

## A WINDOW INTO THE RESEARCH

**T**O PROVIDE a window into the many sources of wisdom that flowed through our research process, we share below a timeline of our research activities, and name the people who led and contributed.

Jess Rimington and Joanna Levitt Cea co-led the Beloved Economies learning journey over the course of seven years as an intentionally co-creative endeavor. Toward this aim, they established the research initiative as a fiscally sponsored non-profit project. They raised philanthropic grant support to resource multiple collaborators over the years, each contributing their own expertise, talents, and insights. Additionally, at times some of the activities were completed on a volunteer basis around other paid work by Cea, Rimington, and a handful of other collaborators. Throughout, a beloved community made this research and its insights possible—from co-learners to research collaborators to grant-making institutions.

What unfolded across our research journey is hard to fully capture within a linear timeline. Many steps were planned in

advance; many were responses to what emerged. The more we learned about the practices of breakout actors, the more we were inspired and emboldened to incorporate the practices into the process of research and creating this book.

### **Phase 1: Refining research scope and questions (2015)**

---

- Conducted literature reviews to understand the roots of business as usual and contemporary trends related to deconsolidating the rights to design (e.g. co-creation, crowdsourcing, lean methodology)
- Identified thirty-five examples of individuals and groups across a variety of fields that work differently from their peers and achieve standout results by:
  - Conducting seventy-five “snowball” style interviews, beginning with an initial group of interviewees from within our personal networks in the fields of social entrepreneurship, philanthropy, impact finance, high technology, social justice movement organizing, and development aid. Each interviewee was asked for recommendations of additional individuals whom we should interview.
  - Completing desk research of approximately two hundred cases.
- Got to know the thirty-five recommended standout organizations and individuals by interviewing them about their mission, motivation for doing so, mechanics and practices of how they go about their work, governance, results, and key challenges.

- Developed our own Beloved Economies definition of a breakout actor by comparing the interviews of the thirty-five recommended standout cases. The qualities that we considered to be “breakout” included validation of the group’s work from external parties, the degree to which the group’s practices differed from the business-as-usual approaches of its field, and the degree to which staff, volunteers, and those the work is intended to benefit assessed the experience of the work as exceptionally positive.
- Based on our definition of breakout actor, we combed through our interviews with the thirty-five cases and identified twenty organizations or individuals that met the criteria. We began referring to this group as our “co-learning community,” which expanded over time as we identified and invited additional breakout actors and subject-matter experts to join the research process.
- Conducted three to five follow-up interviews with each member of the initial group of twenty breakout actors.

Phase I research was conducted by Jess Rimington and Joanna Cea, with support from Hudson Brown on research coordination and Kate Gasparro on the literature review of crowdsourcing and co-creation. During Phase I, Cea and Rimington held positions as visiting scholars with the Global Projects Center at Stanford University, with Dr. Ashby Monk serving as an adviser to the research.

## **Phase 2: Understanding breakout innovation and identifying initial practices (2016–2018)**

---

### **Identifying common elements in how breakout actors work**

- Facilitated ideation and collaborative synthesis sessions (beginning with an in-person gathering in New Orleans, Louisiana, in May 2016) with the co-learning group members. Collectively, we identified an initial set of elements common to the ways of work of all groups present.
- Broadened the initial co-learning group to sixty members, including additional breakout actors and subject-matter experts, based on recommendations from existing co-learning group members as well as from additional interviewees engaged through a continuation of the snowball process from Phase I.

### **Confirming an initial set of five practices linked to breakout innovation**

- Conducted virtual prototype testing of an initial list of twelve common elements of breakout actors' approach and work methods. Through individual prototyping sessions with members of the co-learning community as well as group prototyping sessions with co-learners and their recommended invitees, the initial prototype was iteratively refined into a list of five common practices, as well as a definition of breakout innovation.
- Hired a team of independent researchers and evaluators to cross-check the validity of the five identified practices. The researchers assessed ten groups and conducted interviews with multiple stakeholders of each group about the group's ways of work, the experience of being involved

in the work, and the results. The evaluators found that the groups most strongly following the five practices were also the groups in which stakeholders described results comprising breakout innovation.

- Published a feature article in *Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR)* about the five initially identified practices linked to breakout innovation and the findings of the independent research and evaluation described above. Through *SSIR* readers reaching out in response to the article, we learned of additional breakout actors and examples of the practices in action.
- Conducted follow-up interviews and case-study research with existing and recently identified breakout actors to deepen understanding of how they enact the practices.
- Undertook applied research by trying the practices in our own work, specifically applying the practices in our capacities as staff or consultants with five different initiatives.

Phase 2 research was conducted by Jess Rimington and Joanna Cea, with Dylan Rose Schneider, Hafsa Mustafa, Melissa Nelson, and Shelly Helgeson conducting an independent analysis of the five practices through ten case studies. M. Strickland led numerous case studies and follow-up interviews with breakout actors and identified additional members of the co-learning community who contributed pivotal new perspectives and analysis.

### **Phase 3: Deepening our understanding of the practices and the ripple effects of breakout innovation (2019–2022)**

---

#### **Arriving at a set of seven practices**

- Conducted a series of interviews with nineteen members of the co-learning community whose work focuses on building alternatives to the current economy. Interviews explored the groups' motivations for working differently, the results of their work to date, and their analysis of opportunities and pathways for positive economic change.
- Identified two additional practices (the practices of trust there is time and reckon with history) and validated these additional practices with the co-learning community.
- Validated the seven practices through a literature review of practices for more effective work across a variety of fields.

#### **Understanding why the practices unlock breakout innovation**

- Conducted a series of three to eight interviews each with thirty-one co-learners about their assessment of what the practices spark and undo.
- Based on the recommendations of our co-learning community, conducted additional desk research, literature review, and interviews with subject-matter experts related to what the practices spark and undo, why the practices unlock breakout innovation and broader economic transformation, how to implement the practices, their value proposition, and links between changing ways of work and creating broader economic change.

- Prototype tested with nineteen co-learners an overall analysis of why and how the practices spark broader economic transformation, in the form of an initial book outline.
- Synthesized 103 interview transcripts to re-ground our analysis in the words of our co-learning community.
- Conducted two follow-up interviews, each with sixteen co-learners engaged in the research since 2015 or 2016, to assess how their work had changed over time, as well as specifically how they had adapted to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Understanding how the seven practices relate to intelligence from the natural world**

- Identified that there is a correlation between the seven practices and Life's Principles.
- Biomimicry for Social Innovation (BSI) gathered a “hive mind” of twelve biomimicry professionals to brainstorm together on the question: What insights can nature offer about these practices?
- The BSI team conducted a literature review to identify organisms' behaviors and ecosystem dynamics that reflect the essence of the seven practices.
- The BSI team surveyed the examples to surface larger patterns in natural dynamics related to feedback loops, adaptive cycles, mutualisms, and complex adaptive systems.

**Iteratively writing and editing the book manuscript**

- Completed a final round of synthesis by coding and identifying themes across 167 interview transcripts collected since 2016 to corroborate all key points of the book manuscript.

- Developed draft sections of the book manuscript and shared with approximately thirty co-learners for their co-creative input.
- Refined our analysis and recommendations by inviting review by ten subject-matter experts, as well as ten “narrative testers”—individuals who reflect target audiences for the book.

Phase 3 research was conducted by Jess Rimington and Joanna Cea, with M. Strickland leading the validation of the seven practices through literature review and offering qualitative research expertise to the final round of synthesis; Sonia Sarkar co-leading interviews with co-learners on what the practices spark and undo; Nairuti Shastry leading on desk research, literature review, and interviews with subject-matter experts on links between changing ways of work and creating broader economic change, as well as follow-up interviews on changes over time with sixteen co-learners, and designing and coordinating the final round of synthesis; Anke Ehlert supporting on desk research, literature review, and research synthesis; and additional research synthesis support from Lauren Ressler and Fiona Teng. Jaclyn Gilstrap led on narrative-testing, with initial support from Ellie Diaz Bahrmassel. Deborah Bidwell, McCall Langford, and Toby Herzlich of Biomimicry for Social Innovation led the research on how the practices relate to intelligence from the natural world.

. . .

Throughout the phases described above, as we uncovered the seven practices, we strove to embody them within our research and the creation of this book.