PEX Catalyst Infrastructure – **Group Summary**

Shaping a shared lens as <mark>catalyst for transformation</mark> for philanthropy infrastructure organisations

Emergent ambition: aiming for transformation (a verb)

Traditionally, as infrastructure organisations, we have been focusing on building the identity and resources of the philanthropic sector and strengthening our constituencies and membership – of foundations, donors, NGOs.

Today, both ourselves and our constituents are facing a strong contextual demand to **broaden perspectives, incentivize change at a wider scale, and expand the range of stakeholders who engage in imagining, enabling and amplifying change.**

'Catalyst' as a lens for thinking & doing

We are using the catalyst lens as a metaphor for the **roles, opportunities, practices and skills** of the philanthropy infrastructure organisations to affect large scale change.

We are able to do this indirectly. We can influence the space in-between organisations, the cultural norms within our own or other sectors, and the deep seated issues in communities disconnected from their future, who do not yet have sufficient capacities, interest or knowledge to activate their resources and be proactive about change.

We see the catalyst lens as being connected to the **leadership opportunities** we have in our sector, and beyond, **to highlight issues, connect dots and foster new energy, interest and capacity** so we can:

1. collectively define the transformation needed and
2. create an enabling environment for new ways of thinking and doing to emerge, develop and reach a level where they can self-replicate and expand, without our continued support.

Key words

To connect the approaches under a catalyst lens include:

stimulate, incentivize, generate, amplify, multiply (effects and paths), align (in decentralised ways), see and help others see and act from assets, hope and potential.

Emerging principles for catalytic work
(Ongoing work, last updated on April 26th)

1. **Broaden perspective** – shift focus from individuals and organisations to intersections and inter-organizational/inter-sectoral dynamics.

2. **Break the silos** – connect the dots and the learning that comes from multiple spaces to help unleash new energy and inspiration for change, and accelerate learning or distillation.

3. **Embrace complexity and non-linearity** – engage with the deeper roots of problems, with multi-layered phenomena, and foster a focus towards long term, systemic solutions.

4. **Help build proactive, agile, responsible and responsive actors, within a culture of collaboration** – foster decentralised decisions and agility at all points in the system, including by supporting organisations and ecosystems, not just projects; reinforce cultures where risk-taking and unlearning is allowed and cultivated.

5. **Look for emergence and proactively foster the new and a multiplicity of paths** – new themes, new actors, new approaches, new ways of interacting; cultivate variety in terms of actors and solutions.

6. **Be aware of our own contribution**, both as an enabler and as an obstacle of transformation, and engage with individual, organisational and collective unlearning processes.

Conversation tracks

- **Principles:** continue to define and refine principles of catalyst transformation design and practice

- **Practices:** explore the experience, within the Catalyst Infrastructure group / PEX community, with different practices connected to this lens

- **Experiments:** test new ways of unlearning within the Catalyst Infrastructure group/PEX community

- **Collective action:** explore new ways of collaboration within the PEX community

- **Ecosystem agenda:** is this a helpful lens for the direction of the PEX community as a whole? And can we influence our constituencies and other actors to strengthen our collective impact?

Open questions

- Would the catalyst lens be helpful as a collective stance of the PEX community as a whole?
- Would it be helpful to explore this lens for the PEXforum in Rome?

Next steps

- Spreading the word at the PEX Forum, inviting more practitioners to join the group
- Continued conversations on the tracks – Principles, Practices and Experiments & Collective Action
- Explore alignments of the Catalyst principles with other work in the field, including 4C, Philanthropy for Transformation, and others brought in by the PEX community
- Bring in your practice / case study (see below)

Bring in your practice / case study

- **ACF's Funders Collaborative Hub –** Three ways in which the hub is playing a 'catalytic infrastructure' role (article by Jim Cooke)
    1. Making the ecosystem more visible
    2. Multiplying the possibilities for connection
    3. Identifying and championing excellent practice

Notes

Tracking & consolidating previous conversations in the PEX C.I. group >

Where we are at this point in the conversation – PEX Catalyst Infrastructure

Resources

Please feel free to add interesting thinking, tools & cases from philanthropy and beyond.

- **Shaping innovation futures – Discovery Report** by Griffith Center for Social Innovation

    "We deliberately use the term 'infrastructures.' Just as we acknowledge the significance of providing infrastructures for essential services like energy, mobility, water, and waste, the same lens (and investment) should be applied to mobilising human agency, creativity, and cooperation."

- **Transformation Catalysts: Weaving Transformational Change for a Flourishing World for All** by Sandra Waddock and Steve Waddell

    "Transformation catalysts act catalytically by aggregating, cohering and amplifying actions of transformation initiatives and change-makers working towards fundamental socioecological systems. As catalysts, TCs connect other actors synergistically together towards system innovation, alignment of efforts, and

transformation. TCs make three distinctive contributions to address the purposeful transformation challenges of time span, speed, scale, and complexity.

They (1) research and analyze to 'see', map and otherwise understand their transformations systems' participants and dynamics; (2) they connect the transformations systems' actors so they, too, see and identify highly strategic actions from a collective perspective, and (3) support implementation of the actions. Although their development faces significant challenges, the promise of TCs as a new organizational form is the ability to much more rapidly and effectively address socio-ecological crises."

- **Explode on impact** – Toby Lowe

  How might we approach demonstrating (collective) impact in complex environments & partnerships?

  "It is impossible for organisations to "demonstrate their impact" if they work in complex environments. Asking them to do so requires them to create a fantasy version of the story of their work. This corruption of data makes doing genuine change work harder because it is difficult to learn and adapt from corrupted data."

- **A few rules for predicting the future** – Octavia Butler (2000)

  "So do you really believe that in the future we're going to have the kind of trouble you write about in your books?" a student asked me as I was signing books after a talk. The young man was referring to the troubles I'd described in Parable of the Sower and Parable of the Talents, novels that take place in a near future of increasing drug addiction and illiteracy, marked by the popularity of prisons and the unpopularity of public schools, the vast and growing gap between the rich and everyone else, and the whole nasty family of problems brought on by global warming.

  "I didn't make up the problems," I pointed out. "All I did was look around at the problems we're neglecting now and give them about 30 years to grow into full-fledged disasters."

  "Okay," the young man challenged. "So what's the answer?"

  "There isn't one," I told him.

  "No answer? You mean we're just doomed?" He smiled as though he thought this might be a joke.

  "No," I said. "I mean there's no single answer that will solve all of our future problems. There's no magic bullet. Instead there are thousands of answers – at least. You can be one of them if you choose to be."

- **Investing in the boring revolution** and **Beyond the rules** – from the generous resources document of **Next Frontiers in Funding 2023**

  "From creative accountants, renegade lawyers, radical HR support and more – what are the operational services we need to reimagine and invest in? Shifting away from risk-averse and constraining operations, we will examine the importance of alternative infrastructure that fosters growth and expansion. Without this essential foundation, some of the most promising ideas of today may face obstacles to their development. Initiating this change begins with funders and

investors themselves. This session will shed light on the necessary steps to invest in operational services that support innovation and provide a solid framework for progressive change. Let's embark on the journey to revolutionise the essential behind-the-scenes systems and drive forward meaningful transformation."

- **Practices to pay attention to** – from the resources document of **[Next Frontiers in Funding 2023 – Unlocking Resources at a time of Crisis and Possibility](#)**

    "Too often it's easy to fall into the mental models of grant-making, but often grant-making is reductionist in nature, may narrow our perspective on what is achievable, and reinforce work that fits within the parameters of the existing system. This session will feature six short presentations by individuals who are pioneering alternative practices relevant to resource redistribution, resource allocation and decision-making; ranging from planetary governance and how to account for planetary intelligence, through to prioritising care and repair and supporting the old systems to die."

- ***Drop a link to an interesting practice or perspective***

Who are we? Interested to join?

We are a group of practitioners from the PEX community interested to keep the conversation going on the fundamental role of infrastructure, as the core of what unites us in PEX, looking for ways to use our perspective in supporting each other in finding new ways to amplify change.

The group is coordinated by a committed team from Philea, Inspire and IAC Berlin: Alina Shenfeldt, Hanna Stähle, Alexandra Stef, Alina Porumb, and Vinzenz Himmighofen.

Special thanks to: Tim Draimin, Community Foundations of Canada for contributing to the blog, conversations and online resources, Jim Cooke, UK Association for Charitable Foundations for the catalyst case study, Carola Carazzone and Francesca Mereta from Assifero for contributing to the principles conversations.

The documentation of the process is ensured by Alexandra Stef and Alina Porumb, Inspire and Alina Shenfeldt, Philea.

PEX Catalyst Infrastructure Group

(if you don't see your name but you were part of the conversations or would like to be, please feel free to add your name)

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Would you like to be kept in the loop on this conversation?

Leave your name, affiliation and email below:

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