

Getting to Maybe | Themes

Seeing Systems

In an unpredictable and uncontrollable world, those seeking to transform or build capacity in complex problem domains must anticipate emergence, facilitate innovation, catalyze scaling, and evaluate progress. Understanding resilience theory provides useful frameworks and tools for engaging complexity in the interest of social innovation. System entrepreneurs must develop personal and professional capacities to effectively see, make sense of, and navigate within complex systems.

Designing Systems

To ensure that social innovations are widely accepted, there is usually a need to see changes in the way broad resources flow, the cultural understandings and definitions of the problem, and a shift in the laws and policies that govern the problem domain. A system entrepreneur requires particular lenses and skills to influence value systems, resource allocations, and policy development.

Self in System

Systems entrepreneurship has both “inner” and “outer” dimensions. A social innovator’s awareness of their innermost selves is critical to their capacity to foster change within complex systems. The ‘outer’ work of trying to change a system will often amplify our own ‘inner’ tensions and assumptions, blind spots and paradoxes. Our capacity to engage generatively with such personal material profoundly shapes the nature of our subsequent impact in the world. Social innovators can benefit greatly from practices that cultivate deep awareness, self-knowledge, personal growth, and connection to the source of their most creative intelligence.

Encounters with the Natural Environment

The natural environment can act as a mirror and a window to teach us about our own sense of calling and purpose, and about the complex adaptive systems we seek to engage. Encounters with nature illustrate deep connections between environmental and social systems, and can teach the social innovator key skills such as attending, following, and pattern recognition. Nature also illuminates the concepts of complex adaptive systems, cross scale interactions, and skillful system intervention.

Creative Practice

Creative arts teach the social innovator about the tension between design and emergence. All artists deal with striving to realize an idea through the limitations of both skill and medium. Practice, repetition, collaboration, and performance have much in common with the work of social innovation, as do play, risk, and ensemble. The notion of self as an essential vehicle or starting point for an act of creation or transformation is key to both the creative arts and social innovation.

Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous ways of knowing focus upon both a sense of history and place. Indigenous culture will be integrated in this program to stress the interconnection of all things, even change processes; and to provide insights about complexity and resilience that are central to understanding social innovation. Further, Indigenous arts emphasize the power of creativity, resonance, and transformation. Storytelling practice highlights the role of narrative in understanding your own leadership identity, and in empowering social innovation.

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