

Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION REVIEW

Social Innovation From the Inside Out By Warren Nilsson & Tana Paddock

Stanford Social Innovation Review
Winter 2014

Copyright © 2014 by Leland Stanford Jr. University
All Rights Reserved

➔ What enables a social-purpose organization to excel at developing new ideas and practices? In many cases, the answer lies not in how people connect with the external social landscape, but in how they connect with each other.

SOCIAL INNOVATION FROM THE INSIDE OUT

BY WARREN NILSSON & TANA PADDOCK

Illustration by Luc Melanson

The teacher clears her throat and stares at the floor. She starts to cry. She is sitting awkwardly on an undersized chair in an empty classroom. The neighborhood outside offers a familiar urban scene: lines of weathered row houses, many of them boarded up; a few struggling stores and

bars; streets that are strewn with broken glass; here and there, a drug dealer on a corner. Inside, in the school where she works, the teacher is crying because she is trying to explain how happy she is.

We have asked her a simple question: “How is this place different from other schools you’ve been around?” She thinks for a moment. Then she tells us a story about two very different people: the person she was last year, when she was working at another school, and the person she is now.

That first person came home each night in a depressive stupor, suffocating from a fear of failure. She was hesitant to share her concerns with colleagues. She found it hard to like the kids she was teaching, and she found it hard to like the jaded teacher she was becoming. The second person is joyful. She is in love with her students and excited by the kinds of challenges that used to confound her. She is eager to explore new ideas with her colleagues. She is delighted by how much she herself is learning.

All over Southwest Baltimore Charter School (SBCS), we hear similar stories. “This is a special, special thing that’s happening here,” one teacher tells us. “You’re welcomed through these doors. You always just feel the love,” a classroom aide says. “It’s like no other experience I’ve had in any job,” an administrator says. “I’m finally learning how to teach,” says a teacher who’s in his first year at the school. “This is my ninth year teaching, and I’m finally learning how to teach.” SBCS isn’t just warm and welcoming. It’s *generative*. It

produces a continual flow of new instructional approaches, new ways of relating to students, and new modes of community engagement.

Meanwhile, 500 miles to the north, in Montreal, Tim is hunting bees. A swarm from a rooftop garden has decided to relocate, as swarms do, and after a brief interlude in a nearby tree, the bees have disappeared. Tim is the director of sustainability and urban agriculture at Santropol Roulant, an organization that cooks meals and delivers them to people with reduced autonomy. Meals-on-wheels programs are hardly novel. They have been around since World War II, and there are thousands of them in North America. But the Roulant, as it’s called, might be the only meals-on-wheels organization with bees on the roof—and worms in the basement. (The Roulant has an active composting program.)

The Roulant is a small organization, and it runs a seemingly traditional social program. Yet it has a way of continuously reinventing the social fabric of its community. It does so by threading together experiments in intergenerational connection, food system design, agricultural technology, urban transport, art, and much more. These experiments often seem modest in their initial conception, but they grow to be astonishingly vibrant in practice. Since





its founding almost 20 years ago, the organization has gained national recognition and won a number of awards for its innovative approach. But what strikes people most strongly when they come in contact with the Roulant is the baffling ease with which it attracts hundreds of volunteers.

Ask people what draws them to the Roulant, and they begin to sound much like the teachers at SBCS. They talk about a spirit of invitation. They talk about a sense of connection. One staff member recalls encountering the organization when he arrived there for a job interview: “I can’t say it any other way but that it touched my heart. It’s an organization that focuses on the individual, on the human at the center.” A board member puts it this way: “The belonging is there first, and we work out the details. There is something about really respecting what people can bring.” And a Roulant volunteer sums it up: “This place grows goodness.”

THE ELUSIVE ROOTS OF SOCIAL INNOVATION

In an expansive review undertaken for the Rockefeller Foundation, Christian Seelos and Johanna Mair argue that despite voluminous research on the subject, scholars have very little practical knowledge about what makes an organization good at social innovation.¹ Researchers have focused mainly on innovative ideas rather than innovative processes, and on entrepreneurs rather than established organizations. But how does an isolated idea become a stream of interlinked ideas? How do inspired entrepreneurs make way for the emergence of inspired communities? How, in short, can people develop an organizational capacity for sustained social innovation, much as they might develop an organizational capacity for technological innovation?

When it comes to innovation, social-purpose organizations face particularly daunting challenges. Social innovation isn’t just about providing new products and new services; it’s about changing the underlying beliefs and relationships that structure the world.² It’s one thing to create a new cell phone. It’s quite another to transform an individual, a community, an institution. How do social-purpose organizations maintain an adaptive, generative orientation—the kind of orientation that will allow them to grapple consistently and creatively with the complex social reality that they face?³

We’ve been exploring that question for more than a decade. And we’ve done so by spending time with small social-purpose organizations that have cracked the code in some way—places where institutional change seems to spring from every corner, places where change takes on a creative momentum that lasts many years. We have been particularly struck by how readily these organizations disrupt the kinds of institutional patterns that elsewhere seem to be immutable.

To date, research on social innovation capacity has largely taken an external approach, emphasizing the way that cross-sector networks can help an organization connect to diverse communities in novel ways. Stuart Hart and Sanjay Sharma, for example, argue that an organization’s willingness to expand its radius of action and to engage with “fringe stakeholders” is a critical factor in fostering the kind of imaginative disruption that allows social innovation to take place.⁴ These kinds of external relationships, to be sure, can play a vital role in breakthrough thinking and system transformation. We have found, however, that an organization’s ability to look inward might be an even

WARREN NILSSON is a senior lecturer in social innovation at the University of Cape Town (UCT) Graduate School of Business and a faculty member of the UCT Bertha Centre for Social Innovation.

TANA PADDOCK coordinates Organization Unbound, a global community of practice that explores the organizational dimensions of social change.

more important source of social innovation capacity.

The organizations that we have worked with and learned from don’t resemble each other much at the level of strategy, structure, or leadership. Yet they have in common one apparently simple practice: They pay a great deal of attention to the inner experiences of the people who work in them. The key to changing the world may have less to do with understanding far-flung stakeholders than with understanding the person who sits at the desk right next to us.

THE VALUE OF INNER EXPERIENCE

The idea that organizations should turn inward may seem paradoxical at first. When we’re trying to wrestle with the large and complex issues “out there,” why would it help to dwell on the relatively small issues “in here”? Part of the answer may be that, in the end, there is no “out there.” The cultural, economic, technological, and moral complexities that social innovators confront don’t respect organizational boundaries. As members of an organization speak honestly with each other about their experiences of life and work, they come to understand that the social realities that they seek to change are not purely external. *They are in the room.*

Socially innovative organizations draw on member experiences to generate the raw material of social change. They do so not just in special retreats or workshops, but in the routine meetings and conversations that make up most of organizational life. Borrowing a term from the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, we call this practice “inscaping.” Hopkins used the term “inscape” to capture the invisible, interior structure or essence of something—a tree, a person, a word.⁵ We define organizational inscaping as the practice of *surfacing the inner experiences of organizational members during the normal course of everyday work.* By “inner experiences,” we don’t mean just emotions. We mean everything that makes up our inner lives: ideas and intuitions, aspirations and fears, values and memories.

Inscaping might sound like a “soft” or even a utopian practice. Yet it’s actually quite rational and hardheaded. It helps people to see their organization as it really is, not as they wish it were. The concept is disarmingly simple, but inscaping in practice turns out to be rich and complex—and much less common than one might think. Far from being an easy recipe for success, it is an anti-recipe: It challenges people continually to engage with themselves and their environment in new ways.

To understand what inscaping is, it helps to understand what it is *not*. Inscaping is not group therapy. Although it involves exploring submerged aspects of human experience, its purpose is not to help people “fix” themselves, but rather to inform and enrich the work at hand. Inscaping, moreover, is not a forced, obligatory endeavor. No one should practice inscaping in a way that feels inauthentic. In fact, voicing discomfort with a particular form of inscaping is itself a form of inscaping. And, finally, inscaping is not something that a leader or a facilitator can manage. On the contrary, it requires people to take responsibility for sharing their experiences with each other.

Indeed, it requires even leaders to stop speaking for their organization and to start speaking for themselves—as human beings.

Over time, the practice of inscaping can become an ingrained part of organizational life. At SBCS, the joy, confusion, and frustration inherent in working there form a natural part of any conversation. Staff meetings often start with a discussion of everyone's high and low moments from the current week. In job interviews, prospective teachers are surprised to find themselves honestly—and quite happily—recounting their failures at previous schools. “The weak link isn't necessarily the person who doesn't do the job well,” says one SBCS teacher's aide. “It's the person who doesn't do the job from within or truthfully.”

At SBCS, staff members don't cordon off their personal lives from their professional lives. Conversations, which can cover everything from mental health problems to racial issues, are frank and engaging. They are also generative, in that they foster connection instead of separation. Cultural chasms are just as present at this school as at any other school in Baltimore, but they feel different here. “This is the first job I have ever [had where] I hang out

As members of an organization speak honestly with each other about their experiences of life and work, they come to understand that the social realities that they seek to change are not purely external. *They are in the room.*

with my coworkers,” an SBCS administrator says. “And trust me when I tell you that 85 percent of my coworkers are 100 percent different from me in terms of what we like, what we do, how we talk when we are out of school.”

There is a similar dynamic in play at the Roulant. “Whoever you are, [when you walk] in the door, there is someone there to greet you who is also taking an interest in you as a person and not just as someone who's going to help the organization,” says one volunteer. Meetings at the Roulant feature an odd mixture of program analysis and personal reflection, with one stream of conversation flowing easily and without comment into the other. This way of interacting encourages people to offer each other not only work-related insight, but also appreciation, sympathy, and support. And the setting in which people work—a physical space that is almost entirely open—further supports a commitment to experiential awareness.

The Roulant is also remarkable for its strategic dexterity. The development of roles, projects, and initiatives is a supple process, rooted in the strengths and interests of individual staff members. One staff member explains it this way: “In a lot of other places I've worked, I felt that employers asked the question ‘What can I get

from you?’ And I feel that here, just by changing that question to ‘What gifts do you have to share?’ there is a big shift in the way you are thinking and in the way you are going to behave.”

HOW INSCAPING DRIVES SOCIAL INNOVATION

The kind of inscaping practiced at SBCS and the Roulant has directly contributed to social innovation capacity at each organization. To clarify the link between inscaping and social innovation, we distinguish between two dimensions of inscaping.

Work inscaping involves exploring our experience of the day-to-day work that we do. What are we excited about or afraid of when we undertake a particular project? What intuitions and questions do we have that diverge from the current strategic direction of our organization? How do we experience the structures and processes that define our work? And, most important, how do we experience the relationships that we have with our colleagues?

Work inscaping brings energy and creativity to an organization. As people gain the freedom to express the hopes, fears, questions, and concerns that they have about their work, the space for divergent thinking expands around them. What's more, because work inscaping fosters unusually frank relationships, people develop a nuanced and appreciative understanding of each other. This understanding allows them to move together through difficult new terrain in a way that accommodates their specific strengths and flaws.

Life inscaping involves sharing aspects of our lives that exist beyond our work roles. What aspirations do we harbor, and what challenges do we face? What are our values? What do we care about, and where do we find meaning? Life inscaping isn't a matter of discussing every detail of our personal lives with each other. Rather, it's a way to make sure that we don't have to leave ourselves at the door when we come to work.

As people share their life experiences, they come to see each other as whole human beings and not just as roles. When members of an organization interact regularly as people with families, political interests, spiritual beliefs, artistic enthusiasms, and concerns for their neighbors and their planet, they become attuned to social possibilities that transcend immediate organizational objectives.

Work inscaping and life inscaping may reflect a similar sensibility, but they have very different effects on an organization's social innovation capacity. And those effects, in turn, produce very different kinds of organizations.

The catalytic organization | We apply the term *catalytic* to organizations that enable work inscaping but not life inscaping. Organizations of this type are good at questioning the status quo within their field but are less adept at questioning the taken-for-granted social patterns and values on which their field rests. High-tech companies like those that emerge from Silicon Valley and Bangalore, for example, veer toward the catalytic model. Such organizations value individual curiosity and initiative even in cases when the strategic implications of a new idea are not immediately obvious. They foster the kind of directness and honesty that can make even the most difficult work relationships productive, if not necessarily pleasant. As a consequence, they regularly develop new products, new programs, and new ways of thinking about what's possible in their industry.

These organizations, however, often seem to pursue innovation for its own sake. They are more technically creative than socially creative. For that reason, they may resist the challenge of exploring the deeper meaning or the social impact of their work. Because they are so bounded by the mindset and values of their own industry, they also have significant difficulty in building authentic cross-sector relationships.

Work inscaping alone, in other words, does not lead to *social* innovation. In the absence of life inscaping, the innovation that's enabled by work inscaping tends to be narrow. If people do not regularly draw on their life experiences, they remain stuck within the confines of their professional roles and identities. Their conversations rarely stray beyond certain institutionally defined objectives, and they find it difficult to see beyond those objectives.

The communal organization | We use a different term—*communal*—to describe organizations that pursue life inscaping but not work inscaping. Communal organizations are generous and connected places. Unlike their catalytic counterparts, they empower people to grapple internally with big social and moral issues. They also have an expansiveness of spirit that prevents the kind of operational

tunnel vision that catalytic organizations typically suffer from.

Frequently, however, organizations of this type have difficulty with work inscaping. The practice of holding rich conversations about social issues can degenerate into a constricting framework of political correctness, and people can become so wary of saying the wrong thing that they decline to voice alternative perspectives. People may also become hesitant to speak honestly about their relationships with colleagues, because they're afraid to disturb a mood of surface harmony.

Communal organizations, therefore, struggle to develop and maintain a culture of social *innovation*. Practical creativity requires a relational and intellectual openness that is difficult for communal organizations to sustain. They may develop various programs and projects, but few of those initiatives take root in novel ways. As a result, members of a communal organization can end up losing faith in the social change that they yearn for.

In our experience, many social-purpose organizations get stuck in a communal dynamic. Some time ago, one of us worked with a social enterprise that aimed to help low-income women enter the health care profession. The organization was vibrant and caring; the spirit

THE INS AND OUTS OF INSCAPING

There is no manual for inscaping. But here is a sampling of practices—drawn from our work with socially transformative organizations—that enable people in organizations to explore and share key elements of their inner experiences through their work.

EXPAND THE QUESTION

When planning a project or process, focus not only on what you want to achieve, but also on the kind of experience that you want to create for your team. Similarly, when evaluating a project or process that has already taken place, don't just ask, "Did we meet our objectives?" Broaden the focus by also asking, "How did we experience that project?"

TURN STRATEGY INWARD

A common approach to developing strategy is to analyze the characteristics of an organization as it relates to its environment. Many organizations, for example, use the familiar tool known as a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis. The next time you conduct a strategic planning session, try a variation on the SWOT theme. In addition to exploring internal strengths, ask: "What

are we most passionate about?"

In addition to exploring internal weaknesses, ask: "What do we most struggle with?" In addition to exploring external opportunities, ask: "What are we curious about?" In addition to exploring external threats, ask: "What are our fears?"

PERSONALIZE FEEDBACK

When giving feedback to employees or co-workers, don't merely assess their performance in the abstract. Instead, try to speak directly about your own experience of working with them. Shift from saying "Here's my evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses" to saying "Here's how I experience my working relationship with you."

CHECK IN—EARLY AND OFTEN

One familiar inscaping practice is to begin or end a meeting with a

quick "check-in": You go around the room, giving people an opportunity to say how they're feeling at the moment—what their mood is, what's on their mind. A less common practice is to do a mid-meeting check-in. Doing so can have a powerful effect when a meeting seems stuck. In that situation, people typically have all sorts of mistaken assumptions about what others are thinking and feeling. So stop the discussion, and invite people to share the feelings that underlie their statements (or their silence). This practice, we have found, can resolve seemingly intractable situations very quickly.

SEEK DIVERGENCE

When deciding on a course of action, people in organizations often push far too quickly for a convergence of opinion. As a result, they miss the chance to draw on the different intuitions and perspectives that their colleagues undoubtedly have. Instead, start by listening to those who have serious concerns about a proposed course of action.

Soliciting divergent views up front can lead not just to alternative answers to a given question, but to new ideas for reframing the entire question. It can also help create genuine alignment around the decision that you eventually reach.

ENCOURAGE ROLE HACKING

Experimenting with role boundaries almost always opens up space for additional inscaping. Here are just a few ways to reframe roles in your organization: Invite a colleague into a conversation or a decision-making process that normally lies outside his or her function or area of expertise. Engage in activities that are normally seen as "beneath" your role. (If you're an executive director, for instance, then spend time cleaning the bathrooms at your organization.) In dealing with partners, funders, clients, and other outside stakeholders, draw on your personal life to connect with them in ways that go beyond the work that you do together.

of life inscaping was quite high. Staff members, for instance, gamely confronted significant economic, educational, and racial divisions. But work inscaping was relatively rare. People didn't make time to talk honestly about how they were experiencing the considerable stresses that their work entailed. The strategic thinking of the organization, meanwhile, was relatively fixed. Before it even opened its doors, the organization developed a story about what it would be, and it clung fiercely to that story. By paying scant attention to the intuitions and alternative ideas that arose from the on-the-ground experiences of its staff and partners, the organization missed numerous chances to evolve. In the end, the organization didn't last long. Although it changed the lives of those who worked for it, it never had an innovative breakthrough at the institutional, programmatic, or market level. Without that kind of breakthrough, it was able neither to survive nor to have a broad social impact.

The transformative organization | When the innovative power of work inscaping and the social reach of life inscaping combine, something profound happens to an organization. There is a visceral shift—a change in how people feel when they spend time with the organization. We call an organization that meets this description *transformative*. A transformative organization is an unusually engaging place. It's not merely an instrument for effecting social change; it's a living expression of the change that its members seek. Consequently, it has a remarkable ability to spark institutional renewal: The submerged assumptions and beliefs that shape the taken-for-granted world rise to the surface, and they become more tangible and more malleable.

Consider the Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN), a highly transformative organization based in Vancouver. In 2000, as a result of PLAN's work, British Columbia became the only jurisdiction in the world to recognize the ability to develop trusting relationships as an indicator of legal competence. Adults with developmental disabilities can now legally participate in the appointment of their own guardian if they can show a history of sustaining long-term relationships with other people. (Traditionally, guardianship law has recognized only cognitive indicators of competence.)

PLAN, like SBCS and the Roulant, is able to disrupt and re-imagine the institutional frameworks that surround it. Those who work at PLAN delight in probing the deep assumptions that structure how people understand and experience "disability." The core of PLAN's work involves fostering relational networks for people with developmental disabilities—not fragile networks of service providers, but robust networks based on love and friendship. Building these networks is exacting work. It can take years. But such networks are resilient and deeply fulfilling for all who participate in them. PLAN's approach has spread to a number of communities across Canada. In addition, the organization has led innovation in many other areas: tax law and estate planning, organizational funding, and, most profoundly, citizenship development.

From the start, the goal of PLAN members has been to enable people with developmental disabilities to lead full and meaningful lives, even after their parents are no longer present to guide and support them. Early in its evolution, the organization began to focus on fostering various elements of what its members call a "good

life": relationships with family members and friends, a home that serves as a sanctuary, financial security, and a sense that others will respect one's wishes and choices. At a certain point, though, they discovered that they were missing something. As they shared their experiences with each other, they came to recognize how much the people in their lives who have developmental disabilities had given to them. A good life, they now believe, isn't only about what you have or what you need; it's also about what you can give—what you can contribute to your family, your friends, and your community. And this principle applies to people with developmental disabilities as well.

That epiphany significantly altered PLAN's approach to its immediate work. But it also changed how PLAN frames its broader vision. The more that PLAN members explored the theme of con-

When people integrate inscaping into their work routine, they develop a more nuanced understanding of their work and a keener ability to connect their interests and passions to the goals of their organization.

tribution, the more they realized that it applied not only to people with developmental disabilities, but to any group whose potential for contributing to society was unacknowledged. So although PLAN continued its core work around disability, it expanded its mandate by launching a new initiative: the Philia Dialogue on Caring Citizenship. The goal of the Philia project is to spark a wide-ranging inquiry into the lived experience of inclusive citizenship.

What has driven PLAN's capacity for institutional creativity has been its deeply experiential orientation. The organization has always been committed to both work inscaping and life inscaping. Its founders were a group of parents who wished to secure a future for their children with disabilities. Their hopes, fears, and personal histories are what gave birth to PLAN. "We cannot do any of the more abstract work, the paradigm-shifting work, if we drift away from the stories," says Al Etmanski, a cofounder of PLAN. "It's like cutting off our blood supply. It's that clear to all of us." Today, the organization continues to shape itself by drawing on the feelings and experiences of everyone who crosses its path—member families, to be sure, but also legislators, medical professionals, businesspeople, funders, and, most important, members of its own staff.

INSCAPING IN PRACTICE

People can pursue inscaping in any number of ways. What works for one group may feel awkward or alien to another group. So it's best to experiment with practices that fit the culture and context of a particular organization.

One simple yet powerful approach to inscaping is to introduce experiential questions into workplace conversations that are otherwise purely functional. When a team is planning a project or process, for example, its members might focus not only on what they want to achieve for others, but also on the quality of experience that they want to create for themselves: “How do we want to feel during this project, this board meeting, this fundraising gala, this customer service process?” This kind of future-oriented inscaping might seem as if it could distract a team from furthering its objectives. But we’ve found that focusing on the desired experience of those who create a project enhances the end product and heightens the experience of end users as well. Team members can introduce experiential questions into any stage of any routine organizational process. Whatever approach they take, they should be sure to use a light touch in pursuing it. In most cases, it’s also best to begin an inscaping experiment with a specific project or team rather than with an organization as a whole. (See “The Ins and Outs of Inscaping” on p. 50.)

At first glance, there may appear to be a tension between inscaping and the practical demands of work. We haven’t found this to be the case. A teacher in her first year at SBCS, for instance, told us that the rich, open environment of that school actually freed her up to focus on the exacting requirements of her job. “This is the very first year in my fifteen years of teaching that I haven’t thought about the word ‘accountability,’ but I have probably taken it [a sense of accountability] on the most,” she says. When people integrate inscaping into their normal work routine, they develop a more nuanced understanding of their work and a keener ability to connect their interests and passions to the goals of their organization. The empathy fostered by inscaping also leads to a heightened sense of mutual responsibility among co-workers. People pay greater attention to the impact that their work has on others and put more energy into supporting each other’s success.

Inscaping, of course, is not without its difficulties and limitations. In a highly politicized organization, people can be hesitant to reveal themselves. Not unreasonably, they worry that any show of vulnerability or divergent thinking might become a weapon that others will use against them. In an organization of that kind, experiential sharing is fairly common—in fact, people are eager to share negative emotions—but it happens behind the scenes and in small cliques. Organizations that operate in an environment that requires rapid decision-making can find inscaping difficult as well. People who work in such cultures have told us that they struggle to adjust to the apparently slow tempo of inscaping. Over time, however, they have found that the speed with which their organization ultimately takes action more than makes up for any slowdown in the deliberation process. Inscaping, because it promotes internal alignment, allows organizations to move rapidly and tenaciously once people have come to a decision.

Inscaping can also be challenging for organizations that face a high degree of external scrutiny, either from the general public or from powerful stakeholders—from a funder, for example. In that case, the pressure to conform to certain norms can be overwhelming. Paradoxically, however, it is in a more constrained environment of this kind that a small amount of inscaping can have an especially strong effect. Holding an authentic conversation with a funder or

an oversight body can lay the groundwork for a more co-creative and flexible relationship in the long run.

ESCAPING THE FORM TRAP

The ultimate benefit of inscaping may be that it helps social-purpose organizations avoid falling into what we call “the form trap.” We are all familiar with organizations that look egalitarian and participatory but are not genuinely collaborative. And we’ve all encountered organizations in which people emphasize innovation in the mission statement but are afraid to take risks in their day-to-day work. Conversely, most of us know of organizations with traditional structures and formal cultures that also happen to be engaging and innovative places to work. The difference between the form of a practice—the visible set of behaviors, words, and rules that define it—and our experience of that practice can be stark. The form trap exists whenever we confuse the symbol for the reality, the signal for the fact. We smile and hug; therefore we are compassionate. We sit in circles; therefore we are democratic. We have funky chairs and chalkboard walls; therefore we are creative.

The form trap is hard to avoid because even forms that are initially helpful may eventually lose their experiential spark. We change an organizational structure to make it flatter and more democratic, and for a time that change is quite liberating. We decide to hold a check-in session before every meeting, and at first that practice makes us feel more engaged. Very often, however, there comes a time when the flat structure seems only to mask many of the same power dynamics that existed under the previous structure, or when the check-in practice starts to feel less like an authentic revelation than like a tiresome performance.

The form trap can be particularly problematic in an organization that focuses on social change. The image of what social justice, or education, or health care, or environmental sustainability, or social enterprise should look like can be very constraining. An organization of this kind can become stuck in a rigid pattern of language and action. Over time, its people lock themselves into a set of assumptions: We are legitimate because we say the right things. We are effective because we run the right programs. Inscaping helps people in a social-purpose organization to gauge the real impact of the forms that they use. It helps them become more fluid in their work and more responsive to their context. And it challenges them never to stop asking how they can best realize their purpose in this place, with these people, on this day. ■

NOTES

- 1 Christian Seelos and Johanna Mair, “What Determines the Capacity for Continuous Innovation in Social Sector Organizations?” a Rockefeller Foundation Report, Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, 2012, http://pacscenter.stanford.edu/files/images/capacity-for-continuous-innovation_PACS_31Jan2012-4.pdf
- 2 Francis Westley and Nino Antadze, “Making a Difference: Strategies for Scaling Social Innovation for Greater Impact,” *The Innovation Journal*, 15, no. 2, 2010, http://www.innovation.cc/scholarly-style/westleyantadze2make_difference_final.pdf
- 3 Christian Seelos and Johanna Mair, “Innovation Is Not the Holy Grail,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Fall 2012, pp. 45-49.
- 4 Stuart L. Hart and Sanjay Sharma, “Engaging Fringe Stakeholders for Competitive Imagination,” *The Academy of Management Perspectives*, 18, no. 1, 2004, <http://amp.aom.org/content/18/1/7.full.pdf>
- 5 Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose*, edited by W. H. Gardner, London: Penguin Classics, 1985.