

Creating Global Learning Systems Infrastructure: a collective for multidisciplinary and cross-sector practice to tackle complex public problems

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ABSTRACT

The future of work and education across the globe is uncertain. For practitioners solving complex public problems, limited learning opportunities and constraining work environments threaten possibilities of expanding and elevating their collective practice. Within institutions, practitioners face a multitude of challenges ranging from siloed work to homogenized practice. From the time they enter the workforce, to retirement, they hit difficult-to-traverse learning plateaus. The Residency is a global collective of Change Designers—civil servants, civil society and social designers/innovators upskilling in multidisciplinary and cross-sector practice. A year of research, concepting and co-designing informed a learning prototype embedded in a collective action model. The collective is a first-of-its-kind test of global learning systems infrastructure that can facilitate the exchange of mindsets, share power across adjacent disciplines, and privilege plural craft through self-determined exchange.

Author Keywords

public sector innovation; social design; adult learning; multidisciplinary practice; multistakeholder initiative; collective action; future of work; systems; power

THE FUTURE OF ADULT PRACTITIONER LEARNING

“Humans have the unique capability to be endlessly curious.” - James Burke

The future of work across the globe is uncertain. Social, economic, political and technological trends

indicate significant forthcoming changes for workers, workplace and work. While we may not be able to predict with precision what the future holds, it is reasonable to conclude that the future workforce will require workers to think differently, and move with rapidly shifting environments.

At the same time, and relatedly, the education of workers is changing. From the time people enter the workforce to the time they retire, they hit difficult-to-traverse learning plateaus. The opportunities to upskill outside of formal education—for example through webinars, bootcamps, masterclasses, MOOCs—tend to be ad-hoc and timebound, costly and specialized, expert-driven and unidirectional, failing to support learning that sticks with people and spreads through their institutions and broader governance systems.

For Change Designers—governance, design, social innovation, and social justice practitioners working across disciplines and sectors—there are severe limitations to solving public problems together. We’ve seen a wave of global crises and abuses of power despite hard work dedicated to ending them. Transnational, collaborative efforts such as the Panama Papers and the Open Government Partnership, are good examples of what we can achieve when we collectivize action across borders, sectors and expertise.

Elevating Multidisciplinary and Cross-Sector Practice

Within public and social sector institutions, individuals are eager to be challenged by each other to learn different mindsets and methods for public problem-solving—a global learning systems infrastructure needs to be built to facilitate this. It requires a collective action model, outside of formal education and workplaces, that can adapt to context, allow for different perspectives, dig into underlying beliefs and

motivations, and nurture strategy and tactics exchange beyond experience sharing.

Enter: The Residency. The Residency is a practical global learning collective of government, civil society, and social innovators / designers. We act as a Union, Guild and Council for curious minds and lifelong learners applying multidisciplinary and cross-sector craft to complex public problems.

As a Union, The Residency creates enabling environments for learning through the collective, and spreading it through member organizations. As a Guild, The Residency elevates multidisciplinary and cross-sector practice by weaving skills, language and mindsets together, creating sophisticated, situated and plural Change Design craft. As a Council, The Residency sparks constructive peer response, and exposes members to divergent yet complementary perspectives to problem-solving.

Learning theories—such as those put forth by Paolo Freire and Peter Senge—and empirical evidence from learning models such as Luminar and transdisciplinary styles, inspire new possibilities for adult practitioners to learn on-the-job. Building on these theories and models, The Residency asks:

- If our unique capability as humans is to be endlessly curious, and the complexity of socio-political challenges demand us to be—how might we spark curiosity and become infinite learners?
- If public problems connect across borders, but practices to address them are local—how might we facilitate ‘situated’ learning at scale?
- If situations vary across disciplines and sectors, and accordingly, so do mindsets—how might we enable self-determined and self-governed learning that encourages and sustains plural mindsets?
- If formal education and adult upskilling programs are cost- and time- prohibitive for practitioners—how might we design learning systems infrastructure that creates inclusive access to knowledge and skills?

The making of collective learning

Stewarded by participatory designers, the collective spent 2019 researching, concepting and co-designing collective action and learning models. In one year, it grew to 300 people from over 20 countries. The Residency includes 15 advisors, and partnerships with universities, media, and networks.

Prototyping is set for 2020. Collective formation will happen in four steps: first, collective members join with a “self-determined contract” stating what they will contribute, and what they gain from the collective; second, members take on a function, such as mobilizer or knowledge creator, to contribute to the full collective; third, members form a self-governed “learning constellation” guided by provisional curriculum to facilitate exchange; fourth, a subset of collective members become a cohort of Residents that experience structured layered learning, and test concrete pedagogical tactics to elevating multidisciplinary and cross-sector practice.

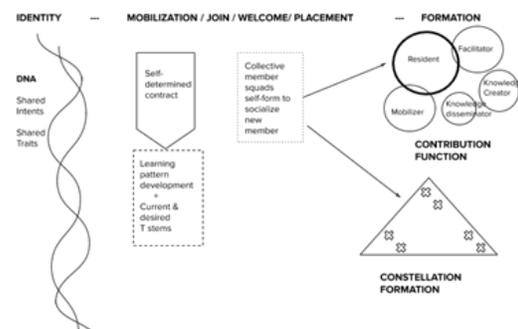


Figure 1. The Residency’s collective formation

Learning curriculum is to be: co-designed by members; problem or situation led, not projects to be delivered; mindset-oriented, focused on unearthing disposition, reasoning models, emotions/affects, and rules/norms; regenerative, inclusive of purposeful moments for sustained contributions; and transdisciplinary, building with mixed approaches to navigating power, complexity and systems.

The Residency provides the cognitive glue between public problem-solvers, generating viable supplements and alternatives to formal education and on-the-job learning.

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