



## DEAR READERS

This document serves as an introduction and summary of concepts and key findings of our masters thesis: 'Large Scale Collaboration towards Sustainable Development', and the 'Magic Canoe' tool it resulted in.

Our intention with this document is to give you an attractive and easily accessible overview of our key findings and data, without needing to work through the full academic document. However, should you wish to explore further, the full thesis will provide a much richer understanding of our work.

Due to the newly emerging nature of this field, many of the concepts and ideas explored here offer initial broad brushstrokes in working with large scale collaboration. The data is theoretical in nature and still requires testing in the field.

We hope you enjoy this journey with us.

Juan Carlos, Kara and Sonja

September 2010

## IMMIGRANTS TO A NEW TIME:

### *THE OPPORTUNITY, THE CHALLENGE, AND THE CHOICE*

As the world has become increasingly interconnected and interdependent, humanity is rapidly entering a new phase where cultures, people, and countries are intertwined in a common global destiny.



When we consider the vast wealth of knowledge, technologies and expertise distributed throughout our planet, the potential is staggering. For the first time in our history, the emergence of an environmentally sustainable, just and spiritually fulfilling planetary society stands before us as an achievable reality.



As humanity has accelerated in its interconnection, and generative potential, the challenges have grown in equal magnitude. At no time in human history have we faced challenges of this magnitude and complexity – climate change, crop failures, depleting oil reserves, financial crises, mass poverty, terrorism, species extinctions and systemic impacts we have not yet imagined.

“The prognosis offered by scientists around the globe, should we continue on our current trajectory, paints a bleak picture for our future survival as a species. Simply stated, humanity is going to need to learn to work together, intelligently, and en masse, very soon”

*Daniel Goleman,  
Ecological Intelligence*

**Humanity has reached a crossroads.**

**A time of collective choice and action.**

**And a small window of time in which that action may be taken.**





## COLLECTIVE WILL AND CURRENT ATTEMPTS

Currently, people all over the world are exhibiting the will to change. There are millions of non-profit endeavours stepping forward and beginning to engage with the multiple symptoms of our unsustainable global society. Currently, these pioneering efforts remain disconnected, and lack a strategic whole systems perspective, thus remaining largely ineffective.



Social change agents, inspired by living systems theories and quantum mechanics, have realized that the key to allowing this new society to emerge is to connect a variety of people working for social change, in supportive dialogue and learning.

*"In nature, change never happens as a result of top-down, pre-conceived strategic plans, or from the mandate of any single individual or boss. Change begins as local actions spring up simultaneously in many different areas. If these changes remain disconnected, nothing happens beyond each locale. However, when they become connected, local actions can emerge as a powerful system with influence at a more global or comprehensive level."*

Magaret Wheatley,  
Berkana Institutue



**COLLABORATION** is an essential part of this needed connection:

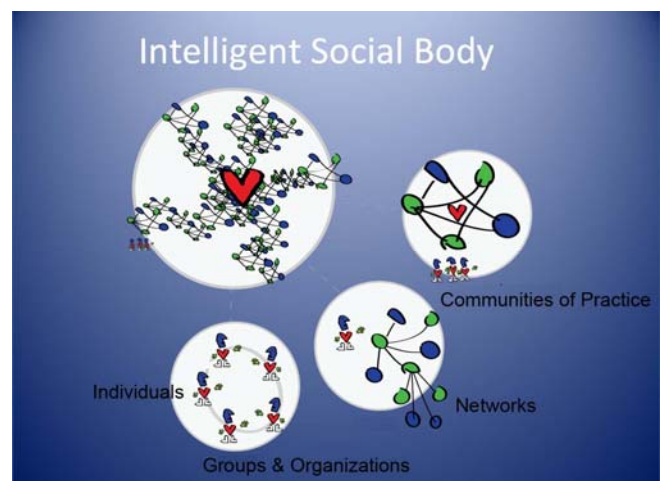
**Interdependence:** Our sustainability challenge is systemic and requires governments, businesses, experts and citizens to work together to change our current systems.

**Complexity:** Facing the sustainability challenge requires a diversity of perspectives, resources and expertise to properly

understand and develop effective systemic solutions. All hold different pieces of the puzzle.

**Restoring social fabrics:** We cannot have environmental sustainability until we have social sustainability. The process of dialogue and working together imbedded in collaboration helps people to build trust and supports the strengthening of societies once again.

Authors such as Peter Russell suggest that through the process of large scale collaboration, a new whole of higher complexity may emerge. In this research we refer to this new emerging whole as a 'social body', with individuals, organizational groups, networks, and communities of practice all existing as different types of participation within this larger body.

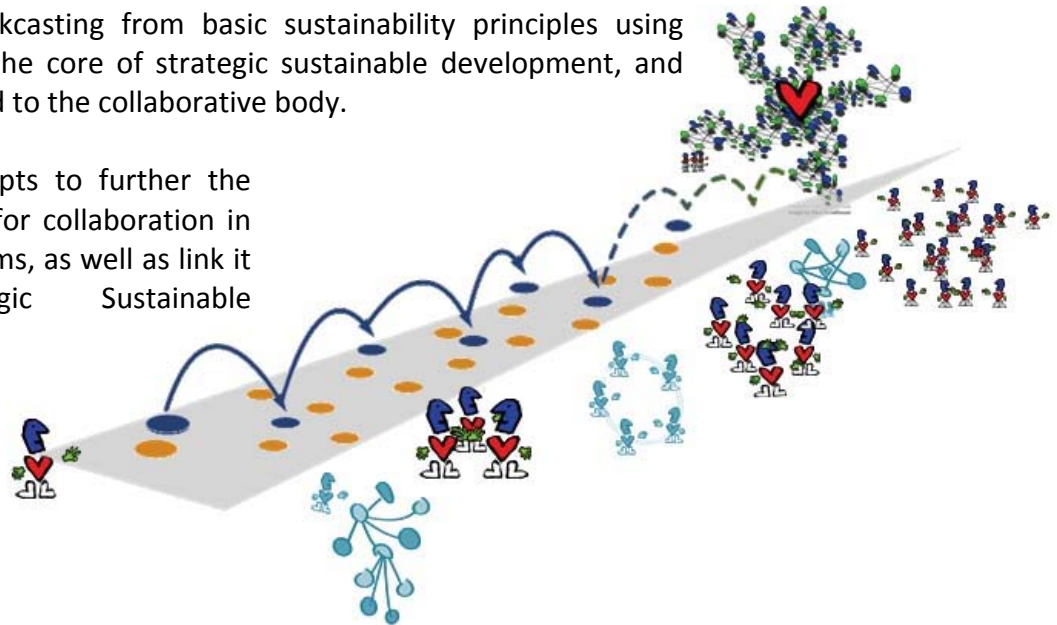


## STRATEGIC SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (SSD)

In order to ensure the actions taken in the complex system are not accidentally counter-productive, a strategic approach to sustainable development can be undertaken.

The concept of backcasting from basic sustainability principles using systems thinking is the core of strategic sustainable development, and can be applied to the collaborative body.

This research attempts to further the body of knowledge for collaboration in complex social systems, as well as link it directly to Strategic Sustainable Development.



## RESEARCH QUESTION

How do we foster effective collaboration for systemic sustainable development?

*Sub Question 1:* What are the conditions of success for collaboration?

*Sub Question 2:* How can a process of collaboration be described?

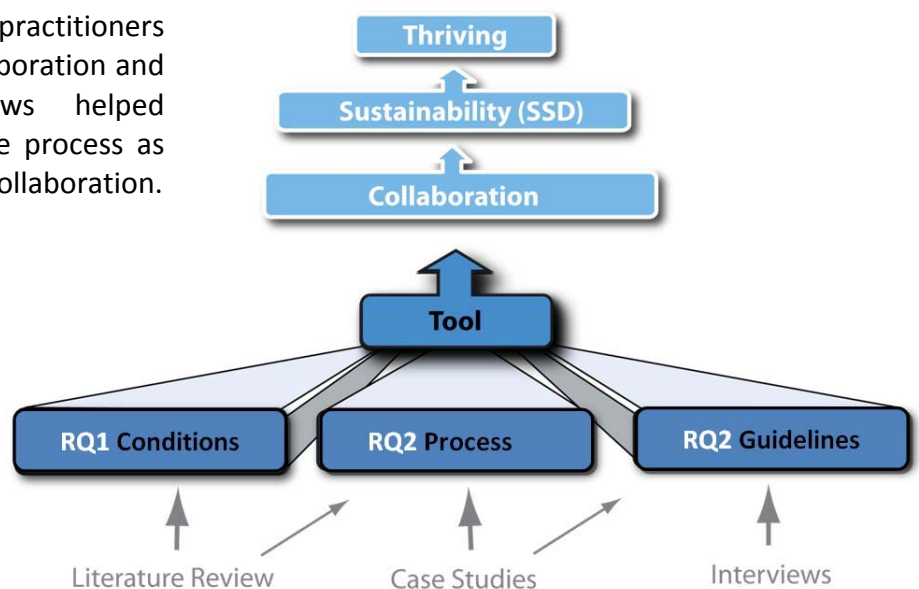
*Sub Question 3:* Based on the process, what guidelines lead to success?

## METHODS

The methods used to answer the research questions were literature review, interviews and case studies. The literature review was used to develop an understanding of success conditions of collaboration and formed the basis of the process of collaboration.

Interviews were conducted with practitioners working within the fields of collaboration and sustainability. These interviews helped develop an understanding of the process as well as guidelines for successful collaboration.

Case studies with the Netherlands Centre for Human Emergence 'Meshwork', Amsterdam Hub and Reos Partners 'Change Lab' helped us to understand collaboration at the complexity level of a social body.



## RESULTS

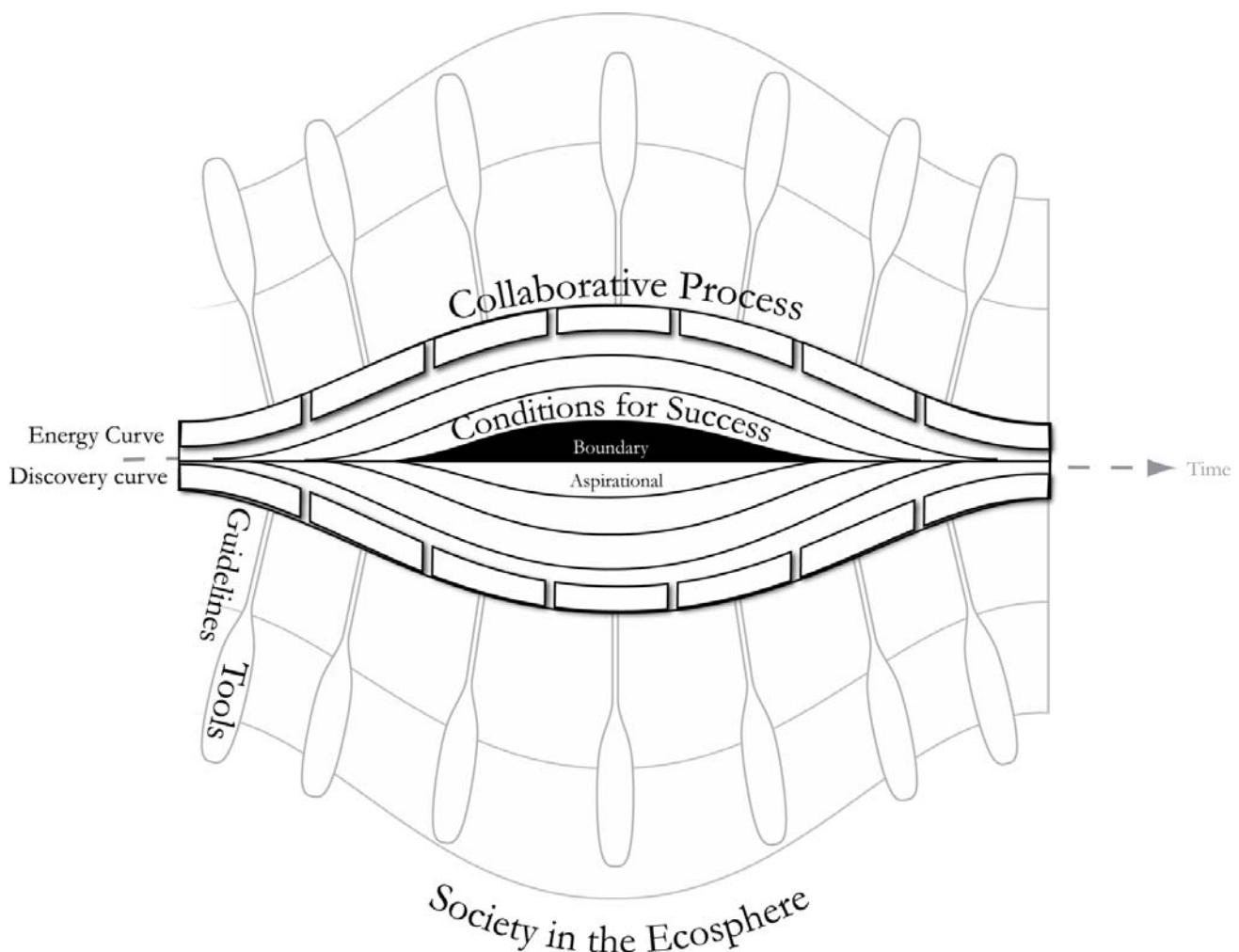
### THE MAGIC CANOE

The magic canoe is a story about a collaboration process that magically expands in size to include any participants wanting to help in the effort towards achieving a common goal.

### BUILDING A MAGIC CANOE

We use the 'magic canoe' metaphor as an image that helps to contain and contextualize the findings of our research. Each subset of results contributes to a piece of the canoe as follows:

1. **Conditions for success** - building a boat that floats in all weather
2. **Collaborative process** – developing a crew's cohesion, and skill
3. **Collaborative phases** – the detailed steps of becoming a successful crew
4. **Guidelines and tools** – picking up the right oars and rowing
5. **Journey of the magic canoe** – successful navigation and growing our crew numbers







## 1. CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

Through our literature review, interviews and case studies various conditions under which human groups and organizational systems flourish or deteriorate were found. Based on this understanding, the following conditions for success in collaboration were found:

### 1. Higher Purpose

Strong higher purpose allows transcending of human differences, and new collective capacities that are greater than the sum of individual capacities.

### 2. Awareness

Only when I am consciously aware of something, do I have the choice to consciously respond to it. This applies to the dynamics of a collaborating group, as well as the system they intervene in.

### 3. Wholeness

To address a problem in a collaborating system, we need to understand its parts, interrelationships and context within all the participation types.

### 4. Interior/exterior

Interior story of success, world view, mental and emotional patterns, directly affects external actions and behaviours on an individual and in the collective body.

### 5. Love/Power

Relational processes build group energy (Love), strategic processes direct that energy towards the purpose (Power).

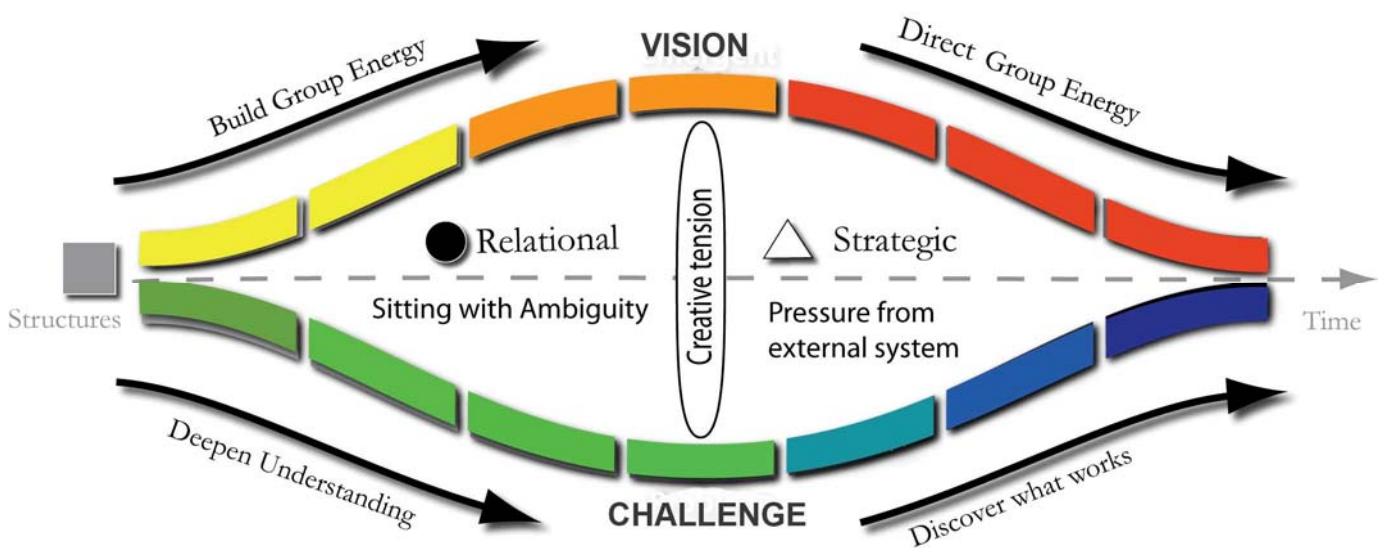
### 6. Order/Chaos

Use as only as much structure as needed to set the self organizing energy of groups in motion. Allow the rest of the process to emerge.

### 7. Rhythm

Collaboration is energized by change and diversity, when held within appropriate rhythms of order and structure.

## 2. PROCESS OF COLLABORATION



### Energy curve

The upward moving curve of warm colours represent the group's emotional and physical energies.

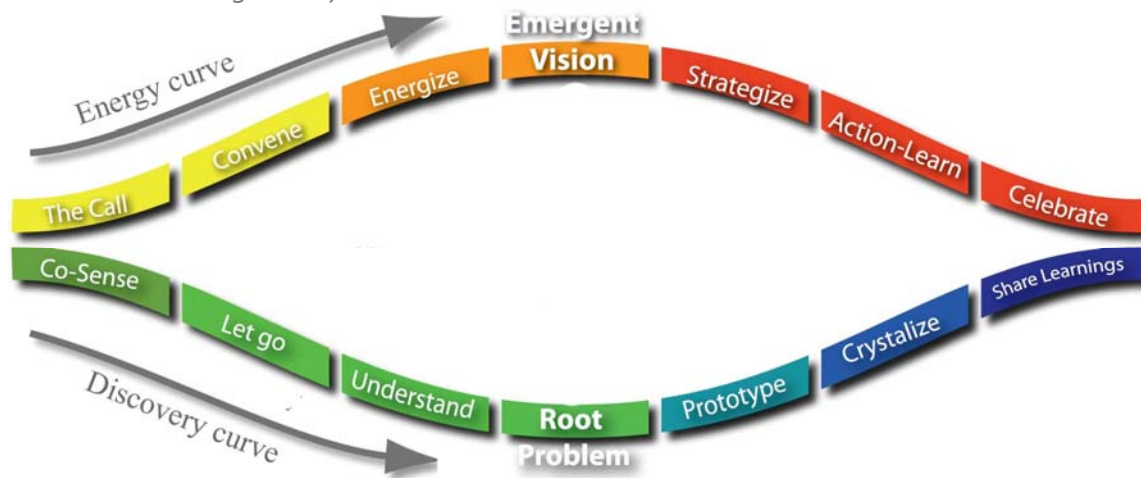
- **Relational element:** develops the group's cohesiveness, shared purpose and understanding through trust and relationship building. It creates enthusiasm, commitment, emotional and physical energy.
- **Strategic element:** efficiently and effectively directs this group energy, within time and resource constraints, to achieve its shared purpose.
- **Structural elements:** processes, systems, procedures and structures, which hold and support relational and strategic functions in achieving their purpose

The downward moving curve of cool colours represents the deepening intellectual and intuitive understanding of a complex system. As the group travels down the curve of understanding, it collects data from multiple perspectives, the mass of which may lead to confusion and discomfort in ever finding a solution. However, if the group's emotional and physical energies are building together, the growing strength of the group container can tolerate the discomfort of this ambiguity.

As the group continues to deepen and hold this ambiguity, it will eventually reach a space where a clear understanding emerges. At this same moment, the group's purpose and vision is clarified in relation to the newly emerged clarity of the need. This respective peak and trough of the curves represents the key moment of truth and choice, and sets up a dynamic creative tension, where (hopefully) collective energy, clarity of purpose, vision and understanding turn to deep commitment, and bridge into strategic action.

### 3. PHASES OF COLLABORATION

Both Energy and Discovery curves can be divided into specific phases, each of which creates a specific outcome, and lays the foundation for the next phase. *(The phases of the lower 'Discovery' curve are not outlined here, as they are well covered by literature on Theory-U and Reos Partners' Change Labs).*



#### The Call

Every collaborative journey begins with a sensing of some need in the environment, and a corresponding call to action. The quality of action will be directly impacted by the perceived quality and sincerity of this sensed need.

#### Convene

The core team draws people into a conversation about how to create events, initiatives and structures to support large scale collaboration in a specific context.

#### Energize

In order to create a new level of collaboration, a lot of human energy is required. This energy can be obtained by building authentic and true relationships and creating a shared vision.

#### Emergent Vision

Once the participants in a collaboration process have a deep understanding of each other and the system, a process of identifying a shared vision is part of building the creative tension of the group to prepare it to move forward.

#### Strategize

Once the creative tension is built up, it is time to focus the energy into concrete actions. At this point clear leadership, committed working teams, strategy and implementation plans are required to move towards the vision.

#### Action-Learn

Working groups implement projects and learn about what works and what does not in a certain context, and continue trying new ideas.

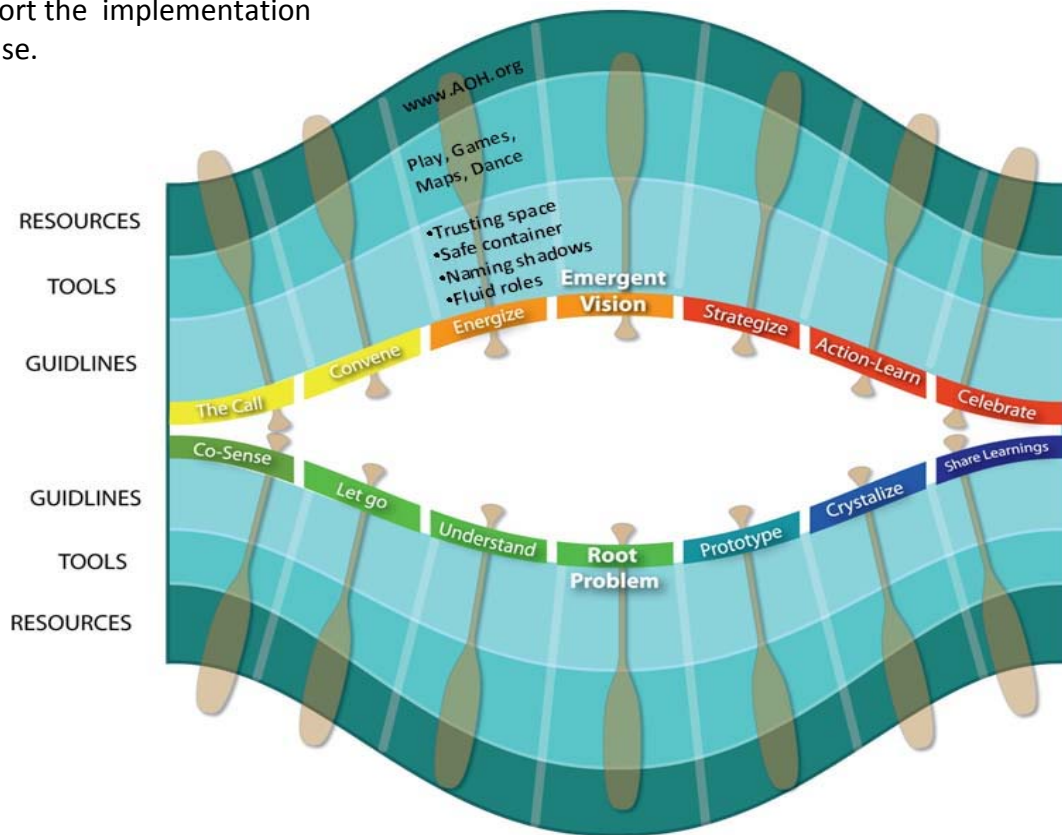
#### Celebrate, Reflect and share

Celebrating small wins and drawing learning from successes and setbacks build energy in the group, in preparation for another collaborative cycle, which may include collaboration at a larger scale.

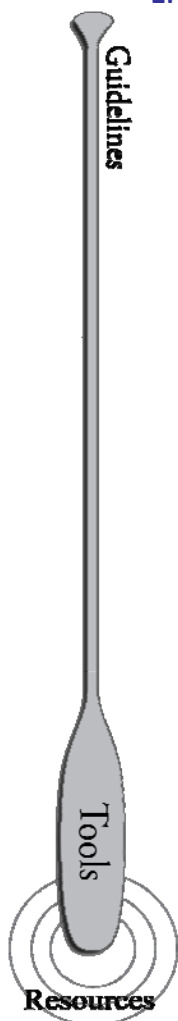


## 4. GUIDELINES, TOOLS AND RESOURCES

These support the implementation of each phase.



### ‘ENERGISE’ PHASE: example of guidelines, tools and resources



PARTICIPATION TYPE	GUIDELINES
All types of participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Authentic <b>trusting space</b></li> <li>•<b>Safe container</b> to hold tension and conflict</li> <li>•<b>Naming</b> and working with the energy and <b>shadows</b> (buried treasure) of the group.</li> <li>•<b>Fluid roles</b> and <b>responsibilities</b> to prevent status and power blockages</li> </ul>
Individual	<b>Individual purpose</b> is honoured and encouraged.
Group	<b>Rhythm</b> of face to face and online meetings
Network	Foster <b>generative connections</b>
Community of Practice	<b>Be the change</b> as a community – embody the outcomes you wish to see
Social Body	Foster <b>holoptic view</b> (everyone can see the whole)
<b>TOOLS</b>	
Play, Games, Bodywork (Dance etc), Circle communication, Workshop on Deep Listening, Agree to Communication Guidelines, Systems Maps.	
<b>RESOURCES</b>	
Art of Hosting practitioners, 16 Ways Dance, etc.	

## 5. JOURNEY OF THE MAGIC CANOE

The Journey of the Magic Canoe is the application of the 'Life cycle of Emergence' from the Berkana Institute to the collaborative process. The Journey consists of four phases:

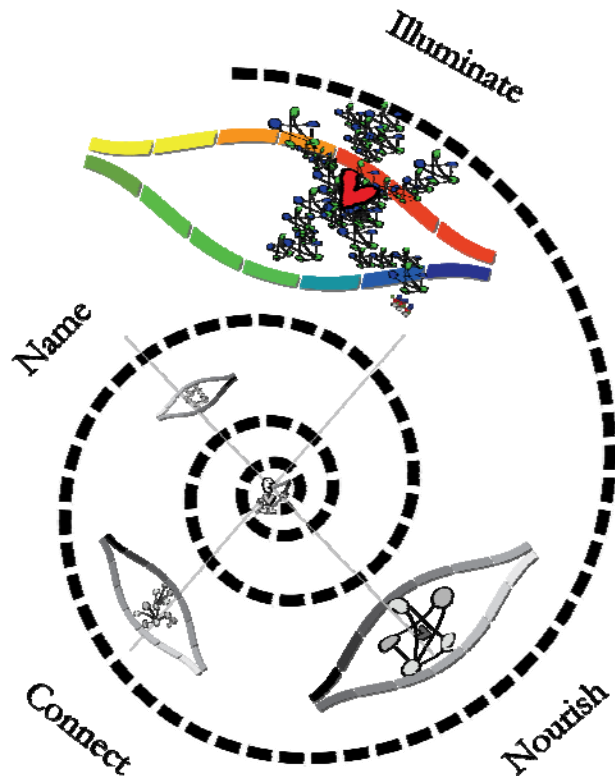
**Name:** brings visibility to all stakeholders

**Connect:** supports similar efforts around the world in developing relationships and shared experiences

**Nourish:** groups commit to work together for a common goal, share knowledge, learn together and support each other in the implementation of their own initiatives.

**Illuminate:** spread awareness of achievements, bringing inspiration to other networks and communities with the possibility of bringing social change to scale.

Online social media and social network platforms help name, connect, nourish and illuminate across geographical distances.



## USE OF THE MAGIC CANOE TOOL

The gift of the magic canoe to the practitioner, is its ability categorize and order otherwise overwhelming amounts of information.

This tool, once fully developed, could be used to aid design and planning of collaborative processes at various scales, as well as a diagnostic tool to help restore health to a struggling collaborative process.

As an online platform, the full framework has the potential to serve as an open source knowledge garden (a type of wiki), in which practitioners may collectively build up best practices as pertain to the various aspects of the canoe.

### NEXT DEVELOPMENT STEPS

The Magic Canoe tool requires further expert feedback. Guidelines, tools and resources (as outlined in the full thesis) are initial suggestions, which can be collaboratively polished by further interviews and expert feedback.

The canoe also requires testing in the field, through design and implementation of the process in large scale collaborative forums and events. This requires, ideally, the involvement as well as feedback of experienced practitioners in the field.

## CONCLUSIONS: CATCHING THE WAVE

Society is transiting through turbulent storms and aims to find safe refuge. However, there is still a tsunami of changes and transformation coming our way. It is imperative that society learn to act collectively in order to masterfully ride through the wave of global challenges and transformation. No single person or organization can do it by themselves.

The maps, processes and tools developed in this thesis are the preliminary contributions to a set of navigation tools that may aid the steering of such a 'canoe' of collaboration.

The journey of the magic canoe is a journey of healing, restoration and trust amongst people from all nations. It is a journey of learning to care for one another as we design the new world infrastructure and learn to act as a cohesive, generative and beautiful whole.



## THANK YOU TO ALL OUR COLLABORATORS:

### INTERVIEWS:

Sheri Herndon, Toke Moeller, Tim Merry, Peter Merry, Tatiana Glad, Marilyn Hamilton, Carlos Mota, Jonathan Dawson, Fernanda Ibara, Craig Henen, Mohan Bagwandas, Manuel Manga, James Reader, Chantelle Wyley, Dumisani Magdela, Bridget-Ann Woods, Bob Stilger, Juan Pablo Rico, Regina Rowland, Deborah Frieze, Anne Marie Archer, Benjamin Aaron Degenhart, Tom Atlee and Dominique Hermans.

### CASE STUDY ORGANIZATIONS:

The Netherlands Centre for Human Emergence, Reos Partners and The Amsterdam Hub