



BUILDING ECOSYSTEMS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

How do we collaborate to create ecosystems that support innovation for systems change?

A reflection on the Unusual Suspects Festival 2014: Session 22
Co-hosted by Social Innovation Generation (SiG) National and Oxfam

Prepared by Social Innovation Generation (SiG) National on behalf of the collaboration
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collaborate

ABOUT



www.sigeneration.ca

Social Innovation Generation (SiG) seeks to address Canada's social and ecological challenges by creating a culture of continuous social innovation. Our focus is on social innovation that has the potential for impact, durability and scale. SiG is a collaborative partnership founded by The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, the University of Waterloo, the MaRS Discovery District, and the PLAN Institute. Our ultimate goal is to support whole systems change through changing the broader economic, cultural and policy context in Canada to allow social innovations to flourish.



Oxfam

www.oxfam.co.uk

Oxfam is a world-wide development organization that mobilizes the power of people against poverty. We are a confederation of 17 organizations working together in more than 90 countries. Around the globe, Oxfam works to find practical, innovative ways for people to lift themselves out of poverty and thrive. We save lives and help rebuild livelihoods when crisis strikes. And we campaign so that the voices of the poor influence the local and global decisions that affect them. In all we do, Oxfam works with partner organizations and alongside vulnerable women and men to end the injustices that cause poverty.



collaborate

www.theunusalsuspectsfestival.uk

The Unusual Suspects Festival was a four-day festival that blended international expertise and innovation with local thinking and practice from across the UK. The Festival featured a collection of interlinked events that highlighted the ways in which collaboration and social innovation can work in sync and asked how this can help address some of the most difficult issues we face in society today. The Festival took place in London from September 2-5, 2014 and was curated by the [Social Innovation Exchange](#), [Collaborate](#) and the [Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation](#).

22 How do we collaborate to create an ecosystem that supports innovation?
Social Innovation Generation in collaboration with Oxfam

Session 22 was moderated by Tim Draimin, Executive Director of Social Innovation Generation (SiG) National. Drawing on examples from both Canada and the UK, the session examined the architecture of ecosystem development - roles and enabling conditions - as well as the less tangible elements of developing a social innovation ecosystem - the social contract, personal relationships, distributed networks, and the power of collaboration.

PROLOGUE

Taking a systems approach, it becomes clear that messy, longstanding problems are created by the systems in which they exist. To innovate on these social and environmental problems, it's necessary to find ways to see, understand and use the system itself.

- [SiG Knowledge Hub](#)

On September 5, 2014, Social Innovation Generation (SiG) National and Oxfam hosted one of the final sessions of the inaugural [Unusual Suspects Festival](#) at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation UK office in Hoxton Square, London.

Session 22 was designed to test out SiG's findings from a preliminary scan for ideas on how to build 'ecosystems' for systems change (summarized in a 2-page [working paper](#) titled, Systems Change; see Appendix II).

Our premise for the scan and the session - building ecosystems for systems change - has been percolating for some time.

As social innovation begins to mainstream, social change work is shifting from social projects to tipping systems. Inspired by an increasingly shared understanding that tackling complex social and ecological problems requires tackling *root causes*, the movement is rapidly championing *systems change*.

What are 'root causes'?

The root causes are, generally, the [system dynamics or conditions that created a problem in the first place](#) and entrench the problem in society. These root causes are what defy transactional or singular interventions, allowing the problem to perpetuate, be it climate change, homelessness, intergenerational poverty, conflict, or isolation.

To solve our most pressing social and ecological problems, we need systems change.

To take on systemic problems, we need systemic solutions. Yet the most compelling social innovations - truly transformational initiatives - in pushing to transform systems, are also shaped by external conditions (cultural, fiscal, political, temporal or physical conditions) and by systems pushing back.

What if we could tap into or craft those external conditions to become an enabling environment for social innovations to accelerate into truly systemic solutions?

What if we could intentionally cultivate a system that actively nurtures innovation for systems change?

These questions inspired both our scan and the joint session with Oxfam:

How do we collaborate to create an ecosystem that supports innovation for systems change?

Why 'ecosystem'?

Ecological thinking has [long informed](#) systems change work as one of the most robust ways of thinking about complex systems and system dynamics.

Imagining the enabling conditions for systems change as an 'ecosystem' offers both a narrative and an analytical framework for thinking about 'systems that nurture innovation for systems change.'

In other words, the analogical power of 'ecosystems' captured our imagination and provoked us to think about the roles of social capital, relationships, power, resource flows, culture and networks in developing systemic solutions to our greatest social and ecological challenges.

"We can't impose our will on a system. We can listen to what the system tells us, and discover how its properties and our values can work together to bring forth something much better than could ever be produced by our will alone."

— Donella H. Meadows, [Dancing With Systems](#)

An 'ecosystems' framework creates conceptual common ground, allowing us to *listen* to existing systems, *discover* their properties, understand how to *align* emergent opportunities with our values, and *work together* to transform current systems into those that nurture and sustain innovation for transformational systems change.

Having heard echoes of interest in this framework during our scan, the language of ecosystems seems to capture and illustrate the ongoing shift towards systems change.

It also reminds us that systems change implicates both social and ecological ecosystems.

[SeanLowrie @SeanLowrie · Sep 5](#)
Question: How to craft and build an ecosystem for social innovation? Love the biological metaphors. Courage #unusualsuspects #siecosystem

Learning by leaping.

In keeping with the Festival spirit of "[unlikely connections for social change](#)," Session 22 was an unusual gathering. In collaboration with Oxfam, we convened a seven person cross-sectorial panel of 'ecosystem builders' to test our early findings and learn by leaping.

Diving into the session prompt, we hoped to discover patterns of insight on: "*How do we collaborate to create an ecosystem that supports innovation for systems change?*"

The Panel included:*

[James Whitehead](#)

Global Innovation Adviser at [Oxfam](#) (co-host)

[Rachel Sinha](#)

Co-Founder of [The Finance Innovation Lab](#)

Sustainability Manager at [ICAEW](#)

[Surinder Hundal](#)

Interim Chair of the Board of the [Partnership Brokers Association](#) (PBA)

Director of [Rippleseed](#)

[Simon Tucker](#)

Independent Adviser on Social Innovation and Systems Change

[Andrew Barnett](#)

Director of the UK Branch of the [Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation](#)

[Paul Ellingstad](#)

Director of [Human Progress Initiatives](#) at Hewlett Packard

[Jon Huggett](#):

Founding Board Chair of [Social Innovation Exchange](#) (SIX)

*See Appendix I for full biographies

No one contested the fact that ecosystems are important.

Instead, the discussion - and this reflection - focused on where 'deliberate intentionality' comes into play. If developing ecosystems that support innovation for

systems change are important, how can we be more proactive around collaborating to actually craft such ecosystems? How do we create new opportunities and nourish ecosystems to collectively target complex problems? What does it take?

[SIX @si_exchange · Sep 5](#)
The question is not if #ecosystems are important, but how to deliberately support them. @sigeneration @TimDrainin #unusualsuspects

This was an exercise in echolocation.

We hoped the session would begin to sound out and 'map out' what work on ecosystems for systems change is already happening in and between the different sectors. What have people already learned through their experiences and what insights have been uncovered? Are there common trends or ideas on how to build ecosystems for systems change?

This 'echolocation' exercise revealed several patterns of insight around how healthy ecosystems for systems change develop, as well what it will take to nurture these ecosystems moving forward. The panelists, the audience, and the tweets collectively highlighted common points of light that together produced a constellation to guide us forward.

Some of these findings will not be new - they are the sum of multiple voices sharing their lived and learned experiences. Moreover, major collaborative and investigative projects are similarly exploring how to craft social innovation ecosystems (see *Appendix III*).

What we hope to add in this reflection is the force of convergence; by convening an 'unusual' panel of practitioners from across the social change system, we aspired to not only uncover common insights, but also *potential actions* to inspire further collaboration.

What is still needed is a shared understanding of ecosystems for systems change.

By the end of the session, it was clear that 'ecosystems for systems change,' as discussed in the session, had deep, resonant value for the social change activists and practitioners in the room.

What is still missing is a coherent, accessible story about crafting such ecosystems - a story about how

our actions have broader impacts than we can foresee and how we can harness that opportunity together.

We hope 'building ecosystems for systems change' will fuel that story, driving momentum and collaboration.

This brief reflection – on an all too brief gathering – is an attempt to begin that story, by sharing the common patterns of thought, insight, and potential actions that can propel us forward.

Across the public, community and private sectors, we are hearing a growing call for systems change and a growing desire to unlock the full power of social innovation such that the collective outcome is greater than the sum of its parts and radically transforms systems to reduce vulnerability, enhance resilience and nurture our collective wellbeing.

CHAPTER ONE: PATTERNS

The first half of the session focused on patterns of insight that map the current state of (very young) ecosystems supporting innovation for systems change, particularly key gaps and important opportunities.

PATTERN 1

**THE ECOSYSTEM IS BORN OF NECESSITY.
IT IS VITAL TO SYSTEMS CHANGING SOLUTIONS.**

An ecosystem is born of necessity. The growing understanding of the systemic nature of problems is driving a growing urgency for systemic solutions and ecosystems that support innovation for transformational systems change.

Ecosystems are vital to innovating systemic solutions because:

An ecosystem approach develops new value networks.

Partnering with the usual suspects limits the solutions imaginable and actionable. As new institutions and community groups link up, what we have not even dreamt of will become feasible. Connecting different players in new ways can inspire a shift in thinking about the power of collective action.

It invites a 'change at scale' focus, driving resourcefulness

This was called problem-focused resourcefulness, or a 'problem-oriented, but solutions-focused' style during the session, highlighting that a focus on change at scale (systems change) invites a new kind of problem-solving mindset – it necessitates a resourcefulness that inherently requires partnership.

It focuses on long-term time horizons and constant scanning, simultaneous to actionable initiatives.

While an ecosystem may grow to address an entrenched problem, the focus is on multiple points of intervention over time to tip the system, avoiding the technical trappings of any one solution. Social innovation is not a 'fixed address.'

The need for ecosystems is born of the necessity for systemic solutions. An ecosystem framework invites more thoughtful, systemic ways to connect the different actors at different scales simultaneously trying to influence a problem.

SiG @sigeneration · Sep 5

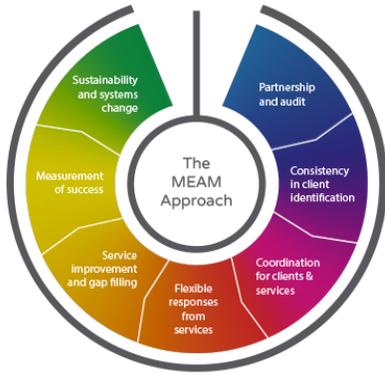
James Whitehead: #unusalsuspects partnerships drive #innovation leading to unexpected opportunity #Slecosystem

CASE

MEAM (Making Every Adult Matter)

Convened and supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation UK, the Lankelly Chase Foundation and the Garfield Weston Foundation, MEAM is a coalition of four national charities – Clinks, DrugScope, Homeless Link and Mind – that collectively represent over 1,600 frontline organizations working in the criminal justice, drug and drug treatment, homelessness and mental health sectors (meam.org.uk).

By convening, connecting and aligning their work to collectively influence policy and services for adults facing multiple needs and exclusions, MEAM is fostering a common ecosystem for systems change by leveraging a non-prescriptive framework to influence and transform service interventions across the system.



theamapproach.org.uk

By linking a critical mass of diverse frontline agencies working across the service delivery and policy system, the coalition's outcomes far outreach what would have been possible operating alone.

There are two ecosystem approaches essential to systems change:

Vertical Partnership:

An ecosystem crafted around a solution

Vertical partnership grows around the lifecycle of a social innovation from idea to research to theory of change to prototyping to iterating to testing to scaling to mainstreaming.

Too many players working to support social change see themselves as isolated agents, focusing on select stages of a social innovation's lifecycle, without linking up or partnering with others working on different stages.

The result is key gaps in vertical partnerships, specifically in gathering evidence and a lack of funding for accelerating innovations that have the possibility of success.

Horizontal Partnership:

An ecosystem crafted around a problem

A horizontal partnership is a collaborative, holistic ecosystem around a complex problem.

More often than not, social interventions are 'service-rich and system-poor.' People are bombarded by interventions from different providers, all of which add up to less than the sum of the parts, because it is the system itself that pushes people into difficult situations or prevents them from getting out.

Increasingly, social change and innovation practitioners are asking probing questions about the systemic nature of problems, summarized by the simple, but profound question: *Why?*

Why? is driving an awareness that addressing root causes requires working with diverse, even antagonistic, collaborators in new, innovative ways, growing a wide, holistic network of relationships to coordinate around the problem.

The ecosystem is born out of the necessity to address massive problems.

PATTERN 2

TAKE COLLABORATION SERIOUSLY.

SiG @sigeneration · Sep 5

@h_kippin in the hotseat at #Slecosystem notes that #collaboration precedent is in natural ecosystems

Collaboration is both natural and complex. As Henry Kippin - Director of Collaborate - highlighted in an audience comment, "We aren't so clever that we invented collaboration; rather, it is natural. We try to be the broker and to get under the skin of collaboration, but we must stay humble."

While ecosystems are born of necessity, collaboration is necessary to develop and support an ecosystem - a key element of the problem-focused resourcefulness driving the pursuit of systemic solutions.

That collaboration is important was not contested during the session; rather, as Henry Kippin highlighted, it was considered natural - so much so that it has evolved into a popular buzzword in the 21st century. But that does not make it easy to do.

Collaboration is messy, experimental and temperamental. There are costs to failure, both in opportunity costs and failing to transform the system. There are costs to success as tensions around money, power and brand intensify. Whether a collaboration is planned or organic, it will always be emergent and experimental. The key is to take collaboration very seriously.

Collaborating to develop vital ecosystems that support innovation for systems change, whether oriented around a complex problem (horizontal partnership) or a systemic solution (vertical partnership), requires a

radical change of both mindset and behaviour, not only at the organizational level, but also at the personal level. It requires working across sectors and cultures, against the odds.

SeanLowrie @SeanLowrie · Sep 5
Ecosystems need collaboration which needs quality relationships and great process management skills
#siesystem #unusualsuspects

Managing Relationships.

Successful collaborations are all about people. They involve bringing together disparate worlds of action and intent, as well as people who do not speak the same language.

Collaboration critically depends on very strong working relationships across divergent and diverse interests, as well as fostering a willingness to act in new ways. Collaborating requires managing the fractures and alignments between *people*.

CASE **SOCIAL INNOVATION EXCHANGE NETWORK**

From the [SIX PUBLIC REPORT 2014](#) by Darcy Riddell,
Ph.D. in Social Innovation (University of Waterloo)

“The SIX Summer School convenes practitioners with an incredible breadth of disciplinary knowledge, training and skills - from finance, public policy, and management, to social work, education, community development, social enterprise, and activism.

But for this group to understand and catalyze ‘culture shifts’ at larger scales, we will have to get our own house in order: by translating experiences across disciplinary and experiential chasms, valuing the translation of language and meaning, and sharing stories to allow a more coherent culture of social innovation to emerge.”

To build broad, wide, deep networks of people around a systemic problem or solution requires scanning the whole system, getting under the skin of the people within it, understanding their position and seeing both the gaps and needs that are inhibiting collaboration.

When collaborations collapse, it is often due to power plays and failing to understand vested interests and needs.

PATTERN 3 **BE POWER AWARE. THERE IS A TIME FOR COLLABORATION AND A TIME FOR CONFLICT.**

Nurturing an ecosystem requires a deep awareness of power: Who has it? What kind? Who does not?

The closer you get to the ‘fulcrum’ (of power), the more power and influence you have, but the less flexibility in what you can do. And vice versa.
- James Whitehead

Understanding power is essential not only for collaborations to thrive, but also because systemic change challenges the status quo, inviting new forms of power. Being power aware nuances the role of collaboration in crafting ecosystems - moments of dissent and conflict can be as important. Conflicting or dissenting voices may question the ecosystem in critically insightful ways, adding a whole new type of fuel to the fire that radically changes the solutions possible - for the better.

Conflict can be a sign of progress, and should be expected if shifting power is critical to solving complex problems.

PATTERN 4 **RAGE IS CRITICAL.**

Rage is critical to any social change. Why is rage important?

People do not often get involved in systems change or social innovation because they are nice or want to give back. They get involved - passionately involved - because they are angry about the way things are.

Rage is what gets us to do good things (it can also get us to do bad things), but if the rage isn’t there, we aren’t getting anywhere.
- [Jon Huggett](#)

Similar to conflict, rage is a sign that the system is being challenged, disruption is happening, and change is underway. Rage is what drives us forward when the system pushes back against our efforts. It is what motivates and ignites systems change. It is both the impetus for social innovation and the sign that it is starting to take hold.

Arthur Schopenhauer, a German philosopher, posited that all great truths are initially ridiculed, then violently opposed, then accepted as obvious and received as wisdom.

If there is no violent opposition, then we are likely just talking to ourselves.

PATTERN 5 **WITHOUT DIVERSITY, THE ECOSYSTEM** **COLLAPSES.**

“All the elements together draw strength from the diversity of contributions that collectively target all aspects of a given social challenge”
- [The Solution Revolution](#) (2013)

The excitement and enthusiasm around the powerful opportunities of an ecosystem for systems change may overlook the important diversity of individuals who could or should be included - ‘the unusual suspects.’

Key unusual suspects are:

- (1) **Community:** the people affected by complex problems and allegedly served by solutions. The value proposition of a social innovation is deeply personal for them.
- (2) **The mainstream intrapreneur:** individuals from mainstream and large institutions who are not already aligned with systems change work.

SeanLowrie @SeanLowrie · Sep 5
Maybe we need to find people who haven't yet drunk the social innovation Kool-Aid #siecosystem

These two groups of stakeholders in systems change were noticeably absent from the session on September 5th and their absence from the broader work of social innovation introduces two barriers:

- (1) Systems change is thwarted if we do things to people or for them, rather than with them.
- (2) There is a mainstream ‘heart drain:’ the flow of passionate, systems-thinking individuals from mainstream (corporate or public) institutions to the social sector.

Until more ways are found to get deep into mainstream institutions, and to integrate community deep into social innovation, ecosystems for systems change will not thrive. As with any ecological ecosystem, without diversity it will collapse.

PATTERN 6 **WE ARE BEDEVILED BY LANGUAGE.**

With diversity, conflict, power, rage and collaboration comes a massive dictionary of different words for explaining social change.

The idea of an ecosystem itself introduces a new analogy and language for thinking about and actioning *systems change* (another piece of jargon).

In the context of the social innovation movement, there are camps who want to see ‘ecosystem development,’ others who discuss ‘field-building,’ others still are concerned with the ‘infrastructure’ of social innovation, and yet more focus on ‘capacity-building.’ These frameworks are not redundant - in fact, they are complimentary - but the point is that the complexity of the language and the struggle to develop a common lexicon diminishes shared understanding, which in turn diminishes the success of ecosystems for systems change.

We are operating from different points of reference so that even the same words have different meanings, depending who is speaking and who is listening.

Words matter: they have precise meanings to specific audiences. The frame of reference for the same word can be very different. Go beyond the buzzwords.
- [Paul Ellingstad](#)

It is imperative to develop a shared understanding. There is a storm of concern brewing about language becoming the barrier to success - and a common appreciation that language is deeply important.

We can be trusted or we can be liked. Disrupting the status quo often leads to dislike, but change can continue *if we are trusted*. And trust is only fostered and maintained by what we *do* and *say*.

...many of the words we use sound nice and multisyllabic, but we can exalt in terminological inexactitude, and not get to the point. My challenge is to get to the point and that's the one I try to work on.
- [Jon Huggett](#)

CHAPTER TWO: PIVOT TO ACTIONAL STEPS

Halfway through the session, the discussion pivoted to ideas for actionable steps. How can we all be intentional in crafting and strengthening ecosystems for systems change? What could be our role in driving toward greater intentionality?

The development of the private and public sectors are well-worn topics of discussion, but there is rarely broad public discussion on how to develop the social sector, how it grows, and how it interacts with other sectors, let alone how to craft an ecosystem where these different sectors interrelate and interdepend.

Where can we be more deliberate around creating the conditions to develop the world that we want?

ACTION 1 MEANING OVER LEXICON. ENGAGE THE WORLD.

If we want to build trust and build bridges, we have to use the words of the world. We have to provoke, get reactions, and hear what people are saying. We have to both stimulate discussion and listen to speak.

The great speeches of history – prose that ignited sweeping change and continues to inspire – prove the case: integrity of meaning is more important than the integrity of a term. The power of great orators flows from the accessibility of their words and from the common understanding of their meaning and passion.

It is about getting to the point, so people can understand, argue, disagree and engage.

We can use the words of the world without codifying them. We can begin to re-empower language with meaning, rather than the other way around. Only then does the opportunity to co-create a broader narrative around systemic change become possible.

ACTION 2 DO STRONG ANALYSES OF POWER.

SiG @sigeneration · Sep 5
@Oxfam J.Whitehead: whenever u r looking at #systemschange u _have_ to do a strong analysis of power & the people in the system #Slecosystem

Systems change requires a strong analysis of power and the actors involved – a mapping of power, allies and opponents. Who's with you? Who's against you? Who are your blockers? What are they in it for? Why might these unusual suspects actually be allies?

An analysis of power will not only illuminate what is holding a system in place, but can also reveal key levers for transforming power and igniting systems change – often through the most unexpected collaborations.

ACTION 3 COLLABORATION REQUIRES SHARED LEADERSHIP.

A core condition of systems change is not only to collaborate, but to collaborate with people that irk us, that we don't like, and to share leadership with them.

For this reason, collaboration requires very specific skills: persistence, courage, tenacity and, most importantly, leadership.

The reality is that sometimes we can all lead all the time – a leader-rich environment is a good thing.

This type of leadership-rich environment grows from a different paradigm of power than traditional hierarchical control; it stems from network power where your contribution is your power. It is the expression of power in a healthy ecosystem.

Network power is further emboldened by bridging social capital: the capacity to not only bridge disconnected groups, but to 'hold' the shared vision that gathers disparate partners together and fosters community.

Those best at expressing network power embody more than shared leadership; they are facilitative leaders, operating as key facilitators to empower the collective whole.

The network power of facilitative leadership is the most critical factor for successful collaboration. There are clear success patterns: such 'leaders' nurture relationships; make risks and expectations explicit; enhance innovation outcomes and transparency; facilitate reciprocity; and reduce transaction costs.

Collaboration takes time. There is always a pressure to go fast, but the real endgame is to go far. The capacity to mitigate this pressure and truly share leadership takes both effort and professionalism.

Moving forward, we can deepen and formalize hands-on skills for cross-sector partnership to develop sustainable capacities for collaboration.

CASE **PARTNERSHIP BROKERS ASSOCIATION**

Formed in 2012, the PBA became the first professional entity for cross-sector partnership and brokering as a paradigm of change. Brokers take on clearly defined roles to help partners go through a wide range of challenges.

PBA is building a body of support for what brokers do, as well as evidence around brokered vs. unbrokered partnerships and the differences that make one more successful than the other.

Highly effective partnership brokers spend intensive quality time on relationships and cultivate the internal capacities of the partners to continue to collaborate and innovate over the long-term. They enhance the overall partnership such that the collective contribution and outcome is greater than the sum of the parts.

ACTION 4 **MAKE IT PERSONAL.**

*"It is at the deeper human touch, self-catalyzing systemic change becomes a shared possibility."
- Joe Hsueh, [Why The Human Touch Is Key To Unlocking Systems Change](#)*

We must all learn in action and be serious about learning as we go from people.

For example, we can engage in dialogue interviews to capture a unique bird's-eye view of a system, while building community along the way through the time-intensive relationship building that can accompany an interview. This is action-network learning.

As relationships deepen, turn partnerships into friendships. Tap into and be open about collective rage. As shared understanding becomes more nuanced, as trust intensifies, and as introspection becomes more open, partnerships can transition into friendships, born of a mutual understanding of common rage that drives a collective impetus to bridge gaps and act.

We may not share all our values, but we can share a goal.

SiG @sigeneration · Sep 5
Turn your projects from partnerships to friendships - Rachel Sinha @TheFinanceLab #Slecosystem #unusualsuspects

ACTION 5 **ENGAGE KEYSTONE INSTITUTIONS + INDIVIDUALS.**

Sometimes there's a particular role that creates the hyper success of an ecosystem -- without that role the ecosystem begins to deteriorate (see Sustainable Human & George Monbiot's video on [how wolves change rivers](#)).

Thinking about the critical importance of diversity and shared leadership to a healthy ecosystem for systems change, it is clear there are 'keystone' players who play immutable roles in the success of systems changing innovation.

Unlike keystone species in ecological ecosystems, keystone players are more than passively important to the system; they are the critical conveners of connection and relationships that enable transformative collaboration.

A keystone player is much less about 'who' they are and much more about their network power, attributes, core capabilities and personality. These can be summarized into three distinct keystone traits:

- **Integrative:** human bridges connecting people to a larger contiguous system;
- **Influential:** focusing others on long-term interests and time horizons through appeal and establishing new cultural norms, and;
- **Impactful:** making things happen and fostering "real economic transactions that create a systemic effect, not just get a few people excited for a short time."

Source: Victor W. Hwang and Greg Horowitz, [The Rainforest: The Secret to Building the Next Silicon Valley](#) (2012) pp. 72-3.

Keystone institutions often take the form of secondary or intermediary players, balancing both convening and foresight roles. They surround themselves with organizations of different scales and capabilities, act through them to address common issues, facilitate the process of developing shared understanding, and support the shift into collective strategy and the early delivery of strategy, all while holding a deep, abiding awareness that more issues will evolve along the way that will require the ecosystem to further mature.

Keystone individuals take many forms; bedeviled by language once more, these keystone individuals are variously termed:

- *Systems Entrepreneurs or Intrapreneurs*
- *Systems Changers*
- *Social Curators*
- *Partnership Brokers*
- *Ecosystem Builders*

Identifying and supporting mainstream systems intrapreneurs, who help transform a system from the inside-out, is one example of a much-needed action to embed successful systems change initiatives and ideas into the mainstream.

SiG @sigeneration · Sep 5

@SimonTucker: need to get deep into the mainstream, large institutions, supporting intrapreneurs who see value in partnership #Slecosystem

ACTION 6

A MANIFESTO FOR EXPERIMENTATION.

A major part of innovation for systems change is experimentation, enabled by trust. Trust is something you do. Both trust and experimentation live in action. We must go out, try something, get feedback and try again. A feedback loop can deepen trust, even as it refines a social innovation.

Both innovation and trust require improving before we prove.

**"If you're not making a mistake, that's a mistake."
- Miles Davis**

REFLECTION

JAZZ

(with credit to Jon Huggett)

The world of music offers a poetic case for the value of experimentation and deep insight into how to do it well.

The process of producing music, like innovation, has transformed over time. Music shifted from a formulaic process of cooperation to an organic, iterative process of collaboration.

When the symphony was considered the highest form of Western music, there were right notes and wrong notes and everyone had to keep time. Roles were divided into clearly articulated activities. Everyone had a place. It worked and still does. But it does not create enabling conditions for transformative innovation.

Then came jazz. Miles Davis called jazz 'social music' and worked as a bridging, facilitative leader to collaborate with lots of people he didn't like, but who contributed to producing some of the world's greatest music. Davis' collaborations were often fractious, but the musicians had a shared goal and a shared process - experiment, get the music to the audience, and get their reaction.

Improvisation necessitates both shared leadership and a willingness to act in radically new ways - to be comfortable with uncertainty, to follow opportunities as they arise, and to see the music through to untold heights of beauty and complexity.

We may have to work with antagonistic partners because we actually have the same goal.

ACTION 7

COMPLETE THE LIFE CYCLE OF SUPPORT.

We are in the same business: transformative social change. Some of us work on small change for lots of people, others on deep change for a few. The key is to become more thoughtful and deliberate in our actions and to determine where we are best placed to act:

**Finding one's sweet spot and, at the same time, operating at the boundary of one's comfort zone.
- Andrew Barnett**

Organizations all have different scales, histories and footprints. We need to identify them and the ingredients that contribute to determining where each organization can most effectively act within an

ecosystem, bolstering the collective outcome with their unique contribution.

We also need to identify the gaps in nascent ecosystems and, if not fill them, contribute to the conditions where they can be filled. We must be prepared to push our own boundaries to work with others, but not to do what others are best placed to do themselves.

Specifically in vertical partnerships, there are two looming gaps currently inhibiting social innovations from maturing into catalytic systems change:

- (1) GAP: Funding for serious, intensive approaches to experimentation, rooted in developing solutions with scientific rigor and/or developing the evidence base for new ideas and pilots.
- (2) GAP: Funding for acceleration and embedding. Even as the literature grows on how to scale an innovation from the margins up or out into the mainstream, there is limited commitment to the intensive development required to help a social innovation become 'scale-ready.'

ACTION 8 **CREATE AN 'ACTIVE INDUSTRIAL POLICY.'**

Systems changing interventions, in being disruptive and boundary-crossing, have to create their own market and market demand. The 'need' may be there, but is the demand?

Most markets are demand-led; ultimately, demand will drive supply. A critical frontier for social innovation interventions - which tackle the same entrenched problems as the public sector - will be to focus on helping shift public sector commissioners and procurement officers away from the standard transactional approach to public solutions and towards *market building* approaches for systems changing innovation.

Already, outcome-based commissioning is creating some flexibility and agility for the public sector to support and contract innovative systems-level interventions.

The time is nigh to take it one step further to fund the time, space and attention required to allow new ways of doing things to thrive. The public sector must *grow*

the ecosystem with a view to have a thriving nursery of social innovations ready for scaling 5-10 years on.

The public sector has a long history of actively building commercial markets; it frequently champions certain sectors to invest in and nurture. In a similar way, the public sector can co-create a narrative around ecosystems that support innovation for systems change by facilitating the development of an 'active industrial policy' that guides how government will partner, mobilize and leverage resources to build the 'social innovation market' going forward.

ACTION 9 **SENSE-CHECK SOCIAL DEMAND.**

Demand is not only driven by government contracts. Ecosystems for systems change have to be about community, about the beneficiaries. Well-intentioned solutions that exclude community will not work. Is there social demand for the innovation? Social demand depends on the integration of community in the solution-making from the start. It is a process known by many names: customer/client-centricity, user-/human-centered design, social labs, or co-production. All are viable and each one contributes to the conditions for successful social innovation and thriving ecosystems for systems change.

CHAPTER THREE: AN INFLECTION POINT

Is 'building ecosystems for systems change' the shared narrative that can drive the next phase of social innovation? After testing and iterating this framework with the participants and panel of Session 22, we are putting it out there again now, hoping to gauge your reaction.

The movement for transformative social change is at an inflection point. The infrastructure and institutions that we are working in were built to address social challenges as individual projects. We are now trying to retrofit them with the agility and capacity to link together around systems change. It is slow, experimental work and it could lead to the next generation of social innovation.

Improvising music together.

Our current song is titled:

How do we collaborate to create ecosystems that support innovation for systems change?

And it goes like this:

With a problem-focused resourcefulness, we can analyze the power at play in a system, only to discover that we must collaborate with people that irk us.

We can include all these unusual suspects in shared leadership, mediated by facilitative leaders, channeling our collective rage toward a shared goal, understanding, story and the holistic integration of multiple-points of intervention into a thriving ecosystem that supports continuous innovation for systems change.

We can engage the public sector to co-create a market building strategy for social innovation and both welcome and empower community to partner in solutions development from the beginning.

We can use clear words to rapidly experiment, get feedback, and learn in action, building community and improving before we prove, only to find that the very way we innovate has transformed...and so have the systems perpetuating our most nightmarish social and ecological challenges.

EPILOGUE: APPENDICES

APPENDIX I – Panel Biographies

James Whitehead: Global Innovation Adviser, Oxfam (Co-Host)

James is currently Oxfam's Global Innovation Advisor. Prior to this, he was Oxfam's Regional Programme Manager for the Middle East responsible for a wide range of humanitarian and development programmes in the region including start up of the Syria Crisis Response, resilience work in Yemen, economic justice in Palestine and gender programming across the region. During this time, he has also supported organisation-wide initiatives on fragile states and working in partnership.

He has an MBA and wide experience of the sector. Prior to joining Oxfam, he was the International Director for Progressio, a UK-based INGO, managing global programmes and policy on sustainable livelihoods, climate change, civil society and governance. He also ran VSO's country programme in Cambodia, working closely with government ministries, multi-laterals and civil society. He has worked for Oxfam GB as a Regional Funding Coordinator and with Caritas Swaziland, where he established the country's first community-based orphan support programme as a response to the HIV & AIDS pandemic. His earlier experience was in the UK voluntary sector working on urban regeneration with deprived communities.

Simon Tucker: Independent Adviser on Social Innovation and Systems Change

Simon Tucker is an independent adviser on social innovation, social entrepreneurship and systems change. He is also Deputy Chair and lead on whole systems transformation for NHS West London, which manages a local health and social care economy for 350,000 people.

Simon brings experience as a social entrepreneur, social investor and adviser to governments on innovation. He was a co-founder and member of the start-up team of UnLtd (The Foundation for Social Entrepreneurs, a C\$180 million Endowment); the Social Innovation Exchange; Social Innovation Camp; the Studio Schools Trust; and the Young Foundation, where he was Chief Executive until Summer 2013. He has worked with governments and NGOs on four continents and a number of international agencies.

Simon has particular experience advising on the design and investment of social innovation oriented funds including National Health Service England's regional innovation funds (C\$410M invested over 5 years), Realising Ambition replication fund (C\$46M invested in 1 year) and the Young Foundation's own incubation and investment programmes. He has also served on the advisory boards of Big Society Capital, Big Lottery Fund (England) and the European Union's Horizon 2020 innovation programme.

Paul Ellingstad: Director of Human Progress Initiatives, HP

Paul leads HP's Human Progress Initiatives. He and the team bring focus to how technology improves the way we live and work through innovative and collaborative problem solving, solution development, and implementation. Paul evangelizes individual and organizational commitment and contribution to society and the planet, which the company's founders, Bill and Dave, rooted deeply in HP's culture and values. He played a key role in HP's embrace of Social Innovation and the company's transformation from a traditional CSR model in late 2009, including architecting and implementing the global health strategy with a talented, agile start-up team. He is a First Movers alumni fellow in the Aspen Institute's Business and Society Program, and he sits on the Millennium Campus Network's Board of Directors. Paul holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and Political Science from the University of South Dakota. He lives in Ireland with his wife and three children.

Andrew Barnett: Director, UK Branch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Andrew Barnett has been Director of the UK Branch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation since September 2007.

Andrew joined the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation where he held the post of Director of Policy Development and Communications. Prior to this, he was Director of Communications at the UK Sports Council and, before that, Head of Public Affairs at the National Consumer Council. Andrew previously held posts at HSBC Holdings, the Arts Council of England, and the Foyer Federation for Youth, as well as working for the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Homelessness and Housing Need. He is a committee member of Healthwatch England, the statutory national consumer champion in health and social care, of Collaborate, and the Social Innovation Exchange (SIX). He is also a trustee of Addaction, the UK's leading specialist drug and alcohol treatment charity. He previously served voluntarily in a variety of capacities: as chair of DV8 Physical Theatre; as chair of the trustees of SPACE Studios, a London-based arts property charity; as a director of Yorkshire Housing; and as a trustee of St Christopher's Fellowship, a housing association providing care and support to disadvantaged young people.

Born in New South Wales, Australia, Andrew was educated at King's School, Bruton in Somerset, and St Andrews University. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and an enthusiast for contemporary abstract and Aboriginal art.

Jon Huggett: Founding Board Chair of Social Innovation Exchange

Jon Huggett advises CEOs globally, and serves on boards in the US and UK. Jon is founder of the Third Foundation, which advises businesses and social enterprises around the world. He has 25 years of experience leading enterprises and advising leaders in both private and social sectors. Jon has advised The Wikimedia Foundation, Médecins Sans Frontières, The Open Society Institute, Social Ventures Australia, and many more.

Jon chairs the boards of the Social Innovation Exchange, which has members across Asia, the Americas, Europe, and Australia; Khulisa in the UK; and the global campaign All Out. He also serves on the board of Zitter Health Insights.

Jon spent four years as a Partner with The Bridgespan Group in San Francisco and New York, where he helped open the office. Prior, he spent four years as a Partner with Bain & Company in Johannesburg and Toronto. Earlier in his career, he worked for The Boston Consulting Group in San Francisco and New York.

Jon served as a community organizer and the board President of the STOP AIDS Project in San Francisco, a nonprofit dedicated to preventing HIV infection. He was founding board chair of the Organization for Refuge, Asylum and Migration.

Jon has run three companies: a \$75M health care operation on four continents; the London-based subsidiary of DAI, focused on economic development in emerging countries; and Planet Out, a lesbian and gay web company. Jon began his career at P&G in sales and brand management.

As a Visiting Fellow at the Saïd Business School at Oxford University, Jon has taught with the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship. Jon was International Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Social Impact at the University of New South Wales. He has been a guest lecturer at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, at the American Graduate School of International Management in Phoenix, and at the University of Southern California. As a volunteer, he taught at Leeuwkop Prison near Johannesburg.

Jon received his BA and MA from Trinity College at Oxford University, and went on to earn his MBA from Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, where he graduated as an Arjay Miller Scholar. He is dual citizen of both the USA and the UK.

Surinder Hundal: Interim Chair of the Board, Partnership Brokers Association; Director, Rippleseed

Surinder is the interim Chair of the Board of the Partnership Brokering Association (partnershipbrokers.org), the international professional body for those managing and developing multi-stakeholder collaboration processes. After a career in the corporate sector, where she led global senior management roles encompassing communications, strategy, innovation management, marketing, corporate responsibility and partnership development, she is now working as an independent specialist in the field of corporate responsibility and cross-sector partnerships for sustainable development.

Prior to establishing Rippleseed (www.rippleseed.com), Surinder was an executive director at the International Business Leaders Forum, a global not-for-profit business leadership coalition working with global businesses on corporate responsibility and sustainable development initiatives world-wide.

Having worked in such telecommunications companies as Nokia and BT, developing their business in emerging /transitioning economies, Surinder has substantive knowledge of finding collaborative solutions to the challenges such markets face and of the role of technology in social and economic development. She has also instigated and facilitated internal partnerships as an effective and sometimes a radical way of delivering business, cultural and organisational transformation.

Surinder is an accredited partnership broker and holds a post-graduate certificate in Cross-sector Partnerships from the University of Cambridge. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA). She holds a MBA from Cass Business School (City University) in London; a BSc Honours in Life Sciences from the University of Westminster; and was awarded her PhD in pharmacology from the University of London.

Surinder can be reached through surinder@rippleseed.com

Rachel Sinha: Co-Founder, The Finance Innovation Lab; Sustainability Manager at ICAEW

Rachel Sinha is an award winning systems change entrepreneur. She co-founded The Finance Innovation Lab, which empowers positive disruptors in the financial system, designed to connect and scale entrepreneurs with new business models in finance, advocates for policy change and entrepreneurs in mainstream financial services. She has helped launched a number of systems change programmes under this umbrella including AuditFutures, The Natural Capital Coalition and The Finance Foundry, amongst others. The Lab was named one of Nesta and The Observers "50 New Radicals" in 2012 and this year, has been shortlisted as a semi-finalist of the Buckminster Fuller Prize in the US, known as "Socially-Responsible Design's Highest Award."

Rachel is committed to building the market for systems change entrepreneurs and is working on a number of projects that raise awareness of the practice. Together with fellow Point People, she launched www.systemschangers.com, a series of video interviews with twenty systems frontrunners from finance, social care, technology, civic participation, health, education and the environment; she is co-author of *Labcraft: How Innovation Labs Cultivate Change Through Experimentation and Collaboration* and has written for Fast Company on building the practice of systems entrepreneurship.

Rachel has a BA in Psychology, an MA in Marketing and was a THNK Scholar at the Amsterdam School of Creative Leadership, designed to deliver the next generation of creative leaders that will have a significant societal impact.

She is Sustainability Manager at ICAEW, a Director at The Point People and a member of the European Commission Expert Group on Social Business. In 2013, Rachel was named a 'Sky Future Leader' by Management Today/BSkyB.

APPENDIX II

[Systems Change Two-Pager](#) [direct download]

APPENDIX III

With various collaborative and investigative projects exploring how to craft social innovation ecosystems, Social Innovation Generation (SiG) National produced a resource page on '[Ecosystems for Systems Change](#),' a living page of key reports, articles, dialogue, and projects on building ecosystems for systems change. Projects and people to follow include, but are by no means limited to:

- [Collaborate](#)
- [Social Innovation Exchange \(SIX\)](#)
- [Project Innovation: Developing an Innovation Mindset](#)
- [Systems Innovation Lab](#)
- [Systems Changers](#)
- [Flip Labs](#)
- [New Profit Inc.](#)
- [Volans](#)
- [Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation](#)
- [Finance Innovation Lab](#)
- [The Partnership Brokers Association](#)
- [Civic Systems Lab](#)
- [Greg Horowitz](#) and [Victor Hwang](#)
- [Natural Capital Coalition](#)
- [Oxfam Innovation Lab](#)
- [HP Living Progress](#)
- [Leaders shaping market systems](#)