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DesignShop for systemic transformation

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Despite over 40 years of applied systemic co-design practice, MG Taylor's DesignShop methodology has remained a proprietary black box. DesignShop has found its way into the World Economic Forum's Annual Meeting in Davos (Evans, Taylor, & Bird, 2018), and counts practitioners among the ranks of major professional services firms such as PwC, Capgemini, and KMPG. Senior DesignShop practitioners recently stated "it is safe to claim that the DesignShop is the most employed, systematic, commercially delivered, large group process on the planet" (Evans, Taylor, & Bird, 2018, p. 347), yet scholars and practitioners in the broader systems and design co-creation arenas, such as Peter Jones (2018), have noted the difficulty of getting a clear picture of what this proprietary methodology entails.

In their 2016 *Innovation Methods Mapping* study, VanPatter and Pastor noted, "beneath some innovation process models, deep codified knowledge exists, as well as numerous tools and techniques" (listed as MG Taylor; pp. 106-7). This is certainly true of DesignShop; Evans *Collaboration Code* series seeks to distill the fruits of 40 years of collaborative design practice into 6 volumes. Yet the coverage of DesignShop in the systems and design co-creation literature to date amounts to fewer than ten pages. The recent publication the *Collaboration Code* and other practitioner-oriented DesignShop literature has lifted the proprietary veil, but these books are not written in the language of co-creation or co-design literature and, on their own, have been insufficient to facilitate comparison with other methods.

Dee Brooks' (in press) M.Des work builds on this recent DesignShop literature to explore the methodology through case study research. Brooks' report provides the first research-oriented look into the interior of the DesignShop black box, and identifies a concise set of attributes and techniques that typify and differentiate DesignShop within the context of applied systemic design practice.

In this workshop, we will provide a hands-on introduction to several of the key tools and methods of DesignShop. We will pay special attention to the complexity-appreciative means by which practitioners facilitate problem framing, and how those problem frames are used to facilitate dialogic co-design that translates to pragmatic actionable outcomes that support large-scale transformation at the organizational and systemic scales.

Starting from the proposed prompt: "how might our systems of governance incorporate the rights of future generations," workshop participants will:
- Collaboratively validate/iterate the proposed prompt to craft a compelling purpose statement

- Co-design a supporting problem frame by defining:
    - Supporting objectives or themes (which systems of governance? Whose rights? Which futures?)
    - Scope and givens/non-negotiables
    - Outputs proposed, including level of detail
    - Outcomes being sought (e.g. commitment; alignment)
    - Inputs and information required
    - Potential sponsors and participants
- Explore how that problem frame would be scaffolded into a bespoke process architecture to facilitate a full-scale DesignShop Large Group Intervention

Learning by doing in the DesignShop mode, we will collaboratively explore the dimensions of this wicked problem space, simultaneously engaging with the content of the problem through deep authentic dialogue and the process by which the DesignShop intervention is defined and designed.

Participants will gain a hands-on introduction to 6 key attributes that Brooks' research identifies as hallmarks of DesignShop:
- Problem framing through co-design
- Applied systemic design principles (recursion, iteration, variety)
- Dialogic scaffold and iterative agenda design
- Self-led parallel teams
- Hierarchy suspension
- Sensemaking and learning embedment for co-design

Through exploring these DesignShop techniques, we will seek to compare and contrast these aspects of DesignShop practice with the prevailing approaches documented in the literature and those practiced by workshop participants.

As Jones (2018) has noted, contemporary co-design and workshop methods too often appear to rely on methods that are popular in the present, and do not always reflect the knowledge and methods accumulated over the 50+ year history of co-creation practice. In the context of wicked problems and large-scale systems change, reliance on such assumptions poses significant risks.

The DesignShop tradition has sought to engage the diverse perspectives of groups of 20 to 100+ participants to reflect the requisite variety required by complex challenges, and to facilitate emergent collaboration through a balance between process-structure and the spontaneous

contributions of participants (Taylor, 2008). Contemporary practitioners are exploring means of scaling DesignShop interventions by another order of magnitude to facilitate systemic scale co-design.

The diversity of perspective coupled with Designshop methodology allows for not only a richer picture of the operating ecosystem, but encourages the challenging of assumptions and biases surrounding practices and goals. Whether in its classic Large Group Intervention form or in its newer even more massive applications, the DesignShop approach has valuable teachings to offer to scholars and practitioners at the intersection of systems and design.

This session will be led by Dee Brooks, Practice Lead for Accelerated By Design. Dee has been working in DesignShop practice since 2001. She recently completed her M.Des in Strategic Foresight and Innovation at OCAD University, where she focused on developing a DesignShop-driven co-design approach to foresight. Dee will be supported by a team of 2-3 facilitators at RSD8.

We recommend a full-day workshop to support participant learning and deep engagement with the proposed problem domain. However, we can scale down to a half-day workshop to accommodate the conference programming.

Technical and workspace requirements are minimal and flexible. Preferences are listed below:
- A large open space would be preferable. Ideally, we would want a single room with at least 65 sqft of space per participant.
- Extensive whiteboard space would be useful. Rolling or wall-mounted whiteboards would be fine. But we can work with other material if needed.
- Occasionally, we would like to play music during the workshop if possible. We can bring equipment if needed.
- If possible, access to the room on the day before the workshop would be preferred.

References

Jones, P. (2018). Contexts of Co-creation: Designing with System Stakeholders. In *Systemic Design Theory, Methods, and Practice*(Vol. 8, Translational Systems Sciences, pp. 3-52). Springer Japan.

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Taylor, M., Evans, R., & Bird, K. (2018). *Models: Frameworks for Transformation* (1st ed., Vol. 3, Collaboration Code). New York: Imaginal Labs.

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