CO-CREATING OUR STORY

A HYBRID PARTICIPATORY CASE APPROACH TO EVALUATING + ACCELERATING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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Introduction

In response to a wave of public critique and pressure, social sector organizations appear to be embarking on organizational culture change efforts at an unprecedented level. Much of this public critique and pressure is a reaction to the ways in which these organizations lack diversity and perpetuate inequitable practice, whether consciously or subconsciously. A spate of articles has reported that demand for diversity, equity, and inclusion consultants to support organizational change initiatives is at an all-time high.

The Center for Evaluation Innovation's most recent research into trends in philanthropy found that 56 percent of foundations with endowments of more than $10 million were undergoing or had undergone within the last three years an intentional process to shift organizational values toward diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Sixty-one percent reported going through an organizational restructuring.[1] These initiatives can either move an organization toward becoming one that is more effective and draws on everyone's lived experience and wisdom or they can result in in greater distrust and division. When brought into these efforts, evaluators can either help the change effort be more equitable, co-generated, and sustainable or fail to use a participatory approach and make things worse.

This brief describes an evaluative approach we took to an organizational change process at a foundation that could be useful to evaluators. We acknowledge that we carried out this work using an inclusion framework but not a DEI one; however, we share it with the hopes that evaluators may be able to build on it in their work.

1 Center for Evaluation Innovation (2020). *Benchmarking foundation evaluation practices 2020*. Available at https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/cei_benchmarking2020/

Evaluating Organizational Change

A significant body of organizational change literature[2] explores how workplace culture and culture change processes themselves are shaped by "sticky" narratives that transmit organizational memory through time, making it difficult for the dynamics within an organization to shift into a new pattern. These narratives include stories about staff and leaders' motives and actions, about why events unfolded in a particular way, and about the value and quality of the change effort. Because organizations are complex systems shaped both by internal and external power dynamics, including those surrounding race, gender, class and other dimensions of inequity, there are inevitably multiple competing narratives through which leaders and staff make meaning of the change effort.

These organizational narratives are reinforced over time by formal and informal recounting of what happened. These narratives themselves become tools for driving and resisting organizational change, as they can be used "to deflect other perspectives, to challenge counter stories, to mark as dubious the motives of others, to establish the credibility, legitimacy, and dominance of certain viewpoints, and to present a compelling justification for aims and actions. In other words, narratives shape meanings and can act as counters in the game of organizational power and politics around programmes of organizational change."[3]

Evaluations of change efforts are one such formal recounting, with the evaluator's choices about which stories, experiences, and interpretations of change are treated as valid and which are excluded reinforcing a particular narrative of change. Given this, evaluators of organizational change risk deepening the disempowerment of particular staff (most often those whose views and aspirations are already least likely to be heard and treated as credible) and increasing cynicism about the change process among those who do not see their experiences represented in the evaluation's conclusions. Rather than simply describing and drawing conclusions about a change process, an evaluation can easily set it back.

Many of these concerns around inclusion were on our minds in 2016 when we — an evaluation consultant, a case writer, and two foundation partners — set out to evaluate an organizational change process at a mid-sized foundation following a tumultuous time in its history. We aimed to design an inclusive evaluative approach

2 See, for example, Vaara, E., Sonenshein, S., & Boje, D. (2016). Narratives as sources of stability and change in organizations: Approaches and directions for future research. *Academy of Management Annals, 10,* 495-560; Brown, A.D. (2006). A narrative approach to collective identities. *Journal of Management Studies,* 43, 731– 51; Heracleous, L. (2006). A tale of three discourses: The dominant, the strategic and the marginalized. Journal of Management Studies, 43, 1059–1087; Buchanan, D. (2003). Getting the story straight: Illusions and delusions in the organizational change process. *Tamara: The Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science, 2, 7–21;* Tsoukas, H., & Hatch, M. (2001). Complex thinking, complex practice: The case for a narrative approach to organizational complexity. *Human Relations,* 54, 979-1013.

3 Buchanan, D., & Dawson, P. (2007), Discourse and audience: Organizational change as multi-story process. *Journal of Management Studies, 44:* 669-686.

that would result in a cohesive yet pluralist story in which staff of all positions and lived experience would see their voices reflected and treated as valid. More important than the product of the evaluation, we wanted an evaluation process that surfaced competing narratives in a way that enabled staff and leadership to understand and grapple with each other's experience and interpretations of the change process without putting the staff with less power at risk. And finally, recognizing that the evaluation would inevitably affect how the foundation's change process continued to unfold, we wanted an approach that would enable staff to draw insights and generate ideas about how *together* they might shape a change process and culture shift that represented the aspirations of a broader array of organizational actors going forward.

This brief describes how this approach unfolded at the Fetzer Institute, a 60-person foundation in Kalamazoo, Michigan. After briefly describing the approach, we explore its potential benefits, pitfalls, and tradeoffs through the Fetzer Institute's story. We have included a more detailed explanation of the methods we used throughout this process in the Appendix.

Crucially, at the time of this story, none of us had deep experience designing and supporting DEI processes or with the analysis of structural racism or other social and structural dynamics that affect equity and inclusion. While our approach was intended to protect the safety of staff and prevent the erasure of particular perspectives, we did not sufficiently account for how experiences of the change process or of the evaluation itself are affected by these dynamics. Although we have included some reflections below on equity implications of the design, the approach described below should be read with this in mind and improved upon by evaluation practitioners and case writers with more expertise in inclusive and equitable facilitation and analysis. Since this story took place, the foundation has embarked on a more explicit DEI-focused change process. Our reflections on the relationship between the events recounted here and the organization's culture shifts since then are also included in the story.

An Overview of the Approach: A Hybrid Participatory Case Study

Organizational change processes can be difficult to evaluate for a variety of methodological, political, and ethical reasons. The value and effects of organizational change can be experienced and interpreted quite differently by staff occupying different levels, functions, or tenures at the organization, as well as by staff of different races, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, immigration status, religious affiliation, and disability, defying synthesis into a clear set of conclusions or single narrative. If evaluation conclusions do not reflect the experience of staff — or are perceived to "toe the party line" of organizational leadership — the evaluation itself can trigger or increase internal tensions about the change process and even create a sense of

institutional betrayal among members of the organization. Evaluators have an ethical responsibility to tread carefully during data collection and analysis to protect staff from potential negative consequences of sharing unpopular or contradictory perspectives (e.g., retaliation, ostracization, and even termination).

Some of these challenges can be addressed through the participatory design and methods, where those affected by a change process participate at all phases of the evaluation, including determining the scope of the study, the questions that should be asked, the design of the instruments, conclusions that should be drawn, etc. Because participatory approaches are grounded in a commitment to removing barriers to participants' aspirations to improve their own social situation, this method could ultimately support an organizational change process that is co-owned and co-generated by the broader staff, arguably resulting in a more holistic and sustainable change. However, if deployed in an organizational setting where staff face real or perceived negative consequences for criticizing the change process, or where there are significant tensions between groups of staff in different units, levels, or identity groups, a fully participatory approach presents real risks of doing harm to individuals and the organizational change effort itself.

In response to these concerns, we experimented with a hybrid participatory case study approach intended for organizations, teams, or groups where conditions are not quite right for a full participatory approach (because organizational incentives, structural power dynamics, and interpersonal conflict are likely to prevent full, candid, and safe participation by everyone and/or staff and leadership have very different perceptions about appropriate and fruitful lines of inquiry).

The goals of this approach are to:

- Generate greater engagement and trust from the entire organization for the evaluative process and the conclusions drawn about the effectiveness and value of an organizational culture change intervention.
- Mitigate risks and trauma to employees resulting from social (i.e., racial, gendered, class- and sexuality-based and, in this case, religious affiliation) and organizational power dynamics by providing both confidential channels and group opportunities for recounting staff experience, sharing perspectives, and interpreting information.
- Build empathy and understanding among different people and groups in the organizations for each other's points of view, especially after a tumultuous period, thus increasing the likelihood that the organization's change process *following* the evaluation will be more inclusive, equitable, and positive for all staff (and thus more sustainable).
- Produce more nuanced findings that account for a broader array of experiences and reveal structural dynamics within the organization that may be invisible to leaders. (With equity expertise and a fully culturally

responsive evaluation approach, findings would also have increased in multicultural validity.[4])

- Ensure that findings and insights are useful not only to external audiences but also to the organization itself, such that at the end of the process staff are better equipped to identify and address how organizational change processes are experienced differently by staff occupying different positions of power, navigate difficult change work, and generate actionable ideas for improvements.

We call the approach "hybrid" because it blends four evaluation and learning approaches:

1. Participatory case study method
2. Evaluator-led document review, interviews, and thematic analysis
3. Case teaching method
4. Emergent learning[5]

Participatory case studies Like all participatory research and evaluation methods, participatory case studies aspire to empower stakeholders to inquire into and make sense of their own situations and contexts, with an aim toward taking action and affecting change. Participatory case studies engage the"subjects" of a case in the research process, including the identification of the issue or problem in need of inquiry and change, the conceptualization of the approach, data collection, analysis, joint meaning-making, and often even the writing.

Case teaching method A teaching case is an approach to case writing developed originally for advanced teaching in business degree programs. Teaching cases involve creating a rich narrative that highlights key decision points and the dynamics around them without any analysis or synthesis provided by the writer. Teaching cases allow readers to explore why the characters in a case might have made the decisions they did, including what tensions, demands, mindsets, and other factors may have driven those decisions, as well as what the tradeoffs, consequences of, or alternatives to particular decisions might have been. When discussed in a learning setting, teaching cases sensitize learners to the complex contexts within which decision makers and others act, and can often build empathy for those actors and greater situational awareness.

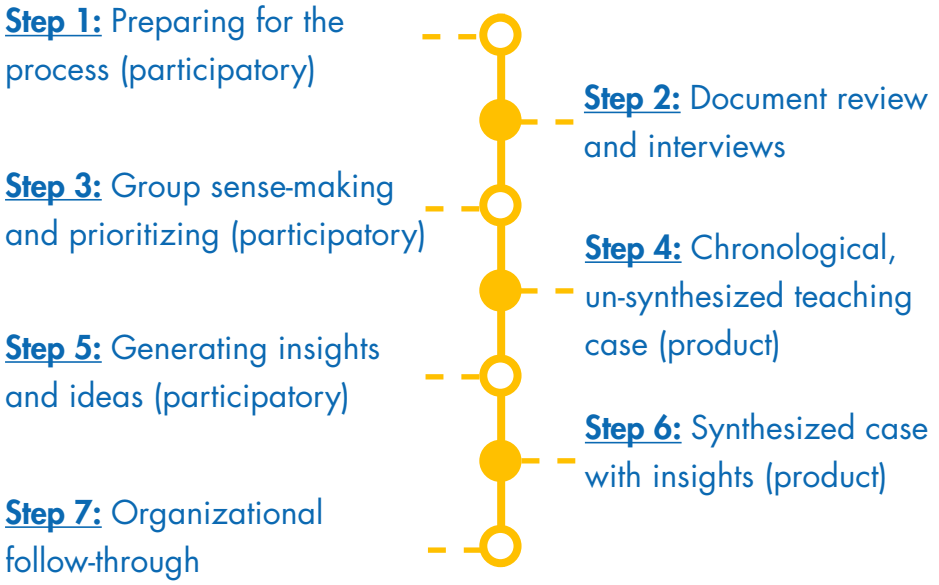
Emergent Learning Developed by organizational development and learning experts Fourth Quadrant Partners, Emergent Learning is a structured approach to team reflection and learning. [See www.4QPartners.com.] It includes principles and facilitation techniques that help groups make systematic observations about what results have occurred, draw insights about what drove those results, generate new forward-looking hypotheses about how to be successful in the future, and identify concrete opportunities to put those hypotheses into action.

4 See Kirkhart, K.E. (2013, April). Repositioning validity. Paper presented at the Plenary on Perspectives on Repositioning Culture in Evaluation and Assessment at CREA Inaugural Conference, Chicago.

5 Darling, M., Guber, H., Smith, J., & Stiles, J. (2016). Emergent learning: A framework for whole-system strategy, learning, and adaptation. *The Foundation Review, 8*(1): 59-72.

Our study design included seven sequential components over the course of a nine-month period (Figure 1). The process was anchored by three facilitated organization-wide sessions — at the beginning, middle, and end of the process — to accomplish the participatory and learning-oriented aspects of the work at critical junctures in the process. We include a summary of the seven steps here. Detailed methodologies for each step, including exercises and use of Emergent Learning for this approach, are included in an Appendix.

Figure 1: Steps in the hybrid participatory case method



Step 1: Preparing for the process (first large group convening)

To begin the project, we hold an initial gathering of the entire organization. In order to establish agreement about how the evaluators and staff will work together and to solicit input about the approach of the case study and what lines of inquiry to pursue, we guide the organization through a series of exercises that provide nuanced and honest feedback in both anonymous and identified ways. Our aim is to make it clear to participants that we are using their feedback to guide our approach to the case and the lines of inquiry to pursue.

Step 2: Document review and interviews

In Step 2, the approach switches to a more conventional evaluator-driven approach, with an historical document review and interviews to identify key decision points and events. Here we draw heavily from the feedback from the first session to construct interview questions and choose which themes to explore.

Step 3: Group sensemaking and prioritization (second convening)

Using the compilation of themes developed through interviews in Step 2, we hold a second large-group meeting. In this phase, we guide the group through a set of exercises to test the representativeness and significance of the initial themes we gleaned from the interviews, see if we have missed anything, and determine which themes the group collectively believes are most important to include in the case study. We use techniques to mitigate the tendency for a single narrative to dominate the conversation, urging small groups to think about an issue from a range of different perspectives and positions within the organizational system.

Step 4: Chronological unsynthesized teaching case

Following the second gathering, we produce a teaching case telling a chronological story of the change effort. The narrative highlights key events and decision points that were relevant to the issues raised by staff in the earlier data collection efforts but without offering any additional analysis or synthesis, in the style of a classic teaching case. Importantly, because the group has already seen the clustered themes during Step 3, none of the critical tensions or controversies appearing in the teaching case should be a surprise. This style of teaching case brings out rather than minimizes different reactions to, experiences of, and interpretations of events. It serves as the mechanism for making visible the competing narratives to staff so that they can grapple with them in the next step.

Step 5: Generating insights and ideas (third gathering)

After distributing the teaching case to the staff, we hold a final all-staff convening to:

1. Jointly generate deeper, more nuanced insights that can inform their own plans for moving forward and can be included in a public-facing case for the larger field
2. Develop actionable ideas to test in practice.

First, to ground the staff in the data and story they produced together, we teach the teaching case with the large group to help staff reflect on where key tensions and successes have occurred, under what conditions, how they are perceived, what effects they have produced, and how those effects might be different for different staff. The evaluators then frame this tension and others surfaced by the conversation as a series of future-facing, action-oriented questions designed to crystallize insights and elicit solutions. From here, using Emergent Learning techniques, teams co-create their own solutions to alleviate the tensions they are experiencing rather than simply surfacing them through the case and then leaving them to fester. In addition to generating ideas of action, the process generates richer and, importantly, collective wisdom to convey to the external world.

Step 6: Synthesized case with insights

After this process is complete, we convert the teams' insights and hypotheses about its core tensions into lessons learned or recommendations for a synthesized version of the case aimed at a public audience. These lessons should be recognizable to the whole group as the ones they generated together. In this experiment we did not seek another round of review and approval by the staff as a whole of the lessons but rather by the original commissioners of the evaluation (co-authors of this brief). In future iterations, this step would involve a final participatory review of the conclusions drawn in the public-facing case.

Step 7: Organizational follow-through

Ultimately, organizational leaders must take it upon themselves to create mechanisms to address the identified organizational dynamics and tensions and support action on the ideas generated by participants in Step 5. This step represents the ongoing work of organizational change with a commitment to follow through with the collective vision for the change process. Its importance cannot be overstated because without discernible action the effectiveness of the entire process will be undermined. Critically, it must be visible to all staff and follow immediately on the heels of staff generating ideas and insights so that they do not lose trust in leadership's commitment. Additionally, we suggest building in a sequence of participatory reflections on how the work continues to unfold so that co-ownership is maintained and the new "muscle" of co-creation is exercised.

The Story of the Fetzer Institute's Community of Freedom

The Fetzer Institute, based in Kalamazoo, Michigan, has a mission to help build the spiritual foundation for a loving world. The Institute believes that many social ills are driven by an underlying spiritual and moral crisis that creates isolation and fear and prevents people from working across divides toward a larger shared purpose. It operates programs and provides funds to other organizations whose work aims to build a spiritual connection between people. The Institute also believes that contemplative practice and a personal and community spiritual grounding in love is critical for fostering individual and community transformation.

Following a tumultuous organizational period during which several staff were terminated and a new organizational direction was set, a concerned board of trustees sought to stabilize the organization and return it to its core mission by appointing a new president and CEO from the board's ranks. Amidst considerable organizational tensions and staff anxiety about job security, the new president initiated an organization-wide effort to engage staff in what its founder, John Fetzer, called a community of freedom.

The intent of the community of freedom (COF) is difficult to grasp, particularly in a few short sentences. Given Fetzer's mission, the intent was to create a community where people can come to work and be their full, authentic selves. Fetzer leadership also hoped to create a space for all staff to deepen their relationships with one another and find common ground. What's more, providing the space to develop such a community could help Fetzer become a more effective organization if it could create a culture of love and authenticity and develop the skills to lean into challenging situations.

Under the new president, working closely with senior leadership, the effort to build a community of freedom took the form of a weekly three-hour meeting for the entire 60-person staff to explore their individual spiritual journeys and nurture their inner well-being together. These early days of the COF required rebuilding trust among staff and senior leaders including the board, which had been damaged during the upheaval.

After three years of implementing the community of freedom, the Institute's president sought a way to share the story of COF with partners, including both successes and failures. Fetzer's director of learning and program director (authors of this brief Cullen Puente and Thomas, respectively) had participated in an Evaluation Roundtable[6] with the evaluator (Beer) and case study writer (Parker) and thought a similar case study process would be very effective in documenting, analyzing, and disseminating the community of freedom story. However, previous experiences with external consultants had resulted in case studies that staff felt had glossed over the ups and downs of their experience, presenting an overly polished version of the organization in which they could no longer see themselves. This caused staff to lose trust in the legitimacy of a leadership-directed case process. Future cases would need to better reflect a wide array of perspectives about the community, including a deeper degree of candor about challenges and tensions that remain unresolved.

This level of candor would be difficult to achieve in a case study amidst what staff called a culture of politeness, characterized by conflict avoidance and an underlying fear that criticizing leadership could result in termination. However, because one of the goals of the community of freedom was to build the capacity of the staff to have difficult conversations and address conflict directly, the leadership team wanted the case process to reinforce the idea that candor and criticism based in love were, in fact, safe and healthy. As a result, the case study process would need to simultaneously allow staff to confidentially share their views and create conditions for the community to talk openly with each other about their experiences to date.

Finally, leadership wanted the evaluation process itself to serve as an organizational development and learning opportunity. Only three years into the community of freedom, the leadership team felt as though they had made great progress as a community but also needed to pause and reflect on how they had changed; what they had learned about what it takes to make these changes; where they continue to get

6 The Evaluation Roundtable is a 30-year-old network of evaluation leaders in philanthropy hosted by the Center for Evaluation Innovation. Regular convenings include the use of teaching cases to help participants explore the political, institutional, and social dynamics surrounding the design and use of evaluation in the sector. See www.evaluationroundtable.org for more information and a collection of teaching cases.

stuck; and what action ideas staff had about how to continue moving forward.

Thomas and Cullen Puente engaged Beer and Parker as a consulting team with a shared general idea about how to proceed and a commitment to co-design a process that could be both evaluative and a positive intervention at the same time. All of us recognized several risks associated with this project from the outset. The stakes were raised when we promised greater participation and an honest accounting of a wide range of perspectives. If we failed to deliver, would the project harm the fragile trust the community of freedom had begun building? The process could also re-open old wounds from the time of organizational upheaval or trigger fear of reprisal. Fetzer leadership was excited about the project and assured us that we would be free to produce a candid case without internal editing or interference, but would that hold true when they saw the finished product?

Preparing for the Process

At an initial organization-wide convening, Institute staff developed several shared hopes for the evaluation process through a Head, Heart, Hands, Feet exercise that asks participants to consider what they would like to come out of the process from a head perspective (what would they like to learn), a heart perspective (how would they like to feel), a hands perspective (what do they hope to be able to do differently), and a feet perspective (what would they like to be able to carry to external audiences). For example, staff expressed a strong desire to tell an "authentic" story of the community of freedom (i.e., no sugar-coating or control of the narrative by leadership). At the same time staff surfaced a real fear of being candid and a desire for a safe process. Others were concerned that the group would get fixated on the negative aspects of the work without being able to recognize and appreciate the good that had come of it.

To translate these hopes and concerns into features of the study process and to ensure that staff worked in groups of people they might not normally spend time with at the facilitation, staff were sorted into randomly assigned small groups. Each group generated concrete hypotheses about how the study design could achieve those desires. Hypotheses generated by the small groups of Fetzer staff included statements such as:

- "If we provide confidential avenues for everyone (not just those on the interview list) to share their experiences or concerns, then we will be more likely to have the full range of perspectives."
- "If individuals have the opportunity to decide whether they will be quoted by name in the case and to review and edit their quotes before anyone else sees them, then we will have more truthful insights."
- "If individuals will share their experiences and observations in the spirit of improving the Community of Freedom, then we will avoid sending ourselves into a negative cycle of blame or anger."

- "If we can decide together what elements of the story are most important to include, rather than having an 'official' version for which the leadership team has final editing rights, then this process will contribute to the trust we are trying to build."

To close the initial convening, staff used sticky notes to anonymously answer initial questions about the positive and negative effects of the COF process on them as individuals and at the team and organizational levels, as well as to "seed lines of inquiry" for the case (see Figure 4). We then asked them to place their sticky notes on corresponding posters around the room to aggregate their responses and to start to see potential patterns. Some staff asked us to place their notes for them so they would not be seen making critical comments. The data collected through this process gave the evaluators a broad, though shallow, sense of perceived outcomes and drivers that could be investigated more fully in subsequent steps.

For example, data revealed a significant variation in perceived benefits of the COF to individual participants. Some identified noteworthy personal transformation vis-à-vis their individual spiritual exploration while others identified no personal benefit or even increased discomfort with questions of spirituality. Importantly, some staff had become employees at a time when the Institute did not have an explicit commitment to individual spiritual growth and for them, the COF represented a significant shift in the basic "contract" of employment.

Others were hired after the COF was developed and came on board understanding that this is a journey they were committing to. Some believed the COF had increased trust among colleagues and begun to heal organizational culture while others felt it had exacerbated or created new divisions. The anonymity of the responses prevented us from analyzing the data for patterns based on other characteristics of respondents (e.g., Did those in the administrative unit feel less positively about the COF change process than those in the programmatic unit because it felt more peripheral to their responsibilities? Do staff of color have a different experience than white staff?) However, interviews in the subsequent step were used to probe these issues.

Figure 4: Excerpt of themes for further inquiry identified by staff in the large group exercise.

"Thinking about what would make this case study most useful to the community of freedom itself, what questions should we be asking as we do our inquiry?"

- Hope that the case study tells the full story of the COF including why it started, how it has helped the work, what isn't working, and what could be reviewed.
- Explore the distinctions between personal and professional lives, between the organization and the COF and the implications of those distinctions
- For those who are resistant or uncomfortable, why and how can COF better engage them?
- Is the COF gathering a truly safe space?
- What changes would you make to the COF process to enhance your experience and commitment to it?

Interviews and Document Reviews

Based on the seeds of inquiry, the evaluators then conducted a historical document review to understand the initial intent of the COF process and create a timeline of significant events and decisions. We conducted confidential in-person individual interviews with 33 of 60 staff representing each department and level (including all members of the board of trustees); five group interviews, which included observation of team meetings; and participated in three community of freedom gatherings. In total, the evaluators had direct interview contact with 45 of 60 staff, with remaining staff invited to provide input via phone or email.

The semi-structured interviews were designed to both understand staff perspectives on the sequence of events and key decisions and to probe on issues raised at the initial gathering. Evaluators analyzed interviews to produce clustered observations in four categories, listed below with some example observations. Note that observations were shared with staff without any information about the frequency with which these observations were represented in the data, in part to limit the likelihood that staff would try to identify whose opinions they reflect and in part because we did not want to influence staff's rating of the significance of the observation for the story. Observations were synthesized in the evaluators' language. No comments or observations were excluded.

Example Observations

The value of the Community of Freedom

- The COF gatherings have helped staff get to know colleagues from different departments, often for the first time. These relationships and the concrete practice of "assuming positive intent" have broken down some barriers between individuals and departments, contributing to more effective working relationships and increasing morale.
- The COF has enabled staff to learn about different faith traditions and spiritual backgrounds of their colleagues, and some say they have become more open and less judgmental of differences as a result.
- The COF has helped some staff feel a greater cohesion between their personal life and their work life and given them a sense of integration they haven't experienced before.

Supportive factors

- Many staff have sensed an increase in the vulnerability and openness in leadership and the board, which has manifested as a willingness to

be challenged, admit mistakes, and be self-reflective in front of (or with) staff. This has humanized leadership, increased the sense of connection between staff and leadership, and made staff feel more trustful. This kind of "human-ness" and humility seems critical to people believing that the COF is really a space for genuine community and personal exploration.

- The transition to a mix of small group, individual, and large group time in the COF — as well as mix of internally-led sessions and those with external speakers — has increased the sense of inclusivity in the gatherings by accommodating different personal styles, comfort levels, and areas of interest.

Barriers/challenging factors

- Several staff have been or still are unclear about the meaning and purpose of the community of freedom, particularly with respect to what it means concretely for their work and for the work in the administrative building. This is driven in part using abstract language to discuss it, which can create a feeling of exclusion. It is also driven by the infrequency with which the group talks about work-related issues within the COF space, as well as the fact that staff don't spend much time directly exploring with each other how the things they are learning and building in the COF gathering can and should "show up" in the way they work together and perform their jobs.
- Many people feel a tacit pressure to participate in COF in particular ways. These include that they must participate in small groups regardless of comfort level; they cannot necessarily express their own spiritual beliefs or perspectives without fear of offending someone of different beliefs; and they cannot offer conflicting perspectives or challenging questions without repercussions from colleagues or supervisors. Whether these risks are real or perceived, this feeling creates a cognitive and emotional dissonance with the expressed values of "bringing your whole self" and leaves some questioning the authenticity of the stated purpose of COF work."

Suggestions to make the COF more effective

- Dedicate regular time in the COF gathering to talking explicitly about the connection between the new strategic direction/work and the COF. What are we learning through our experimentation with building a COF internally that would influence how we approach our work with each other and our external-facing work? (In other words, if building a COF is the core of our work, how can we strengthen the link between our day-to-day work, the personal spiritual exploration, and the community building we do in the gatherings?)
- Clear and continual signals that feedback and alternative perspectives are encouraged and welcome—and demonstrating that that feedback is

considered even if not implemented—seems to be an ongoing need. This could include more modeling on the part of senior staff and leadership of this kind of interaction and willingness to tackle tough issues and listen openly. This kind of ongoing messaging and modeling could help overcome Fetzer's "culture of politeness" and reduce some people's fear of offering alternative perspectives or even "lovingly critical" feedback.

These observations were shared first with the Institute's learning and evaluation staff to ensure that wording would avoid putting any staff at risk or triggering overly defensive responses from leaders of the COF while still communicating the observations fully and with candor. Almost no edits were requested.

Group Sensemaking and Prioritization

The evaluators again convened the organization to interpret, weight, and prioritize these observations for inclusion in the case and to inform a deeper inquiry. Individuals scored each observation along the two Likert scales to assess the *representativeness* of the observation and the *significance* of the observation to the story of the organization's evolution. Key challenges were narrowed into a set of six for deeper discussion based on a combination of these two scores (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Framing questions capturing the key tensions and dynamics that underly the COF story

1. How can a group best begin building a community of freedom when the individuals in the group have different degrees of interest and buy-in to the idea and to spiritual exploration?
2. What does it take to create a sense of shared responsibility and ownership for a community of freedom so that everyone has real input and feels that the community belongs to them?
3. What does it take to balance the principles and norms of a community of freedom with common elements of organizational management such as performance management and hierarchical decision making?
4. What does it take for a community of freedom to productively and lovingly deal with upheavals in the workplace (such as staffing changes, changes in direction, and conflict)?
5. 5. What does it take to transfer the progress on relationships and shared values made within the community of freedom gatherings into the larger organizational culture, processes, and work?
6. How can we create conditions for exploring, understanding, and respecting one another's spiritual approaches without making individuals feel pressured into participating in practices they don't believe in?

The scoring process revealed that staff experience with the COF varied widely, as did the effects of the COF on both individual staff attitudes/behaviors and team behaviors. Several of the observations that were not particularly "representative" had nonetheless been rated as significant to the story by a sizable majority of the organization. Seeing that many people believed that such findings should be included in the final case was a particularly helpful practical outcome of the rating process, although we had to take care to consider whether indications of significance were resulting in the dismissal of key counter- narratives. With respect to the challenges in particular, we suspect there was some recency bias in this process and staff were more likely to rate as highly significant the problems that were *currently* plaguing the change process compared to those that may have been significant barriers at previous points in the process but subsequently resolved.

Small groups then explored the challenges that staff rated as most significant to the story, unpacking their effects, their causes, and insights about how they were (or could be) surmounted. We decided to focus on challenges rather than both challenges and success factors in these discussions because we sensed that many staff were still doubtful that the case study process would treat staff-identified challenges as legitimate rather than painting an overly polished narrative.

The interpretive process among some of the small groups was still plagued by clear power dynamics and norms around who speaks. As we might expect in almost any organization, the group including the president struggled to have a free-flowing conversation despite the president's efforts to create space for others to speak. Although we used a "switch perspectives" card to ask people to purposefully play devil's advocate, the conversation never entirely overcame those dynamics. This experience raises the question of the conditions under which a participatory interpretive process can happen between staff and leadership versus when staff should process and interpret data in a separate setting from leadership, with the conclusions of the two groups to be synthesized in another way.

To make sure that we had not missed any key findings or perspectives, we invited people to write down points that were important for us to consider in writing the final case give them to us. We followed up with those who included their names to learn more about their perspective and integrated that information into the teaching case.

The Written Teaching Case

We (the case writer and the evaluation consultant) then wrote a chronological, unsynthesized teaching case with a focus on the key decisions, events, and reactions that helped to illustrate the core challenges and benefits identified in earlier steps.

After it was written, individual quotes were excerpted from the case and sent confidentially to the quoted individual for vetting and editing before the case was shared with anyone in the organization. While the data collection process leading up

to this moment did seem to help people feel safe to be candid about their experiences, and many were willing to be quoted by name with criticisms or frustrations about the COF in the case, ultimately a number of people were fearful still about possible reprisals from supervisors and asked that their names not be used in the final case. In those cases, we asked if they felt the point they were making was still important to convey and whether we could include their perspectives in statements that would not identify them. While in teaching case studies, we would typically try to persuade people to be quoted if we felt the point was crucial, we did not do that here because of the power dynamics at play and the real fear expressed by some participants about possible repercussions.

Only after all quotes had been reviewed and approved by each individual was the full final case sent to our primary contact at the foundation to make any factual corrections in the descriptive information as well as to the president, board chair, and vice president of program. While each asked for minor adjustments in their own quotes, none asked for any changes or edits to the case. The teaching case, 47 pages in length, was distributed with a letter from the CEO stating how excited he was to have the case and how grateful he was for everyone's candid participation and bravery.

Though the Institute set aside one of its weekly three-hour COF meetings for staff to read the teaching case, we suspect that the length may have been prohibitive, and we are not sure how many read it in its entirety. We did hear from some participants that they were surprised at and gratified by the level of candor and range of perspectives included in this case, and several noted that it was the first time they understood the full history and intent of the COF as an organizational (and individual) change process.

Generating Insights and Actionable Ideas

At the final gathering a few weeks after staff had received the case, we had hoped to conduct a full case teaching to deepen the group's understanding of one another's perspectives, constraints, etc., and to explore patterns together. However, we suspected that too few staff had read the case in its entirety for effective case teaching. So instead we identified a set of underlying dynamics or tensions through our own analysis. We framed these as forward-facing questions and asked staff to revise, combine, or develop additional questions that capture tensions in the case that are most relevant to the lessons they believe others embarking on a similar effort would need to learn. See Figure 6 for the list of questions. Participants then self-selected into the question they felt most compelled to discuss.

To prevent the small groups from getting trapped in rehashing the problem details, or from generating vague truisms (e.g., "Trust is important") in lieu of concrete insights, the evaluators' primary contact at the Institute recruited six staff to help keep

small group discussions moving toward solutions. We provided these staff with a detailed facilitation guide and coaching on how to assist their small group to "pull up" from individual perspectives and instead see the dilemma from a systems level so that they could draw real insights about what works and does not work and what organizational dynamics and conditions are enabling or blocking change. In essence, the coaching encouraged group facilitators to guide the discussion toward exploring how different perspectives, experiences, and responsibilities affect how different people navigate and experience the change process and what recurring patterns they recognize playing out over time.

Using the Emergent Learning table format, each group crystalized their insights about what drove both positive and negative results in the past vis-à-vis their guiding question. Based on these insights, they then generated detailed hypotheses about what, going forward, would continue to help the Fetzer Institute manage this tension or dynamic. They also identified specific opportunities to put these hypotheses to the test (e.g., at upcoming COF meetings, staff trainings, performance reviews, etc.). Each small group shared their ideas in the large group for feedback and refinement. See Figure 6 for excerpts from one group's Emergent Learning table.

Figure 6: Excerpt from one Emergent Learning table

"Framing question/dilemma: *"What does it take to translate the values and principles developed through our community of freedom change process (e.g., trust, autonomy, collaborative decision-making) and apply them to concrete day-to-day work choices and processes?"*

Q1: What happened in the past and what seemed to drive those results?

- As soon as we left the COF meetings, we'd immediately fall back into old patterns of interaction, perhaps because the time crunch of our work drives us into the routines and behaviors that are most familiar.
- When staff brought up the disconnect between espoused values and actions, some managers would get frustrated because they didn't know alternative ways to carry out their managerial duties (e.g., performance reviews or responding to slacking employees) in ways that reflect these new values. Conversely, staff are often unsympathetic to the pressures managers face for ensuring their unit's performance and react badly to difficult performance conversations.
- We seem to have different conceptions about what some of these values mean in practice.

Q2: What insights can we draw about what drives results?

- Explicit communication about the inside/outside link helps us process and apply the values explored in the weekly COF meeting to our day-to-day work.
- We treat each other in alignment with the COF principles when we understand more about each other's perspectives and pressures.
- Reinforcement from leaders/supervisors has been powerful when it has occurred and creates incentives.

Q3: Given our insights, what will make us more successful in the future (action hypotheses)?

- If supervisors and their teams discuss takeaways from the COF gathering explicitly, then there will be better understanding as to how to integrate COF principles into daily work. The COF process will have more effect on our organizational culture and relationships.
- If occasionally we mixed team participation in events, then different teams would gain understanding, perspective, and trust, and we would see more inclusion.
- If management uses COF skills in structural decision-making, then the whole Fetzer Institute will be permeated with COF values and norms.

Q4: What specific upcoming opportunities do we have to test these ideas in practice?

- At our team meetings after the next COF meeting, every functional team should schedule time to discuss explicit takeaways and applications. Maybe we should test beginning every team meeting with this kind of "application" discussion.
- At the next brown bag learning event let's mix up team composition.
- The coaching and training activities scheduled for the management team in January can include skills discussion, and the next 360 leadership review can include assessment of managers' application of these values in their approach."

The evaluators used the insights produced through these Emergent Learning tables — as well as some of the concrete hypotheses about how to manage the dilemmas going forward — as the basis for the "lessons and recommendations" section of a much shorter synthesized case study for public distribution. The planning committee of the community of freedom was charged with putting the groups' hypotheses into action so that the organization itself could benefit from the hard work the staff did through the case study process.

Effects of the Hybrid Participatory Case Study Approach on the Fetzer Institute

We developed this approach to assessing Fetzer's organizational change process with the hope of "unsticking" the sticky narratives that transmit organizational memory through time, as well as making competing narratives more visible so that staff could talk through them and develop a fuller shared sense of how and why events unfolded as they did. After the case study process ended, the Fetzer Institute's learning and evaluation director observed: "We were holding onto things that we didn't even live through but things that happened 10 years ago. You may have come on board last year, but you're socialized into existing narratives about what happened and why. As a result, it can be very hard to break out of organizational patterns. The process of the case study helped us create a new narrative about where we've been and what we've learned from it."

Additionally, the process of the case study gave Fetzer leadership an opportunity to model the openness and candor that they hope to cultivate with staff. They participated in the discussions, grappled with the issues that were surfaced in the case, and reflected openly on what behaviors they would seek to change or improve. Staff noticed that the individuals willing to make critical comments in the case study suffered no repercussions and were, in fact, thanked for their candor and engaged in discussion respectfully by leadership.

However, on the less encouraging side, there was no *immediate* clear "handoff" of responsibility for implementing the concrete hypotheses that staff generated in the final meeting about how to continue improving the COF. The COF planning committee was engaging in its own separate and parallel process for planning changes to the COF and, by the time the yearlong case study process was complete, some of the findings and ideas coming from it did not clearly track with what they had already decided to work on separately. Most significantly, one of the central recommendations that came out the process we facilitated was to apply lessons from the COF to the day-to-day work of Fetzer.

Instead, the COF committee's plans were largely related to what happened within the COF space (e.g., what topics to focus on, how to support people's individual journeys, etc.). Our impression by then was that while they valued the process, the COF planning committee did not view it at the time as an organizational intervention of benefit to the organization itself. Instead, we suspect they viewed it as an interesting and engaging process to produce a story for the outside world. In retrospect, the findings and ideas generated by staff through the evaluation process might have resulted in more action if the COF planning committee had been engaged in the conceptualization and design of the process from the very outset and saw that it was specifically intended to inform their work.

From the perspective of the Fetzer team who commissioned this project (Cullen Puente and Thomas), in the four years since the case study was commissioned, the community of freedom has continued to grow and evolve. The most significant change was the creation of an Organizational Culture department which houses both the community of freedom and human resources, representing a deep understanding that Institute staff and its spiritual community are at the core of all that we do. The strong foundation and grounding of our community of freedom has allowed us to engage in the hard work of discussing pay equity and of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Both initiatives call for vulnerability and directness, something that would not have been possible just a couple of years before.

For example, the Institute recently embarked on a participatory pay philosophy project to candidly discuss issues around pay equity at Fetzer. We used a method called photovoice, which involves participants taking photos and sharing them to help them talk about and illustrate their thoughts on sometimes very challenging topics. This photovoice project engaged several Fetzer staff who, in small groups, shared their photos and participated in honest, brave, and challenging discussions about pay equity at the Institute. Although these discussions were around difficult topics, the work that we've done in our community of freedom and the case study really helped build the trust necessary to engage in dialogue around difficult topics without being overly fearful of reprisal from leadership or any other negative consequences. The facilitator, in putting together the final report for Institute's leadership team, encouraged participants to allow their names to be attached to their own words and photos in the report, as well as in the online photo gallery; while there was some hesitancy around this, most participants did choose to be identified.

The case study, both its processes and the report itself, helped pave the way in that it both empowered staff to speak up without fear of retribution and named tensions needing attention. Without the foundation that had been strengthened through the community of freedom and the case study, the participatory pay philosophy project would not have yielded the rich dialogue and depth needed for us to address something like pay equity. The case study was just one — but a very important — step in growing both our community of freedom and organization.

Reflections on the Hybrid Participatory Case Study Approach as a Tool for Organizational Learning and Change

Although we tested multiple methods for gathering data in safe ways and raising issues for examination without putting people at risk, anxieties about job security understandably run deep, and power differentials are real. Consequently, we see this case process not as a stand-alone intervention but rather one that must be embedded in a longer commitment. A case approach such as this one can help organizations or teams understand what's happening at a deeper level of organizational dynamics rather than individual events or decisions. It can also begin the process of transferring the sense of ownership of the work from positional leaders to everyone in an organization, provided leaders are willing to listen and take seriously the perspectives of staff. The degree to which this case study process can contribute to substantive organizational change depends on whether staff and leadership actually follow through with the ideas generated in the final gathering and come back together again to reflect on whether their hypotheses and actions are producing the results they want. Evaluators can help ensure that this hybrid participatory approach contributes positively to an organizational change process by asking the leadership to commit from the beginning to a process to follow through on the ideas generated from this work.

Appendix

Details on the participatory hybrid steps

Step 1: Preparing for the Process (First Large Group Convening)

In keeping with the principles of participatory case study evaluation, this stage is designed to accomplish three objectives:

1. Establish shared goals and principles of engagement
2. Co-design process expectations
3. Identify lines of inquiry for the study to follow.

This is critical to ensure that the evaluation process accounts for staff anxieties about confidentiality and fairness and for beginning the engagement with a sense of co-ownership and anticipation that the story will reflect a full range of experiences.

Given organizational, racial, gendered, and other dynamics that shape whose voices and opinions have more power and influence within the organization, it is important to create a full-group participatory process that still offers avenues for input that account for power and risk, as well as for different styles or levels of comfort with speaking within the larger group. The evaluators' role during the stage-setting process is to demonstrate that all perspectives are welcome and valid and, more importantly, to find ways to bring controversial or sensitive positions to the fore as credible and worthy of exploration without putting those with less power at risk.

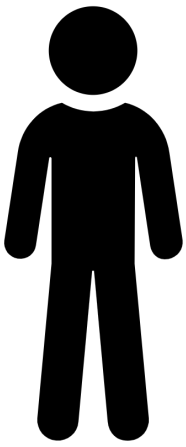
Establishing shared goals and principles of engagement

To begin the project, we hold an initial gathering of the organization. In order to establish agreement about how the evaluators and staff will work together, we use the Head, Heart, Hands, Feet exercise.[7] First individuals and then small groups are invited to grapple with the questions listed in Figure 2. The questions help participants consider not only what *knowledge* they would like to gain from a case study (head), but also how the process itself should *feel* to participants (heart), i.e., equitable, inclusive, safe, respectful, challenging, energizing. Asking groups to identify what they hope to be able to do better as a result of the case experience (hands) signals to participants

7 Adapted from Orr, D. (1992). Ecological literacy: Education for a post modern world. Albany, NY: State Universityof New York.

Figure 2: Head, Heart, Hands, Feet exercise for establishing goals and principles of engagement

As we envision what we hope to gain as individuals and as a community from the case study experience...



Head: *What do we hope to know and understand?*

Heart: *What do we hope to feel and experience?*

Hands: *What do we hope we will be able to do (or do better)?*

Feet: *What do we hope we will be able to share with the world outside our walls?*

that the study process will result in a set of action-oriented insights that move the group forward as well as producing useful lessons to disseminate externally (feet). The exercise closes with a group theming of aspirations in each category. In our experience, most evaluative processes and case studies focus just on the end goal (the feet). For this project, we felt that coming to shared goals, and having participants experience the process as participatory, engaging, and inclusive, were equally important.

Co-designing the evaluation process

To translate these hopes into features of an evaluation process, participants generate concrete hypotheses about how the study design could achieve those aspirations using an "if … then …" format. For example, "If we provide confidential avenues for everyone – not just those on the interview list – to share their experiences or concerns, then we will be more likely to hear the full range of perspectives." Or "If individuals have the opportunity to decide whether they will be quoted by name in the case and to review and edit their quotes before anyone else sees them, then we will have more truthful insights and a process that puts staff at less risk."

Generating hypotheses helps push beyond the truisms that groups commonly articulate when establishing rules of engagement, e.g., "Treat each other with respect" or "Assume good intent." Instead, groups must operationalize their principles in actions that can be embedded into a participatory process. The evaluators are then responsible for designing the remainder of the process in accordance with the group's hypotheses. For instance, based on the example hypothesis above about providing confidential avenues for input, the evaluators could invite staff who do not receive a request to be interviewed to contact them for an interview if they want to share their perspectives. Or they could invite staff to submit reflections or stories confidentially via hard copy or personal email and provide opportunities for staff to privately share individual feedback in each large group meeting.

Identifying lines of inquiry

"The third element of preparing for the process is a participatory exercise to identify lines of inquiry for the case. To accommodate the desire for confidentiality while simultaneously surfacing issues to be discussed as a large group, we invite staff to individually and anonymously populate posters around the room with sticky notes responding to a set of questions. If staff are concerned that physically placing thoughts on the posters would compromise their anonymity and trigger reprisal, we will place their thoughts for them to make sure that their perspectives are included. These questions should elicit reflections on the top-of- mind *effects* (both positive and negative) of the organizational culture change intervention on individuals, on teams, and on the organization, as well as ideas about the questions that are critical to explore in order to understand the story fully. For example:

- Thinking about your personal experience with [CHANGE EFFORT X], what is the most significant positive change it has caused for you personally? Negative change?
- When you look back on your experience [CHANGE EFFORT X], what has been the most frustrating or difficult aspect for you?
- In what ways, if any, has [CHANGE EFFORT X] affected *your work,* either negatively or positively?
- What has been the most significant change [CHANGE EFFORT X] has caused for the organization or team, either negative or positive?
- Thinking about what would make this case study most useful to the *organization itself,* what questions should we be asking as we do our inquiry?
- Thinking about what would make this case study most useful to *other organizations* embarking on a *similar effort*, what questions should we be asking as we do our inquiry?

Groups then theme the observations. These responses are treated as data and also become the aspects of the organization's story that warrant more investigation through the research process.

Step 2: Document Review and Interviews

In Step 2, the approach switches to a more conventional evaluator-driven one with a historical document review to identify key decision points, events, and the leaders' intent related to the change effort writ large (and more specifically to the lines of inquiry identified by the group). This is used to construct a timeline of critical events or turning points and to design an interview approach. The evaluator must then offer avenues of engagement in accordance with principles established at the first gathering, combining confidential data collection opportunities with group ones to ensure feedback from as wide and representative a sample of staff as possible. To reduce bias, it can be useful to construct a sampling plan that engages representatives from every unit and level, from different racial and ethnic (and in our case, religious) groups, a mix of people who are more and less positive about the change process, as well as those directly engaged in it and on the periphery.

Because these data are often too sensitive for participatory analysis at the outset, the evaluator takes a first pass at thematic analysis and compiles a set of provisional observations about:

1. The value individuals see in the change effort;
2. Intended and unintended negative and positive outcomes at the individual, team, and organizational level;
3. Insights about what factors supported the positive outcomes of the change effort at the individual, team, and organizational level;

4. Insights about the barriers to a successful change effort, including common organizational tensions and dynamics related to power and decision making, performance, interpersonal and inter-team relationships, clarity of purpose, etc.;
5. Patterns that arise around experiences by different "cuts" of the organization, such as among people of different racial or ethnic groups, people engaged in different types of labor, etc. (with care towards whether identifying these patterns put any staff at risk of identification and/or reprisal); and
6. Ideas for improving the change effort going forward.

This last component helps maintain staff's sense that the case study process is not simply reflective but generative. Importantly, the thematic analysis is not based solely on the prevalence of a particular theme but is rather a compilation of all perspectives into thematic groups, *without regard to frequency with which the theme appears.* This is to combat the "groupthink" bias and the influence a dominant narrative has on the engagement of groups with the themes. This sets the stage for the group as a whole to engage in interpretation, weighting, sensemaking, and prioritization in the next step.

Step 3: Group Sensemaking and Prioritization (Second Convening)

Using the compilation of themes developed through interviews in Step 2, a second large-group meeting is then used to engage staff as a whole in:

1. Testing the representativeness of the draft observations and prioritizing which topics to focus on in the written case
2. Reflecting on the meaning and significance of the findings.
3. Creating a sense of ownership and agency in the process and product.

Because organizations are dynamic systems, and change processes are likewise complex, a single tidy narrative and generalized conclusions can rarely capture critical nuances, variation in experience, or inequitable effects of the change process. It can also exacerbate inequity, exclusion, and a sense of organizational betrayal, as people's experience of the change process is made invisible in the story. Organizational change processes can be experienced as destabilizing, negative, and even traumatic by some, but exciting and positive for others, so of course individuals can hold competing interpretations of the value, effects, and drivers of the process. And finally, the personal experience of organizational change can make it difficult for individuals to "zoom up" to see and make sense of larger patterns, dynamics, and perspectives that constitute an organization-wide view.

All of these features require a sensemaking process that can accommodate a greater degree of variation, nuance, and even conflicting interpretations than a straightforward semantic theme analysis that simply assesses frequency or prevalence as a stand-in for "representativeness." Although determining the degree to which a particular experience or interpretation of events is shared by many staff versus a few can help reveal what drives group behaviors, it is not the case that the majority-held perception is "more true" or accurate than experiences or perspectives held by fewer staff. Dynamics within the organization—and by extension the success or failure of a change process—are often responsive to the behaviors of even a single staff member. His or her perceptions of the change process and its benefits or costs can translate into influential acts of resistance or support that affect the team or organization as a whole. Additionally, a focus on frequency can reproduce patterns of exclusion of staff of color, LGBTQ, minority gender(s), or others in a majority white, cis, heterosexual organization. Consequently, this step in the approach is intended to prevent the conflation of *prevalence* (representativeness) with *significance* in the interpretation process.

Testing the representativeness of observations and prioritizing observations and insights for inclusion in the case

To help the group together find alternative criteria than prevalence to determine the relevance of qualitative observations to the case, the themed observations from the interviews in Step 2 are presented to the whole staff. First, individuals use an anonymous worksheet to rate each finding along two fivepoint Likert scales:

This finding represents my personal experience or opinion	Not at all 1	2	Somewhat 3	4	Completely 5
This finding is a critical part of [CHANGE EFFORT's] history, without which we cannot understand the real story.	Not at all 1	2	Somewhat 3	4	Completely 5

While the first question provides a quick-and-dirty assessment of the prevalence of the finding, the second helps to identify the *significance* of the finding, irrespective of its prevalence. This approach helps the evaluators lift up perspectives that could easily be excluded from the participatory interpretation of data because they represent only a small minority of staff. It also prevents leadership from dismissing as irrelevant the perspectives of staff perceived as nay-sayers or disgruntled (a dismissal that only increases the disillusionment and disempowerment of these staff). In our experience, this exercise can reveal that staff view the experience of their colleagues as critical to the story even when it does not reflect their own experience (e.g., "The vast majority of my colleagues interpreted this move by the leadership as supportive, but it *matters to the story* that these few colleagues experienced it as undermining and unfair — with these effects.")

This approach may be insufficient for raising issues that relate to structural factors (e.g., racial and gendered power and inequity) in organizations that have not yet begun or are early in an internal diversity, equity, and inclusion effort where staff have not yet begun to develop a shared language that enables them to identify structural power and inherent biases. At this stage, particularly if those organizations are white-dominant and/or white-led organizations, there will often be resistance to transforming practice because of the uncertainty that comes with letting go of white-dominant practices and ownership of narrative. Organizations, then, need to grapple with internal buy-in of both staff and leadership, developing a sense of trust and shared vision. Attempting to effect structural change without fostering trust, shared vision, and a critical reflection on our own biases all the way up the leadership hierarchy can undermine the process and risks reproducing historical and long-standing behaviors and views even as an organization seeks to alleviate some of the symptoms of more deeply embedded structural inequities.

Reflecting on the meaning and significance of the observations

After scoring is tallied to determine which observations rise to the surface as most critical to the story (Likert scale No. 2), participants organize into small groups to explore the potential causes and effects of these benefits or challenges and generate insights about what did (or could) help the organization navigate them. See an example of small group instructions for this process in Figure 3. Again, as groups produce synthesized conclusions, individuals should also be invited to privately and anonymously share what they viewed as the most important observations or insights about each question.

Figure 3: Example small group instruction sheet for joint interpretation and sense-making about challenges

QUESTION 1: What effect did/does this challenge have on our ORGANIZATION OR CHANGE EFFORT?

Consider, for example, how it has affected:

- The attitudes, ideas, or feelings of individuals who occupy different roles at ORGANIZATION or within the CHANGE EFFORT
- Relationships within teams or between teams
- Our other work responsibilities

Before moving on: Each person privately writes on two large YELLOW sticky notes: What do you believe were the two most important observations or insights about this question that the evaluators should consider?

QUESTION 2: What were/are some of the causes of this challenge?

Dig below top-of-mind answers. Consider how the competing demands, pressures, responsibilities, and/or experiences of people in different roles might shape how they perceive and approach the situation.

Before moving on: Each person privately writes on two large PINK sticky notes: What do you believe were the two most important observations or insights about this question that the evaluators should consider?

Question 3: What has helped (or could help) the organization get past this challenge?

Think about concrete actions that have been – or could be – taken by individuals (including you), teams, leadership, the change process planning committee, the board, etc.

Before the end of the session: Each person privately writes on two large ORANGE sticky notes: What do you believe were the two most important observations or insights about this question that the evaluators should consider?

Small group discussions are at risk of being dominated by particular individuals advocating strongly for their own perspective. When exploring the potential causes and consequences of these challenges, it is common for staff to attribute negative motives to a particular group of peers or to the organization's leadership who may not be in the small group to speak for themselves. To help the small groups combat their own interpretive biases and explore potential causes and effects from multiple perspectives, we use a "switch perspectives" card. When the card is placed on the table by one of the roaming evaluators or a fellow small group member, it requires the group to imagine the same issue from a different perspective.

For example, how might somebody in a leadership position see this challenge? What might their intentions have been? What constraints do they face? How about a junior staff person who does not have the positional power to influence the decision? How about someone who is new to the organization and uncertain what the norms are? This process is intended to help the group detect patterns and drivers at the organizational level by jogging them out of their individual perspectives. The exercise of forced perspective switching has the added benefit of deepening a group's skills for tackling conflict with each other more forthrightly.

Step 4: Chronological Unsynthesized Teaching Case

Following the second gathering, the evaluator or case writer produces a teaching case telling a chronological story of the change effort. In traditional teaching case style, the narrative should highlight key events and decision points that were relevant to the issues raised by staff in the earlier data collection efforts. The case should share perspectives of multiple staff around how a particular decision played out, how they interpreted it, what their own thinking was at the time, etc. For example, what did the CEO consider before a controversial staff termination? How did staff in the department where the termination occurred experience and interpret it? How did that change their level of trust in the larger organizational change process? How did other staff react to their heightened distrust? Importantly, the teaching case *should not include* any specific "findings" or synthesis from the data collection to date. Instead, it is intended to provide yet another avenue for staff to grapple with the real messiness and complex dynamics of their story, identify underlying patterns, and explore the organizational tensions that accompany the change process.

Importantly, because the group has already seen the synthesized observations during Step 3, none of the critical tensions or controversies appearing in the teaching case should be a surprise. Each participant, regardless of organizational position, should have the same opportunity to review, edit, or request removal of their own quotes before anyone else sees them or the case as a whole so they can be assured of safety from potential backlash and choose whether they want to take a public stance on an issue. After all quotes are adjusted, approved, anonymized, or removed, the case is distributed to the entire staff. To maintain the spirit and integrity of the process, leadership cannot be allowed to edit the content of the case or make any adjustments beyond their own quotes, nor to add their own interpretation or commentary to the case unless it is presented as a direct quote.

Staff are provided with dedicated time to read the case in its entirety and prompted to observe and consider different perspectives about the drivers, intent, and consequences of key events and decisions. The aim is to help staff see the story more holistically and as inclusive of multiple experiences and perspectives.

Step 5: Generating Insights and Ideas (Third Gathering)

After distribution of the teaching case to the staff, a final all-staff convening is then held to:

1. Jointly generate deeper, more nuanced insights that can inform their own plans for moving forward and can be included in a public-facing case for the larger field
2. Develop actionable ideas to test in practice and set a plan for holding one another and the institution accountable for continuing to work on identified issues.

Generating deeper insights

For a case study process to serve as a meaningful organizational development intervention, the group must move beyond debating or re-hashing individual events in the past to look instead at the deeper organizational dynamics affecting how those moments were — and are likely still — handled and interpreted. A well-crafted and well-taught teaching case can make it evident that a set of underlying dilemmas or tensions[8] are cropping up over and over again. Most of these tensions are not "resolvable," but are rather *ongoing* dynamics that occur in many organizations and are either navigated well or poorly. The organization will likely continue to face these tensions, and other organizations are likely to face similar tensions if they venture into

8 By tensions, we do not mean interpersonal disagreements. Instead we are referring to the meaning common in the organizational development literature: Tensions are objectives that often appear to be in opposition to each other and mistakenly managed as either/or choices, e.g., group decision making vs. individual accountability, innovation vs. efficiency, short term demands vs. long term, control vs. freedom, centralized for coordination vs. decentralized for responsiveness. Instead, organizational development literature asserts that high-performing organizations are those that treat these like both/and choices, recognizing how and when to either strike the right balance between the two or when different situations call for activating one over the other.

a comparable organizational change effort. Our hypothesis is that only by identifying recurring underlying patterns and dynamics can a group find more powerful leverage points for change and build the capacity to navigate these inevitable tensions.

First, to ground the staff in the data and story they produced together, the evaluators teach the teaching case with the large group to help staff reflect on where key tensions and successes have occurred, under what conditions, how they are perceived, and what effects they have produced. Drawing on this discussion, as well as insights from previous gatherings and the evaluators' own analysis, the evaluators then propose a set of tensions or dynamics that appear to be driving some of the key challenges in the story. For example, analysis might reveal that routine frustrations stemmed from a tension between the kinds of values espoused through the formal change activities and the language used and actions taken in day-to-day work life, creating a sense of cynicism or distrust in the authenticity of or motives behind the change process.

The evaluators then frame this tension and others surfaced by the conversation as a series of future- facing, action-oriented questions designed to crystallize insights and elicit solutions, e.g., *"What does it take to translate the values and principles developed through our change process and apply them to concrete day-to-day work choices and processes?"* Staff self-select into which dilemma they want to discuss using a structured learning process called an Emergent Learning table.

Generating actionable ideas

Anecdotally, we often hear that cases have little practical utility for the subjects of the case. In fact, the re-surfacing of old dynamics and tensions that happens through a case process can even set the organizational change process back. To prevent this from happening and follow through with the social change and learning goals of a participatory approach, it is important to close the process with a forward- facing, solutions-oriented process.

Developed by organizational learning experts at Fourth Quadrant Partners, Emergent Learning tables take learners through a process of:

1. Observing what happened on the ground and identifying what factors drove results;
2. Drawing insights about what has worked under what conditions in the past to produce particular results;
3. Given these insights, generating new hypotheses about what will make them successful at achieving the results they want in the future; and
4. Identifying specific upcoming opportunities to put these hypotheses into practice (thus translating learning into action).

Format of an Emergent Learning table

Looking Back	Looking Forward
Distilling insights from our past	Applying insights to our future
Q1: Based on the case, what seemed to drive the results we got in the past with respect to this question?	**Q3:** Given what our insights, what will make us even more successful in the future? *[If we do X, then Y will happen.]]*
Q2: What insights can we draw from what's happened in the past? *[No vague clichés or truisms!]*	**Q4:** What specific upcoming opportunities do we have to test these ideas in practice?

In small groups, staff generate an Emergent Learning (EL) table for each of the tensions or dilemmas, resulting in a set of concrete action hypotheses firmly grounded in what they learned from the case and opportunities to test them in practice. (See abbreviated content of one EL table in Figure 6 of the Fetzer Institute story.)

This level of detailed exploration allows a group to move from lessons that are vague truisms, e.g.,"Communication is critical" or "Trust is important" to more nuanced and actionable insights. For example, "Explicitly discussing within our functional units how the values of the change process concretely apply to our work tasks and team interactions can help us build better strategies to handle challenging work moments — such as performance issues or conflict over decisions — with respect, empathy, and trust in one another's intentions." The Emergent Learning table also allows teams to co-create their own solutions to the tensions they are experiencing rather than simply surfacing them through the case and then leaving them to fester. Finally, the process generates richer — and, importantly, shared — wisdom to convey to the external world in a final, synthesized version of the case study.

Step 6: Synthesized Case with Insights

After this process is complete, the evaluator can convert the teams' insights and hypotheses about its core tensions into lessons learned or recommendations for a synthesized version of the case aimed at a public audience. These lessons should be recognizable to the whole group as the ones they generated together. The final products include:

- A teaching case and case teaching notes for use by other organizations (or perhaps for use in new staff orientation so they are aware of the history of the change journey they are joining).

- A synthesized evaluative case study with conclusions about the effects of the change process, analysis of critical drivers of and barriers to change, and a nuanced set of lessons and wisdom for public dissemination.
- A set of concrete, actionable ideas for managing ongoing organizational dynamics and tensions that are likely to affect how the change process continues to unfold.

Step 7: Organizational Follow-Through

This step involves organizational leaders taking it upon themselves to create mechanisms to address the idenitified organizational dynamics and tensions. This may actually be a series of steps and take considerable time. Its importance cannot be overstated. It may involve a variety of meetings with internal stakesholder groups to operationalize the findings. Ultimately, without discernable action, the effectiveness of the entire case study will be undermined. Specifically, organization leaders should support the teams who generated the solutions in Step 5 to implement the ideas they came up with, observe how they worked, and continue to refine them. Teams should periodically reflect on what is and isn't working in implementing small or large changes, why, and what from this reflection can be returned to leadership, other teams, and the public.

If the implementation is handed off to a point person in the organization, rather than the people in the small groups who came up with the solutions, staff lose a sense of ownership in their own problem- solving ability. Additionally, if the leadership or planning group decided to take *different* steps than the community itself suggested, it ends up inadvertently reinforcing the same dynamics that foundation leadership and evaluators are trying to undo.