The Roots of Innovation: Afternoon Workshop

Foraker Group Leadership Summit – April 2015
Our work this afternoon

- Identify complex challenges faced by the nonprofit sector; select and reflect on one challenge at each table

- Surface long-held assumptions related to the challenge, compile contrary evidence, and develop new hypotheses for success

- Share our work at the tables
Responding to Challenges in Different Contexts
The Cynefin Framework

Complex
- Cause ≠ Effect
- Emergent Practice
- Cause □ Effect

Complicated (Knowable)
- Cause .......... Effect
- Expert Analysis

Chaotic
- Cause ≠ Effect
- Stabilizing Actions

Simple (Known)
- Cause = Effect
- Best Practices
Complex

To have our sector at the table consistently in civic and neighborhood planning

Complicated

To improve access to programs and events via shared online registration

Simple

To make uniform financial data on our sector available for public scrutiny
The Cynefin framework

Source: David Snowden and others

What goals does the nonprofit sector in Alaska have, that involve us in each of these domains?
The Cynefin framework

Choose ONE complex challenge you see as particularly important and pressing......

Source:
David Snowden and others
1. The challenge doesn’t have any standard or established solution.

2. We haven’t yet developed a response, or our current responses aren’t proving effective.

3. There is a sense of urgency to address this challenge.

4. If we successfully tackle it, it’s likely to have significant impact on our ability to create public value.

5. Is there a natural sequence to addressing these challenges? If so, which one comes first?
Two types of Organizational Response

- **TECHNICAL**
  - Improve current strategies
  - Use expert analysis
  - Apply “best practices”

- **ADAPTIVE**
  - Diverge from current strategies
  - Let go of ingrained assumptions
  - Discover “next practices”

Source: Ronald Heifetz/ Marty Linsky
Questioning our underlying assumptions
Assumptions evolve as repeated successful solutions to problems.

What was once a questionable hypothesis about how to proceed becomes a reality that is taken for granted....
In order to innovate, organizations have to resurrect, examine, and then break the frame created by old assumptions.

Edgar Schein, Leadership and Organizational Culture
Complex Challenge

Underlying ASSUMPTIONS that inform the Challenge

EVIDENCE that appears to contradict the Assumptions

ADAPTIVE RESPONSE

New HYPOTHESES for future success

What we’ll DO DIFFERENTLY to test them
Considering this complex challenge

1. What are the deep assumptions we’ve held that have turned this into a complex challenge, that may no longer be true?
   (“We have assumed that.....”)

2. What evidence is there that suggests these assumptions may no longer be true?
To have our sector at the table consistently in civic and neighborhood planning

We have assumed......

- Our nonprofit work exists separately from these community issues
- City Hall and other agencies do not want us at the table
- We have little to contribute
Complex Challenge

To have our sector at the table consistently in civic and neighborhood planning

OLD ASSUMPTIONS

- Our nonprofit work exists separately from these community issues
- City Hall and other agencies do not want us at the table
- We have little to contribute

CONTRARY EVIDENCE

- Our organizations and workers are affected by planning
- Our recent civic memberships and approaches to City Hall have not been rebuffed
- Our impact data are convincing and our trustees well connected
1. What are the **deep assumptions** we’ve held that have turned this into a challenge? ("*We have assumed that.....*")

2. What **evidence** is there that suggests these assumptions may no longer be true?

3. What **alternative hypothesis**, or way forward in responding to the challenge, might we test? ("*We suspect that.....* "*If this, then that.....*" )
Complex Challenge

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NEW HYPOTHESES

- We suspect our work as nonprofits can deeply inform these community issues
- If we’re proactive, we will be respected for engaging with civic agencies
- Working with other sectors, we will better understand how to maximize our contribution
It may be that when we no longer know what to do
we have come to our real work

and that when we no longer know which way to go
we have begun our real journey.

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.

The impeded stream is the one that sings.

Wendell Berry: The Real Work
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