of variety (possible states)—a decrease in people requiring food or an increase in access to food donations—coming into the system (food bank), via its environment (community, neighbourhood, city, etc.).

### Attenuators and Amplifiers

In the process of managing variety, systems use attenuators and amplifiers. Attenuators are the mechanisms and tools that organizations put in place in order to filter, collect, analyze, interpret, and make sense of data. We do this in order to determine, which of these data points are of relevant importance in achieving our goals within the opportunity and scenario at hand, and which are not. As the word implies, attenuators diminish the quantity and/or impact of variables coming into the system from the environment.

**Figure 7.** The management of variety utilizing amplifiers and attenuators.



Using our food bank example, attenuation may imply increasing the number of front-line workers or volunteers in order to diminish (attenuate) the number of service users being served by each staff person, or it may mean deciding that the catch-area of the food bank will be a specific community or neighborhood versus the entirety of the city. In both of these cases the agency is attenuating variety.

In contrast to attenuators, amplifiers are the mechanisms and tools that are put in place in order to augment the outcome of our operations. In our food bank example these amplifiers may take the form of increasing the ask for food to meet the increase in demand. In other cases, amplification may mean diversifying the programs being offered in order to serve a growing need in the community or launching a marketing campaign that re-positions the organization in the eyes of service users, funders or other key stakeholders.



### Ashby's Law

William Ross Ashby coined the term “variety” as “a measure of the number of possible states of a system”<sup>5</sup>. This is to say that variety as a measuring unit, is not quantitative. Variety does not measure the impact or size of these perturbations. Variety is not a quantitative measure. Variety is qualitative, it measures the number of possible states, such as increased in demand, decrease in demand, stable level of demand, etc. Furthermore, as Beer denoted “variety as a measurement is not precise. A system cannot be measured with such level of precision.”<sup>6</sup>

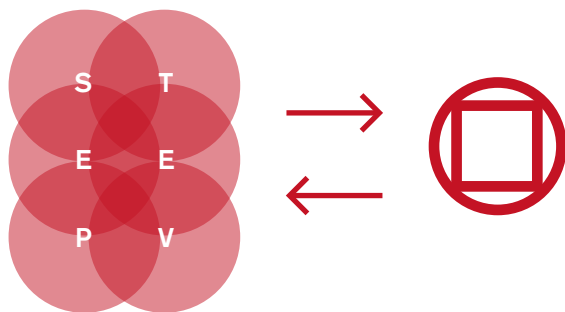
In addition, Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety establishes that “only variety can absorb variety”<sup>7</sup>. By extension, the level of variety that a system generates through attenuation or amplification needs to be equal or greater than the amount of variety being exerted onto it via the environment. This presents several implications for an agency organization. First, it must have the capacity to detect, understand and process variety. Second, it must have the internal communication and control resources to be able to adequately respond to these perturbations coming from the environment and affecting its system, fundamentally its operations. Third, it must have the capacity to do so in an amount of time as to be able to adapt and return to equilibrium (known as relaxation time) before disruptions render the system obsolete and irrelevant. In other words, not viable.

### 2.3 The STEEPV Analysis:

#### A Tool to Help Us Manage Variety

As you can imagine, an environment may have an overwhelming amount of variety. One tool that helps us classify and organize variety is a STEEPV analysis. This is a tool utilized in foresight and futures thinking studies. It segments signals and trends we observe in a determined environment into six comprehensive realms: the social, technological, economic, environmental, political and value-driven.

**Figure 8.** Disruptions and change affecting the relation between environment and operations can be analyzed utilizing STEEPV Analysis.



For example—in the context of a shelter—signals and trends may take the form of changes in outdoor temperature, cuts to operational funding for housing and homelessness programs or changes in public perception on homelessness. Observing these signals and trends may help us determine which of them we deem will have greater or lesser impact on the system, at how and what level of the system (function) will these disruptions affect the organization and most importantly, what effect will it have on the system as a whole. In other words, what is the variety or number of possible states of the system.

### 2.4 Five System Functions

Above, I focused on the relation between a system and variety coming from “the outside world” (or environment) and how we may organize and analyze it. Beer conceived of these concepts through observing nature and studying the physiology of the human body. He proposes that the other two components of a system—Management and Operations—can be understood through what in human physiology would be described as the “somatic system” and “automatic system” composed by five integrated system functions as described below.

#### System Function 1 (S1): Operations.

System 1 is concerned with the fulfillment of specific productive or generative activities that operationalize and bring to life the organization's purpose and reason for existing, its mandate. As in the human body, there are usually various S1 core units that perform a specific function (lungs, liver, stomach, bones, skin, muscles, etc.). Each core unit also includes the mechanisms, which allow it to communicate and interact with other core units in the process of fulfilling a function or creating a desired outcome for the whole system/organization.

As can be deduced, while System 1 plays a key functional role, it is limited in its scope and range of action. S1 needs the support of having a bird's eye view to address more impactful variables and challenges. This is where the organization's management steps in.

#### System Function 2 (S2): Coordination.

System 2 compiles and processes information allowing it to provide different perspectives that include efforts to resolve problems in the interest of the whole. S2 coordinates and distributes the available resources and resolves conflicts arising between core productive units. Physiologically it is associated with the sympathetic nervous system. It is important to note the key role that system 2 plays is control and communication processes within a system. Beyond a functional role, allowing the S1 Operations to fulfill tasks and how system 2 functions are conceived and executed, will have a direct effect on the organizational characteristics of a system. This is, whether the system/organization is characterized as being centralized, open, hierarchical, bureaucratic or innovative.

### System Function 3 (S3): Optimization and Audit.

System 3 has a broader sense of the complementarity of core productive units, allowing it to provide stability, synergy and coherence among these. In an organization, S3 is tasked with managing efficiencies and helps inform norms and policies. Linked to these evaluative functions, S3 also fulfills an auditing function, which is usually symbolized as 'S3\*'. S3 resembles the mid-brain, while S3\* is associated with the functions fulfilled by the parasympathetic system in the human body.

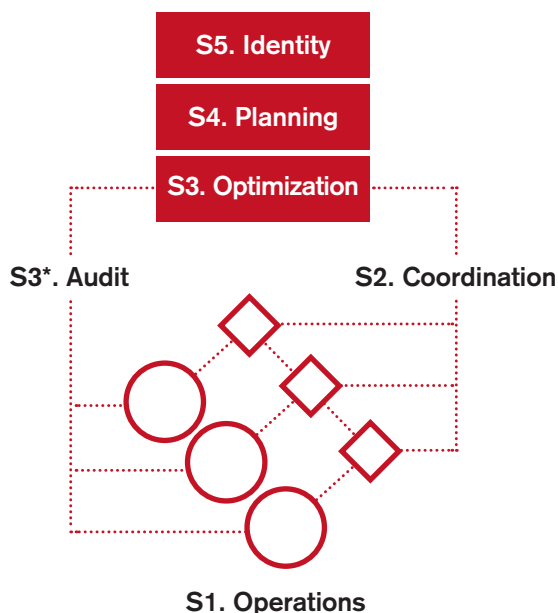
### System Function 4 (S4): Planning.

System 4 captures and processes information that is external to the system and makes sense of it, allowing the system to react and adapt (innovate). In an organization it examines signals, trends and possible changes in the environment and foresees the strategic changes that will be required in order to maintain balance, relevance and viability. In the human body, S4 is associated with the diencephalon and ganglia.

### System Function 5 (S5): Identity.

System 5 is the central repository holding the overall context of the system. As such, it holds the higher values of the whole, a sense of purpose and direction. In an organizational context it is the maximum authority and representation (a Board). It is associated with the functions of the cerebral cortex in the human body.

**Figure 9.** Stafford Beer's Five System Functions.



These five system functions are again derived from Beer's research of organizational management models and the human nervous system, specifically human parasympathetic and sympathetic systems. In his explanations of system functions 1-5,

Beer emphasizes that these are not hierarchically organized and should not be confused with an organizational chart. In other words, we should understand these five functions as fundamental to an integrated and balanced whole, without which the whole cannot independently exist or be viable.

## 2.5 Recursion

In 1970, Roger Conant and William Ross Ashby of the University of Illinois presented "Every Good Regulator of a System Must be a Model of that System"<sup>8</sup>, a research paper in which they introduced the idea that in order for a regulator (management) to effectively regulate a system, it needs to be isomorphic, that is similar relationally, in function and/or form to the system being regulated. Beer expands on Conant and Ashby's ideas stating, "all viable systems contain and are contained within viable systems"<sup>9</sup>. Canada's health system is a good example of a recursive viable system in that it has a neighbourhood structure (Ontario Health Teams), a municipal structure (Toronto Public Health) embedded within a provincial system (Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care), which in turn is embedded within a federal system (Health Canada). In this scenario, "levels of recursion" refers to federal, provincial, municipal, and neighbourhood. Explaining recursion within a viable system Beer states "a level of recursion is a level at which a viable system is in operation, as an autonomous part of a higher-level viable system, and containing within itself parts of which are themselves autonomous viable systems"<sup>10</sup>. This implies that there is a limit to recursion. Having private homes be part of Canada's health system for example, may seem to be recursive to an extreme. Likewise, excessive control or "micro-management" within an organization typically results in bureaucracy.

*"Institutions are not just entities, with certain characteristics. They are instead dynamic viable systems, and their characteristics are in fact outputs of their organizational behavior."*<sup>11</sup>

— Stafford Beer

## 2.6 Bureaucracy

During the research stage of this project, several agency staff spoke of bureaucracy as one of the main limitations to innovation. From the perspective of a viable systems model, it is important for operational function units to count on significant levels of decentralization, autonomy and freedom in order to be able to effectively adapt and respond to the changing environment (perturbations) around them. This includes the ability to (recursively) develop coordination, optimization, planning and mandate-driven functions. Instead, a common tendency is to overly control or micro-manage operations, not only limiting the operations range of freedom to think and adapt in response to the changing environment, but also putting in place functions at other levels of recursion. To exemplify this challenge, look at how in May 2019 the provincial government of Ontario tabled

legislation that allowed it to effectively take over municipal transit projects in the city of Toronto. In this case, it was an overt political move to exert control over another jurisdiction's (system level) function. Willingly or unconsciously, this also takes place within organizations and among individuals. The clearest sign of organizational bureaucracy is when it builds supra-structures over its coordination, optimization, planning or identity system functions (system functions 2 to 5). In the context of the social services sector this is often justified through what many term a "scarcity mind-set" and may take the form of centralizing information and other resources at the management level. This is often done inadvertently, precisely because the division of the natural functions of thinking and doing have become an established belief. That is an orthodoxy that dictates that a management's role is to think, plan, evaluate, optimize, and ideate, while operations focuses on execution (the provision of service). While there are practical benefits for this division of labour—especially in the context of industrial production—it often makes little sense today and even less in the context of service provision.

In contrast, agency Executive Directors and many at United Way often speak of the need to foster a "mindset of abundance". As scarcity mindsets cement bureaucracy within the organization, bureaucracy limits the potential for innovation by limiting access to resources that engender autonomy and freedom of thought and action. But this is not all, bureaucracy also engenders lack of ownership, lack of responsibility and disengagement on employees. Mindsets of abundance in turn are seen as the possibility to make intangible resources, such as time, space, information and opportunities, available to people working to operationalize the organization's mandate. But this implies a shift in the way we see employees. From one in which people are seen as a resource to one where they are seen as an asset, from executors to knowledge experts. In other words, to see them as holistic beings that are not divorced from their vocation, and that can play a key role in providing insights and expertise that informs the reimagining of organizational tasks, services or processes. This is not an aspirational ideal, it is a necessity in the new emerging scenarios of "work" and one that is affecting every industry and sector including the social services sector as expressed by many in this research.

## 2.7 Using a systems lens to build propositional capacity

In addition to what agencies can do to support innovative thinking, there is also what frontline staff can do to develop greater propositional capacity. This is the capacity to move from ideas to a proposed plan of action. Instead of focusing solely on the barriers that are in place for innovative work, frontline workers may benefit from looking at ways to build the capacity (create variety) in order to mitigate (absorb) these barriers and constraints. In an already strapped sector that is narrowing in terms of available resources, this skill can prove to be key to viability. In order to exemplify this, let me share with you an excerpt from a conversation

with Ruth Crammond, Vice-President, Community Investments and Development at United Way Greater Toronto. In our interview, I asked Ruth what she believed were some of the key competencies or skills required to be most effective innovators. Ruth responded "My personal feeling is that the skill set that a lot of us struggle with is to be able to translate ideas from concept to implementation. If we could do this, we would be able to bring about so much more change. I think what we need is for people to instead of saying 'I have this great concept for how things could be different, but I am going to need \$500, and I don't have time, so I am going to need another person, etc.' is to first think of how your idea can be implemented within your existing constraints. If you cannot do this, well, then you're not thinking about implementation. Innovative people work within their constraints. Instead we could say, 'I would like to do this differently, we've always done this in this way, but here's another way we could be doing this, that I think could really work. What can I do within my existing budget? Go off and implement these changes that are within the purview of your work and responsibilities. Document and demonstrate the success and value of your ideas. With this initial success, you may begin to build on for future successes, so that next time when you come up with an idea, your manager may be open even looking for ways to find a little bit of money to support your efforts or evolving what you've done to date. It is equally important to understand that we all work within constraints. Senior management works within constraints such as government funding, rules and regulations, etc. Their creativity comes from finding space within these rules in order to reallocate their resources, free up somebody's time and support innovation. When we have things done, really practical solutions are essential to innovation. Innovative thinking needs to work within and address constraints."

The ideas put forward by Ruth Crammond are of great value in the agency setting. Together with an understanding of Beer's system functions they provide a sense of what organizational constraints to consider when testing or building a case for innovative ideas. For example, from a Systems Function 5 (Identity) perspective, have we considered how our ideas support the organizational mandate and reflect the organization's values and strategic plans? From a systems Function 4-Planning perspective, have we thought of what possible disruptions could affect the effective implementation of our ideas? Do we have a contingency plan in place for these possible scenarios? From a Systems Function 3 approach, have we thought about the implications this idea would have on other teams and/or processes within the organization? Do we have a way to amplify or attenuate these? From a Coordination perspective (Systems Function 2), what would need to be true to effectively implement this idea? And lastly, from an Operational perspective what new value do we foresee this idea providing individuals, the team or the organization? Is this benefit measurable and if so, how will we document and report on it?



# Displacement<sup>1</sup>

Little white horse, take me from here  
take me to the land, where I was born  
I have, I have, I have  
you have nothing



Figure 10.



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## Chapter 3. Displacement

In Chapter 2 on Viability, I have explored two key ideas. First, that the characteristics of an organization are outputs of organizational behaviour. Second—as expressed by many research participants—is the need for a shift in how we understand and approach the role of staff and community to one that is centred on a “decolonizing” mindset of abundance, participation and proposition. While agreeing, in my opinion these shifts need to take into consideration the broader system in which the agency organization and the social services sector as a whole is incerted, and in order to do so, I would like to begin by offering an interpretation of the concept of displacement.

*“Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also, because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence”<sup>2</sup>*

— Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang.

### 3.1 Place

The title of this research paper asks for a definition of the term displaced that will allow us to situate displacement in the context of participatory design. I would like to begin by offering a working definition of place. This definition is informed by my personal experiences as a political refugee to Canada, as a colonized-settler and by my exposure to Indigenous traditional knowledge. While this exposure is recent and basic, it has helped me understand my personal experiences of displacement and has had a great impact in how I understand “place” as both a physical and non-physical space.

Place, as land, provides the material resources with which we feed ourselves, we build our dwellings, ideate and manufacture tools and technologies that we trade with others. Place also speaks to the relations we establish between ourselves and with the environment around us. Place provides the experiential knowledge from which we conceive and understand the world around us. I remember travelling as a child, for the first time to Santiago (in Chile’s central valley) in the middle of winter. For me, the most striking memory of this trip was the rain. Being born in the Atacama Desert, which has an average annual precipitation of 15mm, I had no idea what rain was. I was seven years old, and I remember being mesmerized for I had never experienced water falling from the sky. Place shapes and informs the way we understand the world around us, it produces habits and language, such as learning to say “rain” or “drizzle” and being able to understand the nuances between the two. Place also provides a sense of identity linked to location, it allows us to make statements such as “I am from the north” or “I am from the desert”. Place also links us to others who have inhabited the place before us from them we inherit a way of knowing

and a way of being in place, their experiential knowledge, their stories and lessons of the events that shaped their lives. Place provides us a sense of shared history and being part of its continuity. As such, place is fundamental in providing us a sense of belonging and identity. In essence, Place encompasses and shapes the material, cognitive, psychological and social resources we require to exist and to develop.

Utilizing this definition and by extension, *Displacement* implies a state of deprivation and/or loss of control over these resources. As a displaced person, you are dispossessed of the material, cognitive, psychological and social resources vital to your subsistence. In other words, you are deprived of viability, as the capacity to exist independently.

### 3.2 Displacement

My trip to Santiago at age seven, was the beginning of my family’s displacement from Chile. A few days later we would fly out to Canada, where my father said, “we will see these great water falls called Niagara”. This is all I knew about this new place. A place abundant in water and vegetation, so completely opposite to my place. Our refuge in Canada was—for my parents and their political generation of Allende supporters—the continuation of their systematic displacement, which had started the day of the military coup. A displacement that had begun with the complete loss of control over resources, destinies and power over everything and anything in their worlds, including—in many cases quite literally—their viability.

Displacement also speaks to a present and continuous worldview that seeks to guarantee the “other’s” marginalization from participation and processes of self-determination. What displacement disrupts is people’s need to live in relation to their environment and nature—self-determination—as well as to establish associations with other human beings—self-governance. Displacement is the effective policing of exclusionary control over forms of participation that make self-determination and self-governance possible.

### 3.3 The Other

Displacement is not merely a consequence of prevailing social economic systems that is neoliberalism. Displacement has been designed and implemented through state policies, and constitutes a foundational concept of the ideological structures that support the most extreme expressions of neoliberal economies and philosophy. Furthermore, displacement is commonly conceived as natural and fostered as a necessary evil, “for some to have, ‘others’ must have not”. Even if and when this implies high levels of systemic inequality, displacement continues to be an intrinsic part of how social economic models, business models and at times, organizational models are conceived. The prevailing us/them, mentality (state/citizen, business/client, agency staff/client) is rooted and enforced through the creation of this “Other”. And in turn this “Other” is construed as being different from us, and to whom we hold little or no relation.

Following Professor Samir Gandesha’s<sup>3</sup> studies on what he terms the Neoliberal-personality, this “Other” is depicted as backward, stuck in time, and irrelevant to our present, a thing of the past. The “Other” is an uncanny subject—that despite enlightenment—is construed as alien, abject and a threat to the system.

In the context of social services work, one of the latent unifying characteristics between most who access services is the experience of poverty. Therefore, it is in our interest to further understand how “the poor” are construed as “the other” and how this influences the way we conceive of and understand the role of employees, agencies, agency staff, community members and those most marginalized.

### 3.4 Aporophobia, fearing the experience of poverty

Poverty in Canada is racialized and gendered. Utilizing the proposed approach to displacement, this is to say that in Canada poverty not only has specific range of skin colour, has gender<sup>4</sup> and an accent, but also includes epistemologies that are “outside” of the norm.

Poverty as the deprivation to goods and services, as well as to opportunities to effectively change your conditioned of displaced—through education, health and employment—further reinforces prevailing understandings of “the Other”. In this cycle otherness is not only constituted by those unable to participate in the established economic systems or existing outside of it due to lack of knowledge, experience, understanding and expertise, but also those who physically and cognitively represent an “other” way of being and knowing.

Professor Adela Cortina’s concept of aporophobia<sup>5</sup>—fear of poverty and of the poor—and her studies in the field constitute an important contribution to understanding how neoliberal economies eulogize consumption and promote fear and disgust for the inability to consume.

Means of mass communication and knowledge creation—media, economic experts, political pundits—systematically exploits this aporophobia to reinforce a quantitative, revenue, income and consumer driven understanding of progress and well-being. Via sound-bites, such as “Indigenous people do not pay taxes”, “immigrants are coming and taking our jobs” or “we need to control social spending”, the message is consistent with a strategy that seeks to engrain the belief that those in need are an “Other”, a problem requiring solution and ultimately a source of fear, both for what they represent and what they imply in relation to the establishment’s well-being.

### 3.5 Proprioception

As research for this paper progressed I began to reflect on the concept of proprioception. Simply put, proprioception is the sense through which we perceive the position, place, movement and interactions of our body with ourselves, with others and in relation to our surrounding environment. It is the sense we utilize when we scratch an itch, it tells us not only where to move our hand towards, but exactly what is the relation of our hand to our fingers and to our skin. Or when we dodge a ball in the playground. It is the sense that allows us to place our body—move—in relation to an external object flying towards us.

*“In this salutary sense, a range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking.”<sup>6</sup>*

— Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

The proactive portrayal of the “Other” as different, as backward and abject, feeds on the natural human psychosomatic response to that which is not familiar to us. These responses range from disassociation and discomfort to disgust and violence. Similarly, the experience of systematic displacement elicits in us psychosomatic responses that are commonly described as an “imbalance”, as feeling “out of place”, or as if our world has been turned upside down. Our sense of self (who we are) and in relation to our own persona (our identity), has been flipped on its head. From this perspective, proprioception as a psychosomatic concept, builds on the neurophysiological basis of the Viable Systems Model. But, while the VSM provides us a systems lens to understand natural systems, proprioception

names the internal mechanisms, which provide a sense of place in relation to self and in relation to the external environment in which the system (our bodies and minds) exists. Our natural response to the trauma of displacement is to try to flip our reality on its head, to make it fit to how we perceive the world around us.

### 3.6 The Collective Challenge of Innovation

Here again, as we talk of displacement the concepts of freedom, autonomy and control—explored in chapter two (on viability) of this paper—are called up. As we begin to look for ways to frame the work of innovation that is required from us—in these times of unprecedented disruptions—bringing together these concepts from systems thinking to those that come to us from grass-roots organizing and political resistance can inform a powerful vision for innovation work. I propose that these concepts of freedom, autonomy, self-determination, self-governance are what we need to reflect upon today more than ever as we rethink and reimagine ourselves, and our relations to the world around us. Our capacity to create conditions that foster freedom, autonomy will continue to increasingly impose itself as the key requirement to organizational viability, change and adaptation. In other words, as the key requirement for adaptation, change, innovative thinking and innovation.

The experience of displacement can afford us a unique perspective on innovation at a personal and collective level.

#### *Holding Two Realities at the Same Time*

To be displaced means to be forced to deal with the dualism of realities. On one hand, the established system through powerful forms of knowledge and value creation. One that constitutes the mainstream culture to which we are born or forced into. On the other hand, the intellectual and emotional epistemologies that compose our personal and intimate reality and identities. To be displaced, means to live in a constant negotiation between these two realities. The displaced think in one language and mentally translate before speaking in another. The displaced must maintain an openness to empathize in order to learn and adapt. Their lived experiences and their environments have informed their understanding of the world, yet displaced subjects quickly incorporate what they believe to be true for others in the dominant culture in order to be able to effectively communicate and have their thoughts and actions be interpreted and understood in the most relatable manner.

#### *Moving from the Personal to the Collective*

Similar to the need and ability to hold two realities at the same time, collectives of people adopt these capabilities into their organizational methods. Participatory design methods of the displaced are rooted in this capacity to engender freedom,

autonomy, self-governance and self-determination. Throughout history people living ‘outside’ or ‘at the margins’ of society have come together to create vernacular forms of organization, visions of possible futures and to work towards self-determination. Community-based social service projects, centers, associations and organizations are part of this legacy. These experiences and practices are dependent in individual’s seeing themselves as part of a community and participating in it. Despite their commodification as “participatory design”, dating them the late nineteen-sixties and early nineteen-seventies and to primarily in Great Britain and Scandinavian countries<sup>7</sup>, participatory design methods have been in existence since the beginning of time and have also shaped the most important social movements in modern history.

The current social challenges—poverty, inequality, xenophobia, climate change—are complex and profound. In the midst of all this change, the emergent characteristics of participation and organization—decentralized, autonomous, diverse, localized—are also challenging the way we have previously thought about social innovation work. This is within the structures of modernism and the neoliberal socio-economic system.

We have come to the realization that the current predominance of radicalized forms of economic models are not sustainable and need to change. Neoliberalism is in crisis. The social, economic, political and ideological structures that support free market economies are beginning to buckle under the pressure of societal demands of greater equity, more participation and an increase in consumption. The current needs to augment production and in consequence, the increased environmental contamination and pollution it produces are unsustainable and we need to find new ways of addressing these needs.

In this scenario, those of us interested in designing organizational models and methodologies that foster social innovation need to ask, how will new forms of economic activity evolve? How will neoliberalism evolve? How is participatory design conceived and implemented in these new possible scenarios? And what are the roles of the social sector and of social innovation in these possible future scenarios?

New and emerging social movements are looking to change everything. Innovation needs to catch-up and our frameworks need to understand, embrace and foster this change. Displacement may provide a valuable perspective to innovation that is both personal and collective, individual and systemic. This is to say, that it is in itself a perspective that embraces and fosters the possibility to hold many realities, epistemologies, visions and positionalities together and at the same time.





# Inversion<sup>1</sup>

I can't hear your  
Indian song Mrs. Johnson,  
I've got a tin ear



**Figure 11.**  
Photo by Pablo Insunza.

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# Chapter 4. Inversion

In previous parts of this research paper I provided context to the research question—how may we create viable cultures of innovation—and introduced concepts, which I believe could help us find possible answers. In Chapter 4, my goal is to look at how a perspective of inversion could help us inform the theoretical framing for the work of an innovation network among United Way member agencies.

## 4.1 Inversion as Oppositional Consciousness

Inversion is the vindication of displacement. It looks to transform the psychosomatic response of imbalance in a world turned upside down—from reaction to oppression—to an empowering form of consciousness in opposition<sup>2</sup>.

Inversion perspectives may be approached as the systematic balancing of oppositionalities, i.e. in ways of knowing and being. In this sense, inversion is not merely “the ability to face constructively the tension of opposing ideas”<sup>3</sup> as defined by Roger Martin in relation to integrated thinking. Nor is it equal to reverse thinking where ways of approaching problems are reversed. Inversion is the acknowledgement of many ways of being in the world and actively searching for opposing ways of cognition that are counter to each other, and in fact at times are in direct conflict with each other. As such, inversion is conducive to a more diverse, richer and empathetic understanding of the world around us—as it acknowledges the commonalities and struggles of opposing and conflicting worldviews. Inversion borrows from both traditional Marxist philosophical laws of dialectical materialism<sup>4</sup> and from contemporary business management methods looking to reinvigorate financial viability, competitiveness and ultimately the development of capital<sup>5</sup>. The perspective of inversion is in itself a product of inversion.

## 4.2 From What Exists, to What Could Be

Scientists observe phenomena in order to understand what exists and occurs. Likewise, the Viable Systems Model helps us understand existing natural and human systems and applies these principles to operational management. Yet, could the VSM help us conceive of systems that do not yet exist? I began to play with this question during a class by Panos Panagiotakopoulos at OCADU in which he introduced students to Stafford Beer’s work. The five system functions reminded me of organizational methods and tactics I experienced in Chile during my involvement with social movements. These forms of organizations, which were outlawed and forced to go underground, were instrumental in the work against the military dictatorship during the 1970s and 80s.

Similar to Beer’s VSM, these movements were primarily concerned with the concept of viability, in that they were concerned with existing and surviving. But, while Beer observes viability in relation to operational management in order to fulfill a productive function—that is with what is occurring in systems as the management of processes and operations—these movements focused on the not yet realized, that which would need to be conceived or that which would be. And this is where we can draw a parallel to creative thinking and innovation.

Here is where I would like to begin, by expanding on the experiences of participatory design methods of resistance movements and looking at how we may adapt these in our current context. One such movement, which I am familiar with and can speak to from the perspective of personal experience, is the high-school student movement in Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1989)<sup>6</sup>.

### *The Ideal of Democracy*

In the case of Chile, the abstract ideal of democracy was the fundamental driving force behind the organization in resistance, which in turn was also an output of their organizational behavior and formed the concepts around which people came together to help shape and make the organization possible.

### *The High School Student Movement Against the Military Dictatorship in Chile*

Structurally, these organizations would grow and expand using an organizational model popularly known as “the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5”. In this model, a member of the organization worked to recruit another person in the place in which there was interest to expand to. That first recruitment took on the role of “number one”. The number one can well be associated with the VSM’s system function 5 (Identity) in the sense that it held the highest political responsibility as the representative of the movement or organization in the “environment”. This environment could be a place of work, a neighbourhood or a school. One of the first tasks the number one would be tasked with would be to recruit a “number two”. This number two would fulfill organizational functions such as coordination and finances (S2 Coordination and S3 Optimization and Audit), and together with the number one, would work to grow by recruiting a “number three”.

A “number three” would then be tasked with being the liaison with the “masses”.

This person held a position comparable to a VSM’s system function 4-Planning, in that it was tasked with both taking the opinions and plans of the organization and making them public, as well as reading how the public was feeling, what their concerns and demands were, and bringing that information back to the group. Finally, any additional members of the group—meaning numbers four and five—would help operationalize specific tasks given to the group. In order to maintain a capacity to adapt, make decisions and respond quickly to changes, most collectives did not grow beyond five to seven people. This said, each person fulfilling a specific function was considered a team-lead in their area of work, and could recruit others from outside the collective to support their work. In addition, the organization could always grow to have two or more collectives in the same school and/or specialize in specific types of tasks, such as propaganda, liaising with the police and armed forces, self-defense or human-rights advocacy work.

From an organizational structure perspective, this is how the movement grew and developed from neighbourhood to neighbourhood or from school to school. This model was also recursive. These same functions (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) were reproduced at local, regional and national levels. This effectively created specialized silos of underground work that were highly coordinated. Despite the conditions of unsurmountable precariousness and the overwhelming amount of disruption affecting the system/organization—in the form of political repression and logistical constraints—the level of communication and control that moved up and down the structure was fluid, constant and consistent. It allowed for quick adaptation and response, as well as shifting levels of decentralization and/or more stringent control or compartmentalizing as was deemed necessary.

These models of organization in resistance are structurally, a direct inversion of Beer’s five system functions and allow us to reflect on how environmental factors influence not only how we organize, but what we organize for. In other words, to fulfill a reproductive task—to increase, grow, expand—or to fulfill a productive task—to conceive, maintain, develop.<sup>7</sup>

### 4.3 Inversion in the Context of Social Service Agency System Functions

While the above described models of organization in resistance can be interpreted as a direct inversion of Beer’s five system functions, these can also help us begin a conversation around how we may adopt an inversion perspective to rethink system functions in support of generating innovative organizational cultures.

#### *System Function 5: Identity*

An agency’s overarching reason for existing is usually articulated in its mission. Missions are general statements describing the impact the organization wishes to have in a specific field, in relation to an issue or cause. As we move through the organization and into the operationalization of its mission, the work becomes more focalized and outcome driven, to the point that many times audiences begin to identify an agency with what it does or with the services it provides, as opposed to their mission, to what they stand for or the value it proposes.

From a system’s five perspective the primary goal of inversion should be to constantly remind its staff of the importance of staying true to mission or of being mission-driven. To demonstrate this idea, we could ask; is the agency’s mission to provide a service, say daycare services? Or is it to “build stronger communities”? As soon as we are reminded of the overarching mission, the possibilities for innovation within the provision of daycare services broadens. We may begin to ask; how else could we provide day-care services so that it contributes to building stronger communities?

Placing emphasis, not only on how we deliver a service, but the value the organization brings to the end service-user, also has a direct influence in what the organization begins to understand innovation to be. Most people will define innovation as “a new idea or a new way of doing things”. This definition places emphasis on capacity to generate new ideas. We could invert the concept to emphasize not on new ideas, but on new value. In so doing, innovation is understood as “an idea that adds new value”. This definition demystifies innovation as being about uniqueness or novelty, and acknowledges the importance of evolving products and services versus simply replacing them for supposedly “new, superior ones”. This definition of innovation is also more accurate to what actually occurs on the ground and what innovation is, an evolution.

These ideas have a meaningful impact on innovation at an operational level where lived experiences and insights constantly feed innovative thinking. But it can also help us better understand the many activities that take place at a macro level in an organization. For example, today agencies are perceived primarily as the deliverers of social services, but they are much more than this. Agencies are advocates, research centers, community-building sites and social innovation catalyzers as well. Inversion at the level of the identity creation function may look to explore different ways to redefine an agency’s value proposition. In times when the sector as a whole is being pressured to rethink itself, inversion as a tool to reimagine the agency organization may just be what we require.

#### *System Function 4: Planning*

From a planning perspective, focus should be placed on creating the internal competencies, mechanisms and conditions to acknowledge signals and trends that will impact the organization and each individual program or team and their work in the future. Depending on the available resources of the agency organization, this may mean simply adding these competencies and tasks into existing job descriptions or the creation of a specialized team linked to data-gathering activities, research and service-design work.

A systematic approach to planning would allow us to invert from what has tended to be a reactionary response to change to a stance of proactive preparation and forecasting of distinct possible scenarios the organization may have to operate under in the future.

To provide a simple example to this point, we could ask how many organizations not only have the resources of time, funds, knowledge, etc. to documenting how the current COVID 19 health crisis is affecting their operations? We know this crisis will pass, that we will recover. Having mechanisms to record data, document and interpret the effects of disruptions in as close as real-time as possible could be of great value to providing a sense of how people, organizations and systems may react to possible future crises.

#### *System Function 3: Optimization and Audit*

Frontline workers provided interesting insights into the current audit and optimization related challenges during the research. They included the need to create the technological conditions for agency organizations to be able to collect data and the opportunity to define what type of data is relevant to collect, as stakeholders—service users, funders, donors, volunteers—have differing ways of evaluating agency programs and services.

Even if an agency was technically able to collect data, the bigger problem is being able to move from traditionally funder-required quantitative data collection methods to collecting qualitative data. It was expressed that currently, evaluation tends to focus on how many people used a service or program, but usually ignores or does not understand how programs and services actually work. It is not only that there are few follow up initiatives to look a program's impact in a participant's life, weeks or months after they have accessed the agency service, but there is also a compartmentalized approach to evaluating impact by service or program. This is, an evaluation and data management approach which does not look at how the combination of multiple programs and services complement each other to help provide a broad array of services and allowing for impactful change in a client's life to actually take place.

This key inversion from quantitative to qualitative data gathering would have multiple important implications on an organization, in how it understands auditing and optimization, but also in how it approaches fulfilling its mission and auditing the outcomes of its work.

#### *System Function 2: Coordination*

Coordination—as the methods through which control and communication are exercised within a system—have a direct relation to how organizational behaviour and therefore culture are created. When it comes to coordination, focus should be placed on inverting common tendencies: from expert mind-set-driven processes and methodologies to participatory ones. This concretely means, challenging current limits imposed on open communication and conditioning of power and control in our day-to-day activities and work. Instead, emphasis should be placed on providing all the necessary resources for staff to effectively participate in and affect decision-making processes. Tangible and intangible resources should be considered and may include space, equipment, methodologies, processes and tools as well as time, funds, information and data. Provision of these resources is key to facilitating staff's effective ability to access and interpret information as well as to create new knowledge from the experiences and information provided. In other words, it is not enough to merely ask people (staff or community members) for their input, management also needs to provide people the tools to participate in decision-making activities and processes.

At the management level, beyond the provision of information, focus should be placed on creating the conditions that would allow an inversion in mindsets, from those that incentivize micro-management and bureaucracy to ones that foster individual expression, freedom and autonomy.

#### *System Function 1: Operations*

The key role of systems level 1 functions is to operationalize the mandate (identity) of an organization. Traditional management has tended to view employees as a resource versus an asset to the organization. This is a perspective that is reinforced through the hiring of frontline workers that will be able to do the work and leave the planning and thinking to management. Therefore, one of the primary focuses should be on working with staff to look at ways where each individual has the opportunity to go from playing an implemental role to playing an on-going deliberative role.

Several of the interviewed expressed their frustration that agencies are often seen by recent graduates of Social Work programs and others, as training centres. Young professionals tend to use agency work to gather valuable work experience and

build up their curriculums to then move on to spaces in where they have greater opportunities for career growth, to explore their own interests and/or to contribute to innovative initiatives. These insights confirm the need for agencies to conceive of processes and tools that provide greater levels of participation, responsibility and fulfillment among staff.

#### 4.4 Creating an Inversion-based Framework

Displacement has nurtured lived experiences of design and the creation of participatory design methods. These methods can be principled on an oppositional-consciousness that is a positionality of embracing our marginality and disenfranchisement and using it to conceive alternate propositions to those imposed by the status quo. One of the goals of this research has been to do just that, by way of providing a theoretical framework for how a networked innovation effort at United Way member agencies could look like in the near future. The following are some key characteristics to consider.

##### *A Network That is Directional Not Prescriptive*

When I first mentioned the idea of “an agency innovation network” to agency frontline staff the questions were “Who will run this network?” and “Who will fund it?”. These two questions are clearly related. In a scenario in which agencies and community-led initiatives tend to be seen as implementors of funder-conceived programs and services, the idea of a funder-driven network does not land well. An inversion perspective on this would imply looking at how funders may support the creation of community and agency-led innovation initiatives. From a funder perspective, this does not mean not having any responsibility beyond providing funds. It means having a directional role in which resources—including data, research, methodologies, funder innovation priorities and desired outcomes—are made available to agencies, but funders do not prescribe, regiment or regulate the innovation processes and methods the agency will utilize in their innovation work.

##### *A Network as a Resource Generator*

Furthermore, from a funder (United Way or other) perspective the network should be understood as a way to leverage the collective resources of the social services sector. This is not limited to financial resources, but should include the active generation of support networks and communities of innovation practice, as well as other forms of open-source knowledge and experience-based resources. This is an important way in which the network model can directly invert current tendencies to commodify design through a proprietary mindset with regards to the tools, methodologies, services and products such network may produce.

##### *A Network that Fosters Cognitive Inclusivity and Diversity*

An inversion-based perspective to creating knowledge resources engenders an openness to understanding ways of knowing and being that stem from experiences in industries, sectors or disciplines, beyond the agency and social sector. This contributes to counter the disrespect, distrust and polarization that persist despite multiple attempts to foster collaboration, understanding and exchange.

Externally, an innovation network can help to invert, what agency staff expressed as, the portrayal of a social sector that is “slow-to-react”, conservative and reactionary. While working internally to support the adoption of different ways of knowing and being within the sector, the network can help showcase and promote the innovative work taking place in agencies, projects and in community.

##### *A Network Focused on Operationalizing Innovation*

The adoption of innovative thinking will only take place if individuals can see how innovation helps with the operationalization of their day-to-day work. This may mean streamlining processes, or facilitating a task through a new way of doing it. Innovation needs to be clearly directed at adding value to a service the agency provides, or to a process or way of working. Therefore, the theoretical and practical tools that the network develops and makes available have to support operational activity. If not, the work of the network and innovation itself may be perceived as irrelevant.

##### *A Network that is Autonomous and Decentralized*

These types of experiences in which innovation is made real and relevant can only be informed by the insights and nuances of the individuals that are directly involved and affected by the experiences and conditions we are looking to improve. These stakeholders may be a service-user, a community member, an agency frontline staff, a funder or an agency manager. The end goal of an agency innovation network is to provide people—these stakeholders—the opportunities and means by which to have direct influence in modifying their current realities and imagining future ones.

This can only happen in systems in which high levels of decentralized movement of communication and autonomous exercise of control are permitted. The organizational structure of the network, its recursiveness, as well as its methods and tools should all foster the adoption of this fluidity and of inversion as an approach to oppositional consciousness.







# Transformation<sup>1</sup>

We are so ravenous, so voracious.  
There is no thinking of the next  
generation—and even then,  
we are not fulfilled



**Figure 12.**

Photo by Brent McDonald, The New York Times.

Illustration based on artwork by Haida artist April White.



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# Conclusion

I would like to conclude by examining what—from my perspective—constitutes the main limitations and the contributions of this research paper. I will begin by speaking to the limitations; I will then explain how each of the three fields of study explored in this research have shaped this paper, and what possible further research and design practice opportunities may entail.

## Limitations

### *Time and Timing*

This research benefited from having access to a pool of generous collaborators and sector experts. Additional time would have allowed to include a broader diversity of voices, especially that of important stakeholders such as service-users, volunteers, private sector funders, and partners of social service agencies. Some of the interviews for this research were to be conducted during the month of March 2020. The COVID19 health crisis with its associated workplace closures, its impact on social service organizations and physical distancing measures, made it impossible to complete some of these interviews and consultations.

### *Current Biases*

The ideological divide regarding innovation that exists between social service agencies and the emerging social innovation industry seeped its way into many of the conversations that informed this research. Complex issues and difficult questions were named, acknowledged and openly discussed. While this research considered a diversity of cognitions, past experiences and current biases, it also limited effective participation of a broader pool of participants. Those that have had negative work experiences with others had less disposition to partake in this research.

### *Relevance*

This MRP was written during times of unprecedented change taking place globally. There are aspects of this research that speak directly to managing operations and building organizational viability and resilience through disruptions such as those we are experiencing. There are also aspects of this research that are limited by these current changes and disruptions. For example, in my conversations with agencies, we had talked of the possibility to work on a first agency innovation networking experience during the summer of 2020. This would consist of a series of workshops during which agency staff would come together—with staff from other agencies—to work on core innovation initiatives within their organizations. While the current COVID19 health crisis, has heightened the relevance and importance of innovative thinking, there are also practical implications, such as a change in service priorities, physical dis-

tancing and increased socio-economic instability which hinder or prohibit the effective implementation of these plans. These are times in which different and new ways of working will need to be explored in order to provide continuity and relevance to this research.

## Systems Thinking: Viability

Systems thinking provides a lens through which we can understand organizational behaviour as an output of how processes are managed within an organization. This idea is key in shifting how we may approach organizational capacity building efforts geared towards creating cultures of innovation. We have tended to use traditional learning and training methods in which staff are exposed to tools, methods and processes. While these are useful in providing information, a systems lens to organizational culture introduces concepts such as cybernetic management and cognitive design, which place emphasis on the creation of knowledge. And so, the emphasis is shifted to the importance of looking for training and learning opportunities in which staff may be exposed to ways of knowing (cognitive diversity) and being. Looking at Stafford Beer's principles on operational management and the Viable Systems Model, provides a greater understanding of system functions, and introduced ways of approaching bureaucracy and the significance of operational autonomy, decentralization, directionality and freedom in creating the conditions for creative problem-solving and innovation. These perspectives also highlight the need to conceive innovation as an activity that adds value to, and supports operations. In other words, innovation needs to be useful and purposeful in order to have any relevance in the frontlines.

Lastly, Beer's depiction of natural systems and system functions, is a useful tool to envision organizational management and organizational viability. It serves us as a tool to not only understand and evaluate how our organizations are managed and operate (what is), but also what programs, services, ideas, teams, departments and networks require in order to constitute viable systems, in order to exist (what could be), and maintain independent existence.

*Opportunities for Further Research:*

*Social Innovation is not Social Change*

In the greater context of current innovation theory and practice—which tends to focus on financial viability—social innovation considers a broader set of human needs and factors. It is by comparison a more holistic approach to innovation. Social innovation promotes a premise that access to information affords us the possibility to create new value and envision possible futures. But it does so, often lacking acknowledgement of power structures within systems that determine the limits to the change we can effectively create. Many social service sector professionals see day-in and day-out, how the services they provide mitigate the effects of complex social problems with little effect on the greater systemic challenges they are rooted in. And so, we are coming to terms with the reality that social innovation does not imply or always drive towards social change. Further research on the applicability of cybernetic principles of operational management and viability, may help us better understand what is required to effectively scale innovative thinking and practice. Research of system approaches to innovation may help us generate the change that is required, not only to mitigate, but possibly find solutions to the complex social challenges we are confronted with today.

**Participatory Design: Displacement and Inversion**

Throughout this research, I held several conversations with agency frontline staff and management regarding how current practices reinforce expert mindsets versus participatory mindsets. These are reflected in funder-agency relations, management-frontline staff relations as well as frontline staff-client relations. Agency insights into what a “culture of innovation” may look like within their organizations helped pinpoint orthodoxies as well as specific challenges an agency innovation framework would need to consider. They expressed that despite a robust history in grass-roots community development and consultation these perceptions often result in staff exhibiting a biased expert-mindset and stance. Several research participants spoke directly of the need to work towards a “decolonizing” framework of innovation.

Elaborations on an understanding of the epistemologies of place and displacement in this paper provide a perspective from which to understand prevailing constructions of identity and otherness within the context of neoliberalism. Contextualizing current management practices, language, mindsets and beliefs within the broader social-economic system within which they exist allows us to reinforce the systemic nature of the change required. This research introduces key concepts, such Samir Gandesha’s “neoliberal personality”, Adela Cortina’s “aporo-

phobia”, and oppositional consciousness. These concepts help us both understand and situate exclusion of otherness from the practice of design and the envisioning of desired futures. But, they also help us conceive of alternative perspectives. Inversion is proposed as a perspective for an agency innovation framework, which understands displacement (and the displaced) as the loss of control over the resources that determine ability for independent existence and fulfillment. As a principle, the oppositional perspective of Inversion could be applied to internal organizational management dynamics, to how an agency approaches its work within community (community-building vs. community empowerment), as well as to the work of broader multi-sectoral collaborations addressing systemic issues.

*Opportunities for Further Research and Practice:*

*Continue Developing a Theoretical Framework*

Concepts, such as system functions, recursion and viability together with the theoretical framework of inversion presented in this research paper, provide a starting point and opportunity to begin to conceive of participatory design methods that are diametrically different from ones currently being used in the local social services sector. This is primarily due to the fact that they seek to invert existing ways of understanding the practice of innovation and engender a broader, more inclusive and agency-lead approach to creating organizational cultures of innovation.

In the near future, this research could give way to:

- Establishing agreed-upon, sector-appropriate innovation terminology and principles.
- Exploring the co-creation of an inversion-based framework, with direct participation of agency staff and other key stakeholders.
- Co-create inversion-based methods and tools that facilitate the balancing of oppositionalities, and are adaptable to specific social service agency contexts, system level functions and scenarios.
- Further study and research into how an inversion-based framework may complement and enhance existing frameworks and methodologies, which are already in use in the sector. These may include Theory of Change (ToC) frameworks, Casual Layered Analysis (CLA) methodologies, as well as gender-based, and trauma informed methodologies.
- Determining how an agency innovation network may be organized, operate and develop a viable value proposition.

### Traditional Knowledge: Transformation

Traditional knowledge as a field of study is one that I have only been exposed to tangentially through the work of others in the social sector. My graduate studies in the SFI program at OCADU coincided with a growing personal interest in this field and while at school, I searched for opportunities to immerse myself in Indigenous learnings and practices. Conversations with Indigenous friends and leaders such as Sharon Witruk, who was Senior Manager of Indigenous Collaboration at United Way Greater Toronto at the time, and Maria Hueichaqueo, president of the Taiñ Adkimm Mapuche Association in Santiago, Chile provided me with a practical perspective on the issues and challenges faced in the development of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in the context of social work and social organizations.

In May 2019, I was invited by Maria Hueichaqueo to participate in the 30th Previous Learning Assessment and Recognition Conference in Belleville Ontario. This conference is organized by the International Indigenous Recognition of Prior Learning Collective, an organization based in Belleville, Ontario, and which has been working in partnership with Loyalist College, the First Nations Technical Institute located on the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory in the Province of Ontario and Taiñ Adkimm in Santiago, Chile, since 2004. In addition, in July 2019, I participated in the Summer Indigenous Arts Intensive organized by the Faculty of Creative Studies at UBC Kelowna. This intensive course brought together Indigenous leaders, artists, curators and scholars in an impactful experiential learning event on unceded Syilx Territory in B.C. These two experiences provided me the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations regarding the intersections of Indigenous learnings, traditional knowledge and academia, the contradictions, nuances and problems in non-Indigenous research methodologies, language and perspectives.

*“Equivocation is the vague equating of colonialisms that erases the sweeping scope of land as the basis of wealth, power, law in settler nation-states.”<sup>2</sup>*

– Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang.

These learnings had a profound and multi-dimensional impact on me and this research. From a personal and intimate dimension, these experiences moved me to dig deeper and question my own status and condition as immigrant, displaced, settler, colonized. This lens has also helped me begin to more clearly delineate my positioning and role in relation to the Canadian colonial state project, and in relation to First Nation and Indigenous people’s experiences, struggles and epistemologies. Through this research, I have expanded my understanding of

displacement not as a consequence, but a policy utilized to impose the concept of ownership over land. As such, displacement has not only played a foundational role in establishing and maintaining the settler-colonial state projects in both Chile and Canada, but it continues to be exerted as a tool of economic dominance. Displacement as a tool of colonization is not a thing of the past, in fact we are currently living post-colonialism only in abstract academic terms. In the concreteness of the day-to-day, what we are currently witnessing—in Wal Mapu (the ancestral territory of the Mapuche people) as well as in Wet’suwet’en—is the continuation of displacement policies in support of neoliberal socio-economic development.

These experiences also have an academic dimension. Indigenous stories and teachings informed and seeped their way into how I was reflecting and elaborating concepts of place, decolonization and indigenization. But my exploration of traditional knowledge is incipient and I am excited for what further research in this field could yield for participatory design and what it could mean specifically in the context of the social services sector. There are many agencies that have years of experience in this field, such as the Native Canadian Centre, NaMeRes, and Native Child and Family Services. In conversations with members of these organizations, like Jeffrey Schiffer, executive director at Native Child and Family Services, there is a growing feeling of hope and momentum for what a deeper engagement—of non-Indigenous people and agencies—with First Nation and Indigenous knowledge, experiences and teachings could mean for the social services sector as a whole. Indigenous and Traditional knowledge has the potential of deepening our understanding of the change required today. At the beginning of chapter 2 on Viability, I began by looking at two perspectives on viability, one that focused on financial viability and a second which spoke of organizational viability. To close this conceptual circle, I would like to provide the following idea. As agencies have begun in recent years to look for new ways of providing services and continue to be financially sustainable they have piloted initiatives with social enterprise models. Some are beginning to look at business design tools, such as the Business Model Canvas. In my opinion, one example of this deeper understanding of the change we require today, is the work others have done in relation to incorporating Indigenous teachings into the Business Model Canvas and which has resulted in the Flourishing Business Canvas. Adoption of these business tools by the social sector, could have a transformative impact on the way we address current disruptions and challenges to agencies and to the sector.

*Opportunities for Further Research:*

*Transformative Change*

While this research serves as an initial exploration of concepts of place, displacement and land in relation to ideas of inversion, participatory design and social innovation, future research should look to Indigenous teachings and traditional knowledge as a source for deeper understanding of the magnitude of the change that needs to take place and the role the future social services sector can play in contributing to that change.

I am interested in the study and research work that may further our understanding in: 1) The complications with Western social-science research methodologies of Indigenous teachings and knowledge<sup>3</sup>; 2) The conceptual and philosophical intersections and differences in commonly used terminology and frameworks, such as de-colonial, post-colonial and Indigenizing; 3) How Indigenous teachings and perspectives may help us begin to conceive of ‘reconciliation with all living things’ as it relates to social services (agencies) and the role they play in these processes of reconciliation<sup>4</sup>; 4) How we may apply traditional knowledge and Indigenous teachings into the tools being utilized in agency work<sup>5</sup>.

In an effort to research how we may create viable organizational cultures of innovation, I have explored concepts and ideas that can help us begin to build a theoretical framework for an agency innovation network. The most important characteristic of Inversion as a perspective to innovation, is that it is based on the principle of adding, including and leveraging ways of knowing and being of many, with mutual respect and reciprocity.

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# Notes

## Preface

1. Andre Gunder Frank, *Economic Genocide in Chile: Monetarist Theory Versus Humanity* (Nottingham: Spokesman Books, 1976), 28-33.
2. This quote is documented in the Minutes of the meeting of the 40 Committee, which took place on June 27, 1970 and was chaired by Henry Kissinger. Office of the Historian of the U.S. government, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXI, Chile, 1969-1973. Document #41, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v21/d41>.
3. *C.I.A. Activities in Chile*. Report released by the CIA, September 19, 2000, accessed January 25, 2020, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/news/20000919/01-01.htm>
4. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008).
5. For official statistics and qualitative data on human rights violations in Chile during the military dictatorship see *The National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture Report*, also known as The Valech Report (National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture, 2005 and 2011).
6. Excerpt taken from transcriptions of a PBS interview with Nobel Prize-winner Economist and Chicago School of Business Professor Milton Friedman where he describes a talk he gave to university Universidad Católica students in Chile. Commanding Heights series PBS, October 1st, 2000, accessed January 25, 2020, [https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commanding-heights/shared/minitext/int\\_miltonfriedman.html](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/commanding-heights/shared/minitext/int_miltonfriedman.html)
7. The following books provide a range of ideologically divergent perspectives on the social and economic impact of neoliberal economic policies implemented in Chile. Hernán Büchi, *Transformation of Chile: A Personal Account* (Paperback, 2010); Pilar Vergara, *Auge y caída del neoliberalismo en Chile* (FLACSO-Chile, 1985); Carlos Huneeus, *El Régimen de Pinochet* (Santiago, Chile, Editorial Sudamericana, 2000).
8. Slogan read in signs and graffiti throughout Chile during the popular uprising, which began on October 18, 2019.
9. Seth Godin, *What To Do When It's Your Turn (And It's Always Your Turn)* (Canada, The Domino Project, 2014), 23.

## Chapter 1: The social services sector and innovation

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2. Statistics Canada, “Gross domestic product of large census metropolitan areas, 2009 and 2013 (in current dollars)”, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/170127/t001b-eng.htm>
3. *Rebalancing the Opportunity Equation* report (United Way Greater Toronto in partnership with the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership, Factor- Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, 2019), accessed April 15, 2020, [https://www.unitedwaygt.org/file/2019\\_OE\\_fullreport\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.unitedwaygt.org/file/2019_OE_fullreport_FINAL.pdf)
4. Average calculated by considering the percentage of annual revenue—coming from federal, provincial and municipal grants—reported in 2018-2019 Financial Statements by the five agencies participating in this research. St. Stephen’s Community House (78%), West Neighbourhood House (77%), The Neighbourhood Group (57%), North York Community House (81%) and Agincourt Community Services Association (63%).
5. *The Opportunity Equation* report (United Way Greater Toronto in partnership with EKOS Research Associates and the Neighbourhood Change Research Partnership, 2015), accessed April 15, 2020, <https://www.unitedwaygt.org/document.doc?id=285>
6. Ali Amad, Danielle Groen, Malcolm Johnson, Jason McBride, Courtney Shea, and Matthew Silver, “The Ford Fallout”, *Toronto Life*, January 2020, 46.
7. Sarah Giles, Danyaal Raza and Rupinder Brar, Private, “For-Profit Health Care is a Terrible Idea for Ontario” (*The Huffington Post*, 2019), accessed March 21, [https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/the-conversation-canada/ontario-for-profit-health-care\\_a\\_23648575/](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/the-conversation-canada/ontario-for-profit-health-care_a_23648575/)



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9. *Sector 3600 Survey: Taking the Pulse of Ontario's Nonprofit Sector* (Ontario Non-Profit Network's Report, 2019), 4.
10. Ontario Government, "Ontario Adopting Process to Better Connect Job Seekers in Hamilton-Niagara with Good Jobs, accessed March 28, 2020 <https://news.ontario.ca/mol/en/2020/02/ontario-adopting-process-to-better-connect-job-seekers-in-hamilton-niagara-with-good-jobs.html>; Dan Kaetema, "Hamilton-Niagara part of government pilot project to contract out employment services", <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/contract-employment-services-ontario-1.5466860>
11. The concepts of core, adjacent and transformative innovation are commonly used in business innovation design and helps envision and manage portfolios of innovation initiatives within an organization. Initiatives are placed within a chart utilizing an "x" (markets) and "y" (products and/or services) matrix, depending on the level of expansion of these two criteria. This chart is commonly known as the innovation ambition matrix.

## Chapter 2: Viability

1. One of the most ambitious applications of Stafford Beer's cybernetic approach to operational management took place in Chile during Salvador Allende's Popular Unity government (1970-1973). This experience is well documented in Eden Medina's *Cybernetic Revolutionaries: Technology and Politics in Allende's Chile*. Allende's government ended with a military coup on September 11, 1973. The flames that engulfed La Moneda (Chile's government palace), are the same the flames that soldiers used to burn books and other forms of knowledge in the streets of Chile. These flames ended multiple projects, as well as the lives of so many during the military dictatorship reflected in this illustration. The photograph is captured by Canadian Lynn Murray—taken in front of La Moneda on September 4th, 1973. The photograph shows Allende supporters celebrating the 3rd Anniversary of the "Chilean Road to Socialism". It is one of a series of photographs produced thanks to the negatives Murray secretly extracted from Chile on November 1973. The text is an excerpt from singer songwriter Angel Parra's "Litany for a Computer and a Baby about to be Born," which referenced and attempted to explain—the Stafford Beer lead—Project Cyber-syn, through song.
2. Joshua Freeman, CTV News, "Toronto Losing About \$65M a Week Amid COVID-19 Pandemic", accessed April 26, <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/toronto-losing-about-65m-a-week-amid-covid-19-pandemic-1.4881916>
3. This definition of cybernetics was originally presented by Norbert Wiener, in his work *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Paris: Hermann & Cie., 1948; Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1961).
4. Stafford Beer (1926-2002) was a British scientist, management consultant, lecturer and poet. Beer is considered to be one of the first to explore the application of Cybernetic principles to the field of operational management. His studies of nature (natural systems) and human neurophysiology derived in his proposed Viable Systems Model, which looks at the principles that allow a system to maintain viability, this is to be capable of independent existence.
5. W.R. Ashby, *Introduction to Cybernetics* (London: Meuthen & Co., 1956);
6. Stafford Beer, lecture at *The Intelligent Organization Conference* (Monterrey, Mexico, 1990), accessed December 16, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7COX-b3HK50>.
7. Stafford Beer, *The Massey Lectures: Designing Freedom* (CBC Radio's Idea series, 1973), 22.
8. Roger Conant and William Ross Ashby, Every Good Regulator of a System Must be a Model of That System (Chicago: Int. J. Systems Sci. vol. 1, NO. 2, 89-97, 1970)
9. Stafford Beer, lecture at *The Intelligent Organization Conference* (Monterrey, Mexico, 1990), accessed December 16, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7COX-b3HK50>.
10. Stafford Beer, *The Massey Lectures: Designing Freedom* (CBC Radio's Idea series, 1973), 72.
11. Stafford Beer, *The Massey Lectures: Designing Freedom* (CBC Radio's Idea series, 1973), 77.

### Chapter 3: Displacement

1. As an immigrant child, much of our links to home were built through memories of family, stories and songs, including children's rhymes. "Caballito Blanco" (Little White Horse), was one such song, which I remember having a discomfort with. It felt to express ideas of power through the figure of the horse, the white horse as in those referenced in the stories of Spanish "conquistadores", or Napoleonic wars and independence heroes. When I sang it as a child, in my mind I felt I was singing it to Canada, asking it to send me back home. And Canada seemed to sing back to me, "I have everything here, but you have nothing". The image of the rocking horse seeks to reference these childhood memories, as well as the back and forth of memory, identity and nebulous positioning of colonized-settlers in relation to Canada. This photograph was taken in June 1978—in my grandparents' home in the city of Antofagasta—on the day we left to go to Santiago on our way to Toronto, Canada. This was the last time my parents, siblings and grandparents were together in the land where we were born.
2. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor* (Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 2012), 5.
3. See Samir Gandesha, "Identifying with the Aggressor": From Authoritarian to Neo-Liberal Personality (Constellations, 2018); or professor Gandesha's lecture, *The Neo Liberal Personality and the Politics of Disgust* (Vancouver Institute for Social Research, 2014), accessed January 14, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUcCn9VvkNM>
4. Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) research group, *Getting Left Behind Report, Who Gained and Who Didn't in an Improving Labour Market* (PEPSO in partnership with McMaster University and United Way Greater Toronto, 2018).
5. Aporophobia, the term defined as fear of poverty and the poor was originally conceived by Professor Adela Cortina. This concept describes the role of the individual as consumer in society and as a distinguishable characteristic of neoliberal culture. Adela Cortina, *Aporofobia, el Rechazo al Pobre* (Ediciones Paidós, 2017); Adela Cortina, *Por una Etica del Consumo* (Santillana Ediciones Generales, S. L., 2002).
6. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 1994), 172.
7. Elizabeth B.-N. Sanders & Pieter Stappers, *Convivial Toolbox, Generative Research for the Front End of Design* (BIS Publishers, 2012), 28.

### Chapter 4: Inversion

1. I first heard the Delgamuukw court case referenced in a story Professor Peter Morin told us—a group of students—at an Indigenous knowledge intensive program in Kelowna, B.C. in the summer of 2019. He told us the story of Mary Johnson, an elder from Kispiox who wanted to maintain traditional protocols and sing a dirge before commencing the court hearings, and the reaction of B.C. Supreme Court Chief Justice Allan McEachern who said, "*I don't have time for your Indian songs Mrs. Johnson, I have a tin ear.*" The story of Mary Johnson brought many images, feelings and reflections to mind. It made me ask myself, how much do I hear? How much time do we—who have settled in this land—take to listen, study, learn, understand Indigenous people? Also, as a designer interested in participatory design and from the perspective of displacement, it brings me back to the dilemma of being both not heard and not being able or willing to listen. A closing-up to others instead of opening-up. The contour in this illustration reflects the hybridity—Indigenous, African and European—of rhythms and religious beliefs, culture that is reflected in traditional (to Peru, Bolivia and Chile) dances called "La Diablada", which translates to "Of the Devil" or "Devilish". In this dance, penitents wear devil-like masks usually made of tin in honor of a Christian Virgen del Carmen, who is portrayed both as queen, saint and villain. The photograph by Pablo Insunza, documents one of the most important student occupations of a high school in Chile during the dictatorship. This action helped invert the power relation between high school students and the dictatorship. It resulted in the toppling of the junta's Minister of Education, a sign that the military and society as a whole was beginning to listen to the demands of a generation that had known nothing but dictatorship.
2. Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) 54,5-62,3.
3. Roger Martin, *The Opposable Mind, Winning Through Integrative Thinking* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009) 15.
4. Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (Revue Socialiste, 1880).
5. Peter Drucker, *Post-Capitalist Society* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1993); A.G. Lafley and Roger Martin, *Playing to Win* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013).
6. Traditional forms of social and political organization were prohibited and persecuted during the military dictatorship in Chile (1973-1989). In this context viability often took on the connotation of survival. For social and grass-roots organizations—as well as parties on the left of the political spectrum—capacity to continue to exist and operate despite the dictatorship was the

central focus and function of organizational management. The high school student movement is particularly interesting for the high levels of versatility, creativity and engagement it achieved considering the age of its members—average 14 to 18 years old—, the levels of repression it endured and its precariousness in resources and life experiences. See Mauricio Weibel, *Los Niños de la Rebelión* (Santiago, Chile: Aguilar, 2017); Rolando Álvarez Vallejos, *Las Juventudes Comunistas de Chile y el movimiento estudiantil secundario: Un caso de radicalización política de masas* (1983-1988)(Ariadna Ediciones, 2017) 170-217.

7. In the late 60's and early 1970s Maturana and Varela proposed the concept of autopoiesis. As defined by Allena Leonard, autopoiesis refers to the “process of self-production, which maintains the identity of an organism or an organization as itself”. In this context, the term “self-production” is introduced in juxtaposition to the traditional belief that the primary function of living organisms is to reproduce. In stating that the primary function of an organism (or organization) is to self-produce, Maturana and Varela place emphasis on those activities that allow for the system to have separate existence, that is to be viable. Stafford Beer takes this idea further and cautions on the signs of extreme autopoiesis when an organization over-emphasizes the importance of internal, procedural and efficiency seeking measures versus developing the capabilities to adapt to the changing environment in order to continue existing for the reasons it was conceived. In these scenarios, the outcome may not be as dire as an inability to continue to exist, but it may result in a loss of identity.

## Conclusion

1. In “Reconciliation Here on Earth” (Resurgence and Reconciliation: Indigenous –Settler Relations and Earth Teachings, 2018), Professor James Tully references Haida Artist Robert Davidson’s telling of contemporary stories of Raven, the transformer. Tully describes the story saying “Raven, the transformer, tries to bring light the damage that a vicious way of life is causing to the people who are caught up in it, yet who misperceive it and so continue to reproduce it. Raven removes one eye from the villagers as they are sleeping so they will see with only one eye when they awake”. He quotes Davidson’s commentaries on his own artwork. The copy accompanying this illustration is an excerpt from Davidson’s commentary and the contour in the illustration is based on artwork by Haida Artist April White entitled Raven IV (2005), in which she depicts Yaahl, “the trickster cousin, in the Corvidae Clan”. The story of Raven, the trickster and transformer is used in this illustration to reference the language of transformative social change which social innovation, Indigenous teachings and current social movements aspire to, while the photograph—by Brent McDonald of The New York Times—is of one of over 350 Chileans who have lost their eyes in the October 18 uprising. Government containment tactics of this uprising, which is popularly referred to as the “awakening of Chile”, has been characterized by this form of repression in which police shoot rubber bullets aimed at peoples’ faces, causing ocular damage and the loss of vision. Despite this, the uprising continues and promises to transform Chilean society demanding an end, and/or reforms to the neoliberal economic model imposed during the military dictatorship.
2. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, *Decolonization is Not a Metaphor* (Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society, 2012), 17.
3. This will include further study of works of Indigenous scholars including Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Bonita Lawrence, Vincent Clement, Alicia Elliot, Niigan Sinclair and Regna Darnell.
4. Professor James Tully’s work regarding reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and of human with other living beings—described as a “dual crisis”—are ideas that peaked my interest. I would like to explore these further and look at how these relationships are applicable to understanding and conceiving of alternate ways operational management in the social agency scenario.
5. One aspect of this research that was truncated by the 2020 COVID19 health crisis and the timing of this research was the possibility to interview Jeffrey Schiffer, executive director of Native Child and Family Services in Toronto. The teachings and experiences of Indigenous people working in the social sector can be of great contribution to the process of creating indigenizing methodologies through networks of agencies. This may help us build on existing processes, tools and frameworks. I am thinking—for example—on how we could work towards moving from using tools, such as the business model canvas, to studying and piloting the use of the flourishing model canvas and the Indigenous model canvas in the context of the social services sector.

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9. Cortina, Adela, *Aporofobia, el Rechazo al Pobre*, Ediciones Paidós, 2017.
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