

The Birth of the Bhavishya Alliance

Learnings & Insights

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Contents

- 1) A Note on Methodology
 - 2) Preface
 - 3) Lab Schedule
 - 4) Introduction: A Silent Emergency
 - 5) Reading the Change Lab as Theatre
 - 6) What did we learn about Change Lab design?
 - 7) What did we learn about collective intelligence?
 - 8) What did we learn about the nature of the team needed to deliver a Change Lab?
 - 9) What have we learnt about the role of context and local culture in the Change Lab?
 - 10) What did we learn about gender in the Change Lab?
 - 11) What did we learn about the U-Process?
 - 12) Summary of Recommendations
 - 13) Conclusion: What is Healthy Innovation?
 - 14) List of Participants, Staff and Champions
- Appendix One: Abridged Learning History

A Note on Methodology

This document is intended as an outline of key learnings and insights from the Maharashtra Change Lab process over three months. Emphasis is placed on drawing out some of the major lessons from the Lab which could inform and enrich future endeavours and thus be the subject of further research.

The Bhavishya Alliance appointed Gomathy Balasubramanian to the role of Learning Historian for the duration of the Change Lab. This document also includes an abridged version of the Learning History of the Change Lab written by Gomathy. This document, even taken as a whole, does not aspire at a complete chronology of the project. History can be viewed from many different perspectives and lens, this document simply offers one picture. Neither do the authors intend this document to be a commentary on the relative importance of events. Instead events that illustrate clearly a point of learning are favoured over events that might be landmarks in a chronology of the project.

The basic approach has been drawn from Glaser & Strauss (1967) “grounded theory” to allow for patterns to emerge from the data collected, thereby generating theory via intensive analysis of the data, which included multiple documents from the Change Lab, the learning history and primary experiences.

This document is co-authored by Zaid Hassan who was on the Maharashtra Change Lab Staff Team, and Mia Eisenstadt, an external anthropology and development studies researcher.

Preface: The Birth of the Bhavishya Alliance

The process of giving birth is rarely simple. It comes with both profound joys and towering anxieties. While preceded by many years of work by many people, the Bhavishya Alliance was born and started to take its first steps during the three months of April, May and June of 2006. Appropriately enough, this period of creation was full of ups and downs, moments of happiness and sadness, challenges and breakthroughs. We attempt to honour the spirit and character of the Bhavishya Alliance here, through capturing our learning, developing questions and insights from the experience.

Like all parents, we are convinced of the beauty, strength and intelligence of this particular baby. We are lucky, however, to be surrounded by a community of stern but loving aunts and uncles who have supported us, and continue to do so, in our moments of parental blindness. To stretch the metaphor just a little further, we are very aware of the amount of work, energy and attention it takes to raise a child. The task of nurturing the Alliance is tied into the very same qualities of attention, love, and discipline that are required to bring up a healthy child and combat malnutrition.

The Bhavishya Alliance is extremely ambitious, complex, messy and fraught with risk. If, however, we remember that our commitment to this work stems from a need to see children healthy and happy then the risks are simply issues we must learn to navigate in the course of life. Only when we become parents ourselves do we begin to appreciate the anxieties and joys of our own parents. As the Bhavishya Alliance fast approaches its first birthday we would like to invite you to participate in the work of nurturing the Alliance, a unique multi-stakeholder partnership that is learning how to walk and to run.

Introduction: The Silent Emergency

“The Indian experiment is still in its early stages, and its outcome may well turn out to be the most significant of them all, partly because of its sheer human scale, and partly because of its location, a substantial bridgehead of effervescent liberty on the Asian continent.” - Sunil Khilani, The Idea of India

Child malnutrition in India has been described as a silent emergency. This is born out in the stark numbers of the nutrition crisis. Forty-seven percent of India’s four hundred and fourteen million children under the age of six have some form of malnutrition. Malnutrition is a complex issue to tackle because it’s a multi-factoral phenomenon. Because there is no one single cause, the factors that effect the situation are diverse and difficult to tackle in parallel. These range from social factors, such as the disempowerment of women and girls, to economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, through to political factors such as poorly functioning government agencies. Effects can manifest in equally diverse ways, with children suffering from stunted growth to increased susceptibility to disease. The situation is seemingly intractable, partly due to the increase in the absolute number of children being born, partly due to the complex nature of the change required at multiple levels (from the mother through to governmental institutions) and finally as a consequence of the size and diversity of India’s population and geography.

Within the State of Maharashtra where the Bhavishya Alliance started work, populations suffering from malnutrition include children in illegal urban slums in Mumbai, children in Adivasi communities in the forests of Nandurbar, and a whole array of rural and peri-urban communities in-between representing a variety of cultures. This sheer diversity of contexts means that no blanket approach to malnutrition can be implemented. Or rather, that no single approach will succeed. Approaches need to be contextualised for the particular circumstances of a situation. This leads to tension between the need to address unique needs and large-scale social change. Often policies towards malnutrition rely on a certain homogeneity of the population (of speech, language and cultural practice) if they are to deliver centrally driven services efficiently and within reasonable cost.

The uniqueness of the overall situation, leading to the label of “a silent emergency,” is that there are few visible signs of early to moderate malnutrition. Children, particularly those under the age of six, can look healthy without showing any of the obvious signs of illnesses, unlike in the case of other diseases. Parents, therefore, have little indication that anything is wrong with their children, at least until malnutrition is severe enough to result in more obvious symptoms. The challenge of affecting change in such a context cannot be

underestimated. Many development professionals, working in the area of malnutrition, are often perceived as the bearers of bad news. Many recount tales of hostility from communities and parents, who resent being told by outsiders (development agencies) that there is something wrong with their children, implying that they are not good parents. In other words, for many parents child malnutrition is not a problem, they are not aware of its existence.

The diversity of stakeholders affecting the health of a children are vast, ranging from young mothers and siblings, all the way through to nutritionists and food manufacturers to governmental officers at Panchayat, district and State levels. The nature of the situation presents immense challenges not only in technical or political spheres but also the social and communal. Establishing partnerships of trust between these stakeholders, who more often than not come from extremely different realities, is a highly complex task.

Purely technical solutions to malnutrition in India are known. Over the past 20

Child Malnutrition is a Complex Problem that Can Only Be Solved Through an Extraordinary Approach

Type of complexity	Definition	Ordinary approach for simple problems	Extraordinary approach for complex problems	Process requirement for complex problems
Dynamic	Cause and effect are far apart in space and time	Piece by piece	System as a whole	Systemic
Generative	Future is unfamiliar and undetermined	Existing solutions	Emerging solutions	Creative
Social	Actors have diverse perspectives and interests	Experts and authorities	Stakeholders and stickholders	Participative

Source: Kahane after Scharmer and Senge

years, many interventions ‘at scale’ have been attempted, including one of the largest government-sponsored nutrition programs in the world, the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS). However, “few decision makers have a holistic understanding of malnutrition's multi-sectoral causes” (Heaver 2004) and “nutritional inequalities across different states, socioeconomic and demographic groups are large—and, in general, are increasing” (Gragnotati 2005). As a result, millions of children remain malnourished. It is clear that new approaches are urgently needed.

The challenging nature of the malnutrition situation in India means that it cannot be addressed using traditional methods. The diagram below summarises the characteristics of complex problems and the requirements for addressing them.

The Change Lab: a Laboratory for Social Change

The Change Lab brings together approaches to addressing complex challenges that are systemic, creative and participative. The form a Change Lab generally takes is a sustained gathering of a group of people representing the different sectors of society affected by the issue at hand, coupled with various practitioners. This consists of people from government, business and civil society, as well as community based organizations (CBOs). This group comes together for the common purpose of fostering and creating innovation within a social system. The idea is to create the seeds of a new reality collaboratively. Over the course of a Change Lab a diverse group of stakeholders embarks on a common journey which, in broad strokes, consists of a shared process of seeing and experiencing the system directly, of connecting to their own personal commitment and in quickly prototyping seed initiatives on the ground with a growing group of stakeholders.

The Change Lab is, in a sense, a container (See Box 2). It is a controlled environment within which a group of people experience, become conscious of, and then develop strategies for how to cope with the turbulent and fast-moving dynamics of a modern society. In comparison with the “real world” – the Change Lab aspires to be a space within which it is safe to do things differently, be that shifting power relations or fostering a culture where mistakes are the basis of learning. It’s important to consider that the fast-changing nature of society today means that in some ways the strategies developed within the Change Lab themselves, are less important than having the environment and the capacities with which to continually develop new strategies in response to the ebb and flow of social challenges. In the midst of ever increasing social complexity the Change Lab is a response to the need for such a space.

Box 2. What is the container?

“The container, in this case, is any closed, inescapable environment. It can be 12 people in a 28’ open boat for 3 weeks at the Sea School, or it can be the river, the glacier, the ropes course, even a room somewhere. The image that best describes this principle is the stone polisher, the can that turns and tumbles the rocks we found at the beach until they turn into gems. The rocks don’t get out until they’re done, the friction between them, the chaos of their movement, is what polishes them, and in the end the process reveals their natural inherent brilliance. We don’t paint colours on them, we trust what’s there.”

- “The Container

The Bhavishya Alliance and the Maharashtra Change Lab

The Maharashtra Change Lab took place over three months in April, May and June 2006. It was the product of some three years of work. The project arose out of an initial conversation, between Joseph Jaworski of Generon Consulting and Tex Gunning of Unilever, around how the Change Lab process could be applied to the issue of malnutrition. The project found its genesis in the founding of the Partnership for Child Nutrition (PCN), which was convened by the Synergos Institute-Generon Consulting, UNICEF and Unilever. A local Indian organization, the Bhavishya Alliance, was formed expressly for this purpose. The Bhavishya Alliance and the Maharashtra Change Lab, which was run by the Alliance, were the first projects supported and funded by the Partnership for Child Nutrition, with the intention of convening more labs in different countries.

The purpose of the Bhavishya Alliance is to accelerate the reduction of child malnutrition in India. The Alliance's first project, the Maharashtra Change Lab, convened a "Lab Team" of approximately 30 government, business, and civil society leaders to work with the Alliance's Executive Committee and Champions to co-create three sets of results:

- **Solutions**

Three to six systemic, scalable, sustainable initiatives that can, by the end of 2007, substantially reduce child malnutrition in the five hardest-hit districts in Maharashtra.

- **Relationships**

High-trust relationships among participating leaders and their organisations, that will enable them continue to develop and implement breakthrough solutions to this and other vital societal problems.

- **Capacities**

Strengthened capacity of participating individuals and teams to undertake such deep innovation and change in large and complex organisational and societal systems.

Lab Schedule

Module	Title	Dates for Lab Team	Dates for Executive Committee and Champions	Dates for Esteemed Guests	Location(s)
1	Lab Launch	April 10-21 (12 days)	April 13 (or April 10-13 for those who want an immersion in Lab experience)	April 10-13	April 10-12 at retreat site in Maharashtra and then 13-14 in Belapur office
2	Community Learning Journeys				April 15-19 in various communities in the target districts and then 20-21 in Belapur office
	Break including substantial "home work"	April 22-May 7 (16 days)			In home organisations plus visits to various places in India
3	System Learning Journeys	May 8-26 (18 days)	May 12	May 11-12	May 8-10 at various places in India and then 11-12 in Belapur office
4	Nature Retreat				May 13-21 at retreat site in Uttaranchal (and in transit to and from)
5	Initiative Prototyping I		May 23	May 22-23	May 22-23 in Belapur office and then 24-26 in target districts and partner locations
	Break including substantial home work	May 27-June 4 (9 days)			In home organisations
6	Initiative Prototyping II	June 5-16 (12 days)	Occasional individual contact	June 9	June 5-8 in target districts and other partner locations, and then 9 in Belapur office
7	Initiative Prototyping III		Occasional individual contact	June 16	June 12-15 in target districts and other partner locations, and then 16 in Belapur office
	Break including substantial home work	June 17-25 (9 days)			In home organisations
8	Initiative Launch	June 26-30 (5 days)	June 27-28		In Belapur office

Reading the Change Lab as Theatre

If we were to try to “read” the Change Lab as theatre what kind of play was it? Who were the players? What was the nature of their relation to each other? Was there only one production being performed with a set cast or were there multiple plays taking place simultaneously on one stage? Can we understand the idea of a “plenary” conversation as the script of a play being performed in public? Can we understand “small group conversations” as being the scripts of plays being performed by a few actors on private stages? What was the difference between the “public transcript” and the “hidden transcripts” of small group conversations?

Questions, it is said, look to the future while answers look to the past. Each part of this section begins with a set of questions. We have not set out with the intention of answering these questions but rather of exploring and discussing them with a view to how they might inform the design of future Change Labs. Each set of questions are intended to extend and deepen the learning from the Change Lab in themselves.

In considering the metaphor of the Change Lab as theatre these questions provide a point of departure and set direction for enquiry. The theatrical metaphor provides a valuable tool in analysing an aspect of the Change Lab, or any social intervention, that is normally difficult to discuss, that is, the role of power. Power is considered to be a running theme throughout the lessons drawn from the Change Lab rather than treated as a separate area of learning. Part of the reason for suggesting power is a running theme comes from the idea in social analysis that *“communication is at all times already penetrated by power.”* (Flyvbjerg 2001)

“The theatrical imperatives that normally prevail in situations of domination produce a public transcript in close conformity with how the dominant group wish to have things appear. The dominant never control the stage absolutely, but their wishes normally prevail. In the short run, it is in the interest of the subordinate to produce more or less a credible performance, speaking the lines and making the gestures he knows are expected of him. The result is that the public transcript is – barring a crisis – systematically skewed in the direction of the libretto, the discourse, represented by the dominant. In ideological terms the public transcript will typically, by its accomodationist tone, provide convincing evidence for the hegemony of dominant values, for the hegemony of the dominant discourse. It is precisely this public domain where the effects of power relations are most manifest, and say analysis based exclusively on the public transcript is likely to conclude that the subordinate groups endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic partners in that subordination.”

– James C. Scott

An underlying concept that continually informed our thinking on power was the idea of the “hidden transcript” and the “public transcript” articulated by professor

James C. Scott. Scott argues that situations of power imbalance and domination result in a marked separation between the public and the hidden. Those who harbour even a subconscious fear of the repercussions of the speaking aloud tend to speak more openly in safe, private conversations rather than in large group conversations. Scott's work provides an elegant and simple tool to guide our understanding of the many events of that took place over the course of the Change Lab. The division between the public and the private also opens up a plethora of questions about dialogue that represents a cutting edge of research in the area of systemic change.

The Chilean public intellectual Humberto Maturana writes,

*“We concede power by obeying. Power relations are a manner of relating in which obedience is the fundament. Hierarchical systems take place under power relations, that is, in obedience, and in obedience there is no collaboration. Collaboration is only possible when the relation is based in the emotion of love, that is acceptance of the legitimacy of the other in coexistence with you.”*¹

The context for the insights presented here is a ground breaking multi-stakeholder partnership. Our broad concern is to better understand the basis for collaboration between diverse sectors to achieve change. As Maturana reminds us, the basis for collaboration is love not obedience to power structures. Thus new innovations in multi-stakeholder partnerships and the continued nurturing of existing Labs require new thinking to reflect on the patterns and lessons from experience gained by all in the Change Lab.

¹ "Making Mistakes: blindness and the expansion of vision" by Humberto Maturana Romesin and Pille Bunnell, Learning Organizations, Vol. 1 No.3, 2001

What did we learn about Change Lab design?

How does the design of the Lab influence the task of devising new approaches to the issue of malnutrition? If we analyse Lab design into decisions around time and space, what were the effects of the design? From living, working and collaborating in the Lab what was learnt about the lab spatial design is conducive to a successful Change Lab? How does Lab design influence social innovation? Is there enough space for creativity in the Change Lab? We will first examine our learnings from the design of time and then the design of space.

The Design of Time

What was the impact of time on the productivity and capacity of the participants? The time table was constructed in advance, did the use of time create order or put undue pressure on participants? What were participants views towards the timing of the Lab, how were participants feedback responded to? How did time pressure impact working patterns and creativity? How is the duration of the Change Lab viewed as a whole? Was the right amount of time allocated to each part of the U process? Or is it difficult to schedule a U-Process in advance? Does the U-Process have its own natural, 'indigenous' rhythm?

If time is the devil then speed is God' - .com mantra

Convening the Change Lab took place over three years prior to the launch. Due to the fact that the identification of partners and the formation of the various institutions required to run a Change Lab took so long, there was immense pressure to launch as soon as feasible. Advice from various Champions and donors, coupled with decisions made within the institutions associated with the Lab, meant that the design of the Lab, in sheer size and scale, resembled a high-speed, high-risk moon-shot. The need for speed over-rode most other considerations.

The cost of the timing was significant. Many of the parameters of the Lab were set without adequate consultation with the Indian staff and with the participants, all of whom were identified and bought on board by in the weeks prior to the Lab. It is noted that the non-Indian facilitators had a three year head start on Indian facilitators.

There was a lot of pressure, on people who were new to the project, to complete a momentous and socially significant task in a very small time frame. This timing raised the stakes, every moment mattered. Despite this, participants perceived that a lot of time was wasted and frequently the timetable created by facilitators did not schedule in enough time for participants to decompress, share stories and bond.

During the course of the Lab, there was a very difficult trade-off between the time it takes to arrive at decisions democratically and the time it takes for a decision to be made and enforced unilaterally. On the one hand there was a shortage of time to share information that would have resulted in informed democratic decisions, on the other hand there was a real need for participants to own the process, which would not happen if too many decisions were made unilaterally by a small group of leaders. The evidence of this was the number of times decisions made prior to the launch of the Lab were questioned by participants.

It is important to realise that often deep ideological or paradigmatic conflicts in groups take the form of conflicts around time. Differences in opinion about the relative worth of an activity or in the merits of allowing an idea airtime usually result in disagreements around time. It is normal for groups in conflict to spend more time arguing about saving time than using time effectively.

When a group begins to argue (to “cycle”) around a time-related issue there is usually a deeper issue at stake that the group does not want to tackle directly. In a number of instances these arguments were settled unilaterally by the staff team making a decision, in some cases they were settled in partnership with participant-facilitators and occasionally they were settled by the participants flatly refusing to co-operate.

“I have some fundamental questions—whom do I ask? We are doing a mockery. There is no time. We have less time. Let us look at facts in the face. Its being rushed. It was like a TV show-audience that gets to clap.” – Participant

Spatial Design

What are the constraints to creativity that are imposed by the physical environment? What did participants feel towards their environment, did they ‘own’ the Lab? In hindsight, what is the best way to conceptualise the space of the Change Lab, as a scientific laboratory, a college campus or even a family home? How participants experience the space that they live, work and breathe in is essential to map out theoretically because space can create or stunt social and working relationships. How does the working patterns of the designers reflect on the working patterns within the Change Lab and how appropriate is this design for the participants? Who is involved in the design and what is their capacity to change it or for its evolution? What did we learn about the relationship between Champions and the Lab Team from the use of space in the Lab?

The Impact of Space

The learnings presented here do not assume that finding a conducive and inspiring working environment to hold a Change Lab are easy or inexpensive to find, despite its importance. It is, however, critical to be cognizant of the effects that such decisions have on the success of a Change Lab. The decision for where to locate the Change Lab space was influenced by economic constraints and physical capacity rather than the requirement of a stimulating environment. In hindsight the Lab staff, particularly process-orientated staff, on Change Labs, could approach a more holistic understanding of space as a condition for a successful Lab.

In the design of the Lab the process of finding a space that was large and free for three months was not straightforward. Office space was donated for the duration of the Change Lab. Over the course of the months prior to the Lab this space was rebuilt to create a space to fit the Lab Team's needs. However, while the space was extremely flexible and generous in terms of spatial orientation, due to the fact that the rebuilding process was largely unsupervised by process-orientated staff, many details were left to be decided by builders unfamiliar with the process requirements. For example, the space was lit by strip-lights that, although making sense from an economical point of view, gave the space an extremely clinical character. Upon occupying the space, non-structural details that could be altered were altered by the Staff.

The effort of attending to the creation of the space was worthwhile. In contrast to traditional offices spaces within the Indian context, the space was considered to be highly innovative and unorthodox. The use of floor seating with traditional, hand-woven quilts helped changed the character of the space into something less standardised and more aesthetic and stimulating. The fact that shoes were not allowed to be worn into the space created not only a sense of a sacredness absent from the average boardroom but also sent an aesthetic reminder that this was an Indian Change Lab, with a distinct cultural heritage.

While the space was largely an open plan space, there was one corner office. The occupation of this corner office was subject of heated debate during the weeks preceding the launch of the Change Lab. There were two roles in conflict over the decision for how to use the space. The first role was the role of wanting to establish equality among all staff members. The second role was the role of respecting differences within the team, with more senior staff being acknowledged through the allocation of space.

For future reference, more breakout spaces and different types of spaces (for reflection, for small group meetings, for relaxation) could have been beneficial in the Food Lab. The only break-out space available was a small library, which was

frequently used as a small meeting room, as a meditation room and as a place to de-stress. All staff meetings took place in the Library as it was the only private space available. Later on the process, co-design meetings with participants also took place in this room.

The Change Lab environment was partly compromised by the fact that relative to more natural spaces, it was highly artificial, with a lack of plants and outdoor spaces (it was on the seventh floor of a tower block). It physically resembled a container, which perhaps accentuated the feeling of being trapped on a roller-coaster. Again, a recommendation here is to include a garden or a green space as part of the Change Lab environment.

In defence of the space, as a blank sheet, there was space for creativity, but the design of the Lab did not provide time or resources for participants to co-own the space or actively co-design it (perhaps a rare option at the best of times). As a result, the space was sometimes lacking colour, imagination and group identity. Collectives benefit from having a space that they see as reflecting them and they feel “at home” in. Feeling comfortable and ‘at home’ is more likely to promote an environment of trust and fellowship amongst the group. In contrast feeling trapped in a white-walled, strip-lit, sterile container, will raise stress levels and increase the propensity for conflict.

Nature as a Space

Time in nature was a major strength to the Change Lab design. There is a lot of evidence from participants of the immense enjoyment and sense of connection with self, source and the group from the time in the Himalayas (See pp. 19-24 Learning History 2006). During this time there was a lot of pleasure, insights and creativity, even as conflicts arose and were resolved. It was during this time in the Himalayas that participants began co-facilitating with staff, significantly shifting their ownership of the process.

However, the design of the U-process meant that this part of the process was a discombobulated section, rather than an integrated part in the Change Lab whole. This created a sharp contrast between stressful, high pressure and relatively non-aesthetic environment in Mumbai and the peace, stunning natural beauty and insight of the time in the Himalayas. In some ways the temperature difference between Mumbai and the Himalayas was mirrored in the dynamics of the group.

Both elements, a space that is conducive to work and connection with nature need to be integrated into Lab design much more fully in future Change Labs. Employing nature as a running theme in the design can permit the whole team to feel nourished by their environment and feel inspired and energised. While the

role of nature within the Change Lab process has been previously recognised, with the nature retreat playing a key role, this is not enough to maintain the peaceful stability of the group. This is a key learning. Rather than compartmentalise nature into a single module, natural and aesthetic spaces are an ongoing requirement through the trajectory of the Change Lab.

What did we learn about collective intelligence?

How was collective intelligence created? Was it seen? Did the Bhavishya Change Lab reaffirm the theory that the wisdom of the collective is greater than the sum of its parts? What were the barriers and the catalysts of collective intelligence, and how was this incorporated in to the design of the Change Lab? What did we learn about the forms of intelligence present? Given there are multiple intelligences, which were cultivated and valued? Which intelligences were underutilised to detrimental effect? Is the concept of collective intelligence limited or does our understanding of collective require conceptual expansion?

Complex social systems require decisions to be made on the basis of a collective intelligence as opposed to an individual in authority. An individual, no matter how experienced or expert, can never match the genius of collective intelligence. Decisions made either by experts or those with power within a complex system will display signs of logic in the short-term. A group displays collective intelligence when the conditions of diversity in its composition and access to information by its members are met. If a group lacks diversity or lacks information, then it will in all likelihood not display signs of collective intelligence but rather will tend to either conflict or group-think.

Self-nomination

Early in the Lab process the Staff Team learnt that several participants had been nominated by their bosses (or in some cases ‘super-bosses’) and told to report to the Bhavishya Alliance offices, either with little information about what was expected of them or being told that this was a part of their job and they had no choice. This was a factor that can undermine collective intelligence of any group.

Due to the intensely personal nature of the Change Lab, the probability of a successful process goes up dramatically if people participate of their own volition. Collective intelligence and collective identity is undermined by the presence of participants who are not present out of their own volition. Intention and clarity of commitment are key factors in the success of the Change Lab. Participants must ideally self-nominate, and come because they want to be there not because they are assigned. They must know what they are getting into, and if they still want to sign up then the Lab has a healthy foundation. Over the course of the Lab participants deepen and sharpen their commitment and intention, both at an individual and collective level.

One explanation for the number of conflicts that arose over the course of the Lab is the presence of participants who had not decided to undertake the process of their own free will. Due to the fact that there was no legitimate route to “exit” the project, these participants had very little to lose in objecting to the process. They

could not leave of their own free will and no one was going to ask them to leave. This policy of “inclusion at all costs” is incongruent with the conditions for the emergence of collective intelligence. There must be room in the process for people who choose to leave to leave as early as possible should they choose to.

“I realise that it is easy to talk about change and transformation. In this journey I experienced how disruptive this can be, when I was required to shift from familiar ways of understanding situations. I also realised that change begins with the self. It is easy to say that we have to bring about change in others. How often are we even conscious of the changes needed within us?” - Participant

The Condition of Information

The constitution of the Change Lab brought together participants with varying degrees of knowledge and experience with child malnutrition. Some participants knew nothing about child malnutrition, while others had spent decades working on the issue. This diversity of understanding contributes positively to the group because it prevents the development of group-think amongst the group². The diversity of the team will only be an asset when participants and teams have access to the information that is available within the group. It makes sense, however, to make some distinctions between the different types of information that a group might access. For example, it is useful to distinguish *propositional knowledge* (knowledge that is expressed through propositions or statements), *practical knowledge*, *experiential knowledge* and *presentational knowledge* (knowledge that is expressed through non-verbal channels)³.

During the first few weeks of the Lab, anxiety around sharing information was high. Those with more experience with the issue of malnutrition, particularly those with medical training, believed that it was critical to bring the rest of the Lab up to a minimum standard with regards to malnutrition. The main requirement being expressed was the need to share what can be thought of as “propositional knowledge” or the “logic” of child malnutrition. Many aspects of the process which did not directly and immediately address this need were deemed by several participants to be a distraction from the issue of malnutrition – at least until the issue of information transfer was addressed.

Even though a number of information based presentations were made, for example on nutrition, on government structures, this point was never really

² Groupthink is a type of thought exhibited by group members who try to minimize conflict and reach consensus without critically testing, analyzing, and evaluating ideas. Groupthink may cause groups to make hasty, irrational decisions, where individual doubts are set aside, for fear of upsetting the group’s balance. The term is usually used as a derogatory term after the results of a bad decision.

³ Singh, A (2005) ‘The Group Unconscious’ unpublished Masters thesis.

adequately resolved during the course of the Lab. Continual challenges to the process as the Lab progressed could be interpreted as a disagreement about the amount of time dedicated to the transfer of propositional knowledge specifically about child malnutrition. The tension between what can be called “content” and process was acute. The staff team and the facilitators engaged in a negotiation on this need, with participants continually asking for more time to give presentations in plenary. The facilitators spent time trying to balance the requirement for what was judged as an expensive way to use time, that is, an excessive focus on propositional knowledge to the detriment of practical knowledge, experiential knowledge or presentational knowledge.

In hindsight, one possible avenue to explore is to spend time comprehensively mapping the information (the propositional knowledge) that is “in the room.” The requirement of information for collective intelligence can partially be met if participants all know what each other knows in the sense of knowing how to use a telephone directory or an internet search. If participants are able to create and use a “knowledge map” – allowing them to know about the knowledge and experience of other participants, they would know enough to pull in the right individuals during the course of making a decision or designing an innovation.

“I feel good about the process and where we are. But I am bewildered by the ups and downs and the fluidity. We all have different skills and can come in at different times. The challenge is to stay with the call.” - Participant

In addition to meeting the needs of propositional knowledge, a greater emphasis must be made on the surfacing of presentational knowledge. It has been argued that “certain symbols and figures are embedded in the group's conversation and register at a pre-conscious or unconscious level in group members.”⁴ These symbols and figures become key to understanding group identity.

This type of knowledge was demonstrable during an improvised skit that the participants and staff put on in the first week of the Lab to illustrate the complexities of undertaking learning journeys into communities. One of the male participants noticed whilst playing a farmer, would not talk to another participant, a young woman, who was playing the role of a visitor. When questioned about this, the “farmer” explained that he was put off by the fact that the “visitor” had interrupted him while he was farming and she was wearing “city clothes” that he believed were not appropriate for a woman. This opened the gates to a conversation on gender, rare for the Change Lab. Much of the data came not from verbal expressions but from examining the physical behaviour of “actors” in the skit and examining the gender dynamics in the conversation itself. For example, various male participants verbally and energetically expressing support for gender equality while at the same time, not allowing women to speak

⁴ Nichol, B. (1995). *The Group Unconscious*.

for themselves. It was only when the facilitator posed the question of what was happening to the women in the group, explicitly asking all the men to be silent, did female voices engage in dialogue.

The skit and the ensuing dynamics provides an example of the surfacing of knowledge from the group unconscious, in this case gender dynamics, and demonstrates how tacit knowledge can become explicit within the group. The criticality of such knowledge to collective intelligence arising within the group cannot be underestimated. In general, the dimension of group knowledge that are somatic/body centric that are illuminated in theatre or performance are largely unexplored within in the current context of Change Labs (except for activities such as yoga that promote group body intelligence that were part of the Lab).

“The Lab Team Members came closer together as a community. The presentation by each member about their work, expertise and gifts uncovered what kind of potential exists in each member which can be tapped into. It brought the team together as a collective in the sense for the first time.” - Participant

Small Group Intelligence versus Plenary Intelligence

It is useful to contrast the collective intelligence of different groups. Small groups tended to work better together than the entire group in plenary. The majority of conflicts arose in plenary sessions.

There is a difference between the issues that can be raised and processed in small groups that cannot be addressed in a presentation to eighty people. Power asymmetries are amplified when presented in a public space causing humiliation and chaotic oscillations in status - small trivial issues then become emblems of wider relations of power. Asymmetries take on a larger and potentially more damaging impact when made public to a large group rather than at small group level. It is, however, very important to note that power dynamics are also maintained by individuals working in small groups. Shifts in power dynamics almost always occur in plenary, in “the public transcript.” When small groups are subject to unbearable amounts of stress or pressure they tend to “storm the public transcript” – in other words, issues that were once aired privately are taken to the public stage and precipitate group conflict. This is one reason why so many group conflicts surfaced in plenary sessions.

During the Realising Phase the Lab Team split into four small teams. One of these teams got caught in a lengthy conflict, while the other three teams did not (even though it’s important to remember that each team had its own fair share of both unhealthy and healthy dynamics.) The team in conflict was dominated by participants from one sector and did not meet the condition of diversity. Of the

other three teams, one was dominated mostly by participants from another sector, the two remaining teams had a greater diversity with no one sector dominating. While it is controversial to judge the performance of the various teams against each other, it is plausible that those teams that functioned well, coming up with innovative and systemic ideas, were teams that met the condition of diversity.

“Standing on a small hill, looking at sun-set, I asked myself: If I was born in pre-independence era, what would I have done? I recall one of the addresses to the team. While doing business, we cannot close our eyes to millions of people who have no food and thousands of babies that are dying every minute owing to malnutrition. This is not a simple problem that can be nailed through a fish-bone or through pareto analysis... it is the consequence of a larger systemic failure that includes all... the government, communities & the business world. And it will take all the players to shift the current reality.” - Participant

What did we learn about the nature of the team needed to deliver the Change Lab?

What were the roles of the staff and the facilitators and how did these evolve? How central is the role of the facilitator to the success of the Change Lab? Is there a power structure amongst the group of facilitators? How was formal authority recognised and how was informal leadership practiced? Was there a need for formal agreement? How was the progress and problems of the facilitators monitored and addressed? How were the facilitators and staff supported? What kinds of challenges did they face and how were these resolved in a healthy manner? What did the rest of the group feel towards the role of the facilitators? How do we overcome or transform to mutual benefit the power dynamics between the champions and Lab Team Members? How do we overcome or transform the power dynamics between the champions and Lab Team Members?

The appointment of Indian staff occurred for the most part in the weeks preceding the launch of the Change Lab. Other staff came on board after the Lab began. This meant that there were disparities between the non-Indian staff, all of whom had been working on and off on the project for three years, and the Indian staff. The learning curve for Indian staff was tremendous. The most serious issue however was not the learning curve *per se* but the lack of ownership that resulted from the fact that the entire Change Lab process had been designed by a small sub-set of the Team. In some ways this is an obvious mistake but the learning here concerns how decisions are made in the heat of a countdown to launch. There was a lot of pressure to start after 3 years of preparation work to harness the increasing momentum, which was at risk of getting lost. Further work needs to be done on clarifying the parameters and conditions of a successful Change Lab launch, taking into account local context.

This is a key learning about the healthy conditions for delivering a Change Lab: staff must be involved in designing the process, as well as the overall decision making process, in order to have a genuine sense of ownership and sustained commitment to the process. It takes time for staff to internalise and own the process and therefore an ideal scenario would be co-designing with the Indian staff prior to its inception. It makes sense to consider running a Change Lab type process for the staff and stakeholders in order to design a Change Lab for a wider group of stakeholders.

If we think about the Change Lab as a moonshot, the rocket was launched without first meeting a clear set of conditions for the success of the Lab, such as involving local staff in the design process as well as involving local stakeholders in the goal setting processes. Consequently, participants encountered a set of

predetermined (non-negotiable) goals, that they then partially rejected. This raises the question: how do you set goals and create the design process to maximise local ownership? Bhavishya is remarkable in that it has survived multiple ownership transfers, but it has taken a lot of time and effort to successfully transfer ownership.

Like concentric ripples in water, what happens at the core team impacts the wider system and the periphery. The nature of the Change Lab Team is greatly influenced by the Lab design, internal power structure, knowledge, health, well-being and communication of the core teams.

The social capital required to run the Lab only lay with a few of the people (those who had been involved in the formation of the Lab over the previous three years), in that most of the relationships with stakeholders were held by one or two people. The varying levels of experience with the U-Process inhibited Indian staff members from making informed decisions about the lab design. In some cases assessments made by Indian facilitators were dismissed because of their lack of fluency in the U-process. This undermined not only their authority but the cohesion of the staff team as a whole. There was also a resultant tension with the need to avoid 'elementary mistakes' in a high risk setting and the desire to be democratic.

In the weeks prior to the launch of the Change Lab, the non-Indian facilitation team had several conversations about how best to work as a team. It was agreed that due to the complex nature of the project a flexible approach would be required with different people taking on leadership at different times as skills and experienced necessitated. During the course of the Lab, as the stress of delivery and results rose this arrangement became more rigid as the most senior member of the team became *de facto* leader of the team. Sometimes this was a successful arrangement, at times where the complexity of the situation was high, the arrangement clearly did not work and roles required more precise shape and definition.

How to avoid replication of the situation? What are the skills and capacities required to operate as a flexible team with in a complex and high-pressure situation? No one individual can consistently make the right decision in a high stress, fast paced and complex environment. Therefore, rather than examine individual leadership in this Change Lab, the more important question is: *what skills and capacities need to be cultivated to maintain a healthy team leadership in the complexity of the Change Lab?*

Internal conversations amongst the staff team revealed an interest in a Deep Democracy process, that staff self-funded. In the third week during the break Myrna Lewis facilitated a Deep Democracy session. The intervention explicitly

dealt with the relationships. Dynamics were complex. Myrna's assessment of the dynamics of the room was that the dynamics represented what was going on with malnutrition in Indian society. For one facilitator, this led to a realisation about the nature of the work. Rather than the Change Lab being about supply chains, strategy, mismanagement or technology, *systemic change begins in the room amongst participants*. Many of the critical reasons why child malnutrition persists in society, for example gender inequalities, donor conditionalities, unhealthy power dynamics, a lack of collaboration between diverse agencies, a lack of space capacities for innovation, all exist in the room. They are embodied and enacted every day in relationships between participants.

The Health of Staff and Facilitators

“The success of an intervention depends on the interior conditions of the intervener” - Bill O'Brien

The facilitators and staff shared the same living space, which provided opportunities for informal conversations and time for team bonding and new friendships. At one level, this was fruitful for team cohesion. Despite the fact that the process was difficult for facilitators there was an array of lasting friendships that then informed the process. Soon after the Change Lab, one of the participants commented that the dynamics between the Lab staff and participants would have been markedly different had they lived together in the same space over the course of the Change Lab. This is important to note for future Labs and Lab Team building.

Facilitators learnt to judge their own limits, and realise that only if they themselves are adequately nurtured, stable, happy and healthy are they capable of maintaining the balance of the larger group. Specifically, facilitators developed the capacity to express needs and share what you have without undermining personal resources or coming across as being professionally inadequate. There were no formal support processes for facilitators independent of the staff team. Given the periodically high emotional charge of the situation, formalising a review and assessment process would ensure that the health (mental, emotional, physical, energetic) of facilitators was maintained throughout. It would also make sense to have various support mechanisms, such as shadow facilitators to assess situations and provided additional coaching for facilitators and staff team facing difficult issues and conflicts. It is important to explore other mechanisms to support and nourish the well being of all participants and staff.

The Lab Team Members began to co-facilitate relatively mid-way through the process. Relatively few of them were experienced and trained facilitators. Therefore, it is equally as important to monitor the health and performance of

participant-facilitators in the context of the Change Lab that deals with highly complex issues.

In a practical sense, staff and facilitators found their own ways to let off steam and regain energies. Early on in the process local facilitators would go home on the weekends despite long travel distances. Foreign facilitators faced a different challenge because they were far from home in a small town with limited facilities. One of the foreign facilitators joined the local laughing club and learnt reiki, whilst others read, ran, and tried to exercise despite pre-monsoon heat waves. There is an opportunity to use arts and sport to maintain the health and energy levels of the staff and facilitators as well as strengthen the health and collective intelligence of the team. In the latter half of the Change Lab most of these practices degenerated due to time and delivery pressures, which, was at the detriment to the facilitators' well being and the health of the overall process.

A key learning here is that facilitators must allocate time for their relaxation and renewal. This is not leisure but an inherent part of the process. For example, at one point there was no break for 3 weeks and for some, the process became charged, heated and difficult towards the end of this period. This would suggest an urgent need for discipline in collective activities that are chances for team building, socialisation, relaxation and rejuvenation. These clearly contribute to the success of the work and should not be neglected for the sake of time/cost saving in the short term.

During the course of the 12 week lab there were 4 weeks of breaks. The foreign facilitators were usually away for these breaks, either working on other projects or going home. Their lack of presence was commented on and felt. From time-to-time foreign facilitators missed critical days because of travel schedules. While this arrangement was contracted with the funders and home institutions, it was not contracted with the Lab Team. In future staff need to remember that it is critical to contract clearly with the Lab Team.

Attitudes towards the staff team and the facilitators shifted dramatically and often unpredictably over the course of the Lab. The dynamics of the Lab placed stresses and strains on the inter-relationships internally within the staff team as well as between the staff team, Lab Team and champions. There were several episodes when the Lab Team challenged the authority of the facilitators, sometimes on the basis of competency and sometimes on the basis of lacking authority. This had the effect of placing further stress on the internal relationships within the staff team. The staff team had a very short history of working together. Treating challenges to competency objectively was difficult because staff were still learning about each other strengths and weaknesses. Process orientated work means that facilitators as a team must be prepared to be attacked (see Mindell, A "*The Leader as a Martial Artist*" for more).

Part of the preparation for facilitators and staff must include coping with questions and doubts pertaining to their authority, legitimacy and competency. The team must be able to stand together if they are to function as a healthy collective. All attacks on this culture must be simultaneously taken seriously and rebuffed.

Team norms and agreements must be put into place prior to the launch of a Lab in order to create healthy conditions, mutual respect and accountability amongst team members. A culture of operating as a collective must be co-created and nurtured. It is easy to underestimate the time, energy, and attention required to cultivate such a culture. In this instance the staff team worked together for 2 weeks prior to the launch of the Change Lab. This was clearly inadequate. Just as it is nearly impossible to grow a healthy garden in 2 weeks, you cannot grow a healthy team in 2 weeks equipped to handle the stresses and strains of an unprecedented Change Lab in scale and scope.

“The hardest thing that a facilitator can do is to try and bring the attention of a group to its own dynamics. However, looking at ourselves honestly, both as individuals and as a group, is necessary. It is in fact the key to understanding how we will do things differently.” – Facilitator

The Nature of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

“We are in business and we are trying to see if we can do something better than business. We do not see that these are in conflict.” – *Tex Gunning, Unilever*

The uniqueness of the Change Lab, in many ways, arose from its multi-sectoral character. Participants, Staff and Champions were drawn from diverse contexts. For most people participating in the process the diversity of the group was new. It resulted in both confusion and richness. Participants and Champions found themselves having to marry their own perceptions of other sectors with the direct experience of having to speak, engage and work with people from different sectors.

From time-to-time sectoral differences came to a head and resulted in either heated debates or conflict. The earliest meeting of the Champions with the Lab Team resulted in a wide-ranging and heated debate about the nature of corporate participation. Champions who were activists found themselves face-to-face with champions from the corporate sector. Logics that were previously held as “truths” were aired and criticised.

Relatively speaking, the sectoral differences resolved themselves amicably within the Lab Team but not within the Champions. Part of the reason for this is obviously the amount of time Lab Team Members spent with each other, talking in both structured and unstructured contexts. This became clear when in the

second week a well-rounded multi-sectoral team presented ideas to Champions and were told off for being too corporate. One of the participants, from the corporate sector, wanted to know why the Lab as a whole had not rallied to defend the presenting team. Were we a team or not?

Overall, it could be argued that the differences in perspective and experience that existed within the room were not often recognised as positive, even when they served to bring the group together. Due to the collaborative nature of the Change Lab and the perception of high-stakes, conflict, particularly when it became sector-focused in nature, was generally viewed by participants with some alarm. The challenge of ensuring the participants felt safe (even if uncomfortable) with sectoral conflict was not adequately met.

The challenge and opportunity of the Change Lab are the dynamics that result from multi-stakeholder engagement and the very real differences of position that arise. While conflict is perhaps inevitable (particularly if people are being honest), the pay-off for learning how to work through conflict to a space of genuine collaboration is very high. The Change Lab undoubtedly gave the Lab Team Members an experience of this pay-off but more can be done to mine sectoral differences and bring them to bear on the outcomes of the Lab.

“Realisations that all of us across different sectors remain in our own cocoons within the 4 walls. Not aware of reality. Had to be at this lab to learn all these things. How sincere are we in doing our jobs is the harsh question. We have just skimmed the surface, we have not really dug deep. I think we have just begun.” - Participant

“I am clearer than ever that all the challenges we discuss as being “in the field” are in fact present in the room. If we want to know why communities are hostile to healthcare workers, then the answer is in the room. If we want to know why care programmes in the past have been unsustainable then the answer is in the room. If we want to know why there is low trust in the malnutrition system between different actors then the answer is in the room. If we want to change the system then we must also change what is in the room.” - Facilitator

The Role of Champions and Governance

While the Change Lab itself proceeded at the speed of a rocket, the establishment of governance structures proceeded at a much slower pace. In practical terms this meant that there were no “higher powers” that difficult decisions or disputes could be brought to. The Champions, in a way, served this purpose. Their role was nebulous at times, in that while they were very committed to the project their

roles were not formalised and they constituted a group larger than the Lab Team itself.

Champions however, did make a number of critical interventions. On a day-to-day level, one example involved a champion who was a facilitator was asked by the Lab Staff to come and act as a facilitator to help unblock the process. This was at a point where the legitimacy of the staff seemed to be particularly low. The Champion turned up and facilitated a session where he lovingly, directly and energetically challenged the Lab Team, reminded them of their purpose and helped them through an exercise of appreciative enquiry around their initiatives which helped crystallise participants ideas and next steps. After the session a staff facilitator commented that they were envious of the way he had spoken to the Lab Team, that is, directly and bluntly.

“We are floating in and out as champions. The connections have not been deep. There is a need for champions to meet. Where do we reposition ourselves? We need to meet again and more frequently.” - Champion

Relations with Champions went through its own life-cycle, of peaks and troughs. One of the earliest encounters resulted in a conflict between the Champions and the Lab Team. This in turn caused a conflict within the Champions group, around the appropriate role of corporations within the Alliance and a conflict within the Lab Team around how participants need to stick together when attacked by Champions.

During the course of the Lab it became clear that the Champions were operating as a distinct and very different team from the Lab Team. The stresses and strains between the two groups meant that they didn't really coalesce into a collective. This raises the question of how the Champions and Lab Team can operate as a single team given the differences between them. The key lesson here was in recognising that incorporating a large group of Champions into the Change Lab requires as carefully designed a process as needed for the Lab Team.

Power

Is it possible to arrive at a theory of power, a concrete understanding of the dynamics of power, permitting unhealthy power dynamics to be changed?

The neglect of power dynamics in the Lab created an artificial and disabling gap between the reality of the situation, compared to its idealised state. The Change Lab set up a space as if relationships within the space were not affected by power. For example, Lab Team Members were treated as if they were all of equal status. Senior Lab Team Members and juniors were assumed to be equal and so the design and values of the process reflected this. Incorporating awareness of

positional differences, for example, senior members being given additional time to be heard, would diffuse the power dynamics inherent in the proceedings and would display greater congruence with local Indian culture. In a sense treating participants as equals resulted in many interactions between participants being status transactions, with uncertainties in power being constantly (re)negotiated.

The location of decision-making power within the Change Lab was unclear. This meant that participants (and in some cases staff) were generally unsure of how to make decisions. This produced a lot of confusion because one of the key principles behind the methodology was to run an open process where participants design the innovations that they wish to implement. Not only was this unclear, participants were generally not used to being given such agency. Did the participants have power to do what they wanted or not? Or did power lie with their Champions, or with the Staff? Ownership of the process reached an amicable space only half-way through the process, when participants were invited to co-design and co-facilitate the process on an on-going basis. After that point a small group of participants self-selected to join the staff in making process-design decisions on a daily basis. This practice needs to be extended to the periods before and after a Change Lab.

Power differences, when ignored, risk becoming silent shadows and ghost-roles that leach energy from the group. The pragmatic effect within the Change Lab of unaddressed power dynamics were two-fold. Firstly, there were a number of unresolved conflicts that did drain energy from the group. According to Deep Democracy theory, one reason conflict arises is when a minority feel that their voices are not being heard and their positions not recognised by the group. This was true within the Lab. The minority then seek to influence the situation indirectly, through indirect criticism, through obstruction, eventually through protest, travelling down a road that means small issues snowball into larger conflicts the longer they go unaddressed. Asymmetries of power create difference but can also be a source of wealth as there is a range of assets from which the group can draw on to its collective advantage. In Deep Democracy theory and practice, conflict is an opportunity, for example, to incorporate the wisdom of the minority into the collective. Conflict, when resolved, forges the group into a more intelligent collective. When it remains unaddressed then it has the very real potential to fragment a group.

Second, the power dynamic resulted in a number of “hidden transcripts” where participants arrived at conclusions and positions that they clearly felt were unsafe to raise in plenary. This presented enormous difficulties. For example, participants would share information on a one-to-one basis with facilitators and expect a change in the situation without directly being identified. Over time the space grew safer and many participants who would previously not speak found their voice. Although it’s important to note that in some instances this finding of

voice was an act of immense courage born out of frustration. During the course of the Change Lab there were a handful of instances where this happened, resulting in rather dramatic dynamics that contributed to a sense of being on a roller coaster ride.

The sociologist Ulrich Beck makes the case that *“One could almost say, whenever nobody is talking about power, that is where it unquestionably exists, at once secure and great in its unquestionability. Wherever power is the subject of discussion, that is the start of its decline.”* (Beck, 2006) The point, of course, is not a decline of power for its own sake. Rather, it is important that participants do not feel that they are merely cogs in a process that is beyond their control, subject to hidden power dynamics. Instead, staff need to ensure that the whole group have real agency in the design and structure of the Change Lab process.

Therefore, when power dynamics are explicitly discussed the group can come to terms with its own collective identity and relational agency. When power differentials and dynamics are masked, there is a risk that both individuals and the collective becoming politically disenfranchised and essentially ineffective. The Change Lab as a vehicle for systemic change will only succeed when the power dynamics present within the larger system are consciously addressed.

“The learning journey truly became a defining experience in terms of the challenges it posed especially on the group dynamics front. It was a tough challenge for all of us at different levels – to deal with the baggage of our long experience, to cultivate new ways of perceiving reality, to comply with norms, to deal with authority we are not comfortable with – just to name a few. The team members were strong as individuals, each holding on to their views and positions. The residuals of the first week of the Change Lab were also working on the team. Conflict was seething and found the first option to surface when a request to have a briefing at the commencement of the learning journey was made. The tension continued through the next day and by evening had reached a point of explosion. The team split, tempers ran high, harsh words were exchanged and all were on the point of packing their bags! The cool breeze of the night helped saner counsel to prevail. Members became more introspective.

The first move was made without standing on formalities and the team assembled to dialogue. The facilitator had no clue how to proceed in this situation, what is the right next step. The beauty was it was not important to know in advance but just be present to the situation and listen. As a group we could tap into our collective resources. Personally it was important to be patient, not to stand on one's ego, be compassionate and empathetic. It enabled me get in touch with my inadequacies – to do sensing, to deal with the team; my struggles to be in charge of the process. We as a group could navigate the whole process and emerge stronger in the end. It also mirrored what happens in the community; there is a feeling that community does not have resources and that there is someone from outside who has knowledge and expertise to change their situation.”

- Participant

What have we learnt about the role of context and local culture in the Change Lab?

Which ideas and assumptions built into the Change Lab are Euro- or North America-centric? Is the practice of presencing culturally biased? In trying to create a shared culture is it important to find recreational activities that are appropriate for everyone? How do we characterise the current reality of the system? Can we share one reality, or do the different cultural and/or gendered viewpoints in the room necessitate the acknowledgement of multiple realities? What should the role of local languages be within the context of a Change Lab? Is English language appropriate or inclusive in the Indian context?

Bringing together a diverse group of people, Lab Team Members, Champions as well as Indian and non-Indian staff gave rise to complex cultural dynamics. These dynamics meant that it was difficult to create a shared culture that could be owned by everyone. While a shared culture did emerge, it was not smooth and nor did everyone feel close or attached to it. The importance of understanding the process of team culture creation and how it interacts with existing culture is critical to the success of the Change Lab. In one sense the culture of the Change Lab was largely disconnected from the culture of development that most institutions were operating within. This is a major concern for the future of the initiatives that are created. How can we avoid such critical disconnects?

Cultures of Leadership

Part of the Western dynamic that pervaded the Lab, emanating clearly from the foreigners was the need for equality, seeing it as a desirable characteristic resulting in a healthy working culture and that a lack of equality implied a lack of justice. This had several highly complex implications.

The first implication was among the staff team. Despite clear and semi-acknowledged differences among in knowledge about the Change Lab and the theories that underlie it, new facilitators and staff were invited into the decision making process, with the idea that consensus decision making was obviously superior to unilateral or hierarchical decision making. This, however, is not true in many situations, particularly where experiential knowledge about the process was missing. The result of this was the creation of a somewhat false equality with the staff team between Indian and foreign facilitators. The public position being that there are no formal distinctions that matter but delineations in authority arose nevertheless because some people knew more or had more experience than others. In many ways this dynamic extended into the Lab Team, with participants being invited into participatory decision making processes without necessarily having with the skills or the knowledge to make good decisions. In itself this is

not a problem, as the cultivation of collective wisdom requires people with both experience and those who are new to a situation. It could be argued that the creation of this false equality was more psychologically comforting to the non-Indian facilitators than to the Indian facilitators who several times expressed their willingness to be led.

What do local cultures of leadership look like? What happens when local cultures of leadership clash with non-local cultures that are bought it? Are cultural norms of leadership inviolable?

“There’s too much democracy here!” – Lab Team Participant

The challenge with the decision-making process was that at moments when consensus decision-making was not invited or needed, it seemed to be continually present. At several points participants complained that there was “too much democracy” in the process and someone should just lead.

The problems with the invitation of asking someone to lead are two-fold. One, it absolves the participants of responsibility in decision-making. The lament of “too much democracy” often went together with other, more pointed critiques of the Lab, such as being asked to do things that did not make sense to them. Two, in complex systems unilateral decision making usually results in a series of decisions that are at best a function of the leaders understanding and at worst decisions that ignore much of the wisdom in the room, leading to participants disowning the process and results because they came from someone else’s decision.

The question of leadership culture resulted in a confusion of roles between the staff team and the lab team. It was felt by several people, including the evaluators that more formal process leaders should have been agreed, a practice that would perhaps have been more comfortable for those being led than those doing the leading.

“The Indian reality is both transparent and opaque simultaneously. What is visible is as much a part of the truth as what remains unseen. Foreigners see what is overt, and conflate it with their preconceived notions of ‘the great Indian civilization’. In the process many assumptions evade critical scrutiny, and a great many inferences are either incorrect or partially true. But foreigners can be forgiven their errors. Not so the Indians. Over the years the Indian leadership, and the educated Indian, have deliberately projected and embellished an image about Indians they know to be untrue, and have willfully encouraged the well-meaning but credulous foreign observer (and even more the foreign scholar) to accept it. What is worse, they have fallen in love with that image, and can no longer accept it as untrue.”

- Pavan K. Varma, Being Indian: The Truth About Why the 21st Century will be India's

Another implication of the idea of equality was the belief that everyone on the Lab team was emotionally, intellectually and professionally suited to the process. The idea that there were participants part of the process who, for whatever reason, were not suited to the process was a new and difficult idea for the non-Indian facilitators. In debriefing an intervention with one of the Indian Champions, a skilled process designer and facilitator, he commented that the idea of putting everyone through a common process and expecting it suit all the participants was a particularly American idea. He commented that it was disrespectful to the people who were feeling the pain of the process, and that they should be allowed to opt out of the entire process without stigma.

The challenge of respecting local diversity and difference proved to be difficult for even those in the team familiar with the local context. Prior to the start of the Lab a decision was made, that yoga was a culturally appropriate energy practice in the Indian context (in contrast to other foreign practices such as Chi Qong.) By the second yoga session one of the participants was standing in the circle, the only person not adopting a yoga position. Upon being asked later on the participant explained that he was not Hindu and felt deeply uncomfortable with practicing yoga, which he believed might compromise his faith. Some of the facilitators who had suggested yoga as an appropriate practiced defended it, saying that the participant should not be allowed to opt out. How should decisions about inclusion be made in this context? It is important to note that at the end of the Change Lab the participant explained how his experience of the Lab was of not being able to find any traction or a place to connect throughout the process.

Local languages and participation

During the Lab design phase, a decision was made to run the Change Lab in English. The decision was made in order to simplify the proceeding. If the Lab were to run in local languages which additional local languages would be used? Would it just be Hindi or Hindi and Marathi? Running the Lab in three languages would increase the complexity tremendously. Having said that, informal translation between Hindi-English, English-Hindi, Marathi-English, English-Marathi were common throughout the course of the Lab. The exclusion of CBOs due to the language constraint meant the difficulty of them owning the process and the outcomes of the process increased tremendously.

What did we learn about gender in the Change Lab?

What do we know about gender and gender dynamics in the Change Lab context? Were there inequalities or differences between female and male participation in the Change Lab? How was the issue of gender addressed in the Change Lab design? What would be required for women to be equal participants in the Lab, and is this desired, by women, by men, and by the group? What difference does the gender issue make to the way we conceptualise and theorise about group dynamics and identity? What is the impact of culture on gender roles and gendered behaviour? What is specific about the Indian cultural context, how does this marry with alternative cultural conceptions of gender: rural/urban, north/south, Occident/ Orient? What did women feel about the Change Lab process and their role within it? What role did gender play in the development of innovations relating to malnutrition? Do gendered relationships in the room connect to the outcomes and solutions of the Lab?

For a Change Lab aspiring towards radical shift in child malnutrition, gender presents a formidable and ever present challenge. Both in the Lab amongst participants and in the structure of Indian society, gender presents difficult terrain for staff, facilitators and participants to navigate, particularly without a map or theory to hand. The issue of malnutrition is interwoven with the issue of gender that adds another layer of complexity, both in terms of the goals of the Change Lab and the methodology required to fulfil these goals.

Part of the problem with addressing the gender issue effectively is that many of the gendered dynamics underpinning team work and goal setting are invisible at worst, and hard to diagnose at best. This implies that many gender inequalities might be beyond the direct perception of the facilitators and participants, although they are obviously present in the room through body language, speech patterns and other non-verbal channels (It would be interesting to examine, for example, how the use of Lego Serious Play, a non-verbal tool, either helped bring the gender dynamic into the conversation or did it hinder?). They are particularly hard to detect if patterns of gendered behaviour in the room follow general trends and norms of Indian society. Behaviour can be naturalised and normalised and therefore difficult to question. The following participant commented on the normalised role of women in the communities they visited:

Amartya Sen (2001) makes the case that India is split in two gendered divisions, arguing that there is "*something of a social and cultural divide across India, splitting the country into two nearly contiguous halves, in the extent of anti-female bias in natality and post-natality mortality.*" How did this divide surface in the Change Lab? Would it be more problematic if it didn't surface? Or, if it did? How might gender inequalities be dealt with in a healthy manner? What would a Change Lab that bridged this divide look like?

Non-Indian facilitators experienced strong gender distinctions in group behaviour but in general were ill-equipped to address these dynamics. For example one non-Indian facilitator, noted, with some frustration, that he found it hard to “*connect with the women who all sit together over there in a block,*” and how “*there’s no room on the table*” for him (to sit with them). Discussing the usefulness of raising the gender issue, one young female participant argued that having conversations about gender “*would not change the behaviour of any of the men – so what was the point in having them?*” The experience of both the non-Indian male facilitator and the young Indian female participant indicates a lack of tools, process and ideas to cope with the realities of gender within the room.

The differences between the behaviour of men and women within the group, exemplified in the amount of time taken up by men speaking in plenary versus women, indicates that it is critical to think carefully about the nature of the collective. Instead of treating the group as a homogenous whole, it is necessary to consider the possibility that the whole is counterfeit and maintained through the norms of polite dialogue and conduct. One clear instance was when the group was having a dialogue about gender. A young female staff member expressed anger at the behaviour of the men within the group. Consequently, she reported being ostracised and treated coldly by some older men throughout the duration of the Lab. While these men may have felt that her anger was unjustified and misplaced, the group processes were not able to even recognise and describe this situation, let alone diagnose and arrive at a healthy state of affairs.

It is useful to examine the group as a whole and the conditions for collective intelligence from a gender perspective. In considering how the group is cultivated and behaves, and the extent to which processes are gender sensitive, the design of the Change Lab must take into account gender specific needs. For example, some of the staff members had young children. The working pattern of the Lab made it very difficult for mothers to either participate fully in the Lab or spend quality time with their child. The working style of the staff team could therefore be characterised as hyper-masculine, with long working days and occasional weekends. This, when considering the centrality of the family in Indian society, could be considered contradictory and the source of additional stress.

“In the group, women were largely silent and the issue was mostly debated by the men. At being prompted, women members pointed out to other factors that may influence team member behaviour in the community. Will talking only to the men and not the women silence them further and reinforce the existing patriarchal practices? Since, it is obvious that many of the members are from a different culture [urban, geographical] from the communities they will live in, will it not be better to emphasise upon sensitivity and consideration in relating,

rather than attempt to adhere strict norms of gender?” – Bhavishya Learning Historian

At a more complex level, the development of interpersonal relationships and group consciousness may occur at a different rate and mechanisms amongst the women, amongst the men or amongst the group as a whole. Understanding group behaviour and group intelligence requires examination of the cultural norms and existing cultural practice with respect to group formation in Indian society. For example, is it more common in Indian society for men and women to work in mixed teams or separate teams? The complexity and cultural specificity of gendered norms suggests that the design of the Change Lab may benefit from planning for time into sensing the current *gendered reality* of the Indian system before embarking on the Change Lab. As it was, the issue of gender dynamics arose in random sessions without being consciously designed or cognizant in the overall Change Lab.

From this data, the approach towards gender dynamics could be negotiated between local staff and foreign staff before the onset of the Change Lab. This is critical because cultural norms will vary tremendously between, say the working culture in Boston or rural Massachusetts and the working culture in Mumbai or rural Maharashtra. Specifically, it is useful to ask: “what are the ideal gendered relationships between men and women that the Change Lab could aspire towards? What is the balance between Western ideals of gender (for example, in general, that women have the right to equal air time to men) compared to Indian ideals of gendered relationships and how can we reconcile these ideals with realities?”

The use of the term the “group” or “collective” can clearly disguise the underlying gender dynamics. In response to one male participant continually describing how the Lab was like a family, one female staff member commented privately that she didn’t understand why he was saying that, as the family was the site of greatest violence in society. Exploring such comments was clearly below the line of social acceptability within the Lab. How are such lines of acceptability defined and how can they shift? Many gender issues sit within the group unconscious. *One highly problematic implication of this finding is that gendered wisdom was rarely brought to bear on the issue of child malnutrition.* Given the central role that gender plays within the reality of child malnutrition (as well as issues other Labs are concerned with, such as orphans and vulnerable children, teenage suicide and so on) it is important and urgent to increase the intelligence of the group as a whole to cope more skilfully with gender issues. This could result in innovations that transform existing gender disparities in a potentially unprecedented manner.

Finally, the continuous presence of the gender issue in the Lab suggests that the process could benefit from an in-built gender policy that would guide team

dynamics and would trickle down to the initiatives conceived by the various stake holders in the Change Lab.

“Women and girls look after the water needs of the family. I was curious about what this means in the daily life of the women. One morning, I saw a woman with several containers drawing water from a hand pump. I went to help her just to experience doing the task. After five minutes of continuous pumping, only a quarter of her container had filled from the tap. I spent half an hour there pumping water. It was really hard, and I felt awkward leaving her without completing the task. She continued to pump water for the next two hours. Men of course did not help women in this.” - Participant

What did we learn about the U-Process?

Sensing

The epistemology, or theory of knowledge, of the U-Process suggests that insights about how to shift the current reality will emerge through the ongoing practice of presencing and connection to source. This is a powerful idea in handling complex problems and in many ways the guiding idea in the Change Lab. How participants responded to the U-process was varied, and a lot of work by the Lab Staff was required for participants to reach a level of working trust in the process.

Current theory around the U -process views the Sensing phase as resulting in the group coming to a shared reality of the wider system. This is a nourishing idea, but can serve to obscure difference in both the perception and representation of reality. In post-modern thinking, as well as in post-colonial theories, rather than one shared reality, there is a plurality of overlapping realities. Recognising the existence of multiple realities, creates the space for the diversity of opinions and perspectives towards an issue such as malnutrition, particularly along the axes of gender and power.

This shift from one reality to many is advantageous to creating a group culture of inclusiveness and shared sense of ownership over the solutions and breakthroughs arrived at in the Change Lab. What processes can be employed in order to cultivate a culture where many truths can co-exist with each other, even if some are contradictory? The knock on effect of this is to prevent the propensity for conflict and the damage to the collective intelligence of the team that can occur from exclusion. Further theorising is necessary to ensure in the design that multiple realities are acknowledged and represented in the final product.

“Being in the Change Lab was the first break for me to introspect after 10 years of work. I realised that I had begun to become arrogant, to believe that I knew all the answers. I remembered my father’s warning that the day I begin to believe I knew everything would mark my failure. In the sensing phase, when we were asked to immerse ourselves in the reality producing the problems, I felt confused and believed that I was not being heard. It was painful [and useful] to realise that this was my own unwillingness to not make judgements.” -

Participant

Presencing & The Nature Solo

There is much documentation to testify that despite initial doubts and concerns towards the solo, participants found it a rich and personally transformative experience, that also enhanced the collective feel of the group.

For the majority, the solo provided an opportunity to connect deeply with nature to revisit the issue of malnutrition drawing inspiration from the natural world. However, many participants also commented that they felt the impact more for themselves than on group team building and collective intelligence and called for more group-based work in nature. The implication from this is that the solo was excellent for self-transformation, but that it can only go so far in cultivating group cohesion and consciousness.

A group-orientated activity in nature may also be required to reinforce the groups shared identity through shared experience. For example, it is well known that group outdoor adventures such as orienteering, mountain trekking and camping are successful ways of building a group in a natural environment. Perhaps a learning of note here is that given the success of the solo in nature and of social relations during the time spent in the Himalayas, plus the commonly held desire to spend more time sharing amongst the participants suggests there is a space for a more extended *group* excursion into nature. There was a collective hunger for more nourishing group activities. One such activity was arranged at the end of the Solo where participants spent a day on the banks of the Ganges decompressing and white water rafting. Participants greatly appreciated this day and it was a day of much bonding, relaxation and laughter.

Given the demand for more nature, sharing and team building, a short organised trip into nature, that is participant led, could strengthen participant capacity and also allow the group to function as a co-dependent team, that would have to learn fast the plurality of personalities within the group and their combined collective character. If such an excursion were to be organised and implemented before the onset of the Change Lab much of the groundwork around group thinking and listening would be achieved in advance. Such experiences help to bridge the gap between the individual and the collective and improve the knowledge of the group as a collective rather than the sum of the participants. The participants identified the need for more time towards collective sharing and it would be useful for this request to feed in to the design of future Labs.

“I watched the team as they left me in the tent alone. I didn’t know what to do. This was the turning point. It was very emotional and very painful. I wanted to run back in an hour; and managed to stay for the two and half of the three days required. Being alone helped me value relations in my life and helped me think completely differently. I remembered my family and my husband with great love. It helped me settle down, crystallise thoughts and prioritise relations.” - Participant

Realising & Social Prototyping

“After the solo, hearing other participants talk about their experiences alone in nature, I figured that almost everyone shared something that was out of ordinary. A lot of soul searching and churning was happening. People had lots of ideas about what Bhavishya could do to make a difference in the field of child nutrition. Most participants managed to crystallize their previous experiences and learnings into proposed action plan. There were close to seventy five ideas that emerged.” – Participant

The process of social prototyping presented the Lab Team with an alternative process to a traditional planning based approach. At least in the case of two initiative teams the process worked well, with teams successfully coming up with innovative approaches and directions for how to address child malnutrition.

The amount of time available for prototyping cycles was cut short due to time pressures. This meant that initiative teams did not gain the full benefits of a prototyping approach. Some of the teams also found it hard to abandon traditional planning based approaches. Part of the reason for this was that the explanation for social prototyping was incomplete. More illustrations of social prototyping are required as well as a clearer articulation of the principles that govern social prototyping, and the processes employed to prototype. An epistemology of prototyping is urgently required.

A key observation relating to prototyping was the role of facilitators. In general facilitators played the role of mediating conflict and coaching teams in the prototyping process. The degree of conflict rose during the Realising phases, as decisions around resources and staffing put pressure on participants and staff. This situation is well understood in socio-psychological theories of group-conflict such as Realistic-Conflict Theory. Suggestions for how to decrease conflict include making more resources available to the group as a whole, or failing that, *“conflict between groups...can be reduced if groups...join forces to obtain the resource coveted by all.”* (Halabi, R)

In general the prototyping phase was also confused by two external conditionalities. One was a lack of clarity as to the funds available for the initiative teams and what the route to accessing them was. Participants therefore were confused about how real their initiatives were. Questions were continually asked about this, without clear answers being provided. The second confusion arose from the fact that there was a general attitude that no initiative team should be allowed to fail. This meant that the key principle of “fail early, fail often” was negated. The quality of an idea was no longer the determinant of an initiative succeeding or not, other, more political goals took precedence over the idea and its viability.

Finally, final initiative presentations to Champions indicated a lack of understanding of the prototyping process. For example, the call from Champions for a centralised and unified strategy around the initiatives signalled that Champions were thinking about initiatives, with some modifications, as projects to be implemented, as opposed to experiments that might succeed, fail or generate new prototypes.

“Looking back on the process, the beauty was that it was not important to know in advance what the outcome would be. All that was required was to be present in the situation and listen. Hence as a group we could tap into our collective resources. Personally it was important for me to be patient, to not to stand on my ego, but be compassionate and empathetic. For this, I had to do my sensing of the team. I came in touch with my inadequacies and my struggles to be in charge of the process. In the end, we as a group could navigate the whole process and emerge stronger in the end.” - Participant

Summary of Recommendations

Throughout this paper, we have created various suggestions that are intended to extend the torque of the Change Lab and hence the capacity of the Lab to stretch in order to handle challenges as and when they occur. These suggestions are reiterated here as recommendations for future practice. However, we suggest that it is worth returning to the text to understand the contextual and conceptual underpinnings for each suggestion (page numbers are given in brackets where applicable).

1. Space

In terms of the physical spaces of the Change Lab more breakout spaces and different types of spaces (for reflection, for small group meetings, for relaxation) are necessary to create an environment more suited to the nature of the work. In the Bhavishya Alliance the break-out space available was a small library, which was frequently used as a small meeting room, as a meditation room and as a place to de-stress. All staff meetings took place in the Library as it was the only private space available. Later on the process, co-design meetings with participants also took place in this room (see P13).

2. Equally, a recommendation is to include gardens or other green spaces as part of the daily Change Lab environment. Rather than compartmentalise nature into a single module, the Solo, natural and aesthetic spaces are an ongoing requirement throughout the trajectory of the Change Lab (see P14).

3. Collective Intelligence – Knowledge

During the Lab it would be beneficial to spend time comprehensively mapping the information (the propositional knowledge) that is “in the room.” The requirement for information for collective intelligence can partially be met if participants all know what each other knows in the sense of knowing how to use a telephone directory or an internet search. If participants are able to create and use a “knowledge map” – allowing them to know about the knowledge and experience of other participants, they would know enough to pull in the right individuals during the course of making a decision or designing an innovation (see p18).

4. Nature of the Delivery Team

Further work needs to be done on clarifying the parameters and conditions of a successful Change Lab launch taking local context into account. A critical learning about the healthy conditions for delivering a Change Lab: staff must be involved in designing the process, as well as the overall decision-making process,

in order to have a genuine sense of ownership and sustained commitment to the process (see P21).

5. Systemic change begins in the room amongst participants. Many of the critical reasons why child malnutrition persists in society, for example gender inequalities, donor conditionalities, unhealthy power dynamics, a lack of collaboration between diverse agencies, a lack of space capacities for innovation, all exist in the room. They are embodied and enacted every day in relationships between participants. (P23)

6. One of the participants commented that the dynamics between the Lab staff and participants would have been markedly different had they lived together in the same space over the course of the Change Lab. (P23)

7. Health

Given the periodically high emotional charge of the situation, formalising a review and assessment process would ensure that the health (mental, emotional, physical, energetic) of facilitators was maintained throughout. It would also make sense to have various support mechanisms, such as shadow facilitators, to assess situations and provided additional coaching for facilitators and staff team facing difficult issues and conflicts. It is important to explore other mechanisms to support and nourish the well being of all participants and staff. (see P23)

8. It is equally as important to monitor the health and performance of participant-facilitators in the context of the Change Lab that deals with highly complex and potentially traumatic issues (Page 23).

9. Power

Shared ownership of the process became a reality half-way through the process, when participants were invited to co-design and co-facilitate the process on an on-going basis. This practice, of staff and participant participation needs to be extended to the periods before and after a Change Lab (see P29).

10. Only when power dynamics are explicitly discussed the group can come to terms with its own collective identity and relational agency. When power differentials and dynamics are masked, there is a risk that both individuals and the collective becomes politically disenfranchised and essentially ineffective. The Change Lab as a vehicle for systemic change will only succeed when the power dynamics present within the larger system are consciously addressed by the Lab

Team and Staff. This principle needs to be present in all stages of the Change Lab (See P29).

11. Gender

It is useful to examine the group as a whole and the conditions for collective intelligence from a gender perspective. In considering how the group is cultivated and behaves, and the extent to which processes are gender sensitive, the design of the Change Lab must take into account gender specific needs (see P35).

12. It would be useful to devote sessions to permit gender to be contemplated by the entire group, and to engage in activities to allow for Lab Team Members to understand different gendered perspectives. Theatre for Development and Deep Democracy processes are relevant facilitation tools that were underutilised in the Change Lab and are suggested for future Change Labs. It may also be useful to form a gender committee with the explicit role of observing gender dynamics and seeking interventions to correct these dynamics. For example, instead of male facilitators having responsibility for observing and correcting male dominance, a group of women could have this role. (See P36)

13. Furthermore given that gender is a major aspect of the malnutrition issue, how gender dynamics are embodied in the room was under explored and other processes and tools could be used to build on uncovering the hidden dynamics of gender. To reiterate, it is important and urgent to increase the intelligence of the group as a whole to cope more skilfully with gender issues. This could result in innovations that transform existing gender disparities in a potentially unprecedented manner (See P36).

14. U-process Methodology

The Solo was a success in terms of developing inner transformation, developing ideas and the reaction of the group to natural environment was so dramatically positive, that it is clear that nature needs to be a continuous thread in the U-process. In current usage the full power of nature to transform group dynamics and increase group intelligence and cohesion is underutilised in the Change Lab. (P38)

15. In the realising phase more illustrations of social prototyping are required as well as a clearer articulation of the principles that govern social prototyping, and the processes employed to prototype. An epistemology of prototyping is urgently required. More work is needed to make the principle that it is possible to experiment with multiple projects with a willingness to fail trying a practical reality in thinking and in funding. (P40)

Conclusion: What is Healthy Innovation?

This paper began with the metaphor as the Bhavishya Alliance as a newborn child and as the paper developed, we drew out the learning that can be gained from each step of the process, from birth to standing on its own feet. The learning in this paper has focused on the following areas that need improvement or were a nexus of learning: Change Lab design, Change Lab schedule, collective intelligence, delivery team management, the role of context and Indian culture, gender inequality, and the U-process. If we are to ensure that innovation is both healthy and scalable then we need to incorporate the lessons of the Maharashtra Change Lab into future efforts.

As the first in a new breed of approaches we have cause to celebrate, especially because the Alliance achieved ground-breaking results in the intended goals: multi-stake holder relationships, strengthened capacity and systemic solutions. In addition, there have also been the success stories of multi-stakeholder cooperation, personal and group transformations, long-term dedication to the tasks in hand and cutting edge systemic social innovations. Looking forward towards future Labs, three main themes arise from the Change Lab: innovation, power and health. While the Change Lab focused on the innovation process, it tended towards a neglect of processes in the areas of power and health.

Innovation

The U-process worked and generated a number of innovative ideas. The Change Lab brought together a number of individuals, representing a wide diversity of institutional backgrounds, many of whom had decades of experience within the field of child malnutrition. These individuals went through the process and came up with innovative and systemic approaches to tackle child-malnutrition. The outcome of this process was the Lab Team working together as a team and generating innovative ideas.

Power

A number of power differentials within the Change Lab went unaddressed. Some of these were simply hierarchical and status differences carried into the Lab from the outside. These, for example, include gender issues. Others were created during the course of the Lab. A critical example is around the Champions and Participants, specifically, who holds decision-making power and so on. At various junctions in the process, the logic of power consumed the logic of innovation. This happened almost all the times participants tried to explain their ideas to Champions. In other words, Participants attempted to explain logically their innovations, whilst Champions, as their role demanded, examined the same ideas primarily through the logic of power (what is politically and financially feasible?)

and only after that through the lens of innovation. The lens of power was missing for the Participants and the lens of the Participant experiences was missing for the Champions. The surfacing and transformation of power dynamics need to form an integral part of the Change Lab design.

Health

The majority of the Change Lab Team (including staff) perceived it to be a roller coaster, a long ride of highs and lows. All the participants survived the ride and the majority enjoyed it. Many are involved in sustainable outcomes: capacities, networks and relationships that will continue the hard work of the Lab Team into the future. The major learning here is that in spite of the successes of the Change Lab it put major strains on the individuals involved.

There were too many unresolved conflicts, not enough gender equality, a tight time schedule and ill-defined leadership and decision-making structures. The purpose of this paper has been to identify these points of learning so that future Change Labs can learn from early mistakes and insure that containers are happy, healthy spaces to facilitate satisfied participants to engage in ground breaking work in a healthy environment; rather than an environment that is shaped by unhealthy stressors. Fortunately for everyone involved, because the techniques were unprecedented there was little room to prevent these mistakes without the benefit of hindsight. With the learning in place, the conditions are ripe for great systemic and personal transformation of issues, such as malnutrition and others, to be addressed and solved.

Finally, it is important to remember that few parents are born the ideal parents, most have to listen and learn as they grow to raise a healthy child. The major points of learning from the Change Lab are new opportunities to extend and expand current knowledge of multi-stakeholder partnerships. Our hope is to see them embodied in future Change Labs.

“The past two and a half months have been like a roller coaster ride. There were times I felt even the facilitators and designers of the lab were not ready for the shape of things to come. The Bhavishya Change Lab was the single most unique and enriching personal experience in the last ten years. I had never worked so closely with such a diverse group of people. With them, I could speak my mind out without bothering to be politically correct. I got challenged on the role of corporate sector in the society and my life philosophy. I challenged others on their world view. Many a times, we did not agree, but then there was no need to. What was important was that we came to know each others views.” – Participant

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