Pathfinding-Foresight in Conceptualizing a Christian Artists' Community

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to present a conceptual outline for a long-term pilot project in which a faith-based community of Christian artists serve, as a group, to promote and inspire one another to create art with a Christian world view, and find ways to use their art to build a healing bridge to promote issues such as justice, forgiveness, truth, reconciliation, and love, to the greater community, including Ferguson, Missouri. Conceptualization of this project has been largely though a process of Pathfinding-Foresight, which is defined as, "a creating healing capacity to generatively glimpse patterns and images from the future applying imagination, insight, and intellection to creatively envision and conceptualize new ideas and strategically and collaboratively evolve and integrate them into system frameworks" (Doss, & Horsman, 2014, p. 1). This conceptual outline was developed according to the Presencing Institute and Scharmer's (2014, prototyping) model of prototyping and will serve as the basis for proposing a larger, more focused prototype process within a local church in the St. Louis, Missouri area. A meeting with the church has been set up for the week of July 12, 2015.

Prototyping

The purpose of prototyping is to "create a landing strip for the future you want to create, and to build something that allows you to explore an emerging idea or concept by doing something" (Presencing Institute, & Sharmer, 2015, prototyping, p. 2). In essence, a prototype is a process by which future possibilities may be explored and developed. They are "an early draft of what the final result might look like. Prototyping often goes through several iterations based on feedback …from other stakeholders" (p. 2). In time,

these may be developed into pilot projects (p. 3), and work on the principle of "failing

early to learn quickly" (p. 3). Prototyping is a scaled down version of Scharmer's U (p.4)

and follows a three-step process of "Co-Sensing, Co-Inspiring, and Co-Creating" (p. 4).

As part of the Pathfinding-Foresight process for this paper, several participants from

different organizations were engaged in a *Dialogue Interviews* (Presencing Institute, &

Sharmer, 2015, dialogue interviews, p. 4) to test, and subsequently shape, this

preliminary concept.

　　　　Background. The author has been involved with *The Crossing*

(www.wcrossing.org), a church in the St. Louis, Missouri area, of approximately ten

thousand weekly attendees. Participation is via several campuses, multiple services, and

internet broadcast which has regular attendees from all seven continents.

　　　　Several things inspired the initial concept of an artists' community. They were,

the author's personal love of art, the realization that only certain types of artists found a

place to use their art within the church, recent race-related events and riots in Ferguson,

Missouri (a troubled suburb five miles from the author's home), and the church's senior

pastor's participation on a national level with high profile leaders concerning those

events.

　　　　The author's initial conceptualization evolved through a co-initiating and co-

sensing process (Scharmer, 2009, p. 18) in which the author observed, listened to what

life called him to do, connected with people related to the call, and brought together core

players with a common intention (p. 18).

　　　　As a result of the observation, he determined that there was a gap in participation

among the artists in the church, and approached the church's creative arts team a year ago

with the idea of discussing ways in which the church could expand opportunities. The

author used his photographer friend, Hal Moran (www.halmoran.com) as an example.

Moran is a member, has a photographic art business, and has been exhibited at the

Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., among many other places. Highly competent and

qualified, the church was not using Moran in any capacity. At the time of the meeting, the

church decided that they really didn't have an idea of how to progress. A year later, the

author was contacted about the possibility of subsequent meetings to discuss future

possibilities.

       Jaworski (2012) believes that timing is crucial (p.197), and that an emerging

process centered in truth and love will "bring forth the emerging reality *as it desires*

[emphasis by Jaworski] (p. 95). He observed "that very slight, deft movements at the just

the right time and place would have enormous consequences…[that] when that moment

came, with just the slightest gesture, all sorts of actions and results were brought into

being" (p. 196). The author may never know, but perhaps the race riots in Ferguson

during the year of waiting were part of that movement. This would be consistent with

Jawarski's (2012) views that there is an open and emergent quality to the universe, which

is a domain of undivided wholeness, that within the universe is a creative Source of

infinite potential, and that humans can, by following a path of love, tap into the infinite

potential of the Source (np. From preface pages under "Four Principles"). The complete

process of tapping into the Source is referred to as a "U process" (pp. 19-20), or "Theory

U" (Scharmer, 2009, pp. xi-xviii, 13-14, 469-70). Scharmer (2009) informs us that we

have the potential to "better sense and connect with a future possibility that is seeking to

emerge" (p. 8), and is done through a process of opening the mind, the heart, and the will

(p. 22). When this *presensing* (combination of sensing the future possibility and state of being in the present moment) happens (p. 19), we are able to "learn from the emerging future" (p. 19).

Brainstorming. After being contacted by the church, the author began to consider what might emerge from the future, and during that process developed a vision as follows:

> I have a vision to create a supportive community of Christian artists whose talents are not currently represented—sculptures, painters, photographers, glass blowers, metal workers, dancers, playwrights, poets, etc., both within and external to the church.
>
> I foresee a group of artists coming together to create new opportunities to use their art in a variety of ways for the edification of all. For example, the church may curate art, hold artist fairs, conduct artistic seminars, display art, support performance art, help publish poets, authors, etc.
>
> I can foresee this community growing and embracing Christian artists of other churches and ecumenically fostering a greater impact.
>
> In light of current events in Ferguson, I foresee this community of Christian artists being able to be a healing bridge to the greater community in St. Louis, addressing issues of justice, forgiveness, truth, and reconciliation.[1]

Prototyping Criteria. According to Presencing Institute and Sharmer's (2015, prototyping), the proposed concept should be run through seven criteria:

1. Is it relevant--does it matter to all stakeholders?

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[1] Vision is taken from the document given to each interviewee prior to Dialogue Interviews, a copy of which may be found in Appendix A

2. Is it right--can you see the whole in the microcosm you focus on?

3. Is it revolutionary--is it new? Could it change the game?

4. Is it rapid--can you do it quickly?

5. Is it rough--can you do it on a small scale?

6. Is it relationally effective--does it leverage the strengths, competencies and possibilities of the existing networks and communities at hand?

7. Is it replicable--can you scale it? (p.6).

The author thought the concept of his vision clearly fit all seven. It is relevant, it is right, to the author's knowledge hasn't been done in the St. Louis area, could be done quickly on a small scale, is clearly relationally effective, and certainly could be scaled.

Testing the idea through dialogue interviews. Developing the process further requires *Co-Creating* in which concepts and ideas are tested (Presencing Institute, & Sharmer, 2015, prototyping, p. 4). Several methods are available for testing. *Dialogue Interviews* are intended "to engage the interviewee in a reflective and generative conversation" (Presencing Institute, & Sharmer, 2015, dialogue interviews, p. 2). *Sensing Journeys* are "a way of experiencing the system through the lens of different stakeholders. Together with other users of the system, participants will undertake small journeys to different places in that system" (Presencing Institute, & Sharmer, 2015, sensing journeys, p. 2).   , *Shadowing,* is "to accompany a person for a period of time…to observe him/her during work, and learn from this observation" (Presencing Institute, & Sharmer, 2015, shadowing, p. 2), and *Stakeholder Interviews*, which are "conversations an individual conducts with his or her key stakeholder: customers, bosses, subordinates or peers both within and outside the organization…[and] allow you to…see your role through the eyes

of these stakeholders" (Presencing Institute, & Sharmer, 2015, stakeholder interviews, p. 2).

Since the scope of this paper is to present a conceptual outline of a proposed future project and stakeholders do not yet exist, the most appropriate testing method seemed to be that of dialogue interviews in which generative ideas could be developed. Stakeholder interviews, sensing, and shadowing do not seem to fit as well.

The author selected three different people to interview regarding the proposed concept. They were, Hal Moran (a member of The Crossing church, a well-exhibited photographic artist nationally, and Director of Technology at Bridgeway Behavior Health, a not-for-profit outpatient and residential rehabilitation agency dealing with drug abuse, gambling addictions, domestic valence, etc.), Jim Mueller (a mid-level supervisor at Intelligrated, a material handling company in St. Louis, and an aspiring artist with recent public showings of his work), and Joey Wiley (a friend finishing her Doctor of Ministry (DMin) degree in *Leadership in Emerging Culture* at George Fox University).

In preparation for the dialogue interviews, the author prepared a document outlining his background interest in the project, his broad vision, and a series of questions to be used in the interview process (the document is included in Appendix A of this paper). After enlisting each person's help, he sent the document to them a day prior to the interview so that they could prepare. The document formed the basis of the interview.

As a result of the interviews, the author found that there were more similarities than there were discrepancies in the way the three responded to the questions. The information gained definitely contributed in revamping the vision and direction of the project. All gave information which would be useful in moving the project forward.

Moran gave good background information as to previous effort made by The Crossing with regards to artists within the church. At one time he had been a part of *C2*, a small group for artists that had as its mission to put on special artistic events during the year. A few years later, after a few well-received events, C2 disappeared. Moran's comment was, "Integration of the church with anything cultural is difficult. We have seen ourselves as our own island, apart from culture." (H. Moran, personal communication, July 7, 2015).

The author asked each one if his proposed project should be based within the church or parallel to it. Mueller raised the difficulty of having an externally-focused group such as was being proposed, based in the church. He said, "Most organizations sponsored by churches tend to exist to enhance that local church. Few churches think in terms of the larger body of Christ. Churches will look at this in terms of an outreach ministry that will bring people to them" (J. Mueller, personal communication, July 8, 2015). Wiley put it this way, "The biggest issue is that the church has the tendency to bring people in, and then showcase it [the group]" (J. Wiley, personal communication, July 8, 2015).

The author asked each how they could imagine the proposed project working. Wiley shared a personal experience as an intern at a church in Sheffield, England as part of her doctorate. She observed how two very distinct church bodies (Baptist and Anglican) kept their own identities, yet worshipped and served together. She said that they chose to not be concerned about bringing people into the church, but instead focused on encouraging people outside the church to be "Jesus followers." They talked in terms of those that were "moving toward Jesus," and those that "were moving away." They

had lots of small groups in multiple locations, and truly celebrated differences. Her

comment was that for the proposed artists' community to work, it could not be perceived

as being a program within the church, that the church itself, while supporting it, must

agree to let it stand alone (J. Wiley, personal communication, July 8, 2015). With regards

to the overarching influence of the church on the artists' community, Moran suggested

that the church leadership must be open to new ideas, and that they must be

"intellectually and spiritually honest enough to say they don't have all the answers" (H.

Moran, personal communication, July 7, 2015). Mueller stated clearly that the only way

a proposed artist's community like this would grow is if it were not perceived as a small

group within the church, and that a "core of interested artists, a couple dozen of them,

twenty-four or twenty-five" would be need to form that core group, and that after the

church perhaps gave the group its initial spark, the group must be allowed to take on a

life of its own and set its path organically, cross-generationally, and with diversity (J.

Mueller, personal communication, July 8, 2015). Speaking of the core group, Wiley

emphasized that the core group should be made up of more than artists, that people with a

deep cultural understanding should be included (J. Wiley, personal communication, July

8, 2015).

All three of the interviewees, in different ways, acknowledged an emerging reality

in our global world with regards to a changing society that is moving from the old, 1.0

state-driven mercantile system, the 2.0 free-market driven, laissez-faire system, or the 3.0

stakeholder-driven social-market economy, to a future 4.0 eco-system that is co-creative

in nature (Scharmer, & Kaufer ,2013, p. 52). They all recognized and voiced the opinion,

in one way or other, that churches tended toward a system that is somewhere between 2.0

and 3.0, where churches competed with each other for resources (members and their money), where the main challenges were growth or negative externalities, where there was an ego-centric or stakeholder awareness, and where power was primarily remunerative or normative (p. 52). They all felt that the best way to achieve the vision as proposed, would require a different kind of organization that was co-creative, where awareness was based on collective action and from seeing the emerging whole, as well as from an eco-centric thought and awareness (p. 52).

Their statements seem to reflect those of Makoto Fujimura[2], who claims that one of the issues we are dealing with is with regard to the basic nature of artists. There is "an Old English word used in *Beowulf:mearcstapas* [emphasis by author], translated 'border-walkers' or 'border-stalkers'" (Fujimura, 2014, p. 39), which "were individuals who lived on the edges of their groups, going in and out of them, sometimes bringing back news to the tribe" (p. 39).

Artists are instinctively uncomfortable in homogeneous groups, and in 'border-stalking' [they] have a role that both addresses the reality of fragmentation and also offers a fitting means by which artists can help people from all our many and divided cultural tribes learn to appreciate the margins, lower barriers to understanding and communication, and start to diffuse the culture wars. (p. 39)

"Artists as *mearcstapas* [emphasis by author] can provide significant cultural language or even new operative principles for our societies and churches" (p. 51).

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[2] "Makoto Fujimura, recipient of his fourth honorary doctorate, (Roanoke College, May 2015), is an artist, writer, and speaker who is recognized worldwide as a cultural shaper. A Presidential appointee to the National Council on the Arts from 2003-2009, Fujimura served as an international advocate for the arts, speaking with decision makers and advising governmental policies on the arts" Retrieved July 10, from http://www.makotofujimura.com/bio/.

The information gleaned through the interviews altered the direction of the conceptual outline, most prominently in terms of how or where the proposed artists' group is positioned organizationally. The author had the original intent that the group be located within the context of The Crossing's small group ministries, or part of a larger team. Two interviewees, Mueller and Wiley, did not feel the author's vision would be achieved if done so. Moran thought it was doubtful at best. As a result, in preparation for the meeting at The Crossing, the author has shifted the conceptual outline of the artists' community to that of a free-standing group, not directly under the auspices of The Crossing, but certainly affiliated with it and supporting The Crossing's greater interests.

Strategy

Scharmer, & Kaufer (2013) present the case for three great *divides* (p. 4) characterizing issues and pathologies that prevent societies, cultures, or organizations from being whole. These three divides are, the ecological (a disconnect from self and nature), the social (a disconnect from self and others), and the spiritual-cultural (a disconnect between self and Self—Self being representative of one's future's highest potential) (p. 4-5).

The conceptual outline for a proposed Christian artists' community being a bridge of healing to society would clearly have the potential to help heal aspects of all the divides. In essence, what the author has envisioned is a way to promote a more caring society, both within and external to the local church. What he proposes is a form of servant-leadership. Robert Greenleaf proposed a simple test to determine whether or not a leader is functioning as a servant-leader. It has gained wide acceptance.

The best test, and difficult to administer, is this: Do those served grow as persons?

Do they, *while being served* [emphasis by author], become healthier, wiser, freer,

more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And* [emphasis by

author], what is the effect on the least privileged of society? Will they benefit or

at least not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 27)

The power of art can surely help address such issues as care for the earth. The

recent papal encyclical, *Laudato Si* (Pope Francis, 2015), gives an outline for many areas

that need to be addressed. The same holds true for the social and spiritual-cultural

disconnect. Art has the power to address issues of poverty, class injustice, and to

challenge people to be their best.

Scharmer, & Kaufer (2013) calls attention to "eight acupuncture points of

economic and social transformation [that] if addressed as a set… hold the possibility for

evolving our institutions in ways that bridge the three divides" (p. 46). These are, the

ecological disconnect, the income and wealth disconnect, the financial disconnect, the

technological disconnect, the leadership disconnect, the consumerism disconnect, the

governance disconnect, and the ownership disconnect (pp. 46-47). Considering the vision

of helping to create a healing bridge to the community with the hope of addressing issues

of justice, forgiveness, truth, and reconciliation, the proposed artists' community would

most likely be able to positively affect the ecological, income and wealth distribution,

leadership, and consumerism disconnects. In the specific case of St. Louis, and recent

racial tension and riots in the suburb of Ferguson, the proposed artists' community could

easily help bring to light issues pertaining to the income and wealth disconnect, where the

inequality of wealth results "in wealth concentration in one part of society and unmet

basic needs in another" (p. 46), and in the leadership disconnect, which focuses on the way "decision makers are increasingly disconnected from the people affected by their decisions (p. 46). Artists may be particularly suited to helping bridge the divide. "Connecting justice with beauty is essential" (Fujimura, 2014, p. 49). Artists are needed to help push a movement. "We need artists because they give us songs to sing" (p. 49). "Any cause we believe in needs a song that everyone can sing, a song to march to or rally around, a song that will draw people in so they can learn to care (p. 49).

Conclusion

Through observation over a couple of years, the author realized that all artists in his church, The Crossing, were not being given the opportunity to use their artistic ability within the context of church ministry or services. He believes that the body of Christ is one, and that "from him [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" Ephesians 4:16 (New International Version, 2002). As such, the author felt the necessity to find ways for Christian artists in the church to use their artistic ability. In light of recent events in Ferguson, a suburb of St. Louis, and his personal commitment to promote justice, forgiveness, truth, reconciliation, and love, he envisioned that perhaps a community of Christian artist's could help be a bridge to the grater community.

That vision was clarified through a process of Pathfinding-Foresight in which a prototyping process by Presencing Institute and Sharmer, (2015, prototyping), was used, along with dialogue interviews, and Scharmer and Kaufer's (2013), and "acupuncture points" (p. 46), to determine which areas of social disconnect the proposed artists'

community could be most effective in addressing. Through the dialogue process, the

vision was clarified, sharpened, and deepened.

It seems that in order for the vision to go forward, church leaders must accept the

concept of a community of artists as supportive to their efforts but remaining organically

independent, that the community should not be seen solely as a small group within the

church. "What church leaders can do to really *lead* [emphasis by author] in our times is to

use their influence to bring into being a contemporary *theology of institutions* [emphasis

by author] that will underwrite and support them as they become new regenerative

forces" (Greenleaf, 1998, p. 32).

Ultimately, the conceptual outline of the community of artists is one grounded in

the power of love.

> Power in the context of love, is not power over others, or the power to enforce,
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> but the power *with* others and power *for* others [emphasis by author]. In this
>
> sense, forgiveness and power go hand in hand with a servant way of life. Power
>
> then is not only the power to forgive, but the power to evoke in others the tenacity
>
> to respond to darkness with light, to respond to evil with good, and to respond to
>
> hatred with love. (Ferch, 2012, p. 7)

The next step is to pull together a group of people committed to developing a

community of artists and begin anew the process of Pathfinding-Foresight. Should these

pieces successfully come together, a faith-based community of Christian artists serving as

a bridge to the greater community in the areas of justice, forgiveness, truth,

reconciliation, and love, may indeed become an emerging possibility.

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