

# Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION<sup>REVIEW</sup>

*Informing and inspiring leaders of social change*

Organizational Development

## Inside-Out Innovation

Supplements to the article “Social Innovation From the Inside Out.”

By SSIR Editors | Nov. 20, 2013

() In “[Social Innovation From the Inside Out](#)

(<http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry>

[/social\\_innovation\\_from\\_the\\_inside\\_out](#)),” published in the Winter 2014 issue of *SSIR*, Warren Nilsson and Tana Paddock discuss an organizational practice that they call “inscaping.” That practice, they write, involves “surfacing the inner experiences of organizational members during the normal course of everyday work.” What does inscaping look like in practice? And how can people in organizations begin to explore the promise of inscaping? Nilsson and Paddock offer answers to those questions in their article, but inscaping by its nature is a granular, on-the-ground endeavor: The nitty-gritty details of how it works—and how it feels—matter a great deal.

Magazine Extras (Winter 2014)

Supplements to the article “Social Innovation From the Inside Out.”

[Inside-Out Innovation](#)

([http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/inside\\_out\\_innovation#insideout](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/inside_out_innovation#insideout))

[I Am a Cleaner \(post\)](#)

([http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/inside\\_out\\_innovation#zenith](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/inside_out_innovation#zenith))

[Expressive Change: Inscaping \(PDF\)](#) ([http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/inside\\_out\\_innovation#tutorial](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/inside_out_innovation#tutorial))

[How We Gather \(post\)](#)

([http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/inside\\_out\\_innovation#kufunda](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/inside_out_innovation#kufunda))

[The Form Trap \(video\)](#)

([http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/inside\\_out\\_innovation#video](http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/inside_out_innovation#video))

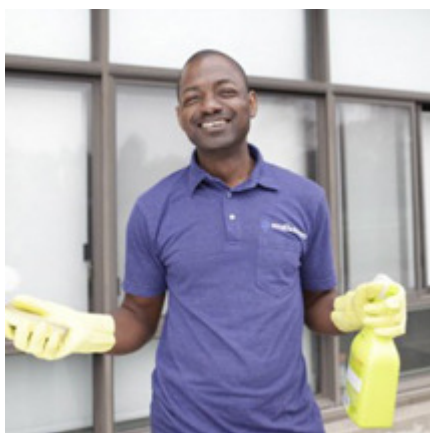
Therefore, to give readers further insight into what it means to pursue “innovation from the inside out,” we present a sampling of material that the authors have provided to us. This material also appears on the website of [Organization Unbound](#) (<http://organizationunbound.org>), a community of practice that they operate worldwide. *SSIR* shares this content essentially in its original form, and with gratitude to Nilsson and Paddock and to their blogging partners Tolu Ilesanmi and Marianne Knuth.

() One practitioner of inscaping is Tolu Ilesanmi, proprietor of Zenith Cleaners, a cleaning service company based in Montreal. Ilesanmi, who is from Nigeria, has an MBA degree from McGill University. Here, following a brief introductory note by Nilsson and Paddock, is a blog post that he wrote about a striking insight that he had recently. (You can read the original post [here](#)

(<http://organizationunbound.org/expressive-change/i-am-a-cleaner/> .)

## I Am a Cleaner

*This latest post from Tolu Ilesanmi (<http://organizationunbound.org/tolulope-ilesanmi/>) is a stunner. It's actually an email he sent us when we asked him to give us an update on his social enterprise Zenith Cleaners (<http://zenithcleaners.com/>). We got more than we bargained for. We have always admired Zenith's devotion to inscaping—to exploring the inner experiences of its members and clients. Tolu's reflections beautifully illustrate that inscaping doesn't just connect people; it expands purpose. The Zenith vision is becoming grander. It is becoming wilder. Its increasing fractal force is leading to some startling programmatic shifts.*



Tolu Ilesanmi, owner of Zenith Cleaners. (Photo by Grace Ding, courtesy of Tolu Ilesanmi and Organization Unbound)

Zenith Cleaners continues to evolve. Very exciting times. We are taking further the concept of Cleaning as Practice and building our future on it. In the process, we came up with this definition of cleaning, which is in itself cleansing.

*Cleaning is the process of removing dirt from any space, surface, object or subject thereby exposing beauty, potential, truth and sacredness.*

In a way, we are cleaning our understanding of cleaning and what cleaning as practice means. It continues to be about leadership development, organizational transformation, paradigm shifts, social destigmatization, culture transformation, crossing boundaries, etc. Cleaning is beautiful. I have gone from “I am just a cleaner” to “No I am not just a cleaner, I only clean” to “Wow, I am a CLEANER.” I go to places now and introduce myself as a cleaner. Who wouldn't want to be a cleaner given the above definition? Are we not all trying to clean something in the world?

*Underneath the dirt is beauty. Our work is merely to uncover it.*

For the first time, I am seeing even the connection between my work as a cleaner and my desire to clean the Nigerian society. This definition brings hope and it suggests that underneath the corruption, underneath the dirt is beauty. Our work is merely to uncover it.

In practice, we are expanding what we offer our clients—offering our clients all of what we are, removing the dirt of fear, hesitation and tentativeness surrounding being a cleaner that cleans your windows and also the cleaner who shows you how to clean the window through which you see the world. ...

We are still cleaning our mission and our vision. But now, we are in the final stages of introducing cleaning as practice in a private school in Montreal as a prelude to introducing it in schools across North America. So when we clean a school, we are not just cleaning the hallways and the bathrooms but if they permit us, there is a possibility of cleaning their system of education. When we clean a church, our intention is to introduce cleaning as a spiritual practice. When we clean for a real estate developer, we can work with them to use real estate developments to clean an environment and a culture—one of the solutions I firmly believe can work in a place like Nigeria. When we clean for an organization, we can work with them to refine their culture.

... We are very close to putting into practice executives and staff being involved in cleaning physical spaces, surfaces and objects as a practice for cleaning subjects within the organization. We are starting with organizations [that] easily get it and it is part of our cleaning package. This is what Zenith Cleaners has been trying to birth and it is very exciting to say the least.

I am an artist but I am glad to be an entrepreneur because entrepreneurs translate reality from the invisible into the visible where it is needed. But perhaps I am not a social entrepreneur but a spiritual entrepreneur, which is what I think the world needs now in order to clean the [dirt] we are confronted with....

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() To help people delve into the practice of inscaping, Nilsson and Paddock have developed several self-guided learning sessions. (You can find the full set of these materials [here](http://organizationunbound.org/in-practice/) (<http://organizationunbound.org/in-practice/>) .) Each of these “conversation deepeners,” as the authors call them, is “designed for a small group of people within the same organization to do together.” The suggested practices in each session, they add, “spring from a global community of practice of organizations asking themselves: What type of impact might we have if we took the inner lives of our organizations more seriously as leverage points for social change?” Here, we invite readers to [download](http://ssir.org/pdf/2-InscapingIntro.pdf) (<http://ssir.org/pdf/2-InscapingIntro.pdf>) and then to follow one of these self-guided sessions.

### **Expressive Change: Inscaping**

*This session introduces you to the concept of “inscaping”—a simple, yet powerful practice that expressive organizations seem to share.—from the “Inscaping” session guide*

[Download the complete session guide here.](http://ssir.org/pdf/2-InscapingIntro.pdf) (<http://ssir.org/pdf/2-InscapingIntro.pdf>)

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() For a sense of how users experience the self-guided inscaping session (above), consider the account provided by Marianne Knuth at the Organization Unbound website. Knuth is a cofounder of **Kufunda Learning Village** (<http://www.kufunda.org/>), a community organization in Zimbabwe. Nilsson and Paddock introduce the post (which you can read in its original form [here](http://organizationunbound.org/expressive-change/how-we-gather/) (<http://organizationunbound.org/expressive-change/how-we-gather/>)).

### How We Gather

*The following reflection is from our newest contributor **Marianne Knuth** (<http://organizationunbound.org/marianne-knuth/>), co-founder of Kufunda Village in Zimbabwe and all-around awesome person. She wrote it a couple of weeks ago after experimenting with one of the *self-guided sessions* (<http://organizationunbound.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2-InscapingIntro.pdf>) we developed for the *Field Guide on Expressive Change* (<http://organizationunbound.org/in-practice/>).*



The meeting space at Kufunda Learning Village. (Photo courtesy of Organization Unbound)

I am in the middle of what seems like a new learning. A deepening of what I have already known, to the extent that it feels like an entirely new discovery.

This is my re-discovery: How we gather affects our outcomes. How well prepared. How clear on intention. How open or closed. How speedy or slow. How connected or disconnected. How attached to outcomes, or open to what will emerge. Joy, contentment, tiredness, irritation, overwhelm. Either of these, or combinations thereof, will

follow depending on how we come together.

It is utterly astounding to me to realise just how deeply true this is. How much is affected by the attention and care we place on the act of coming together, preparing a meeting, opening, holding, closing. In our eagerness for results, and in the busy world we live in, it seems that these are often seen as frills. We don't have time to fully tend to the preparation, or to the full life of a process—and yet without it, we lose so much of what could be possible.

I am learning in particular that as we learn to gather from a place of open-heartedness, perhaps even *Love*, we not only become wiser in our deepened connection, we also physiologically somehow become

able to revitalise and energise ourselves and each other.

For me—it has thus become an imperative, that I do everything I can to help shape each encounter, and each gathering, to foster such a connection. I feel clumsy in my attempt at describing this, but it feels that what I am learning and re-learning is what it takes, quite literally, to shift the consciousness of an encounter, a meeting, a process.

At Kufunda Learning Village we had fallen into the rut of our weekly meetings having become very task oriented. They were the least inspired place of our village (mostly), and several issues were being discussed with only a few voices repeating themselves. There was little collective wisdom at play, and oftentimes we left our weekly Village Circle feeling drained and tired, although we might have managed to tick off many items on our to-do list.

One day—after one too many such meetings—I decided, no more. I could not sit through one more lacklustre meeting. And so I experimented with a practice called inscaping that friends of mine from Organization Unbound have highlighted in their work. Inscaping, in brief, involves “drawing upon the inner experiences of members during the normal course of work to shape and guide the organisation.” Inner experiences include intuitions, ideas, curiosities, aspirations, fears, values, biographies, etc.

The specific exercise during [our next] meeting was about checking in with each other in smaller groups around our inner experience of our work, using this broader definition of inner. Before we did so, we each wrote down our assumptions about how the others in our group were experiencing their work. By the end of this simple check-in, the atmosphere in the room had palpably shifted. I think primarily the act of bringing a wider sense of our work experience into our dialogue was the main cause. But also taking time to consider how we thought our work mate was doing was part of a more full opening up to other.

I found myself happily surprised at the sharing of the two of my colleagues that I was connecting with. During the every day humdrum, we seldom take the time, I realised, to share from a more emotive, intuitive, reflective place around our work. We took the exercise one step further, and so as we came back together as a whole group, we passed a talking piece and shared something personal about ourselves that we hadn't shared at work before. People I have worked with for ten years, became more nuanced to me, and I felt my heart open as people shared beautiful, sometimes challenging, stories about what was going on in their life right now.

Then we spent about 15 minutes going through our typical to-do list. Not only did we manage to complete it much faster than normal, the quality of our thinking together was also palpably

heightened. There was something in our field that enabled us to cut through things more cleanly and clearly. At the end we all remarked on how energising and in fact deeply nourishing this meeting had been. Almost all of us had come in tired and left feeling invigorated. Inspired even. And with a revitalised connection.

As I look back on it now, I think what this did, and what subsequent encounters have done, is activate a wider intelligence and a wider resource, as this fuller, deeper part of us was allowed into the meeting. Furthermore, the conversation was activating a more intimate connection between us, which—I think—allowed for information to flow more easily and for thinking to become more coherent, even as differences were raised. It's almost like there was a stronger field built between us allowing for this flow of ideas and energy to occur. I left that afternoon feeling excited at the realisation that not only do we have access to this collective intelligence, if we tend to the field from which it rises, but also to collective energy.

Over the past two weeks I have had several more such experiences. Our Village Council [the Kufunda leadership team], which does good and important but oftentimes tiring work, began its last meeting with a deeper check in. And then before getting down to business, we spent time reflecting on the purpose of our group and the extent to which we felt we were achieving it. By the end, we had identified some important systemic challenges in how we had been working together. We slowed way down to be in this more quiet reflection—and ended up spending most of the meeting on this. The last 15-20 minutes were spent on critical issues once more—and again they moved clearly and cleanly, and again we were rejuvenated by our time together.

I think this way of connecting ... has been a part of our village for years. What I am realising is how easy it is to speed up, even when we use our practices—circle, talking pieces, powerful questions, etc. As we return to the artistry of thinking together, I am recognising more nuances and subtleties in what it means and takes to bring the deeper intelligence that is always present to the fore.

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() At the end of their *SSIR* article, Nilsson and Paddock describe the perils of what they call “the form trap”—a pitfall that people in social purpose organizations often fall into. In “Sustaining Social Change,” a [presentation](http://organizationunbound.org/expressive-change/the-form-trap/) delivered at [Tedx Cape Town](http://www.tedxcapetown.org) in 2012, Nilsson offers further insight into the form trap, along with ideas on how a practice such as inscaping can give people the tools to escape it.

## The Form Trap

*The biggest challenge the world is facing is not how to create change but how to sustain change, and if we want to sustain change we are mostly paying attention to the wrong things, particularly inside our social purpose organizations and social movements.—Warren Nilsson, in “Sustaining Social Change”*

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