A Dissertation

entitled

Learning, Improvisation, and Identity Expansion in Innovative Organizations

by

Joshua Keidan

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Education in Curriculum and Instruction

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An Abstract of

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This qualitative study investigated how learning works within innovative organizations through interviews with leaders at those organizations. Such organizations included churches and businesses which have found success because of their ability to function as learning organizations. The researcher sought to understand how these organizations create cultures and environments which promote learning, as well as to examine the ways that they have attempted to foster transformative learning, learning which leads to the expanding of identity on the part of the learner. In addition, the role of improvisational values, principles, and practices in encouraging such learning was also investigated. Through interviews with the leaders of 10 such organizations, the researcher found that these organizations fostered learning through creating organizational cultures and structures designed to foster the well-being of those with whom they work. Well-being is fostered in three ways: through nurturing joy, through granting individuals dignity and visibility, and through creating connection and purpose. In order to foster joy these organizations create a playful culture that embraces an abundance mindset, remove fear from the workplace and grant individuals permission to fail. In order to grant individuals dignity and visibility, these organizations put systems in place which

recognize and value individual differences, such as the use of qualitative rather than quantitative evaluation; they adopt responsive approaches which ensure that individuals are listened to, and they reward success and creativity. In order to foster connection and purpose they share ownership with individuals, empowering those within their organizations (or with whom they work), particularly through adopting a systems-thinking approach; they share an expansive vision with individuals who are invited to work with them, and they intentionally nurture connections between individuals and community with the organization. These organizations tend to share an improvisational value system, and to enable learning by creating an environment which encourages identity expansion.

This Dissertation is dedicated to my daughters, with thanks for all their love and support.

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List of Abbreviations

ESC ....Energy Services Company

Fermi ....Fermi Revolutions

Heart...........................Heart Change Management

PI ....Plastics Innovations

SmithFob....................Smithson Family of Businesses

Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated how learning works in innovative settings, ones focused on creating a culture of learning. The purpose of the study was to understand how organizations which self-identify as learning organizations (defined later in this chapter), or which have been identified by others as effectively embodying the traits of such organizations, create cultures and environments which promote learning. In particular I sought to examine the way that such workplaces attempt to foster transformative learning, learning which leads to the reshaping or expanding of identity on the part of the learner, and increases their sense of what they are capable of. In addition, by bringing a focus on improvisational principles and practices to this examination, I hoped to gain a sense of the role that such principles and practices play in fostering this learning, whether they are explicitly or implicitly invoked.

The rationale for pursuing such a study was twofold. First, one goal was to identify commonalities which link such workplaces together. The literature on learning organizations is copious, but the majority of such work explores facets such as the role of information technology in supporting learning organizations, provides advice on how to foster such organizations, focuses on the practices of a single organization (Dias & Escovel, 2015; Elstein & Driver, 2007; Upadhyay, 2012; Yoo & Huang, 2016). Typically such research has also used quantitative benchmarks such as workplace productivity for the purposes of measurement (Yu et al., 2018). Little work has been done that examines the approaches and practices of multiple organizations, or to theorizes how the commonalities of such organizations might yield lessons for broader educational practices.

Second, by bringing to bear a conceptual framework of learning as centered around transformation and identity expansion, and of the facilitation of such change through improvisational principles (see Chapter Two), this study hopes to explore the usefulness of this framework, and to understand how the practices of the learning organizations being studied do and do not mesh with such a framework. This has the potential to shed light in two directions, by revealing the utility, strengths and weaknesses of this model of learning and these processes for facilitating such learning, as well as suggesting how this model and these processes might allow for the improvement of learning within such organizations.

Significance of the Study

As the above description suggests, I hope that this study will contribute to our understanding of how best to create learning environments and cultures, and to the creation of learning organizations. I also aim to add to the relatively sparse literature exploring how the principles and values of group improvisation might be productively infused into learning cultures, and to contribute to a growing but still-not-yet-mainstream understanding of learning as centered around identity transformation.

Research Questions

This study investigated the following questions:

- How do leaders in innovative workplaces conceptualize and experience learning in their organization?

- How do innovative workplaces incorporate improvisational values and practices into their processes?
- What is the relationship between learning, identity expansion, and improvisational practices in these workplaces?
- What lessons might the field of education take from these answers?

Introduction to Learning Organizations

To understand why the field of education might benefit from a study of other organizations it makes sense to first consider the precedents for this research. One example of such research was the cross-disciplinary project led by Pam Grossman which examined teacher education programs alongside training programs for clergy members and clinical psychologists (Grossman et al., 2007; Grossman et al., 2009). One outcome of this project was an understanding of the way in which training programs outside the field of teacher education made profitable use of approximations of practice which allowed them to gain valuable experiences; this project led to a resurgence of interest in how such approximations of practice might be valuable tool in teacher education (Schutz, et al., 2018).

While formal learning is only a small part of most organizations outside of the field of education, we have understood since at least the 1970's that the ability to learn and adapt offers organizations (including but not limited to businesses) their primary strategic advantage. This understanding comes from the work of Donald Schon (1973), who alongside Chris Argyris developed a model of organizational learning which focused on learning as transformation. He approached this not from the perspective of learning theory, but rather from that of cultural criticism. Building on the work of Dewey (1916/2008), Schon (1973) argued that the hallmark of our society is constant change. As a result, to thrive in such a world, organizations must

> become adept at learning. We must become able not only to transform our institutions, in response to changing situations and requirements; we must invent and develop institutions which are 'learning systems', that is to say, systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation. (p. 28).

Together Argyris and Schon (1974) developed a model of organizational learning which focused on what they called single-loop learning, double-loop learning, and *deutero learning* (a term they borrowed from anthropologist Gregory Bateson). They defined these terms as follows:

- Single-loop learning: adapting to environmental changes by taking action. For example, in a classroom, a teacher responds to low test scores by exhorting her students to study more.
- Double-loop learning: adapting to environmental changes by changing underlying values and assumptions. For example, the teacher begins to question her own belief that her students are lazy, and begins to see them as hardworking but lacking in particular skills; she adapts her beliefs and changes her teaching practices.
- Deutero learning: Learning to learn. For example, the teacher adopts practices which push her to question her own assumptions as a regular part of her teaching practice.

In Argyris' and Schon's formulation, to become a learning system of the type for which Schon advocates means creating institutional practices which enable both double-loop and deutero learning. As a result of their work and that of Peter Senge (1990) it has become a commonplace that "organizational learning is …the principal means by which an enterprise achieves strategic renewal" (Brix 2017, p. 113).

Senge coined the term "learning organization" in 1990, in his book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. He chose the term "organization" intentionally, because he believed it could describe a variety of institutions, from schools to businesses to non-profit organizations. Senge offers an ambitious vision for learning organizations as

> organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together. (p. 3)

Senge argues that to become a learning organization, an organization must simultaneously engage in 5 "disciplines":

- Shared Vision: together, those within an organization must share a vision for that organization; the most productive organizations are those that share co-created visions (to which every member contributes) (Flood, 1998).
- Systems Thinking: Those within the organization must become 'big picture' thinkers.
- Mental Models: Those within the organization must share mental models of the company and its values, and be open to changing those models over time.
- Team Learning: All of the other disciplines are enabled by team learning which creates a safe base from which individuals can take risks, make mistakes, and share their true personalities.

- Personal Mastery: This arises out a sense of empowerment alongside a clear vision of organizational goals, coupled with a knowledge of the current reality – this allows individuals to feel a sense of agency, and to dedicate themselves to bridging the gap between vision and reality. “Personal mastery contributes to the learning organization by continually expanding individuals’ capacity to create their own future” (Flood, 1998, p. 260).

As I will discuss in Chapter Two, Senge’s disciplines connect to several improvisational principles; in particular, the focus on team learning as enabling the creation of mental models, shared vision, and personal mastery dovetails nicely with those ideas, as does Senge’s vision of personal mastery, which aligns not only with Dewey’s (1916/2008) vision of learning, in which the capacity for personal growth continually expands, but also with that of Viola Spolin (1963), the originator of contemporary improvisational practices.

Partly as a result of the work of Schon, Argyris, and Senge, it has become a given in the business world that productivity and competitiveness in the business world are functions of learning and knowledge generation (Castells, 2001; Leadbetter, 2000). In particular, Senge’s work spurred a great deal of interest in the creation of learning organizations, although it has been criticized for being overambitious (Casey, 2003; Fenwick, 1998), and for not defining clearly enough the practices through which the goal of becoming a learning organization may be achieved (Caldwell, 2012). It may make more sense to see the model it presents as more aspirational than fully achievable (Finger & Brand, 1999).

Nonetheless, even detached from Senge's disciplines, the idea of the learning organization remains robust. For example, Garvin, Edmonson and Gino (2008) present their own three-part framework for learning organizations. They argue that such organizations rely upon three building blocks:

- Building Block 1: A Supportive Learning Environment
- (Psychological Safety, Appreciation of Differences, Openness to New Ideas, Time for Reflection)
- Building Block 2: Concrete Learning Processes and Practices
- Building Block 3: Leadership that Reinforces Learning

As I will discuss more fully in Chapter Two, improvisational practices connect to all three of these building blocks, particularly the first and second.

While the principles of a learning organization differ from Argyris and Schon (1974) to Senge (1990) to Garvin, Edmonson and Gino (2008), all such frameworks place learning at the heart of what successful organizations do. Considering how such organizations foster learning on the part of the whole as well as on the part of individual employees and clients offers us an opportunity to think about the ways in which educational institutions may or may not possess the qualities of such organizations, as well as how schools and other organizations might adopt or adapt some of the practices of such organizations.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. This chapter has introduced the purpose of the study, has presented the research questions, and has introduced the learning organizations. Chapter Two will offer a review of literature relevant to the study. In this case, that review has several components: first, an exploration of the learning theory which links learning to identity expansion, and which undergirds this research; second, a review of the literature pertaining to improvisational values and principles and their relationship to learning, with a particular focus on clarifying why joy, which might be seen through an analytical lens as a "lesser" concept or priority, in fact plays an important role in learning; and third, a synthesis of the research on improvisation and learning organizations which shows the conceptual linkages between the two. Chapter Three describes the methods used to conduct this research. Chapter Four reports the findings of the research, and examines the themes that arose over the course of the research. Finally, Chapter Five offers a discussion of those findings, exploring their implications, their limitations, and the avenues for further research which they suggest might be productively followed.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter reviews the relevant literature upon which this dissertation draws. The first section, "Learning as Identity Expansion," explores the theory of learning which underlies this research. The second section, "Improvisation and Learning," examines the relationship between learning and improvisational principles and practices. The third section, "Learning Organizations and Expansive Learning," brings together the ideas in the first two sections with the research on learning organizations which was introduced in the first chapter, in order to clarify the relationships between all three.

Learning as Identity Expansion

This section of will examine the range of literature that lays the theoretical groundwork for an understanding of learning as intertwined with identity expansion. It will begin by exploring what is meant by the terms *identity* and *identity expansion*; following this it will lay out a line of research opened by Lev Vygotsky (1978) on the relationship between learning and identity expansion. The final piece of this section will bring a discursive lens to bear on this subject, drawing on the work of James Paul Gee (1989, 2000) to clarify the relationship between learning, identity expansion, and discourse.

Identity and Identity Expansion

Before exploring learning as identity expansion, it makes sense to clarify what I mean by identity. *Identity* is distinct from (though related to) our sense of *self.* Our self is a momentary construct created through reflection which we use as a label or lens through which to view the entirety of our lives (Chater, 2018; Leary & Tangney, 2012). Identities and narratives of life events are the components that make up our self construct (Atkins, 2008; Mackenzie, 2008; Ricoeur, 1992; Wertsch, 2012). Identities are themselves symbolic constructs, in which a label comes to stand for a broad range of activities and relations in which we engage; we can also term such identities *roles*. (Goffman, 1959). Identities are much more robust than our concepts of our "self"; as Landy (1993) writes, "role is an essential concept that provides coherence to the personality, and that in many ways supersedes the primacy of the concept of self" (p. 10).[1] For example, I play the role or possess the identity of father, educator, and musician; these categories are relatively clear-cut, although each is also expansive and can encompass many different types of performances of these roles. My self is harder to define, comprised of these identities, stories from my life history, and my own synthesis of them. Most of us spend our time immersed in our identities, and little time engaged in the reflection that leads to the construction of some overarching self.

These identities are constructed through relation and action, and partly through reflection. In this way, the performance of our roles allows for the solidification of our identities (Holland et al., 2001). Exploring learning as identity expansion, then, means, exploring how learning changes the roles which we play and the symbolic concepts

[1] Julian Baggini (2012) describes the "riddle of the self: … it is at the same time frighteningly fragile and astonishingly robust" (p. 40); fragile because we have little sense of what it might be, and its elements seem to come apart quite easily, and robust because we each tend to have a strong sense that despite this, we each have one.

through which we construct our selves, offering us access to a wider range of roles or to broader ideas about the roles we currently play.

Building on this, the theoretical background for this study grows out an evolving understanding of what learning entails. Specifically, constructivist educators have moved from a sense of learning as the internal construction of external reality (as theorized by Piaget, 1955, for example), to a sense of learning as a process of identity construction and reconstruction. In this understanding, built on the work of Vygotsky (1978), knowledge becomes just one piece of the learning puzzle; another piece includes changing how we think about ourselves and the roles we are capable of playing (our identities). Educational anthropologists and specialists in adult education also think of learning in these terms (Clint Longenecker, personal communication, April 15, 2019; Varenne, 2007, 2008). Yet contemporary schooling tends to engage with learning as the mastering of new skills and the internalization of new knowledge, rather than as a process of learning as an expansion of one's self or shaping of one's identity.

This has not always been the case. The intersection of learning and identity was clear in the premodern period (Rury, 2002); thus in the colonial period of North America schooling was treated as indoctrination and acculturation, and was understood by all concerned to be a means of shaping identity. Contemporary scholars who have explored the intersection of majority and minority cultures in the US have also made the connections between the two explicit (Rodriguez, 1983). More recently, constructivist educators following in the footsteps of Vygotsky (1978) have constructed models of learning as a process of identity change or expansion (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Hand & Gresalfi, 2015; Nasir & Cooks, 2009; Nasir & Hand, 2008). The difference between this more recent scholarship and the pre-modern model of education is that now we engage the more challenging question of how to open students to the reshaping of their identity without cutting off, discounting, or depreciating the identities with which they enter our classrooms.

Vygotsky and Identity Expansion

Recent explorations of learning as identity change have grown out of the work of early 20th century Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978), who understood learning as a process of identity change, and argued that the construction of knowledge cannot be separated from the social context (Miyake & Kirschner, 2006). In contrast to Piaget (1955), who believed that there were relatively fixed developmental stages which constrained learning, Vygotsky argued that development followed learning. In fact, for Vygotsky, "the only 'good learning' is that which is in advance of development" (p. 89). As Lobman and Lundquist (2007) put it, elaborating on Vygotsky's ideas, if we only look at what children can do independently, we will only see what has already developed, and not what is developing.

The implication of the idea that development follows learning is that learning does not simply expand our knowledge, it also offers us new identities and ways of being, relating and acting. This is a byproduct of the fact that for Vygotsky, learning, whatever its proximate purpose, always also expands our ability to learn; not only do we learn particular things, but through learning we also become more broadly capable (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). It is worth noting that John Dewey's (1916/2008) description of growth fits comfortably alongside idea of the social expansion of capability and readiness to learn: Dewey saw growth itself as continuously expansive in this way – by growing, we become more able to grow; by learning, we become more able to learn. This idea of expansive growth, or of development following learning, also helps us move us beyond an understanding of learning as primarily individual, rational, and knowledge-centered, to an understanding of learning as equally intersubjective, affective, and linked to identity. Learning is intersubjective because it happens through interaction and relationship, and affective because our feelings play a role in our learning. Our feelings may cordon us off from learning, in the way that Krashen (1987) described – he called such feelings "affective filters" – or may open us up to learning. In addition, when we experience the growth that comes with learning we may also feel a kind of vertiginous joy – joy in the enlargement of self we are experiencing, and vertigo because of the unfamiliar space from which we now view the terrain of our lives, and the distance which we might feel between our new and old selves (see, for example, Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory*, 1983, for an exploration of this dynamic).

The Role of Play and Playfulness. Vygotsky (1978, 1991, 2004) saw play and imagination as central to learning, because play and imagination facilitate the trying on of new identities by allowing children and adolescents to act beyond their abilities. Through play we are able to try on identities that are beyond our reach, and to be both who we currently are and another person, one whom we aspire to become, or whose identity we wish to try on – so a child may play at being a teacher, or a scientist, or a historian; by practicing enacting these roles, we learn and develop as we move toward them. This idea is essential for educational practices, because it helps us understand that in working with learners of whatever age, play allows individuals to bridge the gap between being a novice and an expert.

Play itself is characterized by the taking of what Bernard Suits (1978) described as a "lusory attitude," in which we both take an activity seriously and understand its unimportance. Suits described a game as "a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (p. 54), and we can understand the lusory attitude as one that arises when we choose to accept unnecessary challenges for the sake of taking part in an activity, which we do for the sake of sociability and in order to have fun. Yet according to James Carse (1986), a lusory or playful attitude also indicates something much more significant.

Carse, in his book *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility* (1986), argued that all activities can be understood to be either finite or infinite games. The hallmark of a finite game is that it is bounded. It has a stable set of rules, it begins and ends, and the goal of playing a finite game is to win. In contrast, the goal of an infinite game is to keep the players playing; as a result, the game need never end (although individual players may move off and on the field), and the rules must change when required to keep the game in play. As he described it,

> For this reason the rules of an infinite game have a different status from those of a finite game. They are like the grammar of a living language, where those of a finite game are like the rules of debate. In the former case we observe rules as a way of continuing discourse with each other; in the latter we observe rules as a way of bringing the speech of another person to an end. (p. 9)

Carse understood all finite games as occurring within larger infinite games. For example, we can understand school as a finite game; we win by succeeding in school. Yet an educator may approach schooling either as a finite game or an infinite game. Approached as a finite game the goal would be for the teacher to "win," in whatever terms they have set – so, for example they might win by possessing all the knowledge and power in the classroom (which is often how new teachers, excited to play the role of possessor of knowledge and power, choose to play the game of schooling), and the rules would be inflexible. Approached as an infinite game, the goal would be to keep all students "in play," with the possibility of succeeding, and the rules would be open to change in order to do so.[2]

For Carse, one key difference between playing a finite game and playing an infinite game has to do with seriousness. We take finite games seriously. When we choose to play a finite game, we choose to wear the role we play in that game, and to identify fully with that role – it is as if we have chosen to play the game of being a teacher and then forgotten that it is just a game: in Carse's words, "one senses a compulsion to maintain a certain level of performance. We cannot do whatever we please and remain lawyers or yogis" (p. 11). In this sense we accept the policing of roles which Goffman (1959) describes as the price of being allowed to play the game. Carse saw this as a function of the way that we hide our freedom from ourselves. We do not want to see that we need not continue playing the game, and we are not trapped within our roles: "To account for the large gap between the *actual freedom* of finite players to step off the field of play at any time and the *experienced necessity* to stay at the struggle, we can say that as finite players we somehow veil this freedom from ourselves" (p. 12).

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[2] Carse, like Suits (1978), argues that one hallmark of a game is that we choose to play it. However, Suits sees this as the difference between play and life; for example, for Suits both school and games are full of the need to overcome unnecessary obstacles, the choice to play a game is what distinguishes it from school. In contrast, Carse argues that our lives are full of choices, and that we choose to play the games in which we engage, even if those choices are coerced.

In contrast, when we approach games as if they are infinite we are playful, because we always understand that the we are more than the role we are playing – I may be a student, or a teacher, but I am also always in excess of that role, I am more than just a student or a teacher. As Carse (1986) described it,

> Since finite games can be played within an infinite game, infinite players do not eschew the performed roles of finite play. On the contrary, they enter into finite games with all the appropriate energy and self-veiling, but they do so without the seriousness of finite players. They embrace the abstractness of finite games as abstractness, and therefore take them up not seriously, but playfully. (p. 14)

Thus Carse (1986) argued that playfulness is a sign of that we embrace our freedom as individuals and accept the consequences of that freedom:

> To be playful is not to be trivial or frivolous, or to act as though nothing of consequence will happen. On the contrary, when we are playful with each other we relate as free persons, and the relationship is open to surprise; *everything* that happens is of consequence. It is, in fact, seriousness that closes itself to consequence, for seriousness is a dread of the unpredictable outcome of open possibility. To be serious is to press for a specified conclusion. To be playful is to allow for possibility whatever the cost to oneself. (p. 15)

When we understand play and playfulness in this way, it helps us understand why Vygotsky (1978) sees play as where learning and identity expansion occur. When we approach what we are doing playfully, we understand ourselves as not being trapped within a particular role, but rather as free to change, to become, and to transform.

Recent research has built on the work done by Vygotsky to explore the way that play allows for identity reconstruction. For example, the work of Tania Zittoun (2006) on teenagers' identity changes bears out Vygotsky's argument, and affirms the space of play, which she called an "as-if" mode (Hviid & Zittoun, 2008) where old identities and ways of being may be called into question, and new identities and ways of being may be safely explored. By trying on roles both literally and vicariously the teenagers she studied were able to engage this "as-if" mode and open themselves to new roles and ways of being. Other recent work also supports this contention, showing that play allows us avoid feeling threatened, exposed or defensive as we reach beyond ourselves, so that we can be a child and a scientist or a student and a teacher all at the same time (Kupperman et al., 2011).

Gee and Discourse Identity Kits

While linguist James Paul Gee (1989) has not explicitly linked his work to that of Vygotsky, Gee's understanding of learning meshes well with Vygotsky's. Gee describes learning as a process of being inducted into a Discourse community. He distinguishes between "discourse" with a lowercase d, meaning verbal interaction, and Discourse with a capital d, which he sees as standing for a range of social practices. As he explains, "Discourses are ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (p. 6).

There are several important implications of understanding learning as entry into and practice within a Discourse, all of which Gee has discussed in his writing. The first of these, suggested by Gee's definition of Discourses, is that learning is about much more than just knowledge, and in particular that part of learning involves forming an identity in relation to a discourse community. Learning is about feeling, thinking, and acting the part, not just possessing knowledge. In Gee's words, a Discourse is an "identity kit" (p. 7), and learning a Discourse means taking on a new identity.

The second implication is that it takes time to learn a Discourse, a new way of being in the world; time that an educational focus on mastery and assessment does not typically allow. If we wish for learners to become part of a discourse community, we need to give them time to try on that Discourse, and to do so without judging them for imperfectly doing so. Building on Vygotsky (1978), we may need to play our way into a new Discourse, trying on the forms of life, actions, beliefs, values and attitudes in a safe environment, to become comfortable using that Discourse.

A third implication Gee (1989, 2000) discusses is that induction into a discourse community requires institutional approval and affordances – if those who are the gatekeepers of the community, whether a teacher in a classroom or a friend who has invited us to a rodeo for the first time, do not allow us entry into the discourse community, we cannot form an identity in relation to that community.

A fourth implication is that what we think of as "intelligence," which most people seem to associate with the speed with which we learn something new, is not fixed. Instead, what appears to be intelligence may instead be understood as the ease with which we enter a new Discourse. One may be highly intelligent in one setting and highly unintelligent in another.

Discursive Identity Construction

By the present day, these ideas about learning and Discourse have been relatively well established, and have been fleshed out in examinations of the role of dialogue in learning (Sfard, 2015; Sidorkin, 1999). For example, work by Resnick and Schantz (2015) exemplifies the way that Gee's ideas have been incorporated into an understanding of classroom Discourse. Here Resnick and Schantz describe the value of "dialogic instruction":

> A key difference between dialogic instruction and traditional instruction is that this form of dialogue accepts students' ideas regardless of whether they are framed in standard English (or German, or…), and expressed dispassionately. All students are invited to participate. Successful teachers and students in dialogic classrooms are not concerned… with "proper" speech, or sounding like the teacher. Students think out loud in these discussions, and half-formed ideas and broken statements are part of that process. (p. 447)

While Resnick and Schantz did not frame this in Gee's terms, as they present it, such instruction focuses on welcoming students into the discourse community of the classroom, and of the discipline, and centers classroom activity around accepting their status as novices feeling their way into new discursive identities through dialogue. In addition, by accepting that learners possess valid identities outside of the privileged Discourse community, educators may offer them new identity kits without asking them to discard the old. It is also important to note that in their work, as in that of Vandamme (2018), identity itself becomes a discursive construction, understood to be created through interaction and dialogue with others.

The taking on of new identities not only comprises individual learning, but also enables the expansion of knowledge more broadly, which is to say it enables the expansion of the range of a Discourse community. Thus literary scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 1984) described how the interaction of our past identities and our newly internalized voices (or Discourses) not only allows us to transform as individuals but also transforms Discourse.

Gee (1989, 2000) echoed this, arguing that those who have multiple identities and belong to more than one discourse community may be uniquely suited to transform Discourse by playfully engaging with it. Gee saw those who are able to straddle different Discourse communities as best positioned to add to, extend, and play with the boundaries of these communities. We can connect this to Carse's (1986) point that those who understand themselves as existing in excess of whatever role they are playing in the moment are able to engage playfully and freely.

Exploring Learning as Identity Construction

Growing out of these frameworks, recent research has focused on learning as the construction of identity, with a particular focus on how learners may be afforded or denied opportunities to construct an identity in relation to a particular Discourse (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Gresalfi et al., 2008; Wenger, 1999). For example, research conducted by Victoria Hand and colleagues (2006, 2012; Hand & Gresalfi, 2015) has compared how students are supported in constructing identities in mathematics classrooms, and as participants on school athletic teams.

Nasir and Hand (2008) argued that the construction of an identity in relation to a new Discourse requires three types of resources: *material*, *relational*, and *ideational*. Material resources consist of requisite knowledge and skills; relational resources are comprised of positive relationships with members of a discourse community; and ideational resources are ways of thinking which allow one to envision oneself as a member of that community. Gresalfi, Martin, Hand and Greeno (2008) have also explored the need for learners to be able to *personalize* their learning, to *have agency* while learning, and to *find success.* If some or all of these six elements of identity construction are absent from a learning experience, the learner may reject the offered identity. As Edmund Feldman writes, "Learning is contingent upon a dialogue in which we feel ourselves addressed and answered" (in O'Neill, 1991, p. 1).

Along these lines, Tania Zittoun and colleagues (Hviid & Zittoun, 2008; Zittoun, 2006) have described the transition from one identity to another as a process in which an individual experiences a *rupture* in their identity (hence the sense of vertigo which may accompany such learning). In Zittoun's formulation, three things must happen in the transition from one identity to a new or reconstructed identity: 1) old identities must be ruptured and shown to be insufficient; 2) symbolic resources (Nasir and Hand's material resources, 2008) must be made available for the reconstruction of identity, and 3) there must be room to explore and play as we try on new identities.

Research on identity change suggests that one more element should be added to the list of qualities of such learning experiences: they must remove obstacles and resistance that might interfere with identity change (Krashen's "affective filters," 1987). Educational psychologist Deborah Britzman (2003) argued that when current identities are threatened, individuals and groups typically react defensively. This jibes with the point made by Nasir and Hand (2008), that offered identities are easier to accept if they mesh well with current identities, or allow for a sense of continuity between such identities. This suggests that part of the challenge for creating such learning experiences is allowing for a sense of continuity and identity change as growing from one's current identities, while also pushing for a rupture of identity which allows for the formation of a new identity.

As the next section will show, improvisational principles and practices offer promising routes to enable such learning, and to provide both relevant resources and experiences with the desired qualities.

Table 1

Requirements for identity expansion in learning

Resources	Experiential Qualities
Material	Personal
Relational	Agency
Ideational / Symbolic	Success
Access to Discourse	Continuity
	Rupture
	Play
	Removal of Resistance

Group Improvisation and Learning

This section reviews the literature on improvisation and learning, with the goal of clarifying what I mean by improvisation, and also of explaining how the adoption of improvisational values and principles may enable the elements listed in Table 1.

Improvisation

Lobman and Lundquist (2007) offered a basic definition of improvisation: "choosing to create something (usually with other people) by making use of whatever is available" (p. 2). This offers a starting point for defining what we think of as improvisation. It is important to note that while solo improvisation is possible, I am interested in *group* improvisation, which occurs when any group (of more than one person) creates together, through a kind of responsive interplay

When we look at improvisation in performance, we see that improvisation happens within structures; for example, musicians who improvise typically don't change the key in which they are playing; in fact, they generally improvise within the same chord structure, playing with it but not violating the boundaries of the song, although they may push or stretch those boundaries. Similarly, R. Keith Sawyer (2001) argued that we should think of all human conversation as a kind of structured improvisation. If we move beyond the boundaries of the conversational genre (for example, by offering a *non sequitur*) we are not improvising, but rather going off the rails, and the conversation will quickly break down.

Improvisational Principles and Space for Growth

The idea of improvisation as a kind of bounded play is useful for us. Sawyer's (2001) conversational illustration is helpful because it allows us to see that the boundaries of improvisation are the boundaries of Discourse. If the central problem in identity expansion is to find spaces for freedom and growth within roles and discursive boundaries that generally function in conservative and somewhat limiting ways (see Goffman, 1959), then improvisation is valuable precisely because it recognizes and works within constraints, while at the same time taking freedom as its starting point. In his *Philosophy of Improvisation*, Peters (2001) argued that the positing of freedom as its starting point is the defining quality of improvisation. According to Peters, this posture of freedom, exercised within the boundaries of the improvisational act, is what allows for "a mode of return – *re-production*—that contains difference" (p. 5). What Peters meant by this is that the act of improvisation opens up the possibility for self-recreation and identity expansion.

While much has been written about improvisation, two of the foundational writings that provide the strongest theoretical grounding for an understanding the value system undergirding improvisation come from Viola Spolin (1963) and Keith Johnstone (1981). The core values of improvisation which they describe offer both a lexicon and lens through which we can view improvisation as a deeply human system for solving both immediate and long-term problems collectively.

Viola Spolin's writings on improvisation grew out of her work with the children at Hull House in the 1930s, where she created games designed to help create connection and community while working with children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.[3] She began teaching them to theatrical performers in the 1950s before collecting them in her book *Improvisation for the Theater* in 1963.

Spolin's (1963) writing stresses the importance of indirect learning through the creation of effective learning environments. Like Vygotsky (1978) she understood learning to be fundamentally social and contextual. Thus her description of "talent" resonates with Dewey's (1916/2008) ideas about growth, and Vygotsky's (1978) conception of learning:

> We must reconsider what is meant by "talent." It is highly possible that what is called talented behavior is simply a greater individual capacity for experiencing. From this point of view, it is in the increasing of the individual capacity for experiencing that the untold potentiality of a personality can be evoked. (p. 3)

Her goal was to create activities through which individuals, working in groups, could expand their "capacity for experiencing." Spolin's ideas help us understand the power of the improvisational moment, the playful space of learning which Vygotsky discussed, and the way that a supportive, effective social learning environment can lead to a space of spontaneity, one which opens up possibilities for the reconstruction of one's identity along new lines or its expansion in new directions. She described that moment in this way:

> Through spontaneity we are re-formed into ourselves. It creates an explosion that for the moment frees us from handed-down frames of reference, memory choked with old facts and information and undigested theories and techniques of other people's

[3] Later, her son Paul Sills would use these games with actors, first behind the scenes in rehearsal, and then onstage, giving rise to improvisational theater in the US.

> findings. Spontaneity is the moment of personal freedom when we are faced with a reality and see it, explore it and act accordingly. In this reality the bits and pieces of ourselves function as an organic whole. It is the time of discovery, of experiencing, of creative expression. (p. 4)

Spolin, like Vygotsky, argued that games and play create a space for spontaneity and for growth. This is because when engaged in game play, "the objective upon which the player must constantly focus and towards which every action must be directed provokes spontaneity. In this spontaneity, personal freedom is released, and the total person, physically, intellectually, and intuitively, is awakened" (pp. 5-6). Putting this in Gee's (1987) terms, through full immersion in the game we are playing we are given free reign with the Discourse (even as we freely embrace the rules of the discursive game), and in pursuit of our goal we roam widely within the game space.

The games and techniques that Spolin devised were created to help learners grow away from typical learning experiences, which she saw as alienating, because of their focus on earning the approval or sanction of others; fearful of the opinions of others, we cannot be spontaneous because we seek a "right" answer that will earn us approval, rather than finding our own way to solve a problem. As she wrote, embedded in a system built on the dichotomies of the learning environment, "we become so enmeshed with the tenuous treads of approval/disapproval that we are creatively paralyzed. We see with others' eyes and smell with others' noses" (p. 7). Like Freire (1970), she saw such educational systems as authoritarian and oppressive. She argued that the learning experience should involve full immersion in the focus of an activity, so that all fear arising from the desire for approval could fall away.

Spolin acknowledged that her method is challenging because it appears paradoxical: “Accepting simultaneously a student's right to equality in approaching a problem and his lack of experience puts a burden on the teacher” (p. 8). Yet she argued that when learning is organized around problems, a kind of equality can exist in the learning environment, in which the leader can be both guide who enables learning and co-investigator alongside those who are learning. The central technique which she offered to help with this is what she called “sidecoaching.” As the learners play the game / attempt to solve the problem, the sidecoach encourages them to stay focused on their goals and on working responsively with one another to reach them.

Such *responsivity* was another hallmark of Spolin’s approach – it requires the players to listen closely, and to accept and build from what other players offer them. This principle of receptivity would later be codified by improvisers into such roles as “don’t negate” and say “yes, and” (Mollen, 2017).

Another important aspect of Spolin’s (1981) approach was its focus on removing critique. She described this as “evaluation without judgement” (p. 7). This approach asks leaders to help groups evaluation whether they have attained their goal without approving or disapproving. The sidecoach takes on the role of a teacher-guide. The sidecoach never tells the “players” what to do, or shows them how to approach a problem, but may remind them of the focus of the activity, or prompt them to action in empowering ways; the goal, as Gary Schwartz (2012) describes, is to help the group members get out of their own way, and to “let the game do the teaching.” Here, with the leader’s guidance, the challenge of the investigation itself brings the participant into the disciplinary community, and challenges them to work within its Discourse.

Spolin's guidelines and improvisational games were designed to enable learners, working in groups with others, to open themselves up to growth and spontaneity through creating processes which they could use to remove obstacles to that growth. As I will discuss below, several researchers have theorized that these guidelines might be used to create the kind of learning environments which Vygotsky (1978) and Gee (1989) have advocated for.[4]

Keith Johnstone (1981) also described improvisation as a tool to nurture spontaneity. He was particularly interested in ways improvisation could be used to encourage creativity through the removal of fear. Johnstone argued that early on we are taught to fear our creative impulses out of fear that others will judge those impulses as either abnormal or insufficiently creative. Like Spolin he valued group improvisation a way to free our creative impulses (and our selves) through responsive action – instead of thinking as we act we have permission to create as we react.

Bringing Together Vygotsky and Improvisation

There has been a growing interest in improvisation in relation to learning. Much of that research has focused on the improvisational aspects of teaching, from the work done by Gallimore and Tharp (1988, 1990) and Berliner (1994) to more recent work by R. Keith Sawyer (2001, 2004, 2011). Yet much of this work focuses on the solo improvisation involved in the work of teaching, from Sawyer's work to that of Burnard (2011) and Dezutter (2011). For example, a team of researchers in Norway has recently begun

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[4] I would add that Spolin's ideas might also help us develop a vocabulary for describing the performative aspects of education and how they can best be fostered. What I mean by this is that typically we think of the improvement of learning taking place through reflection; the embrace of improvisational principles suggests that educators may be able to improve their practice not through reflection but through action and reaction, through the being-in-the-moment that is central to improvisational practice.

creating a taxonomy of improvisational teaching skills, examining the range of ways in which teachers improvise in their classrooms, in the hopes that by clarifying this range, we will better be able to teach new teachers how to effectively improvise in the classroom (Aadland et al., 2017; Ben-Horin, 2016; Maeland & Espeland, 2017). Such work, while useful, focuses on teaching rather than learning.

However, a small number educational researchers have explored the relationship between group improvisation and learning. Psychologists Lois Holzman and Fred Newman of the East Side Institute in Manhattan have been working for many years to bring together the work of Jacob Moreno (1987) with that of his contemporary, Lev Vygotsky (1978). In the early part of the twentieth century, as Vygotsky was developing his theories, Moreno was creating a branch of social psychology focused on using improvisational drama (or non-scripted theater) in group settings as a technique for therapy and group development. Newman and Holzman theorized that applying improvisational dramatic techniques within the field of education might help educators enact the principles which Vygotsky elucidated. Holzman and Neuman (1996; Holzman, 2009) have argued that improvisation functions as a logical extension of Vygotsky's ideas about play and the space that it opens up for exploration and learning. As their colleague Carrie Lobman (2011) explains, Holzman and Neuman

> expand Vygotsky's notion of the ZPD [zone of proximal development] and use it to propose a concept of learning and development as a creative improvisational activity. The ZPD is the activity of people creating environments where children (and adults) can take risks, make mistakes, and support each other to do what they do not yet know how to do. Rather than being a tool for learning discrete pieces of information,

> the ZPD is the ever emergent and continuously changing 'distance' between being and becoming. (pp. 76-77).

Holzman and Newman ran an experimental school for several years where they tried out many of these ideas; more recently, Lobman (2011) conducted a qualitative study on the effects of teaching improvisational techniques to a small group of teachers, and examined how doing so affected their both their thinking about teaching and their classroom practices. She found that the teachers with whom she worked reshaped their own teacher identities as a result of learning and using improvisational techniques and processes, and that when they applied techniques of group improvisation in their classrooms, their students were given the opportunity to be classroom co-creators, gaining greater agency and facilitating their own growth, development, and identity change.

As Spolin's (1963) and Lobman's (2011) work suggests, improvisation holds a great deal of potential as a tool to facilitate learning. We can draw on the work of cognitive scientists to help us understand why this might be – why Spolin's techniques can increase intelligence or spontaneity, and lead to the embrace of new and more expansive identities (Drinko, 2013). Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (1999, 2010) has argued that we have what he calls a "core consciousness," our momentary, acting self, and also an "extended consciousness," a more reflective self connected consciously to our history and ideas. We can understand our identities and broad idea of self as being grounded in this extended consciousness. Improvisation forces us to operate almost entirely in the realm of core consciousness, setting aside our symbolic constructions (identities and self) and existing in the moment. By grounding individuals in their core consciousness, improvisation seems able to free us from the constraints of our extended consciousness, and therefore to open a space for growth and development that can extend the boundaries of identity, or to allow us to accept new identities as working in tandem with old identities, rather than clashing or conflicting with them. This meshes with a frequent refrain in writing on improvisation – that improvisational experiences seem to bring about a kind of loss of self (Jagodowski et al., 2015; Napier, 2004). As Mike Nichols said of working with Elaine May, “when we were improvising at our best, we actually did disappear" (Marks, 1996).

In addition, because improvisation allows for the trying on of possibilities, it also enables the “*as-if*” spaces which Zittoun and Cerchia (2013) argued are essential for the rupturing and recreation of identity. In Vygotsky’s (1978) terms, it allows us to both be ourselves and be beyond ourselves, to be “a head taller than you are” (p. 102). Or as Zittoun (2006) put it, “the child creates, through his or her play, a zone of proximal development—a zone where skills of action not yet quite possible for a child at a given moment of his or her development in the social and material reality, are suddenly possible” (p. 57). While Zittoun framed this in terms of how children learn, there is little reason to think that this principle does not apply to all learners.

Learning Organizations and Expansive Learning

In Chapter One I described a model of the learning organization focused on creating processes that foster continual growth and learning. Such organizations do so by treating individuals and groups as continually growing and expanding through their engagement with one another. I have shown in this chapter how an understanding of learning built on the work of Vygotosky (1978) also treats learning in this way. In addition, I have shown how improvisational approaches developed by Spolin (1964) converge on this sense of learning as expansive growth as well. Along these lines, Schon's (1974) argument that organizations must constantly transform in the face of society changes can be understood as presenting the social versions of the argument made by scholars such as Hand (2006), who see individual learning as centered on identity change; each presents transformation as both the subject and object of learning.

A further examination of the literature on organizational learning offers a range of additional overlaps. Both the literature on learning as identity change and the literature on organizational learning see *transformation* as a central goal of such learning. This is implicit in the works of scholars such as Hand (2006; Hand & Gresalfi, 2015), and is explicit in the works of experts on business learning. For example, in the learning model presented by Clinton Longenecker (personal communication, April 15, 2019), information (knowledge) is the smallest of four factors; his model presents learning as a process of *transformation*, which leverages information (knowledge) and motivation to enable integration and application, for the purpose of transforming individuals within an organization.

Research on identity change or expansion in the field of organizational learning has been somewhat limited, and has tended to focus on the shaping of organizational identities (Brown & Starkey, 2000). Nonetheless, the range of research conducted so far meshes well with the research on learning described in this chapter. Child and Rodrigues (2011), in their review of such research, conclude that fostering organizational learning "requires the bridging of identity boundaries on a basis that is acceptable to the parties concerned" (p. 312), bringing together the identities with which they enter the workplace and their within-work identities (e.g. engineer, HR manager) and a larger organizational identity. They argue that this bridging has two key requirements: establishing trust and "psychological safety" for all involved, "assuaging their fears of failure and personal harm," and having "clear, shared overall goals which provide a sense of direction for the learning process" (p. 315).

Similarly, Lipshitz et al. (2002) focused on the sharing of goals and the creation of psychological safety in their description of how learning can take place not *within* organizations but rather *by* organizations. Their framework for enabling such learning contains several components that can be linked to improvisational practices, including a tolerance for error, a commitment to learning, a sense of psychological safety, an issue orientation, and commitments to group inquiry and integrity which they define as preferring "the loss of face and other costs incurred by public exposure to the loss of an opportunity to learn and improve" (p. 86). They write that

> Productive organizational learning is fairly rare because it requires two psychological states that are difficult to maintain. The first state is psychological safety, without which people are reluctant to take the risks required for learning. The second state is organizational commitment, without which they are reluctant to share information and knowledge with others. (p. 87)

Lipshitz et al. drew on Senge (1990) and Argyris (1991, 1993) to argue that learning is inhibited by defensiveness or a sense of psychological threat, and that effective learning climates must therefore foster inquiry, openness, and trust. They also argue that an issue orientation "prevents the triggering of defensive behavior" (p. 86), which echoes Viola Spolin's point about how when participants remain oriented on the focus of improvisational activity their impediments to participation fall away. Similarly, Yorks and Barto (2015) describe the fostering of a learning culture as requiring the modelling of “a tolerance for error, treating errors as learning opportunities, deemphasizing status differences, and promoting personal safety” (p. 38).

The need to foster psychological safety to overcome resistance to learning jibes with the same point made in terms of learning and identity expansion within the field of education by scholars such as Britzman (2003), and also resonates with the principles of improvisation – improvisational principles regarding saying “yes” to what others offer, listening and paying attention before responding, valuing their partners and the group, and choosing to play by the rules of the game are all designed to help participants center themselves in the moment, achieving what we might see as a kind of flow state, to feel safe, and consequently to overcome their resistance to change.

Another model that has grown to prominence in the business world within the past two decades and which connects to expansive learning is the servant leadership model developed by Robert Greenleaf (1970, 1977). In this model a leader’s central role is not to focus on the success of the organization, but to help those within the organization (both individually and as groups) achieve their goals and perform at the highest level possible. Greenleaf describes the test of a leader as determining whether their actions positively affect those one serves: “Do those served grow as persons? Do they … become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely to become servants?” (p. 6). In this model, as in the learning organization model, growth and learning are paired, and together lead to organizational success.

Research on organizational learning also supports the fostering of learning cultures by promoting collaboration and workplace engagement, both hallmarks of improvisational practice. For example, Park et al. (2014) found that “learning organization culture makes a direct and indirect impact on employee’s innovative work behaviors…. Work engagement fully mediates the relationship between the learning organization and innovative work behaviors.” They argue that workplaces must “develop effective interventions to enhance their employees ' innovative behavior by devoting efforts to create a workplace that promotes collaborative learning culture and work engagement.

While many consulting companies offer improvisational workshops for businesses, typically on an *ad hoc* basis, little research has been conducted that examines the use of such techniques in the work place. What work has been done seems to bear out the value of improvisational practices. For example, Carter et al., in their collection *Best Practices in Leadership Development and Organizational Change* (2005), identified grappling with resistance and improvising as key best practices; they also profile Mattel’s use of an improvisational process to guide their transformation. Similarly, Brandi and Elkjaer (2011) described the central qualities of effective organizational learning as informal, improvisational, collective, conversational, and sense-making.

All in all, then, the overlaps between effective organizational learning and learning conceived of as identity change are numerous. And improvisational principles and practices seem to hold as much promise for enabling both practices.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology of the study, beginning by describing the design of the research and providing a rationale for that design. I explain how participants were selected for the study as well how I dealt with the broad ethical issues which such research engages and the particular ethical issues connected to the sampling method used in this research. I also describe how I approached data analysis, as well as how I took validity and reliability into consideration.

Research Questions & Research Design

The research questions for the study were as follows:

- How do leaders in innovative workplaces conceptualize and experience learning in their organization?
- How do innovative workplaces incorporate improvisational principles and practices into their processes?
- What is the relationship between learning, identity change, and improvisational practices in these workplaces?
- What lessons might the field of education take from these answers?

Study Design

This study approached these question through engaging the processes of grounded theory. The research consisted of a series of in-depth interviews (lasting from 60-90 minutes) with those responsible for shaping the culture of a series of innovative organizations.

Qualitative Research

Because I was interested in the subject of identity expansion and how these organizations foster learning and identity expansion through their practices, it made sense to conduct qualitative research, to focus on the fostering of atmosphere through organizational practices, and on the subjective experience of that fostering. As Zittoun (2006) described, qualitative research is well-suited to the exploration of processes; Charmaz (2006) & Seidman (2006) have characterized qualitative research as useful for the understanding of meaning-making, and because identity is at least somewhat a personal construction (Atkins, 2008), it makes sense to explore identity through this means as well. Further, Creswell's (2007) formulation of the research participant as expert and the researcher as learner is an appropriate model for this type of research, which takes an emic approach, seeking to learn from those who are being interviewed and gain their insider perspective.

Grounded Theory

Within the field of qualitative inquiry I adopted a grounded-theory approach. Grounded theory is a qualitative research approach which contrasts with the hypothetical-inductive approach which is more typical of quantitative research. Rather than beginning with a hypothesis or fully articulated theory, a grounded-theory approach begins with research questions, and the researcher engages in theory construction only after data have been collected. As Cresswell (2007) described it, grounded theory is a particularly useful research approach when theories are incomplete or have not been tested with these populations. It is useful for identifying common features or experiences shared by disparate systems and individuals. For example, although they did not describe it in terms of grounded theory, the work of Grossman et al. (2007, 2009) examining the training of teachers, clergy members, and psychologists was a type of grounded research. Leading advocates of grounded theory approaches describe it as systematic yet flexible (Charmaz, 2006).

Well executed research in the grounded theory mode typically demonstrates the following virtues: It tends to be useful, durable over time, has valuable explanatory power, is conceptually dense, and is modifiable (Cresswell, 2007; Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Glaser and Strauss (1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987) presented the defining features of grounded theory as:

- Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis;
- Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, rather than from hypotheses;
- Making comparisons during each stage of the analysis;
- Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis;
- Sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness;
- The conducting of the literature review during and after the collection of data, rather than prior to its collection.

Early versions of grounded theory, as developed by Glaser and Strauss, tended to be more comparative, while their more recent elaborations have tended to be more systematizing and following strict technical procedures (see Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In contrast, Charmaz (2006), offered a post-modern, constructivist approach to grounded theory focuses on the flexibility of the approach as the key to its use value. As she described it, grounded theory is focused on the construction of theories (rather than their discovery), and on offering "an interpretive portrayal of the studied world" (p. 11); she describes a process in which the researcher uses their own interests and expertise as a conceptual "points of departure" (p. 17) to follow leads which they will then define through data collection. Following Elliot Eisner (1978), Carolyn Mears (2009) similarly described the researcher taking such an approach as a "*connoisseur…* one who has deep knowledge about a subject and who can best use that knowledge judiciously in interpreting meanings and nuances that might be missed by others less informed" (p. 28).

While Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested conducting the literature review alongside the collection of data, Mears' (2009) and Eisner's (1978) focus on the research as connoisseur suggests the taking of a more balanced approach, in which a preliminary literature review has been conducted prior to the conducting of research and a conceptual framework has been elucidated, but a theory has not yet been generated.

I adopted Mears' (2009) approach in this research, and conducted an initial literature review (Chapter Two) followed by data collection. After collecting and analyzing the data, I returned to the literature, and in Chapter Five I examine a range of literature suggested by the themes which had emerged from the research.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the qualitative researcher is an interpretive one (Stake, 1995); even while presenting the insider or "emic" perspectives of those whom the researcher interviews, interpretation is unavoidable. For this reasons Stake (1995) argues that the researcher must always make himself visible, as a way of showing the interrelationship between the researcher and the phenomenon; descriptions should be grounded in facts but the presence of the researcher's subjectivity should always be on display to the reader.

Researcher's Background. I am a white male in my 40s, with a background in English and ESL teaching at the K-12 level, currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Curriculum & Instruction. In addition to teaching, I spent many years leading my school's professional learning community. I have also studied improvisation and has performed as an actor and improviser for several years.

In terms of researcher bias, my interest in learning and identity change grew out of my work with both students and teachers, trying to foster learning and the adoption of new practices. Prior to conducting this research I had little background in business environments or organizations outside of the field of education, nor did I have experience in the field of organizational learning, and so had few biases regarding such practices.

That said, because it can be challenging to avoid biased interpretations of data, I used several techniques to watch for bias as I analyzed data. Yin (2011) suggested three procedures to minimize the impact of researcher bias: "making constant comparisons, watching for negative cases, and engaging in rival thinking" (p. 198). Yin defined *making constant comparisons* as continually questioning one's categorizations and coding, as well as the emergence of patterns in the data, and challenging one's own reasoning. He defined *watching for negative cases* in a way that builds on this – the researcher must challenge himself to look for differences that initially appear under the guise of similarities. And he defined *engaging in rival thinking* as looking for alternative explanations for the researcher's initial conclusions. I adopted all three of these methods for the purpose of avoiding bias.

Intensive Interviews

I conducted this research by engaging in a series of intensive interviews exploring the practices of innovative organizations (Charmaz, 2006, called these “intensive interviews”; Seidman, 2006, “in-depth interviews”). As Mears (2009) described, such interviews

> offer opportunities to cross boundaries of understanding and to learn from the behaviors and life events of others, uncovering insights from the impacts of a situation, or a program, or a policy as revealed in human terms and then communicated in ways that can be used by the people who create the situations, or design the programs, or write the policies. (p. 16)

Charmaz advocated for conducting a series of interviews organized around a handful of broad, open-ended questions. Such interviews allow subjects to

- Tell their stories and to give them a coherent frame
- Reflect on earlier events
- Be experts
- Share significant experiences and teach the interviewer how to interpret them (p. 27)

In addition, they allow the interviewer to

- Go beneath the surface of the described experience(s)
- Stop to explore a statement or topic
- Request more detail or explanation
- Ask about the participant's thoughts, feelings, and actions
- Come back to an earlier point (p. 26)

My interview protocol (Appendix A) offers more than a handful of questions. These served as guidelines for in-depth conversations, to ensure that all the central topics under inquiry are raised, rather than as a hard-and-fast list of questions that were asked. In practice, interviews followed the protocol quite loosely, though all four areas of the protocol (Introductory Questions, Learning, Identity Expansion and Improvisation) were discussed in every conversation, and all subjects were asked to offer a metaphor describing their organizational culture.

Settings, Participant Selection Procedures, and Sampling

In the case of this study, I could not separate setting and participant selection procedures from sampling procedures. This is because the study necessarily relied on a snowball sampling approach. As Dudovskiy (2018) explained, snowball sampling is particularly appropriate when the "characteristics to be possessed by samples are rare and difficult to find" or when access to those samples is challenging. In this case, snowball sampling was essential both as a way to determine which possible participants possess the desired attribute (an innovate learning culture) as well as to allow the researcher access to participants to whom access might otherwise be limited.

For the purposes of this research, the researcher examined small and mid-sized organizations. A small organization has fewer than 100 individuals within it, while a mid-size organization has between 100-999 employees (Gartner, 2019). The organizations profiled in this study had from 6-200 individuals within them.

I sought to identify and interview leaders responsible for shaping the learning culture at innovative organizations. Because there are no standard metrics for identifying such organizations, I selected initial participants based on expert recommendations and on other relevant data which suggested that an organization meets these criteria. The first two subjects interviewed were recommended by my committee based on first-hand knowledge and familiarity with their work.

Once these initial participant were interviewed, I used snowball sampling to identity and gain access to additional participants. I used an exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling approach, and asked participants to refer as many additional participants who meet the study criteria as they were willing to share; I then pursued all leads that were offered (Dudovskiy 2018).

Ten subjects were interviewed over the course of this research. I have used pseudonyms throughout to refer to all subjects and their businesses, and have changed identifying details as necessary. Of the subjects, eight were leaders (either CEO, founder, partner, or chairperson emeritus) at for-profit companies, five of which are linked to the fields of education and training. Those five include Ben and Cheryl, who work within the same organization, the Smithson Family of Businesses (SmithFob); Ben is the co-owner and founding partner of the umbrella organization, and Cheryl is the managing partner of their training division, SmithTrain. The third of those engaged in training or education is Roger, the CEO and cofounder of Heart Change Management (Heart); they work with organizations to help them as they shift direction, with a particular focus on gaining buy-in from organization members and providing training. James and Lisa both run education-sector start ups; James' company, LearnGym, provides community, technological resources, and coaching to individuals pursuing self-guided learning related to technology, such as learning computer programming. Lisa's company, StopIn, contracts with universities to identify students who began pursuing but did not complete an undergraduate degree, to counsel students who might consider returning to school, and to provide coaching and support for those students who return to school to complete their degree.

Table 2

Research subject pseudonyms, positions, organizations

Pseudonym	**Position**	**Organization Type (Pseudonym)**
Dave	founder, CEO	Software (Fermi Revolutions)
Phil	founder, Chairman Emeritus	Plastics (Plastics Innovations)
Roger	Co-founder, CEO	Change Management (Heart CM)
Mark	Lead Pastor	suburban Lutheran Church (Calvary)
Tom	Lead Pastor, Program Director	urban Lutheran church (Hope)
Paul	President	Energy services company (ESC)
Ben	Co-owner, founding partner	11 businesses – restaurants, wholesale and retail food production, training (Smithson Family of Businesses)
Cheryl	Managing partner	Training company (SmithTraining, part of Smithson Family of Businesses)
James	Founder and CEO	Hi-tech learning gym (LearnGym)
Lisa	CEO	College re-enrollment & mentoring (StopIn)

Of the three subjects working at for-profit companies not directly involved with education, Dave is the founder and CEO of a software company; Phil the founder and Chairman Emeritus of Plastics Innovations, which in turn controls six different companies engaged in manufacturing, research and development, and recycling; and Paul is the majority owner and president of an energy services company which functions as a broker matching clients (such as businesses or consortiums of school districts) with energy suppliers with a goal of lowering energy costs for those clients.

The final two sources are both Lutheran pastors. Mark is the lead pastor at Cavalry Lutheran Church, a well-off suburban church, and has found great success in that role, as measured in number of members, the healthiness of church finances, and member satisfaction. Tom is the pastor at Hope Lutheran Church, which serves the poorest part of its city, and runs a highly regarded after-school arts program for area teenagers. Table 2 (pseudonymously) lists the research subjects and their organizations.

Saturation

Charmaz (2006) suggested focusing on interview quality and saturation rather than on conducting a prescribed number of interviews. As Glaser and Strauss (1978) and Charmaz (2006) have suggested, sampling in grounded theory research should aim toward theory construction, rather than at population representativeness. To this end, I had hoped to conduct approximately 15 interviews, with a focus on achieving saturation rather than on setting a strict number of interviews to conduct. A combination of time constraints and a sense that I had achieved saturation led me to stop data collection after 10 interviews

Charmaz (2006) suggested asking the following questions in order to do achieve saturation:

- Have I collected enough background data about persons, processes, and settings to have ready recall and to understand and portray the full range of contexts of the study?
- Have I gained detailed descriptions of a range of participants' views and actions?
- Do the data reveal what lies beneath the surface?
- Are the data sufficient to reveal changes over time?
- Have I gained multiple views of the participants' range of actions?
- Have I gathered data that enable me to develop analytic categories?
- What kinds of comparisons can I make between data?
- How do these comparisons generate and inform my ideas? (pp. 18-19)

I used Charmaz's guiding questions to determine when I had achieved saturation,.

Informed Consent and Permission Procedures

Ethical Considerations

Throughout this research project, I adhered to the principles laid out in the Belmont Report, namely *respect for persons, beneficence,* and *justice* (Mack et al., 2005). Following established convention, I obtained informed consent from the participant (see Appendix B for the informed consent document). I maintained data security and participant confidentiality as part of the commitment to respect for persons and for beneficence.

I identified one area as requiring special attention in order to avoid the possibility of harm to participants. First, while this study could only be conducted using a snowball sampling method, this method has been singled out as having the potential to expose participants to coercion, because when one participant refers the researcher to further participants, there is the potential that those later participants might feel coerced into participation (Boise State University); alternately, earlier participants might feel hesitant to recommend future participants. To minimize the risk of such coercion, I added three components to the consent form. I added two pieces the script portion of the form. The first was an acknowledgement that participants would be asked to refer future participants in the study, and that they have a choice about whether to consent to giving such referrals. The second was an acknowledgement that while the participant may have been referred to the researcher by another participant, that they have a choice about whether to participate in the research or not, and that their choice will not be reported to the referring participant. In addition, I added a checkbox to the consent form, so that participants who had referred future participants could choose whether to grant me the ability to reveal their name in conversation with the participants to whom they had referred me (see Appendix B).

Data Collection Method

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews with the participants were conducted one-on-one in person at their workplaces or in a public setting. The interviews loosely followed the interview protocol (Appendix A). I applied an adaptive procedure, and treated them as semi-structured, to better capture the personal narrative of the participant (Creswell, 2007). Throughout, I used follow-up questions prompted by the responses, and made requests for further detail and clarification.

Appendix A is the semi-structured interview protocol. While it is common to define for the person being interviewed important terms used in the questions, in this instance terms (“learning organization,” “identity,” and “improvisation”) remained intentionally undefined because I was interested in understanding how those being interviewed understand them.

Data Recording Procedures

Meetings were from 45-90 minutes long. The primary focus of the conversation was to elicit the participant’s understanding of the role and experience of learning within their organization, with questions aimed to elicit thoughts about learning, identity, and improvisation. Because research on metaphor creation has been shown to help clarify individuals’ thoughts about abstract subjects (Jamiozik et al, 2016), participants were also asked to offer metaphors to describe their organizational cultures.

The interview and follow-up conversations were recorded using the iPhone voice memo application; I also took field notes during the conversations to capture responses as well as non-verbal cues.

Data Analysis Strategy

After each interview took place I began a memoing process, reflecting on themes, patterns, and concepts and creating field notes (memos) about them. Memoing continued throughout the process of data collection and analysis. Upon transcribing each conversation, I engaged also in what Charmaz (2006) called “initial coding,” coding the data to looking for emerging themes, patterns, and concepts. I attempted to identify the central concerns of participants related to learning in their organizations, and to understand both what is happening in those places and what the participants hope to achieve. Theorizing was a part of all steps of the data analysis in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In addition, once coding categories emerged, they were linked to theoretical models and I attempted to identify central categories to which the others connected. During this theorizing, I applied the tools to avoid bias recommended by Yin (2011) – making constant comparisons, watching for negative cases, and engaging in rival thinking (p. 198).

Validity and Reliability

Validity

According to Leung (2015), validity in qualitative research is measured by the "appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data" in terms of whether they are the right ways to go about answering the research questions. For example, the sampling procedure must be the appropriate method for pursuing the research goals. I tried to align the research questions and methods in ways which meet this criterion.

In addition several validation strategies were employed, including data triangulation and peer debriefing.

Data Triangulation. Creswell (2007) described data triangulation as an important method of achieving structural corroboration. In the case of this study multiple interviews provided sources for the triangulation of data. In addition, I examined additional data sources related to each source – I visited several of the organizations, read internal publications, web materials and the books which three of the ten sources had written – and used these sources for the purpose of data triangulation.

Peer Debriefing. Peer debriefing is intended to increase the dependability of findings (Creswell, 2013). Results were shared with the researcher's advisor so that she might interrogate, challenge, and clarify the research and findings, and offer what Creswell (2007) terms "consensual validation" (p. 204).

Reliability

As Leung (2005) described, "the essence of reliability for qualitative research lies with consistency." Silverman (2008) proposed five aids for reliability in qualitative research: refutational analysis, constant data comparison, comprehensive data use, inclusion of deviant cases, and the use of tables. Refutational analysis and constant data comparison have been discussed in the section on data analysis. By comprehensive data use Silverman means avoiding the exclusion of data which does not fit the researcher's conclusions; similarly, the inclusion of deviant cases seeks to ensure that outlying cases or examples which seem not to fit the patterns identified by the researcher are made visible in the completed research so that others might read the research and draw their own conclusions. The use of tables offers an organizing tool which can make visible to readers of research the organization of constructs, and can clarify conclusions. I made use of all these tools in pursuit of reliability.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

While the purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize, this research aims to identify similarities and connections between practices in the companies interviewed; that is, to generalize. There are some limitations to what generalization is possible, however.

This study was limited to 10 interviews, using a purposive sampling method, by the realities of time and resources. Thus it cannot claim to be exhaustive in its examination of such companies. While the interviews were be chosen purposively, the range of executives interviewed was also limited by access, and the interviews themselves were limited by the time which those executives have available for in-depth conversations.

Delimitations

This study focused on organizations that were identified by others or self-identified as having the qualities of a learning organization; thus the focus is on examining the self-understandings of learning within those organizations; thus much of the practices engaged in within these organizations is taken for granted. This is a delimitation of an emic approach, which focuses more on participant experiences and interpretations of events than on the events themselves.

Chapter Four

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the lessons that the field of education might take from innovative organizations outside of the realm of schooling. To this end I conducted 10 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with executives and leaders in 10 different organizations (one of which is the umbrella organization to which another belongs). The subjects of these interviews were identified through snowball sampling – I began with recommendations from my committee which led me to his first two interview subjects, and further interview subjects were identified through asking for recommendations at the end of each interview.

I also toured several of the organizations with whose leaders I had conducted interviews, read any books written by those whom I had interviewed (three of those the researcher interviewed had written at least one book), and examined any literature produced either in-house or online by the organizations with whose leaders he conducted interviews. In addition, I attended a one-day workshop for educators at Fermi Revolutions (this name, like all other subject and company names, is a pseudonym).

Of the organizations with whom I conducted interviews, two were Lutheran churches which had been singled out for their successes and innovations; two were businesses in the start-up phase, with fewer than 15 full-time employees and operating in pilot mode, meaning that they were still working on generating revenue, but which were engaging with educational questions in interesting ways; the other six were privately-held businesses ranging in size from 15-600 employees, with total revenue between $5 and

$50 million, each of which had been identified by peers and community members as successful and innovative organizations.

Interviews loosely followed the semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A). After the interview subject was asked to share their story and that of their organization, the majority of the interview consisted of follow-up questions drawing out threads of those stories which seemed connected to emerging themes and to the broad subsections of the dissertation subject (learning, identity expansion, and improvisation).

This chapter is organized as follows: the first section, *Subjects*, offers introductions to those interviewed and their organizations, and highlights important facets of those conversations as they relate to this research. Subsections on *learning*, *identity expansion*, and *improvisation* sketch the beliefs of each subject on these broad topics in relation to their organization. The second section, *Themes*, lays out more fine-grained themes which emerged over the course of the interviews, drawing connections between the subjects and organizations, as well as between those themes and the topics of learning, identity expansion, and improvisation.

The table below offers subjects' pseudonyms, titles, and organization types (plus pseudonyms) (Table 3).

Table 3

Names, positions, organization type of interview subjects

Pseudonym	**Position**	**Organization Type (Pseudonym)**
1. Dave	Founder, CEO	Software (Fermi Revolutions)
2. Phil	Founder, Chairman Emeritus	Plastics (Plastics Innovations)
3. Roger	Co-founder, CEO	Change Management (Heart CM)

Table 3 cont.

Pseudonym	Position	Organization Type (Pseudonym)
4. Mark	Lead Pastor	suburban Lutheran Church (Calvary)
5. Tom	Lead Pastor, Program Director	urban Lutheran church (Hope)
6. Paul	President	Energy services company (ESC)
7. Ben	Co-owner, founding partner	11 businesses – restaurants, wholesale and retail food production, training (Smithson Family of Businesses)
8. Cheryl	Managing partner	Training company (SmithTraining, part of Smithson Family of Businesses)
9. James	Founder, CEO	Hi-tech learning gym (LearnGym)
10. Lisa	CEO	College re-enrollment & mentoring (StopIn)

Subjects

Dave, CEO, Fermi Revolutions

Dave is the co-founder and CEO of Fermi Revolutions, a software design company founded in 2001 which is located in a small-to-midsize midwestern college town, and which employs approximately 60 people. Fermi primarily designs software and applications for use within organizations – for example, they might be hired by an automaker to design an application that car dealership mechanics would use to interface with that automaker.

Dave has written two books about fostering joy in the workplace, and is in demand as a speaker on this topic. With one of his co-founders, he has also taught courses at the business school of the local university, and Fermi has given over part of their space to students from the university to use as a business incubation space. Fermi offers regular tours to the public, allowing others to see how they work and to spend time in their workspace. They also offer workshops and training sessions (for a fee) to groups and individuals from other companies interested in understanding the "Fermi way," and in the summer of 2019 they offered their first workshop for educators, aimed at sharing what they do, how they do it, and asking participants to consider how their practices might be adapted in educational settings. In addition to interviewing Dave and reading his books, I also attended a public tour and the educators' workshop held at Fermi.

Before founding Fermi, Dave had worked as a programmer for a traditional software development company. Most programming happens with one programmer working alone at a desk, responsible for his piece of coding but often disconnected from the larger project. When deadlines approach or software doesn't work as planned, programmers work round the clock to code or troubleshoot. Projects regularly run over budget and deadlines may come and go with little to show.

Such conditions had frustrated Dave, and while at that previous company he had experimented with different ways of doing business. He created shared spaces for programmers, and paired programmers together to write code, believing that whatever they lost in speed (because pairs were working together at one computer) they would make up for in the quality of their programming, as mistakes were made and corrected quickly over the course of their work.

When Dave and his partners founded Menlo, they had the opportunity to continue to "run the experiment" (a favorite expression of theirs) of this partnered work, and they also put in place a variety of systems to make work transparent, to ensure that things ran smoothly, and to ensure that no project relied too heavily on any individual programmer or project manager. Everyone works in pairs, from programmers to stress testers to project managers to the "high-tech anthropologists" whose role is to study a client's needs and to ensure that the programs and software Fermi creates meet those needs.

The workplace is full of visual systems designed to help everyone involved have a clear idea of what is happening at any given time. For example, each week they invite clients in to determine what work will be completed in the next week by each pair of programmers. They have created a visual system to facilitate this process – each task that might be completed that week is written down in clear English (rather than tech-speak) on a card; the size of the card indicates the number of hours estimated to be required to complete the task. A 32-hour task will take up an entire sheet of paper, a 16-hour task a half sheet, an 8-hour task a quarter sheet, and so on. The clients then choose cards and lay them out on the worksheets for their pairs of programmers, each of which has space for 32 hours of work (since all employees have additional responsibilities such as team huddles and client meetings that account for the other eight hours in their 40 hour workweek). If the cards they choose exceed the space on the page, the client must either remove some tasks or choose to hire additional programmers to work on that week's project.

This visual system ensures that everyone – clients, managers, and programmers – has a clear idea of the weeks' goals, and that those goals are manageable in the time required. This system also ensures that programmers work only 40 hours a week; they need never take work home or with them on vacation (because the partner system ensures that no individual bears the burden for a particular project, or is irreplaceable).

Similarly, for each project the tasks for the week are hung on the wall; as pairs complete tasks (or run into difficulty) they use colored stickers to indicate their progress – thus managers can know at a glance where the team is at in their work, and where help might be required.

The workplace is friendly and generally informal; everyone works in one large space, with all those tasked to a particular project organized around tables and computers that have been put together in the workspace – thus furniture is regularly reorganized as new projects are taken on, old projects are completed, or project teams are reconfigured. In keeping with this informality, dogs are welcome in the workplace, and babies make regular appearances as well.

Each of these choices has grown out of two things, first, a commitment to the Fermi mission, which is "To end human suffering in the world as it relates to technology," and second, from their focus on "running the experiment." They view their mission broadly – their goal is not just to end suffering in relation to technology for their clients, but also for those with whom their clients might interact (for example, customers who might use the software which Fermi has created), and also for their own employees – they have made a commitment to fostering joy in the workplace and beyond.

In order to foster joy, they strive to make Fermi a place that their employees and clients want to be. Thus they strive to be accommodating, and are willing to try out different ways of doing so. Thus when an employee's child care fell through, they were willing to try out allowing babies in the workplace, and by "running this experiment" they found that doing so had positive effects on morale and joy; they believe that whatever small negative effects on employee productivity might come from allowing babies are offset by the positive energy, employee commitment, and workplace community created by this allowance.

Learning. Learning happens continually at Fermi, and is an important feature of the pair system. Because employees always work in pairs (pairs may work together for anywhere from half a day to a five-day stretch before being reconfigured), everyone is constantly learning from and teaching one another. Thus when a programmer is hired, for example, Fermi cares less about what specific programming languages that person may be comfortable with than they are about their ability to learn. A programmer who has only ever created software for personal computers, for example, might be placed on a project with a programmer with expertise in creating applications for mobile devices; over the course of their time together each will learn from the other, and the next week that first programmer may be teaching someone else how to code for an app.

Dave sees the focus on joy as essential for fostering learning in the workplace. He sees joy as the opposite of fear; by fostering joy Fermi is able to "suck fear out of the workplace," which allows individuals to learn from and teach one another without feeling threatened or fearful because they don't already know how to do something.

Improvisation. Dave thinks of the work done at Fermi as "essentially improvisational." He sees the virtue of the visual systems within the workplace as freeing up employees to improvise as necessary to meet their goals. He views such systems as fostering a culture of trust, which allows management to let go of control over the workplace while still ensuring that those involved in a project will have a sense of how things are proceeding.

The pair system, too, connects to improvisational principles – in fact, when Fermi hires new employees, they do so initially by bringing in a group of candidates and asking them to work in pairs to complete a variety of tasks (the pairings are shifted over the course of the day). Their goal in this process is to “make your partner look good,” which sounds a lot like Lobman’s (year) articulation of one of Spolin’s (year) essential principles of improvisation.

Fermi’s focus on “running the experiment” also might be seen as connecting to the “yes, and” improvisational principle, which fosters a type of positive receptivity to new ideas, and pushes improvisers to change their default position when confronted with a new possibility from saying “no” to saying “yes.” “Make mistakes faster is one of Fermi’s slogans; they believe that mistakes are inevitable, so it is better to make them quickly and correct them when problems are still small instead of catching them later when they have grown into larger problems.

Identity Expansion. Dave views himself as a servant leader (as described in Chapter Two) characterizes the culture at Fermi as permission giving, offering those who work within Fermi the opportunity to try on new roles and new identities that stretch them past their previous roles or selves. He sees this as linked to joy and the elimination of fear in the workplace – one need not fear trying on new roles or new identities, and is encouraged to do so. The partner system helps eliminate some of the risk (and consequently the fear) from this. For example, employees are encouraged to try their hand in other areas of the business – a high-tech anthropologist might spend several weeks trying on the role of programmer or project manager. Because they are always working with a partner, there is little risk that allowing them to do so will negatively affect the progress or quality of a project.

Because computer programmers are generally somewhat introverted, working in pairs at Fermi may actually require identity expansion, and certainly requires an openness to try on a new, more social role. Dave explained this as part of Fermi's giving them "permission to reinvent themselves"; "no one has to know that they were the introverted software designer with their headphones on in their last job." Once an individual comes in for a job interview, who they were in the past doesn't matter to Fermi; as he said, they "don't care about who you were, they care about who you are and what you can do." Thus the culture is future- rather than past-oriented.

Phil, Chairman Emeritus, Plastics Innovations

Phil is the founder and longtime CEO of Plastics Innovations (PI); currently he is the Chairman Emeritus of the company, which is located in a mid-sized midwestern city. PI is the umbrella company for six companies that work with PET plastics (generally used for food and beverage applications); together, they employ approximately 100 people. The initial company focused on packaging design and development; other companies under the PI umbrella include a European company, a PET recycling company, a manufacturing company, and a medical implant manufacturing company.

By training Phil is a chemical engineer. He founded the company in the early 1980s, after having worked at a large glass company, where he had been charged with developing plastic bottles for soft drinks. When the larger company for which he had worked decided not to continue developing plastics products, he chose to leave the company and start his own business. While the company initially began as a pure R&D

company focused on packaging design and development, developing products which his clients could then produce in their own facilities, it has since expanded to include a range of linked companies who share a board of directors.

From the beginning, Phil's focus has been on creating a workplace where people want to be, and over its 30+ years in existence, only a handful of employees have left to pursue other opportunities. Several factors seem to explain this lack of attrition. One is that from the beginning, and despite the advice of those from the business world who had advised Phil, he chose to share ownership of the company with his employees; at present approximately half of their employees have some ownership stake in the company. In addition, Phil chose to keep the company small, and chose to spin off related companies rather than to simply grow the parent company. For example, when an employee suggested expanding into the European market, that employee was given control and partial ownership of their new European company. Similarly, when a biomechanical engineer approached the company and suggested partnering to produce plastic medical supplies, they chose to create a new company and to put a long-time employee at the helm of that company.

Learning. These last two examples also point to the role of mentoring and development (and informal learning more generally) within the company. For example, the employee who was given the reins at their medical supply company had been a "by-the-book engineer" who had never had full responsibility for the performance of a company, and had initially been uncomfortable with the entrepreneurial side of the business. Phil and his partners chose to mentor this person and to help her become the managing partner of that company, rather than to hire in an outsider with the requisite experience.

A focus on education permeates the company. Phil had stepped away from leading his company to become dean of the college of education at a nearby university for several years, and he is deeply invested in the improvement of public schools within the community. Within PI, there is a focus on educating employees in all areas of the business. As part of this push, employees spend time immersed in different divisions within the company, so that a salesperson might spend a month working in the laboratory, and a month working on the manufacturing floor. As Phil describes it, in order to design a new product, the "designer needs to know about a) how it gets made, b) how it's going to be used, and c) what is the value of that? You get that by going out and having an experience."

Educating employees in this way requires serious commitment on the part of the organization. Partly this is simply a result of the logistical challenges that come with such embedding: "It's tough, when you take a designer that you are going to have to use and take them out and put them in the lab for a few weeks, who's going to do the design?" On a more human level, employees need nurturing to help them overcome their initial resistance to working outside of their comfort zone that arises because learning through experience can be initially uncomfortable:

> It's an insecurity thing, when you ask somebody to go out and run a machine that has never run one before, they're scared of it, so the tendency is to say "that isn't my job," so you have to nurture people. (9/25/2019)

Phil sees this commitment paying off in many ways within PI. With the right nurturing, he argues, individuals enjoy learning. In addition, the knowledge that employees accumulate over their time at PI means that they often end up educating those with whom they work. Because most companies with whom they work have a lot of employee turnover, while PI's employees generally stay put, as a result PI's employees are often in the position to share knowledge about their clients' businesses with those clients. As Phil said, "what we provide customers in many ways is learning their business and being able to tell them that ten years later when they" have lost that institutional knowledge, which he described as being satisfying for employees at every level of the organization.

Alongside this, there is a commitment to offering education that exposes employees to cultural differences, in practice this means that when an employee needs to improve their skills in some area (for example, a new manufacturing process), they are regularly sent to Europe to receive training. While the focus here is on formal learning, the European setting means that employees are again learning through experience.

To Phil, meaningful learning comes about through the offering of open-ended challenges. For example, he speaks frequently about a college course he took that presented the students with a gap in the commercial market and asked them to work in groups to develop a way to fill this gap. He sees such challenges as fostering critical thinking and encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit, and he summed up his thinking on this point by saying that "the way people become entrepreneurs is they find themselves in a situation where they can learn." For example, speaking of the woman who has spent the last year-and-a-half leading their newest company,

> we needed somebody from our end to really take over and build a manufacturing operation for this, and we picked her, and it wasn't a natural fit for her, because now all of a sudden instead of carrying out stuff she had to create stuff to carry out. (9/25/2019)

Phil credits her success to her immersion in a culture that surrounded her with entrepreneurial mentors "she was around, being submerged in that," and her willingness to learn through experience.

Improvisation. To Phil's mind, being faced with such open-ended challenges forces individuals to learn how to improvise. Thus he sees the work of PI, with its focus on innovation and research and development, as relying upon improvisation – for example, he described the challenge of being asked to design a bottle for a new product, such as a type of juice. If the juice needs to be heated before being bottled, when the bottle cools the plastic it is made of will deform. Thus they must improvise, trying out different options and finding creative ways to respond to the design challenge in front of them. In Phil's eyes, such improvisation can only be performed because of his employees' expertise, which they rely on to inform the range of possible approaches they pursue.

The spirit of trial-and-error, and finding creative responses to the challenges facing the company have been part of Phil's ethos from the founding of the company. He described a childhood in which he was encouraged to experiment; his dad would "bring things home for me to fool around with; he would bring home electric motors and chemicals; and I would take them down to the basement and fool around unsupervised." He described his wife's attitude toward his entrepreneurial endeavors, including the starting of PI as one of encouragement; when he left his safe corporate job she said, “Hey, go try this, you can always go get a real job.”

He raised his children with a similar philosophy, telling them, “I want you to always be available, I want you to be open,” phrases that echo the positive responsiveness that typifies the improvisational approach (Lobman & Lundquist, 2007). He has encouraged the exploration of new ideas within PI, both small-scale (such as new approaches to packaging) to large-scale. Sometimes this can lead them down costly roads that don’t pan out, such as when PI tried to develop a company that would manufacture specialty plastic components, and invested significantly in this project before it failed. As Phil sees it, if you inculcate a willingness to try new things, enough will succeed “that it becomes ok to try and to fail”; this sense that it is ok to fail is essential for improvisation.

Identity Expansion. While Phil has not thought explicitly about identity change in relation to PI or to learning, many of the practices described above can be seen as linked to identity-expanding practices, as can Phil’s stated commitment to servant leadership. For example, the cycling of employees through different divisions in the company, and the nurturing of those employees to overcome their initial fears when faced with tasks and challenges which they feel ill-equipped to face, can be seen as a model for such identity expansion. His philosophy of wanting both his children and employees to be “available” and “open” to new experiences and challenges also dovetails with this, as does the explicit focus on mentoring individuals to move beyond their comfort zones and to become more entrepreneurial or to gain leadership skills. He describes these approaches as aimed at “better teaching people to explore alternatives”; while he sees such an approach as focused on teaching critical thinking, as the examples above have shown we can also see them as being linked to the Hviid and Zittoun's (2008) argument that growth and learning happen through the safe exploration of alternative identities.

Roger, Co-Founder and CEO, Heart Organizational Change

Roger co-founded Heart Organizational Change in the late 1980s. Heart employs approximately 150 people at two locations in the Midwest, one in a mid-sized city, and another in a larger city. Heart specializes in creating change plans for companies (including major airlines, hotel chains, coffee shop and restaurant chains) and helping those companies implement those plans. Because their work focuses on learning and change, Roger (and all those working at Heart) think very deeply and intently about how learning works.

In fact, this thinking is what led to the creation of the company in its current incarnation. Before Heart took its current form, Roger and his co-founder regularly led corporate retreats for businesses interested in understanding and responding to trends within their industries. The two partners became increasingly interested in the disconnect between the advice they offered these companies and the lack of institutional response – as he put it, why were their ideas "dead on arrival"?

Together they rethought their work, realizing that if they wished to encourage organizations to change what they were doing,

> success was not determined by the learning speed of the brightest few, but of the understanding, embracement, and advocacy of the slowest many. How do we take what was an elite language of the top 12 people of an organization, and make it a common language for the 45,000 people that work there? … How do people learn?

> How do they learn fast? And how do they do it in such a fashion that it can be replicated in 10s and 100s of thousands of people? (10/14/2019)

As they grappled with these question they began to focus on the question of how best to engage those at all levels within an organization. As Roger described it, they saw a gap between the deep engagement that individuals have with their lives outside of work and their tendency to be much less engaged with their life at work. In their view, this gap represents an incredible amount of untapped potential, potential which can only be realized if individuals throughout these organizations are empowered, and if they could find a way to "democratize the strategic information of an organization so that everybody could get off the bench and into the workaday life." If they could help organizations rethink the flow of information and move away from top-down approaches, such organizations could "get greater results and people will have a greater sense of meaning and purpose and connectivity."

In Roger's view, they weren't trying to rethink education or how learning works, but instead were focused on the following question: "how do we get these people that the best version of themselves never shows up in the workplace to liberate that and unleash it?" Roger explained that Heart's way of answering this question was to pair Peter Senge's (1990) work on systems thinking with William Isaacs' (1999) discussions of how to foster productive dialogue. From Senge Heart drew the insight that organizational leaders typically don't trust those who work for them to engage with the big-picture challenges that face the organization. He compares this to asking employees to solve a jigsaw puzzle without ever showing them the image they're trying to create:

> Leaders have a thousand piece jigsaw and they always send different pieces across, and you get all screwed up – why don't they ever send the cover of the box across, so when you look at all of it in context, that makes a lot of sense. (10/14/2019)

Alongside this focus on systems thinking comes a focus on nurturing productive dialogue. Isaacs (1999) describes such dialogue as essentially different from discussion. For Isaacs, "*[d]iscussion* is about making a decision… discussion seeks closure and completion" (p. 54). In contrast,

> *Dialogue* is about exploring the nature of choice. To choose is to select among alternatives. Dialogue is about evoking insight, which is a way of reordering our knowledge—particularly the taken-for-granted assumptions that people bring to the table… To listen to others, to cultivate and speak your own voice, to suspend your opinions about others—these bring out the intelligence that lives at the very center of ourselves—the intelligence that exists when we are alert to possibilities around us and thinking freshly. (pp. 55-57)

In order to foster such productive dialogue organized around engaging with big-picture, systems thinking, Heart has arrived at a method which pairs visual metaphors with Socratic discussions. That is, having worked with a company's leadership to broadly explore goals and directions (such as a focus on improved customer service within a company), Heart creates a visual representation designed as a starting point for conversation among employees of the organization, and outlines a plan for the facilitation of discussions which will take that visual metaphor as a starting point. As Roger described it, Heart sees "visual metaphors as mental practice fields and brain gyms for people to rapidly understand complex information and then to be able to think differently about it and act differently" in relation to it. This is because as they engage with such metaphors learners are able to connect what they see to their prior knowledge, and need not fear that there is one "right" answer. Because there is no "right" answer, individuals taking part in these dialogues are able to focus on listening to one another and allowing them to "think freshly" in the way that Isaacs (1999) described. As Roger put it,

> If we set the table well enough, and we have the data, and we have as much information as possible and we put it all in a system, 95% of people are going to come to some answers that are as good as anything we could have ever scripted for them, but their journeys are going to be different – that is key – but they'll get there because we have set the stage for the search. (10/14/2019)

The Heart system aims at provoking open-ended dialogues and empowering those throughout the organizations with which they work. The core understanding underlying this approach is that if the organization wants their employees to learn and internalize a new approach to their business, that corporate leaders must listen closely to and learn from those employees – learning cannot be a one-way street if the goal is to foster investment on the part of learners, because such investment can only be fostered if all involved have a "sense of meaning and purpose and connectivity."

In Roger's experience, their method works well at achieving this goal. It also fosters trust between those at different levels within an organization. For example, he shared several examples of CEOs growing to trust their employees through participating in and listening to these types of conversations and realizing the deep value of the insights of their employees. Such work has a recursive effect, then, because having begun by creating a more democratic process for organizational change implementation, its successful implementation also strengthens the belief in the value of such democratic practices.

Learning. Roger believes that learning is fostered through the removal of fear, which he sees as central to Heart's method. As he sees it, their use of small group, Socratic dialogue "takes the fear out and opens the vulnerability of people to reconsider" their views and ideas. In order for individuals to learn they

> have got to let go of the fear of being wrong, the fear of being embarrassed, the fear of not knowing, the fear of saying something stupid, all those fears that you learn after somebody said to you "that's wrong, sit down." (10/14/2019)

This idea is explored more in the second half of this chapter's exploration of themes.

The examples above give a good sense of how Heart attempts to foster learning through dialogue when working with clients; within their organization, too, they attempt to foster productive dialogue between those who might initially be inclined to write one another off. Roger offered the example of a person with an MBA who is paired with a graphic designer, and discussed the challenge of getting them past their initial impressions: "the MBA thinks that the artist is so flaky they couldn't get a job, and the artist thinks the MBA is a cold hard capitalist who sold their soul to the devil just for greed and money." Heart attempts to foster learning internally in much the same way they would when working with clients, by strategically using open-ended dialogue and problem solving to open the individuals to one another. In addition, within the company Heart makes a point of stressing the fact that we are each more than the roles we play. Thus Roger offered a quote from the French writer and politician, Maurice Barrès, "born a man, died a grocer" to suggest the danger we fall into within organizations of seeing individuals as simply the part they play. Heart builds reminders that we are more than these roles into both the culture of their organization and the physical space of the workplace. For example, immediately upon entering the office a visitor encounters their "Illustrated Wall," which contains caricatures of each employee which have been drawn to capture the aspects of their lives which might not be visible within the office. To Roger's thinking, the "meaning, purpose and connectivity" which give rise to learning "are fostered through seeing the whole person." When individuals are able to show their passions, skills and talents in the workplace, so, for example, they are not just a proofreader but somebody who has written a children's book, has won the company spelling bee, and is a grandmother, they begin to bring their passion to bear in the workplace, and the group gains cohesion, shared purpose, and respect.

Roger argues that when run well, conversations that take place both within Heart and in the work Heart employees have with their clients, function as a kind of space to play with ideas which participants find exciting, and which creates a "real liberty and freedom" within the dialogue. It is in this space of liberty and freedom is the space where learning happens.

Improvisation. While Roger does not think of the work that Heart does in terms of improvisation, he readily saw parallels between the conversations Heart facilitates and the improvisational practices of engaging fully with one's partners, listening, acknowledging and building from what they offer – he sees these practices as central to the success of those conversations.

In addition, both within the workplace and in their work with clients, Heart treats the work they do as improvisational in that each challenge they face is new and cannot be responded to in scripted ways; nor can or should organizational leaders dictate to those with whom they work how to respond to a particular challenge. Instead, like Fermi, they have put systems for working in place which allow for improvisation on the part of their employees.

Identity Expansion. Of those with whom I spoke, Roger spoke the most directly to the subject of learning as a type of identity expansion. As he expressed it, when attempting to change how individuals within a corporation do things, “How do you challenge underlying assumptions without turning people away or shutting them down? What causes people to be vulnerable enough to suspend their identity and say “let’s think about this?” For Roger, the goal is to take a 55-year old-engineer and cause “them to pause and to challenge their underlying assumptions about the way they see the world works and the way they think they fit into it.”

His response to these question and this goal ties into his philosophy of learning. As he sees it, in order to encourage identity expansion the most important thing is to remove fear from the learning experience, most particularly through

> the absolute absence of a right answer – the minute people believe there is a right answer for which they’re going to be judged or graded against they become timid, they become tentative, and they become guarded. Because they don’t want to reveal that they may not have the right answer. (10/14/2019)

In his view, when we become guarded, we protect our current identity, rather than allowing ourselves to grow or expand our idea(s) of who we are and how we look at the world.

For this reason he sees the role of “teacher” as impeding such growth, because of the perception that teachers are experts who know the “right” answer: “Teaching is learning as a tour guide is to adventure, and teachers retard learning.” As he frames it, “When we have facilitators that represent themselves as the expert, the search stops. When we have facilitators that either are or claim they are clueless, the search explodes” – individuals are open to change and growth when they need not fear being wrong, and Heart’s culture is about liberating that dormant human capability in each person.

Mark, Lead Pastor, Calvary Lutheran Church

Mark has been lead pastor at Calvary Lutheran Church for five years. Many Lutheran churches across the country currently struggle with the challenges of an aging membership and declining attendance. Yet Calvary is thriving, with a healthy, growing congregation and strong attendance.

While Mark had many years’ experience as a pastor prior to coming to Calvary, he had spent the eight years prior to working there as an ESL teacher in a public school in a large midwestern city; he had turned to ESL teaching after becoming burnt out from his earlier pastoral work. However, when his wife was offered a job in his current location he couldn’t find employment as an ESL teacher, and somewhat reluctantly turned back to the church. After spending several years as the junior pastor of Cavalry, he eventually became the lead pastor of their congregation.

Mark does not take personal credit for the health of Cavalry’s congregation, which he instead attributes to the faithfulness of former pastors and also deems a gift from God. He credits the current congregation for its “care and love” and “energy,” and believes that their clear vision and mission have also contributed to the health of the organization.

Shaping that vision and mission has been central to his leadership; he explained that when he arrived, the church had a mission that was "cumbersome and legislative" and "was not doing its job." He began an informal discussion group with individuals vested in the community to talk about re-visioning. He argues that a vision should be discerned rather than legislated, "and then we invite people to join it":

> What we want to do here is provide an environment that allows people to use their gifts and take the risks of faith and putting it out there and making mistakes and coming back and saying boy we really blew that, so let's try it from this angle, so rather than having a legislative environment, to have an environment that is permission giving where people can just say "let's give this a shot" "ok, no problem, tell me how it goes!" And it's kind of messy, but there's a lot of energy that kind of bubbles up. (10/15/2019)

Over time, the congregation moved through a process of shaping an initial vision and a three-fold mission to accompany that vision, as well as elaborations on each part of that mission. Throughout the process they continually engaged and re-engaged members of the community.

Once the vision was elaborated, it has become part of the fabric of church life. The vision and mission are posted on the walls of the church, and are shared in every church publication; they are also the first thing shared with prospective congregation members.

Table 4

Cavalry's Vision and Mission

Vision Celebrating the power of the Holy Spirit by inviting all people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus.
Mission Create a safer place for growing, learning, listening and loving.
Address social issues by focused engagement in community partnerships.
Make direct connections for learning, mutual support and relief with people around the world.

In this way, the vision and mission have become the church's filters which they use to test new ideas and new proposals against. For example, if someone comes to the church's leadership with a proposal for a charitable activity, they look at that proposal through the lens of the vision and mission, which is used to determine whether they should engage in that activity.

Beyond guiding the vision and mission development process, Mark has worked hard to create what he described as a "permission giving," "profoundly playful" feeling to the congregation. Mark ties this culture to Lutheran theology:

> That is deeply embedded in our theology; we're saved by grace and not by our works, so there's the notion that we don't earn our salvation, it's a gift to us, so we end up with a perspective that what we're doing is we're not earning things, we're responding to things, we're responding to something that has been given to us, and there's great freedom in that.

> I will respond to God's grace in a way that's different from you, and that's ok, and my job is to help you figure out how to respond, and if it doesn't work out, pff, you know, God's grace is still with you, not a huge deal! (10/15/2019)

As Mark sees it, and as he shares with his congregation, there is a freedom to try different things, to be playful and to explore as they worship together, that arises out of the security that their beliefs provide: "We're dealing with very important things, profound things, things that are tradition, things that are at the heart of life, but we deal with those things with a sense of play and flexibility."

Overall, Mark sees the challenge broadly facing the church as this: while they "can rely on their theological heritage as Lutheran Christians," they can no longer rely on the cultural parts of their heritage, which tie them to a particular ethnicity and a top-down, legislative structure for the church. To meet the challenges of the present moment, they must open the church in diverse ways and build a new culture, which he characterizes as having the qualities of "radical hospitality, a permission-giving rather than legislative approach, an "unrestrained" rather than constrained style, and a "collaborative rather than top-down" approach to working with their congregations.

Learning. As the discussion above suggests, Mark approaches learning with the belief that in order to grown and learn individuals need to feel safe. Such safety is nurtured in several ways: First safety is nurtured by helping learners feel that they need not fear failure; as he expressed in the description of his job given above, "if it doesn't work out, pff!" In addition, safety is nurtured by treating learning playfully, so that together his congregation members can explore different ideas and pathways, whether or not a given pathway ends up being a productive one.

One aspect of treating learning playfully is a sense of mutuality – that everyone is learning together and learning from one another. Mark compared this to when he taught ESL – while he speaks Spanish, he isn't fluent, and so even as he taught his students English they were teaching him Spanish, which built trust and confidence among the group.

Mark sees his role as facilitating learning, and his aim as to see the group learning and growing, and to help the identity of the church grow and expand. The challenge they face is how to hold onto what is worth retaining of older traditions and ways while finding room for new things and adapting to new contexts. For example, only through offering both modern and traditional services was Cavalry able to understand that a majority of congregants are drawn to the traditional service because they find it offers a more numinous experience than the modern service (though the church still offers both types of services)[5].

Improvisation. Mark has thought of his work as improvisational for many years. Like an improvising musician, he sees himself as someone who, drawing on many years of expertise and training, enters each moment – whether holding a one-on-one conversation or preaching before his congregation – with the intention of being responsive to his audience, engaging in interplay with them, with the goal that each encounter is both meaningful and enjoyable.

Another aspect of how Mark sees his role that connects to improvisation is the centrality of a kind of positive responsiveness, which he describes as central to his

[5] Modern services are accompanied by a band, and use contemporary music and an updated liturgy, while traditional services have organ accompaniment, a choir, traditional songs and arrangements and the historic liturgy.

understanding of Lutheran theology – "we're not earning things, we're responding to things, we're responding to something that has been given to us, and there's great freedom in that" – as well as to his personal ministry: "my calling is to respond to the people of my congregation and others in a way that lets all this stuff come alive in their hearts." The language he uses here mirrors that used by improvisors in their descriptions of how they approach their craft (Jagodowski et al., 2015; Reome, 2019). For example, Second City instructor Kevin Reome asserts that the responsibility of the improviser is to accept and build upon what one's partner offers.

In addition, Mark's desire to create a "profoundly playful" culture in which ideas can be explored and tried out also jibes with the playful ethos of improvisation. His focus on responding to others, and his belief in salvation through grace rather than through deeds together mean that how he and his congregation treat one another – in this playful way – matters more than the success or failure of any particular task they attempt, so too the field of improv generally cares less about whether a particular scene, game or show went well and more about how the players felt and made one another feel while they improvised.

Identity Expansion. Mark connects his thoughts on growth and identity to Lutheran theology, noting that, according to that theology, "[w]e're always becoming, we're always learning, we're always growing." As discussed above, he believes that a feeling of safety is essential to facilitate such growth and learning, and he grounds this safety in that theology as well. For Mark, saying that individuals and the church continue to learn is essentially the same as saying that they continue to grow, and that their identities continue to expand.

Tom, Pastor and Program Director, Hope Lutheran Church

For Tom, his calling to the church has always been fully intertwined with his desire to help empower those who have been disempowered, whether because of poverty, disability, or any other cause. He considered a career in education and advocacy / non-profit work, but a near-death experience in his early 20s led Tom to reassess his goals, and to realize that he wanted to become a pastor. He applied to seminary with a particular desire to minister to those living in poverty.

While he was accepted to the seminary, the administrators feared that his primary focus was on poverty, rather than on a commitment to his faith. In his description, however, the two are inextricable from one another; and his faith has been influenced by the work of Latin Americans such as the liberation theologists and Paolo Freire and his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), who he drew on frequently in conversation.

Several experiences during seminary helped shape Pastor Tom. He spent summers working at their Summer Seminary Sampler, a week-long summer program for teens, and was given the opportunity to start a campus ministry at a nearby university. He also took time off to work in a homeless shelter, and had experiences as a substitute teacher and as a care taker working with children with energy disorders and for autistic children.

Those who ran the seminary were somewhat surprised he chose to return after his year off, which led them to a newfound appreciation for his dedication to the church, which they now understood to be as strong as his commitment to helping those in need.

After leaving the seminary, he spent a few years working in a typical suburban congregation (Lutheran congregations tend to be older and whiter than many other denominations; Pew Research Center, 2020), but was then given pastoral duties at a church in one of the poorest parts of his city – not a common practice, but one that recognized his commitment to working in communities of need. As he describes it, 60% of those living in the area surrounding his church live at or below the poverty line, and of those with greater incomes, almost half live on incomes below 200% of the poverty level.[6]

As he worked to establish himself in that community, he was approached by a woman who directs youth programs in the area and asked if he would partner with her organization to provide after-school programming for children in the area. Initially he said no, out of fear that he would be overcommitting himself, but she persisted, and he took on the creation of after school programs for children in the area, one serving younger children (through age 13) and one serving teens (from 14-18); each group meets two afternoons a week in the house next door to the church.

Over the past three years Pastor Tom has grown and strengthened his program for teens, which was the focus of our conversation. Initially the program had no budget, so Tom organized activities at the church location, with a particular focus on bringing in a wide variety of guests and speakers to engage with the participants. The biggest challenge that first year was combatting boredom; the best way to do so, he realized, was "to actively take an interest in what they are interested in," and to let the students drive the program. Another challenge in the first year was dealing with what Tom called "program breakers," students who never bought in to the values or goals of the program. For Tom, the only solution was to remove those individuals if he wanted the program to thrive.

[6] In 2020, a family of four is considered to live in poverty if their income is $26,200 or less, which is considered 100% of the poverty limit (The Balance, 2020).

In their second year, he was able to raise money to buy a van for the church, which freed up the group to travel off-site. They began to take regular (at least once a week) trips off site, to learn about and take part in activities around the community. For example, they were interested in serving at a local homeless shelter, so they visited and learned about the shelter, helped serve food at mealtime, and then ate alongside the homeless people whom they had served as a way to help break their prejudices about homelessness. As Pastor Tom describes it, his goal is to expand the horizons of the students in his program: “We don’t only do what they are interested in, because you can’t know if you’re interested in about something you don’t know about.”

Tom also fostered partnerships with others in the community. However, he discovered that some of those who were interested in partnering with his group have had priorities which don’t jibe with his own. For example, one organization with which they worked over one summer had what he perceived to be a kind of patriarchal approach to working with his group – rather than building relationships with the teens and working side by side with them, they treated them more as employees to be ordered around.

Such treatment is one of Tom’s pet peeves. He feels strongly that the children with whom he works need to be seen and respected as individuals, and need to be treated as competent human beings. He sees this as not just ethical but also practical. In his words, “When you’re experiencing poverty people are often waiting to take advantage of you, so you develop a good detector for b.s.. You get a good sense of when somebody doesn’t really mean it, too, you have to have some authenticity.”

For Tom, the only legitimate approach to take when working with these young adults is one that centers around mutual respect and a kind of responsive back-and-forth, and he determined to partner only with those who were open to working with his participants in this way. After that sour experience with that organization, Tom decided to raise money and to hire an artist who he had met and who had impressed him with his willingness to engage with Tom's participants as both a mentor and a partner.

In partnership with this artist, the teens spent a good part of the next school year exploring a range of artistic media, and creating a variety of artistic works. This experience culminated in an art show in a local gallery; the artist with whom they had worked turned over half the gallery he had been offered to these students, who were given the opportunity to show and to sell their work (the students earned all the proceeds from the sale of their work).

This work has received recognition both locally and more broadly; they have been covered by the city newspaper, and Tom has been asked to create a documentary for the county about their program. In addition, the national Lutheran magazine put Tom's after school program on the cover of a recent issue, which was particularly gratifying to Tom considering that he had almost been counseled out of seminary years ago.

Tom's care for his students comes through in the small details. For example, when it came time for the art show opening, he asked the kids to dress up for the event, but intentionally only dressed up partially himself (wearing a dress shirt and a pair of ratty jeans), to ensure that no matter what clothes the kids had to wear, they would know that it was ok.

When it came time to choose a name for their 12-week art program, they initially thought of calling it "I see you, I hear you"; eventually, as they talked it through, they arrived at the name "Hear. I am." Both the initial name and the final name signal the reciprocity at the heart of Pastor Tom's work, and, the importance he attaches to helping those with whom he works be visible to themselves and to one another. The image that went along with this logo was a picture of a student with their hands over their face. As he described it, the importance of this image was that it showed what we are all like, each hiding ourselves but crying out for attention, needing to be seen, heard, and felt.

Learning. Tom's understanding of learning is that it takes place through doing and through connecting with others; this mirrors the understanding of learning offered by others in this study, including that of Dave at Fermi and Phil at PI. Like Roger at Heart and Mark at Cavalry, he sees learning as reciprocal – each project he approaches requires him to be as open to learning as he asks the students with whom he works to be.

Tom believes that learning both relies on hope and fosters hope:

> people are so starved and hungry for good things in this world, that when you do something well and right and do it with transparency and protections in place, and people see it… it gives them hope back, and then you get a ball and get rolling with it (10/28/2019)

Tom conceives of his work with his students as following along lines developed by Paolo Freire (1970), particularly on Freire's idea of a problem-posing curriculum, in which the instructors present a problem to those with whom they work and then that group together works to solve that problem. Such a curriculum levels the playing field between instructor and student; for example, rather than offering his own solution to a dilemma, he will offer the dilemma to the group. For example, for a beautification project the group had a pile of used bike parts, and together they figured out how to turn those bike parts into trash can holders. Sometimes he presents more specific challenges, such as giving them the materials to make a picnic bench or a porch swing and then asking them to figure out how to put it together.

He has found that once they begin to learn in this way, their learning snowballs, and they look for additional projects which they can take on. For example, He presented them with old tires and asked them to turn them into planters; after doing so, they figured out how to paint the planters, and several of the students began seeking out other painting projects which needed doing, and without any prodding painted the fire escape of the church's house. Thus their feelings of capability grow through this problem-solving approach.

Improvisation. Tom sees the work he and the other adults do with their students as constantly improvising in response to the exigencies of the moment. While he didn't characterize his students' work in the same way, his description of their projects suggests that they are also improvisational, because the problem-posing technique asks learners to continually draw on their strengths and abilities to improvise together.

In large part the training which Tom has had to do with his students has been to build their confidence (both individually and as a group) in their ability to do so, and to boost their self-esteem so that they feel capable. In this way the sense of hope that Tom describes can also be seen as a sense of self-efficacy or capability.

Tom compared his role working with his students to that of a gardener, and stressed the improvisational nature of such work as he elaborated on that metaphor through a discussion of the garden he had grown with those students over the past summer:

> If the watermelons don't grow – because they are notoriously difficult to grow – then my hot peppers are going to grow in that garden, so you run with that for all that its worth, you harvest the hot peppers and you give them to the local distillery and they'll put them in their moonshine, or you give those hot peppers to people in the neighborhood who like hot food, or we give them out at our Tuesday meal and we learn generosity. (10/28/2019)

This analogy suggests the responsive approach which Tom takes to his work; as he works with his students Tom tries to begin by taking them for who they are, and then building positively from there, in much the same way described by Mark in his description of his work with his congregation.

Identity Expansion. Identity expansion is at the heart of Tom's project. Tom sees young people as fundamental expanding and changing, and sees his goal as fostering such growth. He described himself as called to help those with whom he works "to grow and develop and to learn and to become the beautiful human beings that they actually are." To this end he tries to expose them to as many different possible paths, careers, and options as possible, and to bring them into contact with a wide range of possible role models. He thinks of doing so in terms of planting a garden: "you scatter seed, and sometimes it holds and sometimes it doesn't, so you've got to scatter more seed than is necessary, try a variety of things, and always be trying something new."

He sees having his students create art as central to this task as well, because doing so allows them to express themselves, to play and explore in a range of media, and to stretch their sense of their own capabilities.

Drawing on his garden analogy, he explained that to grow "you need circumstances that are conducive to life, you need warmth, you need light, and in order to have light you have to have some transparency"; he sees his role as fostering identity expansion by providing the right conditions in which different ideas, ways of being, and possibilities can take root in the students with whom he works. And he continually considers "where I need to stretch and grow myself" as well, acknowledging that they are all growing together through their work.

Paul, President and Majority Owner, Energy Services Company (ESC)

Paul studied energy technology in college, and found work with a gas utility after graduating. After the deregulation of the interstate pipeline transportation of gas in 1985, he was tasked with seeking out new clients for his utility. After doing this for several years, he became the energy buyer for a large industrial company; his job was to choose between various energy providers to find the greatest savings for his company. Over the course of doing this he gained greater and greater expertise, and began to be sought out for his advice by other organizations looking to find ways to save on their energy costs but unable to afford a full-time employee whose job it was to pursue energy savings.

As he was gaining expertise, the market continued to grow in complexity. Further deregulation turned natural gas into a commodity that could be bought and sold on the futures market, which enabled a range of other options (such as hedging one's bets on gas prices) to enter into the picture. The expansion of deregulation also allowed for smaller businesses and organizations to band together for the purpose of purchasing energy (for example, a consortium of public school districts might consolidate their energy purchasing). Eventually, Paul purchased ESC and became a full-time energy services consultant.

The market has continued to change with the changing economy. For example, a majority of the local large industrial clients whom Paul had initially worked with have gone out of business, which has pushed him to help other groups (such as local businesses or schools) to consolidate their energy purchasing so that he can find them savings. Changes in energy technology (such as the invention of horizontal fracking and the continued improvement of solar and wind technologies) have also led to changes in the possible energy sources which Paul might procure for his clients.

Paul has a strong customer service focus; before purchasing ESC he spent a year working in energy sales and realized that it was not for him. He takes an approach focused on transparency; in each situation he tries to find ways to save his clients money even as he turns a profit for his own business, and he is open about letting his clients see not only their savings but also his company's cut.

Learning. Paul's business relies on his ability to learn, and his learning relies on his ability to connect with other people who have complementary expertise. As he puts it, his "clients expect him to see around corners," and he does so by drawing on those who know things he doesn't. Because of the complexity of his business – for example, the most recent energy bill passed by the state of Ohio was around 8,000 pages long – no one person can master all of it. In addition, the changing state of State and Federal laws and regulations as well as shifts in technology and in the energy futures markets mean that the ground is rarely steady beneath his feet.

As a result, in order to advise clients and to successfully conduct business (with success defined as saving his clients money while earning some money for ESC), Paul has to continually be learning new things. As he sees it, there are two ways to learn anything, “the easy way and the hard way. The easy way is to pick up the phone.” This means that for Paul, building and maintaining relationships with others within his field whose expertise overlaps and complements his is the primary driver of learning, and he spends a great deal of his time and energy fostering and sustaining such relationships, whether over the phone or over semi-regular meals.

Within his organization Paul is still grappling with how best to teach his employees how to do what he does. He has both salespeople and analysts working for him, all of whom have degrees and expertise in the field, but Paul remains the lynchpin of the company. In part the difference seems to be that ESC revolves around Paul and his ability to synthesize information and arrive at conclusions; he appears to be the ‘hero’ of his workplace. Such a role makes sense, historically – he bought the company from its founder, who played a similar role when he was running it. Paul has enlarged the company and grown the business but is still at the heart of things.

We can contrast this with Fermi Revolutions, where Dave has intentionally tried to create a system that doesn’t rely on any individual gatekeeper or ‘hero’ to be at the heart of things, perceiving such a system as inefficient. Where Dave’s experiences led him to this conclusion (see Dave at Fermi Revolutions, above), Paul’s success in business under his current model seems to obviate the need for such changes.

Improvisation. Paul doesn’t see improvisation as important to what he does; as he explains, “if I’m improvising, I’m doing something wrong.” This belief grows out of his understanding of his role, which he sees as focused on looking ahead, predicting future trends and costs for himself and for his clients. For Paul improvisation connotes a seat-of-your-pants approach which suggests unpreparedness.

That said, his method of tackling each new problem bears a significant resemblance to that described by others in the study, and seems improvisational: On a daily basis he combines the expertise he has gained over his years of working in the industry with the in-the-moment challenge of finding the right solution or response to whatever current task he's working on. Because there is so much change and uncertainty in the industry, doing his job effectively means being willing to treat each situation as unique, because each new problem with which he faced has its own set of parameters and possible solutions. For example, solar energy has only recently become a cost-effective alternative to other types of energy, something that became apparent to Paul when he was asked to consult on a business proposal that had been made to the local zoo, to assess their projections about the cost effectiveness of adding a solar array. We might see this as improvisational in the same sense as that described by Phil of PI; rather than "winging it," in this instance Paul brought expertise to bear as he responded to a new situation, and his responsive engagement with the data overrode his personal belief in the viability of solar power as an option.

Identity Expansion. Paul tends to think in terms of the exigencies of his business, rather than considering larger philosophical questions about learning or identity. Here he is something of an outlier within this study: While he has personally grown and changed over the years of being in business, and is comfortable with the risks and challenges he faces on a daily basis, he remains less confident in terms of teaching others to learn and grow in the ways he has. Where Phil at PI reflects intentionally and works to specifically mentor others to expand their range of capabilities and self-perceived abilities, Paul is less articulate about how he does these things (although it may be the case that he does them equally effectively).

Ben, Co-Owner and Founding Partner, Smithson Family of Businesses

Ben and his partner founded their first business in 1982; the delicatessen remains the flagship business at the heart of the Smithson Family of Businesses (SmithFob), and is a destination restaurant in their college town. In 1992 they opened a bakery to produce bread for the deli and for sale to other retailers in the area. In 1994 they laid out a 15 year vision (Vision 2009) for the company, followed by Vision 2020; this has since led to the creation of 12 additional businesses, including a coffee roastery, a cheese-production facility, a mail-order business and a range of additional restaurants; the one non-food focused business is SmithTraining, their training organization (see Cheryl at SmithTraining, below).

From the beginning, two philosophies came together for Ben which he credits for driving the success of SmithFob. The first is his fascination with and deep study of anarchist principles (in his books and in person Ben describes himself as “a lapsed anarchist”) and the second is a strong service-focused ethos, exemplified in their mission statement:

> We share the Smithson’s Experience
>
> Selling food that makes you happy
>
> Giving service that makes you smile
>
> In passionate pursuit of our mission

Showing love and caring in all our actions

To enrich as many lives as we possibly can

Ben describes their business as having 3 bottom lines – food (high quality), service (to customers and also to those within the organization / each other, and finance. It is an important part of their ethos that there should be no distinction between how they treat customers and how they treat employees.

At its core anarchism argues that the centralized collection of power for the purpose of organization or government is unnecessary (Ward, 2004). For example, Ward argues that in England, small-scale collectives organized for the purpose of providing health care would be preferable to the existence of the National Health Service (NHS), drawing on historical data related to the existence and functioning of such collectives prior to the creation of the NHS. While SmithFob has an organizational structure led by its partners and owners (hence why Ben calls himself a "lapsed anarchist"), Ben and his partners have tried to avoid centralization when possible. For example, rather than growing the company larger, they have expanded the number of associated businesses, so that the company now has 27 partners between their 14 businesses.

Another way that they have tried to incorporate anarchist principles has been to create what they call a "bottom-line change process," a process which guides employees if they wish to make changes in how something is done in the workplace. They teach all employees how to use this process, which involves documenting the desired change, collecting data to support the need for the change, creating a positive vision of what implementing this change would look like, and presenting all of this to management. In practice, both Ben and Cheryl (see below) have a sense that while not every change an employee advocates for is implemented, generally even those whose suggestions aren't implemented feel heard and respected.

Another way that SmithFob attempts to adhere to anarchist principles is to embrace the pairing of empowerment and responsibility. In practice this means that during the training process, and while working, every employee is encouraged to do whatever they believe is necessary to "make things right" if they see something that they believe is wrong. Feedback from employees suggests that they find this empowering. In addition, from the start SmithFob presents its employees with the following "Training Compact."

Table 5

SmithFob Training Compact

Trainer agrees to:	**Trainees agree to:**
Document clear performance expectations	Take responsibility for the effectiveness of their training.
Provide the resources to do the work.	
Recognize performance	
Reward performance	

The goal of this compact is to shape an environment of mutual responsibility, where both trainers and trainees take 100% responsibility for the success of the trainee. SmithFob embraces the servant leadership model described in Chapter Two; while this model does not place greater responsibility on the shoulders of those with greater authority, but encourages the clearer delineation of how those with authority will manage that power, and reminds managers and leaders that their primary goal is to support employee growth.

Learning. Looking back, with hindsight informed by a great deal of reading, Ben describes SmithFob as a learning organization. He defines this relatively simply – not only does learning permeate the workplace, but they understand what happens on a daily basis in terms of learning. Ben argues that "it's impossible to work here and not be learning; if you're working here for a while and not learning anything you must be trying super hard not to learn." He sees the workplace as immersed in learning. He and his partners understand that most learning happens informally, and expect that 80% of the training will take place on shift, while working. As he sees it, "it's almost impossible to wait on a customer or make a dish or bake a loaf of bread without learning." They are an open book company, meaning that financial goals and performance are shared openly throughout the organization, and finances are discussed in daily huddles – which to Ben means that it is almost impossible not to be learning during those huddles unless an individual isn't listening.

Formal learning is a large part of what they do as well. They see part of their mission to be continually learning about the products which they create, source, and sell: "because our focus is traditional food, we're always learning history." They also offer more than 80 internal classes, in which employees may learn about particular foods (such as coffee) or about how to lead, manage, or deal with the financial side of the business. This number continues to grow as employees propose and design additional courses to offer. For example, one course that managers may choose to take is called the "Servant Leadership" course. Those who take this course are required to engage in two hours of formal learning per week, and they define such learning as learning that takes place through study rather than through action (such as reading a book, listening to a TED talk, or attending a class or seminar). They also award scholarships to individuals to pursue their own studies. This jibes with what Ben calls their “theory of relevantivity: everything is relevant to everything, and there is nothing you can study that isn’t relevant to our work.”

Ben sees learning at SmithFob as working in several ways. At the most basic level, employees are taught skills that they need in order to perform their job. In addition, the company has values and core beliefs that Ben believes can’t be taught. Instead he understands the culture and systems within SmithFob as offering modeling and reinforcement that can open people to belief change. Thus when individuals are hired into SmithFob, they are asked to consider how their own values mesh with those of the organization (as articulated in the mission) and to agree to commit themselves to those organizational values; immersion in that culture then reinforces those cultural values.

That said, for Ben it is important that the goal isn’t just to further the goals of SmithFob, but also to help employees discover and reach their own goals, whether or not those goals have anything to do with SmithFob. To this end, the company teaches employees to use a visualization process which is designed to help individuals and groups set goals.

Improvisation. Ben sees improvisation as linked to SmithFob in two ways. The first of these happens in the visioning process. While drafting a personal (or group) vision, they use what they call a “hot pen” process, in which the goal is to write without thinking, to write as fast as you can for 40 minutes, with the belief that “something’s going to come out." Ben likens this to the faith that improvisers have that if they fully immerse themselves in the moment of improvisation they will improvise well. This fits with Kevin Reome's (2019) description of the improviser's role: "You're not responsible for making a good scene, or for being funny. You're just responsible for listening and responding to your partner." Thus as Ben formulates it, visioning is a kind of solo improvisation, in which individuals are their own partners.

Ben also believes that the systems that SmithFob uses throughout the workplace, which he calls "organizational recipes," work to create a safe platform for improvisation on the part of their employees. He contrasts this to workplaces which script employee interactions, which he sees as dehumanizing. Because of his anarchist leanings, he had originally believed that any structure would inhibit creativity, but over the years he has come to believe that the right structures allow and encourage creativity. As he puts it, "We created all these recipes that don't script anything, it just gives you a structure within which you are free to be yourself, in the same way that any good actor would read the script but bring themselves."

For example, he describes the steps of serving a guest:

> you need to find out what the guest would like; you need to be enthusiastic, but your way of being enthusiastic might be different from mine; you need to go the extra mile, so you're honoring the customer's uniqueness and you're honoring our uniqueness as the service provider
>
> It's the same with vision, here's a recipe for vision, but it doesn't tell you what to put in the vision, here's a recipe for servant leadership -- those recipes encouraged creativity and encourage people to be themselves (11/2/2019)

Identity Expansion. Ben sees the role of leaders at SmithFob as “trying to honor the uniqueness” of their employees, and trying to help “individuals become themselves.” He sees the visioning process as central to expanding individual’s sense of their own desires, capabilities, and possibilities, so that instead of steering people toward boxes (such as “manager”) they can steer themselves toward their own goals. He believes that Visioning is a natural skill that every 4 year old uses daily that we get trained out of by social pressure, and those who continue to use it in a productive way become the heroes. Everyone else has the same skill, but they’re told they don’t have it, or they think they don’t have it; but if you teach it to everybody then everybody comes to lead. (11/2)
To clarify how he sees visioning as both expansive and also honoring a person’s current reality and individuality, he suggests imagining having new teachers write a vision of what success will look like in their classroom:

> If you’re a teacher you’re one of 60 million. But if you write a vision for yourself as a teacher, there will be zero visions like that, no one will ever write the same vision, it’s impossible, so whereas the title is dehumanizing, the vision is humanizing. (11/2/2019)

Beyond the visioning process, Ben sees the culture at SmithFob as encouraging the exploration of different possible identities – for example, all employees attend an orientation run by either Ben or his co-founder, no matter where or at what level they enter the organization. Thus other roles and possibilities are on display from the beginning. Additionally, all employees are encouraged to try on different roles and spend time in different businesses within SmithFob for this purpose as well.

Cheryl, Managing Partner, SmithTraining

Cheryl has worked with Ben since before Smithson opened their first business, and was one of the "unpaid friends and family" that helped prepare the opening of that restaurant. Her background is in business, and early on she discovered a passion for training and instructional design. She had stayed in touch with Ben and his partners, and knew that they were always very interested in how best to train their employees, and because they didn't know anything about instructional design, she got excited about the possibility of helping them improve the training that was going on in the organization. They kicked this idea around off and on over their first 12 years, and when they published their first formal long-term vision, which laid out the idea of having a family of businesses, she was very excited:

> it seemed to me that to do that successfully they would need strong training systems so that they weren't reinventing the wheel, and they were already getting requests from outside companies about their customer service training, how do you train your staff, and would you be willing to come talk to my staff about it, so it seemed to me there might be an opportunity to share what was working with the outside world (12/20/2019)

Together they wrote a vision for SmithTraining and started the company. She began by looking at the training that was already happening within the organization, and improving that training; from there she began dealing with clients who would call and ask for help with customer service.

Two years after starting SmithTraining they offered their first two-day training seminar for outside clients, and now the vast majority of the work done at SmithTraining is done for such clients, and they offer a wide array of workshops for those interested in learning about how SmithFob does things.

At the time few companies were offering such training (Disney and Ritz Carlton came to mind), and they "discovered … that small privately held businesses, and especially individual owner operators were really hungry to learn stuff and talk to other people." They found because people were paying them for training they put more time and effort into designing it, and that when they shared it with those people they would receive feedback which would also improve the quality of their training – and all of these improvements could be channeled back into the internal training.

They also made several important choices early – they chose to grow slowly, because Cheryl was raising a family, so the company adjusted to her needs rather than the other way around. They chose not to be proprietary or to ask others to pay a licensing fee for using their methods (which is common in the training field). Instead, "we said here's our approach, we think there's an advantage in adapting it to your world,… but take it, use it, things like our training compact and our business perspective chart, we shared them with people and we said, if you want to use them use them, because we think that if customer service gets better across the board then we all win."

SmithTraining tends to work with smaller organizations and what they call "maverick managers" in charge of teams within larger organizations; while they have worked with large organizations, they're not really set up to train on a large scale. This is because of a third choice they made, not to certify other people to present their content. All of their trainers work within SmithFob, "so they're sharing what they do and what they live."

Another important choice was to ensure that SmithTraining is not simply the training department for SmithFob – indeed, there is no training department. SmithTraining team members (along with managers throughout SmithFob) run training activities throughout the organization. From the start Cheryl put the infrastructure in place that allowed people throughout SmithFob to develop classes and create orientation passports and other materials for their business without having to have SmithTraining to do it.

Like Ben, Cheryl stressed the importance of the training compact to the SmithTraining methods. She sees the fact that they share it with all new hires, and the shared responsibilities it lists as establishing

> a peer-to-peer relationship with the organization… it doesn't mean there isn't a hierarchy, but ultimately you're a smart thinking person and we know you can learn and there's a lot to learn, so we hope you're excited about it and that you take responsibility for it (12/20/2019)

She also sees the SmithFob deep focus on customer service as a feature that distinguishes their organization from others:

> everyone here in the organization is authorized to do whatever it takes to make things right for a customer if there's a problem… I just taught our internal customer service class last week, and I heard again and again "I worked in other places, and I often knew what the right thing to do was, but I wasn't allowed to do it, and so the fact that Smithson's trusts me as a new hire to make a call on giving a customer their money back or replacing their product…", that means a lot to people. (12/20/2019)

Cheryl acknowledges that SmithFob is not paradise, and that like every organization they have dissatisfied and cynical employees, but her sense is that they have fewer of these than other organizations, and that "for the most part people feel like their opinions matter and they understand how to productively get their voice heard," particularly using the bottom-line change system described above.

Learning. Cheryl described what SmithFob does more as focused on training – teaching specific skills – than on learning, which she views more broadly. At the same time, she tended to use the two terms interchangeably, and she described a system which aims to train individuals to accomplish particular tasks, while immersing them in a culture geared toward helping them change their ideas about learning, about making mistakes, and about asking for help.

They try to deliver these messages in as many ways as possible, to ensure that employees hear them often and in a wide range of ways. For example, Cheryl described how the message that admitting that you don't know something and seeking help and knowledge is viewed as a positive action is delivered in three different ways:

> asking for help is a sign of strength, it's not a sign of weakness;
> if you don't know, ask;
> there is no way anybody can know everything, so it is much better to ask and find out that what you were planning to do was right than doing something that you're not sure about and it causes a problem later. (12/20/2019)

Cheryl began by making modest claims about SmithFob's training goals and the value of training within the organization, seeing such training as purely instrumental for the larger organizational goals:

> we exist to bring a great experience to everyone we come in contact with and to deliver this wonderful food and a great service experience, and … if we could just give everybody a magic pill and they'd know everything they need to know and be able to do everything they need to do without doing training, we probably wouldn't do training. (12/20/2019)

Yet over the course of the conversation she shifted to a more expansive view that learning together yields a shared culture and shared values, and helps individuals within the organization build relationships with one another. While training may not be essential, she seemed to suggest, learning is central to the effectiveness of the organization and is an essential part of its culture:

> Organizations are just people, just groups of people, so what the organization is, is really just the conversations that are happening and the connections of the people, and training and learning is a way for people to connect to one another… I've come to believe that people who are continuing to learn are for the most part more engaged in their work and in their life and just generally more enthusiastic about things. (12/20/2019)

In her discussion of the effects of learning on creating community and a shared culture she draws on Claude Steele, currently a psychology professor at Stanford, who had visited and spoken to the SmithFob partners, and quotes what he told them about the importance of strong workplace orientations: "an effective orientation gives people the cultural capital they need to succeed in this situation." The idea of providing cultural capital through orientation suggests a view of culture and discourse in the workplace that is similar to that presented by Gee (1989) and discussed in Chapter Two.

Improvisation. Cheryl has brought in improvisers to do improv training for the trainers at SmithTrain. She did this for two reasons: first, to help make their trainers more comfortable working and speaking in front of groups, and second, because she views the improv of "taking whatever your improv partner offers and building on that," as a useful model for looking for ways to pull together in the workplace rather than being confrontational. She sees this as akin to the SmithTrain idea that both trainers and trainees are 100 percent responsible for the training's success; the trainer is responsible for doing all she can to help the trainee learn, and the trainee also needs to take responsibility for their own learning.

Identity Expansion. While Cheryl generally hasn't taken identity into account when thinking about training and learning, she sees many individuals who work for SmithFob shifting their ideas about themselves during their time there. For example, many come work for them initially as part-time seasonal help (they have a busy mail-order business around the holidays), or while in college, and begin working with a somewhat "dismissive" attitude toward the work:

> they don't think of themselves as somebody who is going be a customer service provider or in the food industry, that's not what they thought of themselves, we hear this again and again…, and they end up applying for full time jobs, they didn't see themselves as somebody who would work in this field (12/20/2019)

Cheryl attributes these change in attitude, and this willingness to rethink their identities in this way, to the strong positive workplace culture – the enjoyment individuals feel while working there, and the sense of community they feel, allows them to reconsider past beliefs. For example, she showed me an email they had received from an employee who had come it work seasonally in the mail order call center. This individual described herself as nervous and scared, and having not worked customer service in over 10 years. She went on to say that she felt very safe and happy working there, and that she loved the positive energy of SmithFob. For Cheryl this exemplified the way that putting systems in place that make people feel safe and valued, and which create a positive workplace culture, can help them move past their fears or long-held beliefs about who they are and what they are capable or interested in doing.

James, Founder and CEO, LearnGym

James is a young (mid-20s) entrepreneur with a passion for improving learning. He grew up in a well-off college town with good schools, but even as a teenager had become frustrated with aspects of the school system that he perceived as misguided. His passion and frustration continued to grow during his college years; he both loved and appreciated his own education, and saw many friends who he saw as brilliant and driven who couldn't succeed at a traditional university because their passions and strengths didn't mesh well with the setting of a traditional research university. As a result, he spent a great deal of time and energy while attending university attempting to garner support for the creation of a new, more entrepreneurial and experimental campus which would encourage such learning. While this effort did not succeed, James left college convinced that there was a great deal of room to create more individual and flexible pathways for learning at all levels.

LearnGym (LG) was built on two beliefs: first, that access to the internet means that at any moment there are free resources available which can help us learn how to do almost anything; and second, that people learn best when they are part of a shared learning community. The vast majority of people who sign up to take free online courses never come close to completing those courses, and James believes that this is because they lack a supportive community which can help them do so.

Located in the downtown of a large midwestern city, LG shares space with a local university to which they have access on nights and weekends. LG was initially conceived of as a place where students who hadn't succeeded in local public schools could spend a year learning in a more self-guided way, but has moved rapidly through several other models as James and the LG staff seek to discover one that works well for both the learners who they serve and their own need to derive a return on investment. They are currently trying out two models that each have strengths and weaknesses; each of these models currently focuses on supporting the development of technical skills (such as coding).

The first of these models is a drop-in model. In this model LG functions like a regular gym. Members from within the local community pay a monthly membership fee, and may drop in at any time and take free online classes which LG helps to identify for them; current members range from teenagers to retirees. The space contains computers, white boards, and other work resources, there is always a coach located on site to provide support to learners as they struggle with challenges or to help them determine what course they should take next. Typically anywhere from 3-10 individuals are working at the facility at a given time, and the business model for LG suggests that to succeed financially they would need around 50 individuals at the facility at any given time.

The second model is a class model; instead of paying a monthly membership fee, in this model individuals pay to take classes at LG. Groups of students gather at set times, and work together to improve their skills. At present, classes average around eight students at a time. They work on online courses and are supported by the coaches who are present during learning.

Learning. As described above, James understands learning as facilitated through "proximity and human connection." Learners need to feel safe and supported. One of the ironies of LG is that the coaches who work for James feel like they do almost nothing to help the learners, but on evaluation forms the learners have made it clear that they view the presence of the coaches as incredibly important. This suggests two things to James – first, how important it is that learners feel like they can receive help when they need it, and second, that this model for learning might be very scalable, because the underutilization of the coaches means that there could be many more students in the room without a need to increase the number of coaches present.

For James, a breakthrough moment in his thinking about education came when he attended a summer semester residential program offered by his university. His experience there helped him realize

> the value of non-rational thinking, and emotional, community-based learning and growth… People need communities, they want communities. So what I'm trying to build are little communities that are deeply supportive of each other that foster growth and support and friendship, and we're using these tools that are at our fingertips (online stuff), and the fact that you're in community allows you to take advantage of them. (10/10/2019)

James describes the majority of LG's members as frustrated by schools and their focus on grades, as well as their lack of concern for the development of useful and practical skills, and their unwillingness to allow individuals to follow their own pursuits and interests. In order to unlock learners' potential, he believes that they need environments which give them support, skills, and freedom. James sees "unlocking untapped potential" as his mission.

In his own life, James believes that the most important learning has happened informally through his networks of friends and acquaintances. For example, he entered college with no knowledge of entrepreneurship or desire to be an entrepreneur:

> I didn't know any entrepreneurs, I didn't know hardly any real industry businesspeople, but then I ran into somebody my freshman year of college within a few months at a random dinner party type thing who was four years older than me, who was deep in the entrepreneurial space, we hit it off, and he became my best friend, still is today, and then he kind of pulled me into that world. (10/10/2019)

Given his focus on informal learning and the non-rational aspects of learning, it makes sense that James hopes to begin offering "soft-skill" courses in the near future, to help LG's members develop not just technical skills but more "human" skills.

One struggle for James is that while he believes that almost anybody can learn almost anything, "that doesn't mean they can be a professional at it," and he grapples with the ethical question of whether his work supporting learners as they pursue these technical skills ends up misleading some of them about their potential to work in those fields.

Improvisation. James sees the work of LG as "wholly improvisational," and believes that essentially, "we learn by improvising." He compares the experience of running a start-up company to "building the plane while it's in flight." Especially at the beginning

> We were building the program on the fly – curating curriculum, changing the program every week based on feedback, drinking through the firehose the entire time; the core of the idea has been the same but the manifestation of it has changed over a dozen times, I haven't tracked exactly how many…. The core idea is the same, but the manifestations change. (10/10/2019)

Even now, when they have moved beyond the initial phases of developing their concept, they improvise continually:

> We told people we will now support any in-demand digital skills. We don't have all those programs ready to go, but if you put down your money and give us a deposit, we will go make it really fast. We are creating the projects for the students about a week ahead of time. (10/10/2019)

He sees this as similar to teaching, which he experienced during several stints as a substitute teacher.

In order to embrace the improvisational aspect of being an entrepreneur, he relies on the feeling of safety, of "not being afraid to fail," because "not that much is at stake." This also translates to the experience of LG's members, who feel safe within the community of LG and supported by the presence of the coaches, and so are able to improvise in response to the challenges offered by the courses they take.

Identity Expansion. James thinks a lot about growth and identity expansion. As he explains,

> What I care about most at this point in my life is helping people figure out who they want to be, and second is when they know that how do we give them the skills and the freedom to become that. (10/10/2019)

He conceives of freedom as a sense of possibility, and believes that we need others to show us a range of possible selves and identities that we might consider or aspire to. In part this is what he hopes for with LG, that the community it fosters will allow it become "a place of transformation." As new people enter LG, whether as employees or clients, he asks them to formulate personal goals and a personal vision (albeit with a less formal process than Ben uses at SmithFob), because he believes that doing so encourages such transformation. In addition, he conceptualizes his goals in terms of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) work on flow (discussed in Chapter Two). He sees flow as having two core elements:

> flow experiences create this feeling that you are more complex than you once were, and also that you are integrating your experience with your sense of self and the world, and the beautiful thing about this is that we hit them both with this idea of learning gyms, ….. you come to a classroom, especially one where it's a blended learning experience, our students have the power to move at their own pace, so they've got that sense of control, where they're not listening to a lecture they can't control, they can pause it, rewind it, speed up, slow down, whatever, and they're becoming more complex because they learn more about the world by the end of every session, and thirdly, they're integrating it, they have discussions with each other they can integrate it, but they're also literally in a room with other people, whereas if

> you're by yourself at home you don't have that community to integrate with. (10/10/2019)

The dual goals of expanding the complexity of the self and integrating experiences into the self which James describes here dovetail nicely with the idea of identity expansion.

Lisa, CEO, StopIn

Though StopIn is only three years old, Lisa has consistently worked to advance the goals of her new company since she entered the workforce after college. Despite her upper-middle-class upbringing and strong education, she found that as a college student she craved the kind of mentoring and coaching that she received while on the field playing college lacrosse. As a result, she felt lost as she approached graduation – she had known how to attend and do well in classes, but didn't know how to approach entering the job market (and found her college's career center to be less than helpful).

When she graduated college, then, she gravitated toward the field of personal coaching / life coaching, though she realized that students paying a great deal of money to attend college had little left over with which to hire a life coach to support them as they made their way through school.

StopIn, now in its third year, and still in startup mode, came about as a logical outgrowth of these interests. Primarily focused on first-generation students, the company works with colleges to do two things: 1) to provide support and coaching to currently enrolled students to help ensure their success, and 2) to use research to analyze stop-outs[7]

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[7] The company prefers the term "stop-out" to "drop-out"; in the parlance of college counselors and student success coordinators, "drop-out" connotes failure, the abandonment of a pursuit, while "stop-out" is less judgmental and more descriptive – to "stop-out" simply means to withdraw temporarily from enrollment at a college or university (Rusin, 2018).

so that colleges can approach those most likely to return to school or to succeed in school and can encourage them to complete their education. Once StopIn's staff have identified prospective returners, they offer them mentoring and coaching, encouraging them to re-enroll and to complete their education, and regularly coaching those who re-enroll and supporting them as they make their way through their program.

Such coaching has two central components. The first is primarily logistical, helping to smooth the way for these students by finding and providing answers and guidance as students maneuver their way through the bureaucratic layers of their colleges and universities. The second is more affective, providing emotional support, offering connection, and sharing their own experiences with these students as all of StopIn's coaches are first-generation college graduates who themselves have experience with stopping out.

Lisa describes StopIn as a "very mission driven organization, everyone who joins the company is passionate about solving the completion crisis in the country and doing it by supporting students with some college credit and no degree." She also characterizes theirs as "a feedback oriented culture" where people have power and are incentivized to speak up and share.

She stresses the importance of transparent systems throughout their organization:

> Every Friday we do an all hands company meeting and we do shout outs and lessons learned, and this is all very public, we are very diligent about setting goals [with] each employee and the company. We track progress towards those goals, that's transparent for the employee, between the employee and their manager, it's transparent on the company level so we can always see how we're doing (12/4/2019)

In this way Lisa and her staff focus on keeping track of individual goals that employees set and making sure they are connected with the larger goals of the organization, as well as with StopIn's six "values":

Table 6

StopIn Values

Teamwork	Results
Constant Learning	Agency
Equity, Diversity & Inclusion	Joy

Learning. Lisa speaks passionately about learning, describing it rapidly as "constant," and explaining that it "has to be repetitive; people have to be really engaged and 'in it,'" and that "learning has to be tied to motivation." She has found that StopIn has had to learn from listening to the students with whom they work to discover what actually motivates them; when StopIn began the staff spent their time talking about how much more money the students could make if they completed their educations and earned their degrees, but the staff found that

> That completely fell flat; the overwhelming majority of students are intrinsically motivated, they want to come back because they want to finish what they started, they always saw earning a degree as a personal goal and they still want to earn it; many are first generational learners, so having this piece of paper they can put on their wall is a big milestone. (12/4/2019)

As she explains, while they were using the idea that "you will earn more over time" to try and connect with these students, this was an imposition of their own ideas and values onto those students; when they changed their approach to focus on listening to the students with whom they work and responding to their concerns she found that "we've been able to learn more, because now we can learn more about what they want and what they need, and what universities can do to help them, and we've also engaged more students."

The lesson she took from this was that "you've got to be able to find a way to connect with people first and foremost, otherwise they're not going to hear you, they're not going to engage with you, they're not going to be present." A focus on listening and responding, set alongside her desire for universities to be more responsive to student needs rather than controlling, has also pushed her to think about how to put learners in the driver's seat. As she expresses it, "I think we just need to trust the humans a bit more."

StopIn uses a coaching model both externally (with the students with whom they work) and internally (with their employees). They see such coaching as revolving around the repeated asking of questions:

> Where do you want to go? How happy are you? What do you want to do? What are your professional goals? How do we support you to align what you're doing every day to be on a track that will get you where you want to be in 5 or 10 years? (12/4/2019)

They have found that approaching learning in this model – as inquiry into the focus and goals of the learners – keeps people "motivated and happy and retained."

They keep such coaching on a tight, regular schedule; for example, Lisa meets with each of her managers weekly to talk about what is going well, what challenges they face, and also to continually build her relationship with them.

She considers good coaching to be a form of good management, and wonders why every employee in every workplace has a manager supporting them in their work, but few schools think about what they are doing in these terms:

> If that's what we know to be a successful model in the workplace with adults, how are we not taking those same principles in terms of motivational psychology, goal setting, positive psychology, and applying [them] to the learning environment in classrooms across the country at every grade level? (12/4/2019)

Improvisation. While Lisa hasn't used the word improvisation to refer to the work of StopIn, when I asked her whether she sees improvisation as a part of their work she described the way they support students as being improvisational, and has a sense of what that term means. As she described it, StopIn focuses on leading from behind and empowering students by listening to those students closely and working to respond as fully to their needs as possible:

> So in my work that's where improv comes in, in the course of a dialogue, getting to know a student, uncovering their hopes and dreams and fears and prior experiences and how they're feeling, [it] is both about being very very in the moment and connected to that other person so that they trust you, so that there's freedom to share, to open up, but it's also about navigating the art of what questions to ask that are really going to unlock the core truth of where the student is what they want and what they're going to do. It's the improv of conversation. (12/4/2019)

Identity Expansion. Lisa (and StopIn) think about students' lives in terms of the number and strength of various "enabling or inhibiting" factors in their lives, ones which either encourage them to resume their studies and to succeed or which mitigate against success. As she sees it, "if you have no precedent in your identity for being a college educated student, that can be an impediment." The coaches at StopIn discuss with their students those students' relationships, including with their universities, with their support infrastructure, with the people to whom they are talking, and together they consider how these relationships enable or inhibit them. They also make of a point of discussing with the students the health of their relationships with themselves, and they talk with the students about their various "personas" and how those enable or inhibit them.

Themes

The sections that follow will lay out each of the themes and subthemes that emerged over the course of this research. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the relationship between these emergent themes and the topics of improvisation and identity expansion, and a summary of its main points. Table 7 illustrates the themes that will be discussed below and their relationship to one another.

Table 7

Emergent Themes with Sources

Theme	Sources
<u>Major Theme: Fostering well-being</u>	All
1. Creating joy	1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10
a. creating a "profoundly playful" space	1, 3, 4, 5, 9
b. removing fear	all
c. granting permission to fail	all
d. fostering an abundance mindset	all
2. Fostering dignity & visibility	all
a. creating systems that allow for and celebrate difference	all
i. embracing qualitative evaluation	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10
b. prioritizing responsivity	all
c. rewarding success and creativity	1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9
3. Nurturing purpose and connection	all
a. shared vision	ll
b. shared ownership	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10
i. systems thinking	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10
c. building connections and community	1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10

Nurturing Joy

Nurturing a sense of joy within the organization was described as an integral part of the culture at a majority of those organizations explored in this study. This section will explore what the subjects had to say about this topic, and will also explore the factors which feed into the cultivation of joy. Subjects whose organizations focus on nurturing joy described intentionally doing each of the following in their pursuit of joy: a) adopting a playful tone b) removing fear, c) granting permission to fail, and d) embracing an abundance mindset.

Dave at Fermi spoke at the greatest length about joy, which makes sense because he has written two books on joy in the workplace, and to some extent fostering joy has become Fermi's "brand." For Dave a joyful workplace is a place where employees want to be, and also a place they can leave behind at the end of the day – one of the central features designed into the partnering system which Fermi uses is that no employee need work more than 40 hours a week (although Dave and the other managing partners often work slightly more than 40 hours), take work home with them, or be on-call while at home or on vacation.

Several of those interviewed described organizations where there is an intentional focus on making sure that all members of the community are feeling good about what is happening at any particular moment. Beyond Fermi, Ben and Cheryl at SmithFob and SmithTrain discussed the importance of fostering "positive energy" and on training employees (particularly managers) to think about the type of "vibrational energy" they are giving off at any particular moment. Mark at Cavalry Church and Tom at Hope Church both spoke about focusing on the feelings of those within the organization in similar ways, as did James at LearnGym and Lisa at StopIn.

As explored in Chapter Two, Carse's (1986) description of infinite games offered a rationale for the importance of seriousness of joy and playfulness. Carse argued that such feelings are produced when individuals wear their roles loosely, and remain aware of the constructed and artificial nature of such roles. For example, in Carse's view a joyful classroom would likely be an indicator that teachers and students were aware (on at least some level) of the artificiality of their roles as teachers and students, and were playing an "infinite game" together, and were consequently able to change the rules of the game as necessary to keep all community members playing. In contrast, the more serious the environment, the more roles are treated as selves, identities are treated as fixed, and games are played in a zero-sum fashion, ensuring that one individual's victory is another's loss. Thus playfulness signals an expansive mindset and an openness to growth and identity expansion.

While none of the subjects of this study articulated their embrace of joy and playfulness in their organizations in gaming terms, nonetheless their descriptions of their goals in terms of joy and playfulness suggest an embrace of this underlying logic. Eight of the ten subjects interviewed discussed the fostering of joy as an important goal of their organization. Only Phil at PI and Paul at ESC did not, and yet as will be described below, even Phil and Paul described embracing many of the practices which the other subjects explicitly connected to the fostering of joy in the workplace. Most of the other organizations include fostering joy in their mission statements, either explicitly or implicitly. For example, StopIn lists "Joy" as one of their six values; Fermi describes creating "a culture of joy for ourselves, our clients, and our users"; and SmithFob describes a goal of "showing loving and caring" in order "to make you smile."

Creating a "Profoundly Playful" Space. One example of how those interviewed discussed joy came from Pastor Mark at Cavalry Church, who described his goal as to foster a “profoundly playful” culture at his Church. In fact, this was the mandate which the previous lead pastor had handed down to him when he was given the job – to bring joy into the Church: “she said to me ‘I know what this congregation needs that I haven’t been able to give them, they need joy, in its most profound sense, and you can give them that,’ and I think I have.”

As Mark explained, “We’re dealing with very important things, profound things, things that are tradition, things that are at the heart of life, but we deal with those things with a sense of play and flexibility.” He describes himself and his associate pastor as “pretty playful liturgically, not in a way that is at all disrespectful, but we laugh a lot in worship, we enjoy, we play off each other a lot, we encourage people to laugh and have fun,” in the service of setting a tone for the congregation.

Mark sees such playfulness as having several functions. Joy builds attachment to the church and the community, because it makes the church someplace that congregation members want to be. For Mark’s congregation, joy is also linked to the first prong of the mission of the church, which is to “create a safer place for growing, learning, listening and loving.”

Further, for Mark, fostering a playful tone aligns with the Lutheran theology of the church, which holds that salvation is attained through divine grace rather than through one’s own deeds or beliefs. As Mark describes it, their theology means that they need not fear failure when attempting any particular project or striving for a goal, because such failures have no bearing on their salvation. Thus, to Mark, a sense of playfulness in relation to the profound signals that the church has a deep understanding of its core values and mission, and recognizes that most of what individuals deal with, even while at church, is significant only as it connects to that mission and those values, and therefore that no one need cling too tightly to a particular idea, project, or conception of themselves. This suggests the way that a joyful environment helps create a space for self-reinvention and identity expansion.

We can see from this example how playfulness can be seen both a factor feeding into a joyful environment and a sign that individuals are feeling joyful within that environment. As both Mark and Carse (1986) suggested, both are byproducts of a sense of generosity of spirit.

Such a generosity of spirit is on display at many of the organizations described in this study, as the sections below will show. For example, Dave at Fermi fosters playfulness in ways both big and small. One small way they do this is by passing around a plastic Viking helmet during their daily check-in "huddle" to indicate who has the floor and may speak. The use of this helmet suggests that they embrace a profoundly playful spirit akin to that nurtured by Mark – it is an emblem of the fact that while they take their huddles seriously, they don't take them too seriously. More broadly, for Dave, playfulness and joy are fostered by doing each of the things described in the sections below: removing fear, embracing an abundance mindset, and giving individuals permission to try things and to fail.

Removing Fear. When asked to describe why joy is important in the workplace, Dave began by describing being asked what the opposite of joy in the workplace is. In his view, the opposite of joy is fear:

> I think it's very difficult to be in learning mode when you are afraid. Fear inhibits our learning, or maybe the things we learn when we are afraid are more related to

surviving rather than to thriving and actually developing ourselves as people. And so for us, part of the joy factor here is, it could go in two different directions. One is what we often refer to as "pumping fear out of the room." If we can keep people out of fear mode, particularly using fear as a motivator, and I would even say artificial fear as a motivator, so many times I think we threaten subtly, about whether is my job safe, am I safe, am I going to get the next promotion, am I going to get a good review, am I doing good work, are my peers valuing the contribution I'm making, that sort of thing…

I've read enough to know that there's a relationship between the chemicals your body produces when you're afraid, adrenaline, cortisol, and the activity of the most human part of our brain, so I think when we are at our most human and at our least reptile we enjoy the opportunity for creativity, imagination, innovation and invention, and I think perhaps even a lot of the learning that's done here in this joyfully intended environment isn't like open up a book and learn routinely, but its more about as we would call it running the experiment and trying things, we're not afraid to make mistakes…. we assume we will make mistakes, therefore what if we create an environment where we will make them quickly and correct them while they are still small? … most fear-based organizations maybe promote the idea that we shouldn't make any mistakes, and end up making really really big mistakes very slowly. (10/1/2019)

As Dave explains it, joy comes about as the byproduct of creating an environment in which as much "artificial fear" has been reduced as possible. As he sees it, we all enjoy "creativity, imagination, innovation and invention," but when we are in "fear mode" we are unable to embrace these things, because we are too worried about protecting ourselves from making mistakes or exposing weakness.

Almost all of the subjects spoke about working to remove fear from the equation. For example, Roger at Heart described at length the way that Heart attempts to foster productive conversations through the removal of fear. Heart's embrace of small group Socratic discussions centered around the exploration of visual metaphors is explicitly aimed at taking the fear out of the conversation and opening "the vulnerability of people to reconsider" their opinions, ideas, and beliefs. For Roger, the use of open-ended questions and discussion facilitators who are not experts (or at least ones who adopt a posture of ignorance) is the most important way of removing fear from a situation; as soon as individuals are trying to get to a "right answer" fear re-enters the picture.

Roger described fear as linked to individual's conceptions of themselves and their expertise. For this reason, he explained that Heart has had the least success when working with college faculty and medical doctors, both groups of individuals who rely daily on their expertise and who he sees therefore as fearful of discussions or conversations which might reveal them to lack expertise in any area (even ones outside their area of study) – suggesting that the greater one's day-to-day reliance on their expertise, the more likely one is to fear being seen as not knowing something.

He also offered a small example of how Heart's choices of language used in conversations is oriented around the removal of fear. When he began running workshops many years ago the facilitators would often ask participants "What did you learn today?" as a way to close the workshop. Over time, they realized that many participants found this question threatening, because by asking individuals what they had learned they were implying that those individuals didn't already know everything they could or should know about a topic. When they changed the question to "What was the catch for you today?" they found that participants were much less reticent, and that even that simple change reduced the amount of fear in the conversation.

Similarly, Heart is very intentional in their description of those who run training activities as "facilitators" rather than "teachers" (as is pointedly explained in several places on their website). This is because the common perception is that teachers are experts who know what the right answer is; thus the mere presence of a "teacher" rather than a "facilitator" is perceived as increasing the amount of fear that training participants experience.

A deep concern for the non-rational parts of learning came through strongly in these discussions of fear. For example, James at LG talked about this in relation to the role of the coaches he employs to provide support to his clients. As described above, the coaches generally perceive themselves as almost superfluous – on any given day they might be asked one or two questions by those working their way through an online course. Yet the clients at LG see the presence of the coaches as one of the most important features of LG. Just knowing that someone was there to help and support them if necessary, particularly in moments of difficulty, made a huge difference in the learning experiences of those clients, according to their evaluations.

Cheryl also spoke about the challenge of helping StopIn's clients get over the fear and shame they attach to leaving college, describing the "fear and negativity" that people carry around for years when "you don't accomplish a goal that you set out to achieve and you thought it was going to be a real milestone to achieve." She acknowledged that this is an ongoing challenge, and that it is likely that they haven’t yet found a way to connect with “some of the students with the most fear and most baggage.”

Because helping the students with whom they work get past these feelings is an important goal at StopIn, she explained that their

> coaches have been intentionally hired for having stop-out experience themselves and being stop-out learners, so when we’ve built some trust and the students say, “I don’t know if I should even bother, it’s taken me so long, by the time I’m done it will have taken me ten years,” [] the coach on the other end can [say], “it took me eight, but it doesn’t say how long it took me on my diploma, I just have my diploma, and this is what it has gotten me. So one way to get over that fear is to really build that connection and to infuse real personal examples of what can be done, what it means, and what it can look like into the lives of people who may not have a precedent (12/4/2019)

Beyond helping students past their feelings of fear and shame, StopIn works to reduce fear by demystifying the processes of returning to and attending school. As Cheryl put it, “you can alleviate fear by giving students more seamless pathways to getting information.”

Transparent Processes. Every subject in this study described a similar focus on transparency and demystification of processes. At Fermi this means using visual systems that ensure that everyone knows what they’re responsible for at any given moment. As Dave explained,

> Clarity diminishes fear: when you know who you’re working with, what project you’re working on, what tasks you’re responsible for, what time you have to

> complete them, when you know the structure of the work, and that you will receive help and support if you need it, you can focus more easily on the work. (10/4/2019)

Similarly, Cheryl at SmithTraining discussed how SmithFob attempts to remove fear from the workplace in several ways, including through the use of transparent but flexible processes which help individuals understand how to approach customer service or how to try to implement workplace change. Quoting Claude Steele, the Stanford psychology professor who once spoke at SmithTraining, she argued that “what’s needed for a successful team is psychological safety.” At SmithFob they recognize that entering into a new workplace always brings a level of fear and insecurity, especially for individuals who pride themselves on being “high performers,” who are exactly the people any workplace would like to retain.

Evaluation Without Judgment. Cheryl also described how at SmithFob they try to foster a feeling of safety by repeating in a many different ways during staff training the idea that learning relies on making mistakes, and that no one has ever been fired for making a mistake. SmithFob also trains all their managers to respond to mistakes and problems in ways designed to eliminate fear, shame and guilt from the situation, and to focus instead on working together to solve problems. She offered this example of how they train managers to respond when a problem occurs at work:

> Wow, this hasn’t gone the way that we hoped, I don’t know if we weren’t clear enough about the expectations or if you didn’t get enough training on it, or if you just forgot the training or got out of the habit, but here’s what the problem is, we’ll fix this and then later we’ll get together and talk about what was going on. (12/20/2019)

This example fits well with Viola Spolin's approach of "evaluation without judgment" (1981), which she argues is necessary for unlocking creativity. It also parallels the types of responses offered by the faculty and staff at the school Summerhill in England, which has worked since 1921 at removing fear, shame and coercion from the learning experience (Neill, 1960); Neill's description of the handling a student's breaking of a window bears a significant resemblance to the SmithFob approach as articulated by Cheryl.

Tom at Hope Church also seeks to remove blame when dealing with his teenage students. For example, he describes dealing with a student who expresses a lot of anger; rather than saying "you have an anger problem," he approaches it by saying

> you have things in your life that make you angry, and society isn't always going to understand your being angry. But what are some methods that you can use in order to deal with people who make you angry, and also how do you keep your anger from hurting yourself, how do you not get punished by your own anger?... What can you do for your own benefit when anger comes along? (10/28/2019)

Approaching things in this way also acknowledges that they may be "righteously angry," rather than frustrating them by attempting to negate their anger and its roots.

Granting Permission to Fail. Another way these organizations attempt to instill joy and to remove fear is to grant individuals permission to try new things and fail. Mark at Cavalry Church used the term "permission giving" to characters how those within the church talk about this. As he put it,

> we're not accustomed culturally to saying "well let's give this a try, if it doesn't work, it's not a huge deal," and I've tried things that didn't work, and then I just say

> "didn't work!" It's not a huge deal, it doesn't mean we're failing or unfaithful, it just means it didn't work. (10/15/2019)

His goal is to model a "flexibility and willingness to try without thinking you're putting everything on the line… At first it may be awkward, but it feels safe."

Tom at Hope Church described a similar approach. With his students he tries to reinforce the idea that no matter what happens, "we will get through this, we'll find a way" whether they are trying something new as a group, facing a difficulty, or dealing with setbacks and problems that come at them from outside the program, often as a consequence of the fact that his students live in poverty.

Others expressed related sentiments. Phil at PI explained that "We try to make people feel like they won't be personally punished for failure or for wrong actions or wrong decisions." Expanding on this, he gave the example of potential businesses that PI had invested time and energy in before deciding not to pursue them further. To Phil this is just the cost of doing business:

> Part of creativity and invention – I'll go even further – part of learning, is making a mistake – how do you learn to write? You write it wrong, until you get it right. You have to recognize that in order to make progress and in order to create and in order to do those kind of things. Virtually every organization and every team has to make mistakes as they go along; not that you want to encourage mistakes, but you don't want to penalize them. You need to reward success, keep moving people to doing the right thing, and you'll get more right things than wrong things. (9/25/2019)

Likewise, Cheryl's description of how SmithFob allows for the making of mistakes (described in the section above) evinces their embrace of this philosophy.

Embracing an Abundance Mindset. Partly these organizations are comfortable with adopting a playful attitude, with making mistakes and with trying new things and failing, because they share an abundance mindset. The term abundance mentality was coined by Stephen Covey in 1989 in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.* Covey contrasted abundance and scarcity mentalities. A scarcity mentality sees resources and possibilities as finite, and approaches the world as a zero-sum game – thus, for one person or business to do well, another must do poorly. In contrast, an abundance mentality sees resources and possibilities as unbounded, and sees the possibility that all parties in an arrangement may win.

The terms, in recent years appearing more often as abundance and scarcity mindsets (rather than mentalities), have become common, and researchers have since investigated these ideas, validating Covey's categories (see for example Huijsmans et al., 2019). Cheryl used the term in referring to the SmithFob approach to business, for example, and it came up as a topic in conversation with Dave at Fermi Revolutions, and was reflected in conversation with James, Phil, Mark and Tom.

Beyond manifesting as a willingness to allow for one's business or organization to try things and fail, or to invest in projects that might not pay off, the abundance mindsets of these organizations infused many additional aspects of their approaches to their work. For example, Cheryl at SmithTraining described their willingness to share training materials with others, and to be an open-book organization, sharing details of their finances with their employees, as two facets of their "open, abundance mentality."

Dave described the culture of Fermi in terms similar to those used by Cheryl. Like SmithFob, they use an open-book approach; in addition, he described the way that employees can rely on one another for help whenever they're stuck with a project: "people feel they can be generous with their time, these two go to other pair for help, and they drop everything to help them, and it's because they feel confident they'll get help in turn." He explained that in the rare instance when someone asks for help and doesn't receive it, it is perceived as a "breach of trust" and a violation of community norms that "needs healing."

We can contrast this with workplaces in which the culture embraces a scarcity mindset, and individuals or teams fear that others' success works to their own detriment. In contrast, at companies like Fermi, where the culture is one of abundance, helping others need not be feared, because work is not perceived as a zero-sum game; in addition, employees understand that a) they are all in the same boat, and that what helps one an employee helps the larger company (so as Dave described, individual performance is "one of the least interesting metrics" to the company as a whole), and that b) what goes around comes around, so that by helping others employees ensure that they will receive help in return.

Fostering Dignity and Visibility

Beyond encouraging well-being through creating a joyful, playful tone in which work takes place through the removal of fear, through giving individuals and groups permission to fail, and through embracing an abundance mindset, these organizations also foster well-being through granting those within the organization (and those with whom they work) dignity and visibility.

The desire to be treated with dignity has two linked components. The first is a desire "to be respected on an equal basis with other people," and the second a desire to be recognized for what Fukuyama (2018) described as "one's superiority," but which might also be seen as being recognized for one's unique and individual accomplishments (which might also give rise to the sense of superiority Fukuyama references) (p. 9). We can also describe this second desire as a desire for visibility. The fulfilment of these desires contributes to an individual's positive feelings of satisfaction and joy.

Those interviewed for this research described fostering dignity and visibility in several ways. The first of these was by creating systems that allow for individuals to express themselves and do things in their own ways, allowing them to work from their strengths rather than forcing them to do things in a way that might work well for someone else but less well for them. Beyond allowing individuals to do things in ways that work best for themselves, many of these organizations rely on evaluation systems which are primarily qualitative, and which consequently allow for an acknowledgement of individuality and thus increase visibility. In addition to adopting systems for working or evaluating performance which recognize and appreciate individuality, a second way these organizations embrace the desire for dignity and visibility is by adopting responsive approaches to their work, ones which begin by listening and building from that which is offered (ala improvisation), rather than beginning by dictating what should be done or how it should be done. A third way they do these things is encouraging and rewarding both success and creativity, particularly creative approaches to problem solving, which also helps individuals feel valued for their unique contributions.

Systems that Allow for and Celebrate Difference. Dave at Fermi, Ben and Cheryl at SmithFob, Roger at Heart, Lisa at StopIn, and both Mark at Cavalry Church and Tom at Hope Church all spoke about creating systems which allow individuals to have some say in both the tasks they choose to accomplish and the manner in which they will accomplish them. The general compact is this: you choose to sign on to the goals and values of the organization and the organization will in turn allow you to best decide how to do so.

Cheryl at SmithTraining explained that creating a "mindful, caring, inclusive culture" relies on putting in place "the right systems" to support such a culture. Dave at Fermi sees systems as fostering caring and inclusivity because they allow organizational leaders to loosen their grip on power and control, and to allow for a wider range of ways in which things might be done. He described control and structure as "two kinds of gears working in opposite direction, where the more structure there is the less control is necessary." While he sees some control as unavoidable (though he mused that "it would be an interesting experiment to see what would happen if you let go of all control"), because he trusts the systems that Fermi has in place, he can feel comfortable with knowing that "he doesn't fully understand how [Fermi] works." To Dave, structures like the workflow boards, which appear to be uniform, actually allows for significant individualization.

The structures which the organizations put in place give those within the organization a range of freedom to do things in their own way. Because they also can provide clarity (see the section on Removing Fear, above), they can allow leaders to feel comfortable trusting those to take care of the work for which they are responsible. For example, the partner system at Fermi allows pairs to work in their own ways, but because one is always partnered with a colleague, and because the workflow is mapped out on the walls of the office, there is little need to fear that an individual might be "slacking off" or not accomplishing a particular task. Thus using systems that both leaders and organization members can trust in turn fosters trust between those individuals.

Ben at SmithFob agreed that effective systems nurture individuality, arguing that "good systems alleviate the need to control how individuals grow and develop – so that those with authority don't need to decide who [those individuals] are, and can let them become who they're going to become." For example, the visualization system they use with both individuals and groups requires a willingness to envision one's future and to set personal goals, but leaves the content of those aims up to the individual, who can then be supported as they reach for those goals. Other examples of open-ended systems include the coaching approaches used at LearnGym and StopIn.

Both Mark at Cavalry and Phil at PI also described creating flexible systems that work for people rather than forcing people to work for a system. Mark explained that Cavalry's goal is to "provide an environment that allows people to use their gifts," and Phil described an approach of figuring out what works for the person, instead of saying "let's look at the rulebook."

Qualitative Evaluation. In many ways, the approach of those interviewed for this research is diametrically opposed to the administrative structures of schools, and is explicitly understood to be so. For example, Dave contrasted the approach of Fermi to that of schools; in his view schools are so focused on rank ordering students that they forgo a focus on learning. In contrast, if Fermi's system works as hoped, every employee will continually learn, grow and succeed – the businesses' success depends upon it. At the same time, the system tries to leave room for employees to be unique human beings with a range of skills, abilities, and strengths, so that no one rubric can simply be used for staff evaluation or promotion. For Dave, using a qualitative, group process for evaluating and promoting individuals is important because it allows for recognizing and fostering a range of cognitive diversity within the organization. As he described it, Fermi is focused on the overall success of projects and the company, and they "almost don't care what individual contributions people make." While he acknowledged that he was being somewhat hyperbolic when he said this, many of their practices, including the pairing that is at the heart of their system, support this idea. For example, in the hiring process candidates are partnered with one another, and the goal during the first stage of interviewing is to make one's partner look good.

At the same time, a recent challenge they have been grappling with at Fermi is that a number of employees have asked for a quantitative promotion process; they want a simple, straightforward formula for knowing how to advance. And while Fermi has been reluctant to lay out a road map for promotion (Dave's goal is to avoid "boiling down the process to some kind of boilerplate akin to "if you check boxes *a, b,* and *c,* you will be promoted to level *x.*"), a committee is currently trying to develop a tool that might honor this desire while remaining flexible enough to value and recognize a diverse range of strengths. Dave compared the promotion process to an eye exam, in which the committee of peers and supervisors evaluating the request for a promotion examine the employee and ask "do they look more like *this* [those at their current level] or *this* [those at the level to which they aspire]?"

Additional examples of qualitative evaluation systems include StopIn's internal coaching model, which uses weekly conversations focused on both company and individual goals to evaluate progress and success, and Hope Church's group discussions and debriefings of activities and programs which work in similar ways. The focus of those debriefings boils down to two central questions: “How did it go? What could we do differently next time?”

Responsivity. Many of the approaches already described can be characterized as essentially *responsive.* We can define responsivity as approaching others by beginning by listening rather than speaking, and building on or from what has been heard. (Such responsivity is an essential value and practice within the field of improv; Lobman & Lundquist, 2007). For example, Tom’s metaphor of growing what thrives in the soil (described in Subjects, above), and Lisa’s explanation of how StopIn has learned from their clients and leads by asking questions rather than assuming they understand what those clients want to hear, both rely on a responsive approach.

Such an approach is built on a belief that those lower in an organizational hierarchy can be trusted as intelligent people who understand and care about the organization’s goals. As Lisa said about working with learners at all levels, “I think we just need to trust the humans a bit more.”

Fermi takes a responsive approach in designing their software; the first step of their design process is to listen to, observe, and learn from those for whom they are designing. Their partner system itself relies on individuals to work responsively as well. And the servant leadership models adopted by SmithFob, Fermi, and Heart also rely on this type of responsivity, and on listening to organization members as if they were customers, with the goal of understanding and serving their needs (such an approach yields its own satisfactions; as Phil at PI said, “the harder I work to make others successful, the more exponentially satisfied I become.”).

Mutuality / Multi-Directional Learning. As has been expressed in many examples throughout this chapter, responsive approaches ensure that learning is always mutual – leaders and members are continually learning from one another. This mutuality was described by Roger at Heart, Lisa at StopIn, Tom at Hope Church, among others. Cheryl at SmithTraining described an approach to training both internally and externally that continually improves from the input of both sets of constituents:

> by sharing it with outside people and getting their feedback we've learned a lot that then meant that our internal training got better, so there was this really great synergy, and you learn things; when you share with other people they share with you. (12/20/2019)

Putting the Learner in the Driver's Seat. These approaches also give learner control over their own learning. This is true of SmithTraining with their visualization and their lengthy menu of internal courses which their members may take, as well as their process for allowing staff members to propose and teach new courses. LearnGym's approach to learning is almost entirely self-directed, and Heart, Hope Church, and StopIn also described an approach which gives control or power over to the learner.

At StopIn they find themselves asking the same questions of both employees and clients:

> We're coaching people: Where do you want to go? How happy are you? What do you want to do? What are your professional goals? How do we support you to align what you're doing every day to be on a track that will get you where you want to be in five or ten years? That keeps people motivated and happy and retained. (12/4/2019)

Lisa went on to explain that it is as important to give individuals permission "to not be into something" as it is to allow them to pursue their interests.

Rewarding Success and Creativity. Many of the subjects spoke of how removing fear from the workplace unleashes creativity, from Tom at Hope Church to Roger at Heart to Phil at PI. Such creativity is essential to the success of each of these organizations. For example, Phil explained that PI has relied on creative approaches to increase business, to sustain partnerships, and to develop new markets.

> Even in early days, we tried to work out situations where you don't just trade dollars for services, you share the rewards for services by giving up something on each side. An example would be "I will develop a new approach for you to run your machine faster; that approach is going to cost me $100,000 to develop, but I'm only going to charge you $50,000, with the idea that when you see what it does and how much faster, you pay me another $100,000. (9/25/2019)

In part PI and the other organizations described in this study see creativity as an essential tool of a small organization focused on doing high-quality work. Many of those with whom I spoke (including Ben, Phil, Dave and Paul) described the importance of creative approaches to sell long-term value rather than simply the short-term bottom-line to those with whom they work.

Given this reality, while these organizations give individuals permission to fail, they also focus on rewarding creativity and success in a variety of ways. Small ways of doing so might include verbal acknowledgment in a workplace huddle (SmithFob, Fermi, StopIn) or having one's work displayed prominently or publicly (Cavalry, Hope). Larger ways include offering financial rewards for successes. For example, Tom at Hope Church has worked to find venues for publicly displaying and selling his students' work – and they keep all the proceeds. For Fermi or SmithFob it can mean that rather than having the company take ownership of a great idea from an employee, the employee might become a partner with an ownership stake in a new venture. Of all these organizations, PI has taken this the furthest, and almost half of their employees have some ownership stake in the company.

Fostering Connection and Community

As many business researchers have described (see for example Senge, 1990, and Sinek, 2019), individuals desire a connection to the group as well as a sense that they are making a difference by contributing to the success of a worthwhile cause. The subjects of this study described organizations that foster well-being by nurturing connections between individuals and to the larger group, as well as to a larger cause.

Shared Vision. Organizations like Cavalry, Fermi, SmithFob, StopIn and LearnGym have clear, simply-worded visions around which their organizational culture revolves. (see discussions in Subjects, above). These visions are expansive, with a focus less on the bottom line than on providing a rationale for why such an organization should exists. Drawing on Carse (1986), Sinek (2020) calls such missions "infinite missions" and "just causes" (p. 36)

Whether at Hope or Cavalry Church, at SmithFob or Fermi, the vision functions as a kind of "gatekeeper" (Mark) against which new ideas and practices are tested; Mark described his role as "keeper of the vision." Individuals who join these organizations are invited to share in the vision of the organization, giving them a sense of larger purpose. Similarly, Roger at Heart describes their work process as in part a way of bringing those within an organization to take ownership of the vision of that organization, and both Lisa at StopIn and James at LearnGym described the way that a passion for contributing to their group's mission keeps employees motivated and connected to the organization.

Shared Ownership: Smallness. Such shared missions also contribute to a sense of shared ownership. In part this may be a function of the smallness of many of these organizations. As Phil at PI explained

> In more conventional and larger organizations, the tendency is for people to have a smaller role to play, because there are so many steps in providing services or providing a product that your role in that … is a narrow piece of the whole. Almost just because of the nature of small and big businesses, everybody has a larger role almost without regard to anything else. A design engineer may go to meet with a customer,… partly because there aren't very many people. The nature of keeping smaller / more focused is that everybody has a larger role, [and] see[s] themselves not as a step in the process but as focused on results. (9/28/2019)

Thus Phil, Paul at ESC, Dave at Fermi and Ben & Cheryl at SmithFob all described intentionally keeping their organizations small, and choosing to grow horizontally rather than vertically. Phil sees smallness as a way to encourage and model entrepreneurial and creative thinking within the company:

> How do I get people to think like me? Don't just grow the company to be this monstrous company, continue to develop different enterprises so that people can become more like you in a different environment… Large companies tend to emphasize process over results, which certainly fosters predictability and control, but at the cost of limiting new ideas and discouraging risk-taking. (9/28/2019)

Both Phil at PI and Dave at Fermi also explain their decision to grow in a way as which is more rhizomatic (to borrow a term from Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) than vertical as a way of sharing ownership and rewarding those willing to take on the risk of creating a new business, which they and their partners see as fostering inventiveness and ownership. Ben has characterized the SmithFab group of businesses in similar ways.

Recently Ben has been reading about permaculture, and as he looks back from the present on his family of companies he describes them using the permaculture term "edge." In permaculture, an edge is where two ecosystems meet – for example, where a field meets a forest, or at the rim of a pond where the water meets the land. Permaculturists describe the edge as the place of greatest creativity and growth, and thus often seek to maximize the edges that a designed landscape has – for example, rather than making a pond that is simply round, by adding many curves around the edges they greatly increase the amount of edge space where water and land come into contact, which leads to increased biodiversity (Burton & Kagan, 2000).

In Ben's eyes, the "edginess" of SmithFob is an important structural feature produced by not growing too large. As he explained, "I look at it like art, if you're making something amazing and special, then it makes sense" to stay small. He contrasts this with larger, more traditional organizations:

> when you're stamping out multiple units, Wendell Berry says it's like a cookie cutter on dough, you've lost all connection to creativity….the whole idea of having these separate businesses creates a lot more of what in permaculture the would call edge … the corporate model is the other way, sort of this monolithic hierarchy defended against the outside world, but what you lose is edge.

> You choose your problems, there's problems that go along with this too, but we chose a lot of edge; creating models where there's a lot of autonomy. (11/2/2019)

While Phil does not talk about the way his company branches outward in similar terms, his belief in the value of smallness because of the way it allows him to share ownership for his company and to avoid adding layers of bureaucracy, meshes with the idea of edges as creative, productive spaces.

Similarly, Paul at ESC doesn't talk about his companies in these terms, but he describes the challenge his inter-related companies face as finding creative ways to "ride the crest" of new trends in energy services; the focus is on looking for new opportunities for business, such as new ways to bundle energy consumers into groups who might find savings (and yield profits) through the using the services of ESC.

Shared Ownership: Systems Thinking. Another way to think about smallness and edges is to consider "edginess" in an organization as a byproduct of individuals feeling responsible for the success of the organizations, feeling connected to its larger purpose and capable of affecting that larger purpose. This takes us back to Phil's point that in a small organization individuals "see themselves not as a step in the process but as focused on results," which might be a way of saying that in small organizations it is easy to foster systems thinking, and that "edginess" may be produced through systems thinking even within larger organizations.

Each of the subjects, no matter their organizational size, described fostering systems thinking, both within the organization and in those with whom they work. For example, the approach to coaching used at StopIn and LearnGym helps individuals think toward big-picture organizational goals as they set and pursue short-term goals. The infusion of their mission into all activities at Cavalry Church also encourages a similar juxtaposition. At SmithFob their bottom-line change process and their insistence that every employee is empowered to do “whatever it takes to make things right” encourage both systems thinking and a sense of empowerment.

Roger at Heart describes how they achieve success working with organizations with many thousands of employees by pushing those employees to apply systems thinking in their conversations about how to successfully implement change within those organizations, by using visual metaphors to foster “big picture” thinking in their small group conversations; again, their sense that their contributions will be listened to and valued gives rise to a feeling of empowerment.

Fostering Purpose and Connection. Almost every interview subject spoke about the importance of building connections both inside and outside their organization, at group and individual levels. Many cited a responsive approach (see above) as an effective way to do this. For example, Lisa described building such connections as the first and most essential role of the coaches she employs. The partner system that Fermi employs also nurtures such connections.

Many subjects spoke about the importance of nurturing a common culture as a way to foster community, including Dave at Fermi, Phil at PI, Mark at Cavalry and Ben and Cheryl at SmithFob. Tom described a variety of practices he uses with his students to foster community. For example, as a final project, he laid out piles of photographs the group had taken over the course of the year, and asked each person to choose a photograph that they weren’t in, that showed another person or an activity; then they were asked to talk about why that photograph showed something important about the group and the year. Roger explained how Heart works to push people to see one another as individuals (rather than the roles they play within an organization) and to build connections from that vantage point, individual to individual.

Several subjects also spoke about focusing more on team accountability than individual accountability as a way to foster a sense of community, including Dave at Fermi and Tom at Hope. For example, Phil described how at PI "we tend to reward people as teams or as groups for activities as opposed to 'I'm the winner' or 'I'm the loser.'" Such an example suggests how a sense of community also contributes to an abundance mindset and the removal of fear from the workplace.

Themes in Relation to Improvisation and Identity Expansion

The themes that emerged from this research (see Table 7) can also be seen as linked to both *improvisation* and *identity expansion*. The examinations of improvisation and identity expansion within each organization (offered at the end of each Subject section) illustrate how the subjects viewed these two topics; the brief sections below will look at these topics more broadly, in terms of the themes that emerged from the research. Broadly, this research suggests that within these organizations there is a relationship between the fostering of well-being (which in turn feeds learning and organizational success) and the adoption of approaches which we can characterize as improvisational and which link to identity expansion.

Improvisation. While the subjects described varying levels of familiarity with improvisational practices, they all recognized the applicability of such practices to their work. In particular, they tended to respond most emphatically to the idea of positive responsiveness that underlies improvisation, and which is linked to engaging with people as unique individuals and building and learning together. Improvisation is also linked to playfulness, the granting of permission to fail, the removal of fear and the fostering of joy, and to the building of connections and community. As I will discuss in Chapter Five, given that these organizations each arrived at the range of practices which they have embraced through a kind of experimental or improvisational approach suggests that, as in improvisation, beginning with the desire to create an organization which treats individuals in particular ways may be the most important thing these organizations have done (which we might compare to a kind of deontological approach to ethics). At the same time, it may also be possible for such organizations to borrow either practices or vocabulary from the world of improvisation as a way of jump-starting such processes.

The Boundaries of Improvisation. Within these organizations, as in life, no activity is purely improvisational. As Sawyer (2001) has described, improvisation happens within boundaries, and plays off scripts. For example, even in improvisational performance, the performers are drawing up cultural scripts (which they have experienced playing out in their own lives as well as in the media) which allow them to take on a range of roles. Goffman (1959) describes how the presence of such scripts actually allows us to readily step into almost any role with which we have familiarity. This is reflected in how both Ben and Cheryl described providing basic scripts to the employees at SmithFob which they can use as a basis for their improvised interactions with customers and other employees.

At times, too, it is important that scripts be more rigidly adhered to. For example, as Gawande (2009) has described, following scripted procedures can be essential; for example, he describes how the use of checklists has led to decreases in infant mortality. While none of those interviewed in this research deal regularly with such life-or-death matters, there are safety procedures in place within kitchens (SmithFob) and labs (PI) that are crucial and which are intentionally inflexible. Improvisation, which can connote a kind of “winging-it” (Peters, 2001), has little place in such procedures.

In fact, as Sawyer (2011) describes, experts possess both a greater range of scripts upon which they draw when dealing with routines as well as a greater ability to improvise in response to the exigencies of the moment. The combination of systems and scripts off which individuals may improvise within the organizations I have described here seems to aim at helping individuals within the organizations develop such expertise. For example, the visual systems used at Fermi are regimented, and this regimentation provides a framework within which improvisation becomes possible.

Such systems, which create the boundaries demarcating the limits of improvisation, can also be seen as marking the boundaries of Discourse within these organizations (Gee, 1989). There can be no improvisation without such boundaries – non sequiturs work against productive improvisation by working against the grammar of the Discourse (Sawyer, 2001).

An important commonality which these organizations share is that they have intentionally tried to create what we might call *humane* systems which make limits clear while allowing for flexibility within those limits. As Phil at PI described, they care about the person more than the handbook, and try to find flexible ways to approach challenges and problems. Another example of such an approach was the dress code adopted by Mary Barra when she became CEO of GM; she took what had been a 10-page dress code and changed it to a two-word one: “Dress appropriately” (Murphy, 2018); such a policy is meant to start conversations rather than foreclose them.

Such flexibility is important because as Goffman (1959) described, the scripts we use to understand the roles which we play can be very confining; we not only feel limited by those scripts but also police the roles of others when they fail to adhere to such scripts (Foucault, 1979). Lobman (2011) has described how such scripts confine teachers, both by creating tight boundaries for what they believe is acceptable and also by tying them conservative ideas about learning. Lobman argued that the more improvisational our understanding of the work we do (despite the boundaries of that improvisation), the more we understand that each role we take on is a kind of performance. Gee (1989) has argued that such a meta-understanding is what allows for meaningful learning to occur – learning which is more performative than cognitive.

Identity Expansion. Organizations including LearnGym, Fermi, Heart, StopIn, SmithFob, and Hope and Cavalry Churches approach their members (and those with whom they work) as though they are always “growing, becoming, and learning,” as Mark at Cavalry Church articulated. They see individuals not as fixed or tied to the roles they that fulfil within an organization, but as always exceeding such roles. As Carse (1986) describes, such a sense of individuals exceeding their roles is linked to the playfulness of treating life and work as an infinite game. Thus, a sense of individuals as always containing more than meets the eye, and always in progress toward a different future self contributes to all three facets of well-being – it feeds into the creation of joy within the organization, the fostering of dignity and visibility, and also helps build connections and community. Such an understanding of individuals as simultaneously playing a role and also exceeding that role also mirrors Vygotsky's (1978) description of the way children exist and learn while at play, and thus may be an important facilitator of learning within these organizations.

By fostering joy through adopting an abundance mindset, through removing fear and giving individuals permission to fail, these organizations facilitate the kind of identity expansion which in Chapter Two I described as linked to learning. The practices these organizations adopt that foster dignity and visibility help individuals also help individuals feel safe being themselves, and feel as if they need not mask their individuality to be rewarded or recognized in the workplace. Similarly, the practices of these organizations that foster connection and community help individuals feel that they are accepted within the group, and that the group will support them as they grow.

Conclusion

In the final section of this chapter, I have attempted chart the relationships between emergent themes. I ask that readers recognize that such charting requires oversimplification, and that almost all of the practices that the subjects described their organizations engaging in function in a range of ways. That said, over the course of these interviews, the range of themes which emerged suggest that the success of these organizations rests on their ability to foster learning, and their ability to foster learning is in turn grounded in their prioritization of the well-being of those within those environments. Fig. 1 illustrates this process.

Figure 1. Central learning process.

While such a figure appears very simple, as Fig. 2 and Fig. 3 (below) illustrate, the interviews conducted for this study suggest that focusing on the well-being of those within an organization is not a simple matter – it requires a rethinking of many conventional practices, and in particular requires that organizations listen more and dictate less, and consequently that they give more power to those within the organization and hold their own authority more loosely.

In terms of the fostering of well-being within these organizations, the subjects reported doing this in three major ways: through creating a joyful, playful space in which to work and learn; through helping individuals feel seen, valued, and connected to one another and the organization; and through giving those individuals a sense that they are contributing to something important (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Components of well-being.

These components of well-being can be broken down further; a range of factors emerged which contribute to each of these three. Factors which contribute to the creation of joy include creating a playful tone within the organization, fostering an abundance mindset, removing fear, and giving individuals permission to try things and to fail. Factors contributing to a sense of recognition and connection include the implementation of systems which allow for and celebrate differences, including the use of qualitative methods for performance evaluation; prioritizing responsivity (which we can define as starting with listening and responding in ways which acknowledge and build on what has been said); fostering a sense of shared responsibility; and building connections between individuals and fostering community. Factors which contribute to a sense of meaningful contribution include the nurturing of shared, expansive vision, as well as systems thinking, and the rewarding of success. Fig. 3 illustrates these components in relation to one another, and Table 7 illustrates all themes and subthemes, as well as the sources from which they were derived.

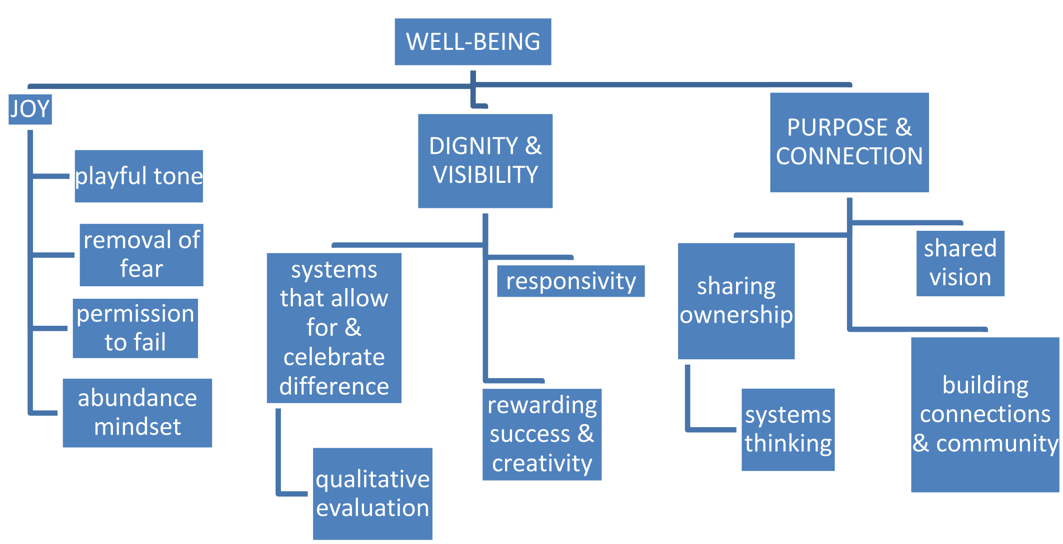

Figure 3. Components of Joy, Dignity and Visibility, Connection and Purpose

Building on these illustrations, Chapter Five will offer a summary of the findings of the research, and will examine how these findings connect to additional research in the fields of psychology, education, and business, before concluding by exploring their implications for future research.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Introduction

Where Chapter Four offered an overview of the results of the study, with a particular focus on the themes that emerged and on examining the role of learning, improvisation, and identity expansion within these organizations, in this chapter I will attempt to sum up the important points raised in that chapter, as well as to explore some of the questions and ideas raised by those points that deserve further study within the field of education.

The purpose of this research was to investigate how learning works within innovative organizations, paying particular attention to the relationship between learning, improvisational practices and identity expansion within those organizations, with the goal of considering what lessons educational institutions and other organizations might take from these organizations.

Summary of Main Findings

The main finding of this research was that these organizations have succeeded by placing a premium on the well-being of those with whom they work (whether those individuals are part of the organization or engage with the organization as clients or partners). It is important to note that these organizations view well-being not simply instrumentally, as something worth fostering because of the returns it yields in other areas, but also as an end that is worth achieving because it possesses intrinsic value.

These organizations foster well-being in three main ways: 1) they create a joyful environment through the removal of fear, through granting permission to fail, and through adopting an abundance mindset; 2) they foster dignity and visibility by putting in place systems that both allow for and celebrate individual differences, by approaching others responsively (listening before speaking and learning together), and by rewarding success and creativity; and 3) they nurture connections and community, with an emphasis on nurturing shared ownership and a shared vision. These organizations have generally adopted a set of values which we can categorize as improvisational, and which support the identity expansion of those with whom they work.

Connections to Previous Research

This section will review connections to previous research in the fields of psychology, education, and business. In particular I will draw connections to research in positive psychology, to business literature focused on learning organizations, to systems thinking and to the removal of fear, and to a wide range of educational research that these results support.

This research can be seen as helping to validate work on student-centered approaches to learning, as well as work on approaches that validate the dignity of students and teachers and which offer meaningful, student-driven classroom experiences. In addition, this research supports research which has been conducted on the importance of well-being in the classroom, and the connections between well-being and student performance; indirectly, it also supports research which has shown the demotivating power of quantitative classroom evaluation (the awarding of points and letter grades). The results of this research also bolster work done on fostering classroom community. While the study of improvisation and learning and learning in relation to identity expansion are not yet robust fields, this research also supports the nascent research in these areas.

This section will by looking at connections to the field of positive psychology and research into well-being. From there it will move into an exploration of connections to research in learning as it relates to the range of constructs explored in this research, including well-being, joy, fear, abundance mindset, dignity and visibility, connection and community. Following this it will examine connections literature related to business learning.

Research in Psychology

The well-being framework that emerged from this research, both connects to and support Martin Seligman's (2012) recently developed well-being theory, as articulated in his book *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being.* Seligman describes well-being as a construct with both subjective and objective components, and describes it as having five essential components, which he sums up with the acronym PERMA: Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishments. Seligman's model is relatively new, and has not been thoroughly investigated; preliminary research supports it value as both a conceptual model and as the basis for tools which may be used to measure well-being (Coffey et al., 2016; Goodman et al., 2017; Kern et al., 2014). Table 8 maps this model against the results of this research, and suggests both the utility of Seligman's theory and the value of the model constructed during this project.

It is worth noting that Seligman's earlier research (and models) had focused on the fostering not of well-being but of happiness; he has since rejected happiness as a goal because of his sense that it is too subjective, and lacks interpersonal components including a sense of the broader good. The choice to use the term “joy” rather than “happiness” in this research is connected to this understanding of the limitations of happiness.

Table 8

Seligman’s (2012) PERMA Model of Well-Being Mapped Against Themes

Model Term	**Related Themes**
Positive Emotion	Joy, Playfulness, Removal of Fear, Permission to Fail, Abundance Mindset
Engagement	Removal of Fear, Fostering Dignity & Visibility, Shared Vision, Shared Ownership
Relationships	Responsivity, Fostering Connections & Community
Meaning	Fostering Connections, Shared Ownership, Shared Vision, Systems Thinking
Accomplishments	Fostering Dignity & Visibility, Qualitative Evaluation, Responsiveness, Rewarding Success & Creativity

Like well-being, joy has only recently become the focus of psychological research. Pawleski (2020) argues that the recent turn toward joy in the field of psychology (and in the field of theology as well) has grown out of a sense that both fields had previously focused primarily on negative feelings. The examination of joy has been “intended to correct this imbalance by emphasizing the power of joy to transform lives and bring about greater human flourishing” (p. 107). My research provides tentative evidence supporting the connection between joy and transformation.

Research in Education

Well-Being. Until recently, little educational research has examined well-being, and the research that has been done, has treated well-being instrumentally – not as a good unto itself but rather as a quality linked to desired outcomes.[8] For example, Somerville and Whitebread (2018) found that in children, greater well-being is associated with increased ability to self-regulate one's emotions, and that the greater the children's well-being the more they were able flexibly adapt in order to perform such self-regulation. Earl et al. (2018) found that students who rated themselves as having greater need satisfaction and well-being outperformed their peers academically. My research suggests that we might understand this result as having implications that move in two directions – it is likely both that greater well-being leads to stronger academic performance and that weaker academic performance leads to lower estimation of well-being.

Over the past decade similar research focused on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has taken a similar approach to teaching students how to be self-aware, to self-regulate, to make responsible decisions, to build relationships, and to be more socially aware (CASEL, 2019). Here the emphasis is less on fostering well-being within schools than on teaching individuals to care for their own well-being no matter the setting. While it seems likely that fostering well-being in the way that organizations I studied do would also help foster the building of these skills, because many of these organizations model

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[8] It is worth noting that educators such as Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (Soka Gakkai, n.d.) and A. S. Neill (1960) and educational philosophers including Robin Barrow (1980) and Nel Noddings (2003) have all argued that happiness should be the ultimate goal of education.

such skills as part of their systems and processes, additional study would be needed to see if such practices would feed into SEL in these ways.

Research on Joy. As with well-being, a limited body of research focuses on the fostering of joy in education. Wolk (2008) and Griffiths (2012) each have argued for the importance of joy in schools, and have proffered lists of activities which they believe are linked to doing so. Their lists dovetail nicely with my research. Some examples of techniques they advocates for that match my findings include giving students choices and letting them exercise their creativity, celebrating their successes through displaying their work, and rethinking assessment to be more individualized (Wolk), fostering strong relationships in classrooms (both teacher-to-student and student-to-student); and through helping students experience "unpredictable, personal transformations" (Griffiths, p. 665). Griffiths' final point here links joy to identity expansion, a connection also drawn by Neill (196), who described "the greatest joy in childhood – conquering a difficulty" as a type of transcending of one's self.

Nonetheless, only recently have researchers begun exploring joy and other positive feelings empirically. Goldstein (1999) argued for the need to conduct research into the affective components of learning, particularly in relation to Vygotsky's theories, and in the past decade researchers have begun pursued such research.

For example, Rantala and Määttä (2012) and Rantala et al. (2016) have studied Finnish elementary school students to determine the sources of joy in their classrooms. Rantala and Määttä found that students want to learn, and enjoy learning, and that:

> Joy comes from being active, and can be engaged through play.
> Joy is encouraged by the freedom to choose how to approach tasks.
> Joy cannot be hurried; it takes time to nurture and arrive at.
> Joy comes about when challenges and abilities are well matched.

For different students, joy comes from learning different things and in different ways.

Joy is experienced socially, and can be increased and reinforced by classroom culture.

Joy increases when students have a voice in decision-making about their own learning.

Learning environments can either constrain or allow for the expression of joy. (pp. 93-100)

My findings echo theirs, and their list of conclusions also reinforces the strong interconnections between the many components of well-being within the framework which I have generated.

This study also connects to work on learning and brain chemistry, as summed up by Willis (2007), who draws on such work to argue that the more students enjoy learning, the more successfully they transmit and store information. Summing up the field of brain research, she argues “that superior cognitive input to the executive function networks is more likely when stress is low and learning experiences are relevant to students,” and that “when classroom activities are pleasurable, the brain releases dopamine, a neurotransmitter that stimulates the memory centers and promotes the release of acetylcholinem, which increases focused attention” (para. 10) She also advocates for making learning relevant for students, allowing independent discovery as part of learning. Such research on brain chemistry helps clarify the reasons why well-being and learning are interlinked.

Removal of Fear. Neurological research has also helped clarify the ways that fear has impeded learning. Bledsoe and Baskin (2014) describe the role that fear plays in memory deficits and in the short-circuiting of important functions of the nervous system. Sullo (2009) also presents evidence that fear compromises our ability to learn, while acknowledging that many teachers believe that fear is an effective motivator. Research on performance grading also suggests that it leads to decreased motivation and increased fear in students (Krijgsman et al., 2017).

Research in the social sciences helps us understand the cultural roots of beliefs in the importance of fear and suffering in schooling. There is a long tradition of believing, according to a saying attributed to Aristotle (Diogenes, 1959), “The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet.” For example, Lyons and Drew (2006) argue that America schools intentionally cultivate fear, in order to encourage the development of passive and dependent citizens. Such research suggests the difficulty of adopting approaches which this research suggests are better suited to fostering learning.

Dignity & Visibility. Dignity has not directly been the subject of much research in the field of education. As Tapola (2011) describes, many teacher education programs use the word “dignity” in their description of how they hope to teach their students to approach those with whom they work, particularly working with students whose backgrounds (whether racial or socioeconomic) differ from their own. However, Tapola’s research suggests that few teacher education programs have thought through what they mean by the term dignity, and consequently they use the term in several different ways, including in ones which suggest that some individuals are more deserving of dignity than others, and which those of us concerned with the dignity of all individuals should find troubling.

More recently Hantzopoulos (2016) studied a single school (Humanities Preparatory Academy in New York), and explored how their curriculum, which is centered around a human-rights education (HRE) framework, supports an approach which treats both teachers and students with dignity. She defines dignity in a way which draws on Kant's (1998) categorical imperative, with a focus on treating others as ends rather than as means, and which also mirrors the discussion of dignity in my research, which describes treating others with dignity as seeing them as both equal and individual. Hantzopoulos' description of the practices of Humanities Preparatory Academy which foster dignity resonates with the practices described in this dissertation as fostering well-being, including focusing on building caring relationships, creating a culture of respect for different, and fostering democracy and student agency within the school.

Systems that Allow For and Celebrate Difference. Many individual teachers find ways to make allowances for differences among their students and find ways to celebrate those differences; one notable historical example is Albert Cullum (1967). Cullum's *Push Back the Desks* describes an approach to teaching which made participation in projects or writing assignments voluntary. As Cullum explained,

> Placing class projects on a volunteer basis removes all student fears. I have not yet encountered a class where all students did not volunteer to take part in some aspect of a project. Each child quickly finds his own level of success, and the class works as a team with pride and dignity. Children are supportive of one another…. There were no tests or quizzes or failures. Of course some students were better prepared than others, but the important objective was to acquire a taste of American history, not an A, B+, or an F. Each student could work at his own level. The result was that everyone was stimulated by a challenge proportional to the work they could handle. (pp. 19, 36-37)

This description contains many points worth noting. First, by making participation voluntary, Cullum engages with the point raised by Carse (1987), that one must agree to play a game for it to feel like a game; the choice to participate signals that a student has chosen to adhere to the rules of the game and signed on to the values of the project, which fosters ownership; following Suits (1978), this also turns learning into a game. Cullum's focus on letting all students achieve at the level they are able rather than rank ordering them with letter grades allowed them each to feel successful and recognized for their individual accomplishments. And by allowing each student to be challenged proportional to their abilities he grants them dignity and control, and helps them achieve flow as they work.

A more recent, systematic attempt to create systems that allow for and honor difference was the development by Wiggins and McTighie (1998) of the Understanding by Design framework, a backwards-design approach to curriculum which advocates for allowing students to show mastery in individualized ways, rather than simply by completing a particular assignment or taking a teacher-designed test.

Research that compares systems which allow for individuation and recognition with those that do not is limited but suggestive. For example, Gresalfi et al. (2008) compared ideas of competence in math classrooms and on the basketball court and found that as members of a basketball team students understood their individual roles and how to improve and were not expected to be experts in every aspect of the game. Consequently they were able to develop strong identities in relation to the sport, to have positive experiences, and to learn and grow as players. In contrast, in math classes expertise was harder to understand, possible student roles were ill-defined, little space was available for individualization, and the definition of success was limited and mostly felt beyond reach. As a result the students did not develop strong identities in relation to mathematics, experiences were negative, and learning and growth were limited.

Responsivity. Research on culturally-relevant pedagogy has found that such approaches take a responsive approach to teaching, building from student interest and background (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Research on the adoption of improvisational techniques and values in the classroom suggests that they can encourage responsive teaching and by doing so increase engagement (Keidan & Denyer, 2020).

Fostering Connection and Purpose. A range of research on student-centered learning suggests the value of student-centered approaches, particularly those that focused on building relationships within schools and giving students ownership over their learning. An examination of this research also indicates the overlap between the conclusions of this research project and such approaches. For example, Jacobs et al. (2016) identified ten elements of student-centered learning which align well with the outcomes of this research (Table 9).

Large-scale studies examining the effects of student-centered practices have found that students in the schools which had adopted such practices significantly outperformed students in more traditional schools, and that even students who entered such schools performing two years or more below grade level had generally reached grade-level benchmarks within two years (Friedlaender et al, 2014; Pane et al., 2015; Pane et al., 2017). It is also worth noting that these schools were non-selective in their admissions, which suggests that the selectivity of the organizations profiled in this study may be less of a limitation than might be anticipated. The third of these studies (Pane et al., 2017) also found a relationship between positive identity development and the meeting of whole child needs and the success of these schools.

Table 9

Ten elements of student-centered learning (Jacobs et al., 2016)

Element	**Definition**
Students and teachers as co-learners	Teachers gladly acknowledge that they do not know everything and look forward to learning along with students.
Student–student interaction	Teachers encourage students to share with their peers; this can bring both cognitive and affective advantages.
Learner autonomy	Students become less dependent on teachers and build the skills and attitudes needed for lifelong learning.
Focus on meaning	The best learning takes place when students fully understand what they are studying.
Curricular integration	Students see how the various topics and subjects they study are linked to each other and to the wider world.
Diversity	Learning activities strive to meet the needs of all students and to help students appreciate the differences among them.
Thinking skills	Students go beyond the information given to them, as they perform such mental acrobatics as giving examples, disagreeing, and explaining.
Alternative assessment	Assessment broadens to include nontraditional forms and encourages students to join teachers as assessors at many points in the learning process.
Learning climate	Teachers seek to create an atmosphere conducive to robust participation by all class members.

Table 9 cont.

Element	Definition
Motivation	Teachers promote intrinsic motivation and encourage students to motivate themselves, peers, and teachers to learn and to enjoy learning.

From *Simple, Powerful Strategies for Student Centered Learning,* by G. M. Jacobs, W. A. Renandya, and M. Power, 2016, pp. xiv. Copyright 2016 by G. M. Jacobs, W. A. Renandya, and M. Power.

Sharing Ownership. Similarly, Harrington et al. (2019) found that student achievement improved when students felt ownership over the learning process, and were given "opportunities for agency — the capacity and propensity to take purposeful initiative" (p. 45). Stone and Surmitis (2018), reviewing the literature on student ownership, concluded that students must be given opportunities to construct the curriculum, and to make decisions affecting the community, whether at the classroom or school-wide level, and to actively create school and classroom communities.

Improvisation. As the overview in Chapter Two illustrates, research on improvisation and learning is very much in its infancy. Nonetheless, the results of this research project connect to work done by Lobman (2011) and Keidan and Denyer (2020) to suggest that the value system of improvisation, with its focus on responsivity and positive building, offers useful tools for promoting student-centered approaches in the classroom that foster learning and well-being.

Identity Expansion. Similarly, this research dovetails with that of Zittoun (2006), as well as that of Greeno, Gresalfi and Hand (Greeno & Gresalfi, 2008; Gresalfi et al., 2008; Hand & Gresalfi, 2015) to suggest the importance of understanding learning as a process of identity expansion, and the need to offer viable identities to individuals which build on their past experiences and provide a pathway forward. The subjects of this study explicitly offered opportunities for reinvention (Dave, Ben, James), and worked responsively with employees and clients to help them envision pathways and alternative identities (Ben, Lisa).

Research in Business

Learning Organizations and Systems Thinking. This study helps to validate the approaches to organizational learning described in Chapter One. For example, Schon's (1973) description of learning as central to organizational success is borne out by this research; each organization profiled in this research has thrived in direct relation to its ability to foster learning, and each can be characterized by its embrace of what Argyris and Schon (1974) call deutero-learning, or learning to learn. Senge's (1990) characterization of learning organizations as places "where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured…and where people are continually learning to see the whole together" (p. 3) also fits the organizations described in this study, and this study also bears out the importance of systems thinking, team learning, and personal mastery that he describes. It is important to note that the term "personal mastery" is somewhat deceptive; Senge defines it as arising out a sense of empowerment alongside a clear view of organizational goals that allows individuals to feel a sense of agency. His definition connects to the sense of purpose and agency which the organizations profiled in this research foster in their members.

Beyond Senge's endorsement of the value of systems thinking and the importance of holistic, "big picture" approach to thinking within an organization, a great deal of time has been spent defining systems thinking and researching its applicability (Andrew &

Petkov, 2003; O'Kane, 2015; Shaked & Schechter, 2017). Such research, like my own, bears out the value of systems thinking, while it also cautions against reductive approaches which focus on the big picture at the expense of paying attention to details, instead suggesting that effective systems thinking is concerned with ensuring that details and smaller processes are designed to mesh with the whole and in light of organizational goals. As with systems thinking, the importance of removing fear in order to foster organizational learning is widely supported within the research literature (Garvin et al., 2008; Lipshitz et al., 2002).

Servant Leadership. Research on servant leadership has shown that the servant leadership approach adopted by several of my research subjects also promotes all the aspects of well-being described in this study. In particular servant leadership approaches foster dignity, as well as a sense of empowerment and purpose (Walumbwa et al., 2010), they remove fear and encourage creativity (LaPoint & Vandenberghe, 2016; Liden et al., 2008).

Improvisation. While it has become common for many types of organizations to use improvisational training within their organization, the writing on such training to date generally lacks rigor and research grounding. A recent study by Balachandra (2019) suggested that improvisation techniques might prove useful in promoting interpersonal skill growth among entrepreneurs. Rather than focusing on the techniques of improvisation, research by Vito (2016) examined how improvisation worked within two different businesses, and found alignment between improvisational values such as responsivity and approaches in which groups collaboratively build together and the business success (in contrast to less successful controlling, top-down approaches). While preliminary, the results of my study mesh with those of Vito to suggest that we can define a broadly improvisational approach grounded in a collaborative and responsive value system.

Limitations of the Study

As we consider what lessons or areas of inquiry might come out of this research, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the research.

The major methodological limitation to the research derives from the fact that the research relies almost solely on interviews with those at the helms of various organizations. As a result, the results focus on their hopes and perceptions of their own organizations, rather than on what the reality of the employee, client or customer experience of those organizations may be.

As far as considering the experiences of these organizations in relation to the experience of those working in or with schools, there are important differences between these organizations and schools. Perhaps the most significant limitation has to do with selectivity and the ability of these organizations to exclude individuals from participation. Each of these organizations, including the non-profit ones, has the ability to be selective in who they choose to allow to join their community, while the public schools which educate a majority of American children do not have the freedom to choose who they will educate. The for-profit businesses exercise greater selectivity than the non-profit churches, but the churches are still able to turn away those who are not prepared to endorse the overall purpose and mission of the organization. In contrast, public schools must serve all comers to the best of their ability. This poses a challenge to educators, who cannot exclude those who may reject the central goals at which they aim, or may see little value in the learning they are being asked to do. This makes their job more challenging; while Ben's deli will fire an employee who habitually arrives late to work or declines to complete assigned tasks, a school must continue to attempt to educate a student who is prepared to take little responsibility for her actions.

Alongside this, even as these organizations work to foster a diverse group of employees, clients or members, with a range of strengths, abilities, backgrounds and viewpoints, and also to nurture an approach to work and to interpersonal relations that I have described as one of infinite play, there is a sense within which each privileges a range of actions and behaviors; the diversity they espouse is bounded by that which can be readily incorporated into the organization. Thus even Tom at Hope Church, whose central goal is fostering the growth and unique development of those with whom he works, has removed individuals from his group who he described as "program breakers" who refused to play the "game" of the group as he and the other participants had defined it.

Another limitation relates to the demographics of the subjects of this study. Those interviewed were all white, and a majority were male and in their 50s-70s. While many of those working within their organizations are different ages, and each of their companies explicitly seeks out a diverse group of employees, nonetheless it may be the case that their viewpoints, no matter how well intended or broadly aimed at inclusivity may still be bounded by a range of beliefs tied to middle class, white American culture; that is, they may require translating or testing out in settings that are primarily non-white or working class.

In addition, all but two of these organizations are for-profit, and no matter how lofty their mission may sound, they remain in existence only as long as they focus on the bottom line. While the bottom line is certainly a concern for schools, their non-profit status and educational mission thus differs significantly from the majority of these organizations. As Cheryl at SmithTraining put it to me and I mentioned in Chapter Four, in contrast to educational institutions,

> we exist to bring a great experience to everyone we come in contact with and to deliver this wonderful food and a great service experience, and … if we could just give everybody a magic pill and they'd know everything they need to know and be able to do everything they need to do without doing training, we probably wouldn't do training. (12/20/2019)

Yet this remark requires a caveat; at other points in our conversation Cheryl acknowledged that training serves a variety of purposes, including indoctrinating new team members into the culture of the organization and providing them with shared experiences which can be the basis for connection and relationship-building with their co-workers. In addition, almost anyone involved in training, teaching or education might similarly believe that if we didn't need to teach x, we wouldn't teach it.

Having said this, as her comment makes clear, within these organizations learning never takes place solely "for the sake of learning." This makes sense when we consider that the most common definition of knowledge in the business literature is "the capacity to take effective action" (Kumar & Phrommathed, 2005); thus gaining knowledge means increasing this capacity. In contrast, the central purpose of schools it to promote student learning (although there may be little agreement as to the purpose of such learning beyond vague platitudes such as “preparation”).

Yet while this may be a limitation of this research, it might also be worth considering what might be gained in the world of education were we to treat knowledge in this way. What if we were to consider the purpose of learning within the various disciplines as focused on “the capacity to take effective action”? Many teachers already take this approach, and standards like those offered by the National Council on Social Studies (NCSS) also are focused in this way – the most recent revision of the NCSS standards (2014) are aimed at increasing students’ ability to function as effective citizens in a democracy. Asking those within schools to approach teaching in this way might be an interesting angle to take.

Another limitation of this research relates to organizational size. The organizations profiled in this research are also all small – the largest, PI and Heart, have fewer than 200 employees, which contrasts with many educational and business settings. It is fair to ask how the practices of such organizations might translate into larger settings that might require more bureaucratic structures. Phil at PI acknowledged this issue when he described beginning the company with “no rulebook,” but finding that some 30 years and many more employees later, PI now needs (and has) such a rulebook.

Yet others interviewed argued for the scalability of their approaches, including Dave at Fermi, who descried their approach as readily scalable, while acknowledging that growing significantly larger would require running a range of experiments to determine what would work best for that size organization. Still, he made the case that even in large workplaces individuals work as part of divisions, units and small teams, and that when working for a client Fermi itself essentially functions seamlessly as a division within much larger organizations. Roger at Heart also sees their work as scalable; while Heart may be a boutique firm they have trained up to 50,000 individuals at one time, and have created approaches and materials which have been used by some of the largest companies in the USA.

While it may not be a limitation, exactly, it is also worth considering whether the focus on joy in these organizations may not place a burden of emotional labor on those within the organization. The term “emotional labor” was coined by Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983) in her book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling.* In that study of Delta’s flight attendants she describes the way that modern professions demand not only physical and mental labor from employees, but also emotional labor. Might a focus on joy and well-being within organizations (whether businesses, non-profits or schools) lead to a similar kind of forced emotional labor?

In the case of the organizations profiled in this research, this does not seem to be the case, because at all levels of the organization there is a shared responsibility for how individuals are feeling. As Cheryl at SmithTraining describes, each partner (employer and employee) is “100% responsible” – thus the trainers are 100% responsible for the learning of their new employees, and the new employees are also 100% responsible for learning (while the math here doesn’t work particularly well, the sentiment does). Similarly, if employees are 100% responsible for having positive energy in the workplace, management sees themselves as equally responsible for nurturing that energy and creating a positive culture. Thus, unlike the flight attendants profiled by Hochschild, who have “weaker rights to courtesy than customers,” (p. 89), because the company’s servant leadership ethos exhorts employees at all levels to offer similar quality service to both groups, it is unlikely that the focus on positive energy or joy in these workplaces would foster resentment.

Yet there seems to be a danger here that must be considered; while a company like Fermi Revolutions might hire those who they deem “play well with others,” and then particularly reward those whose social skills and positivity make them valued co-workers, while counseling others out of the organization, in the case of schools it is important to recognize that joy must be fostered rather than forced (for example, if students are exhorted to feel a particular way or act as if they feel that way, they may perform the feeling rather than feel it), and joy must also be treated as its own reward (because when an individual is feeling excluded from the group or from learning they may bear some responsibility, but the responsibility must be equally shared and borne by the group and the teacher).

Similarly, as we consider the nurturing of joy in the classroom we should take care to avoid treating teachers in the ways that Hochschild (1983) describes the Delta flight attendants who she studied being treated – they were both forced to modulate their own emotional behavior and to work to modulate that of their passengers in a kind of motherly or parental way. She describes the deep acting of emotional labor "a new development in deskilling" that narrowly defines how workers carry out their labor. As she discusses, such work intrudes on the private lives of employees and is also coercive of both those flight attendants and the passengers with whom they work.

In order to create systems that nurture joy and well-being rather than forcing individuals to merely present the appearance of them, it is important that at all levels individuals' feelings are acknowledged, respected, and that there is an ethos of care and responsivity in place, so that negative feelings are treated as symptoms of a systemic problem rather than as something that an individual needs to correct (as Tom at Hope Church discussed when talking about the anger felt by those with whom he works).[9]

Implications of Findings

The findings of this research, when taken alongside the research cited in this chapter, bolster the argument for focusing on well-being both as a means to fostering learning and as an end in itself. This is the case in both formal educational settings and in other settings where learning is important.

In turn, given the components of well-being, one implication is that educators must loosen the reins a bit, and substitute flexible systems for controlling ones. For students to feel joyful, visible, and connected, they must not be afraid to try things. This suggests a wholesale rethinking of what happens in classrooms, particularly in secondary and post-secondary education, where well-being tends to be treated as irrelevant to the work and learning that are taking place. As A. S. Neill puts it, "The happiness and well being [sic] of children depend on the degree of love and approval we give them. We must be on the child's side" (Neill, 1960, p. 82).

As the section describing connections to the literature makes clear, the results of this research mainly bolster what we already know about learning. On individual levels many teachers through systems and levels try to implement many of the practices which this research suggests are effective, as do some schools and districts.

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[9] Hochschild's (1983) work also suggests why a focus on joy (or other non-rational aspects of learning) has been depreciated over time – because the "rationalization" of schooling was a way to de-feminize schools.

That said, this research suggests that it is worth rethinking the traditional role of teachers in classrooms, and the idea of a standardized curriculum through which students move at a set pace. Even those organizations in this study which have set curricula in place for their participants give the learners much more control over how they learn and how they demonstrate that they have learned.

Further, this research suggests that if we want teachers to trust students, we need schools that trust teachers. Right now schools are teaching environments, but broadly we can say that they need to become learning environments, or learning organizations. If a business selling cheese or creating software – each fully answerable for the quality of what they offer to their clients – is able to function as a learning organization, in which all members continually learn, can we reconceive of schools in the same way?

To do so means breaking away from models that treat teachers as dispensers of knowledge and holders of power, and creating models of schooling in which they feel safe sharing their knowledge and power with their students, in the same way that a learning organization might trust their employees. Keith Johnstone (1981), who spent many years teaching before moving into the world of theater and improvisation, had this to say about his colleagues in the middle school where he taught: “I liked my colleagues, but they had a colonist’s attitude toward the children” (p. 20), meaning that they approached their students as if they (the teachers) held all the power and knowledge, which they could beneficently bestow upon their students. In contrast, Johnstone played the role of teacher as helper, assistant, guide and mentor. The organizations profiled in this research has thrived because they approach their members and those with whom they work as partners rather than as colonial subjects who need to be edified despite themselves. What would it look like for us to treat those whom we educate in this way?

Improvisation. This research also suggests that the field of improvisation offers principles and values and potential practices which can support those within organizations (educational or not) as they seek to strengthen well-being and learning. Through trial and error, building and experimentation the various organizations profiled in this research have arrived at approaches which share many of these qualities. It is worth asking whether by borrowing more directly from the field of improvisation, embracing its values and perhaps borrowing some of its practices, other organizations can find success while not spending as much time reinventing the wheel, as it were.

Identity Expansion. The central implication of this research is that individuals learn and grow when they are in environments which care for their well-being. When they feel safe, secure, visible and valued, connected to others and to a larger purpose, individuals learn and grow at the same time. On the one hand, this implication feels entirely obvious; I would speculate that when most individuals consider their own experiences of learning and growth they sense this. Yet it also seems to be relatively infrequently honored, whether in our schools or in workplaces, in large part because human feelings are an inconvenience to the efficient functioning of bureaucratic systems. Thus the organizations profiled in this research are at their most innovative when they find ways to create systems that allow for and honor such feelings rather than treating them as obstacles. This may be the most important challenge offered by the results of this study – to encourage others to develop similarly humane systems.

Practical Applications

Because the results of this research are so multi-faceted, any educator or organization leader concerned with learning might choose their own entry point as a way of beginning to make practical use of these results. My own bias would be for those interested in practical applications to consider sharing the figures offered in the themes section of Chapter Four with those within their organizations, and together considering in what ways current practices foster well-being, and where more work might be done in this regard, and then working to create together a practical plan for improving in this regard.

Most of the subjects interviewed for the research have thought a great deal about learning and education, and it is also worth considering their thoughts on this subject. Both Dave at Fermi and Ben at SmithFob see our US public education system as "dehumanizing" because of its standardizing of curriculum and its focus on quantitative assessment. James Lisa and Roger echoed this, and all spoke passionately about trusting students to guide their own education, and to learn through the pursuit of their own interests, even at a young age. Roger spoke at length about how Heart has helped the CEOs of large corporations learn to trust their employees by giving them the opportunity to listen to those employees engage in systems thinking and consider the challenges facing their companies, and together we wondered about how teachers could be encouraged to trust their students in the same way, or administrators and educational leaders could be brought to trust teachers, since the goal can't be simply to burden teachers with another responsibility within a system that gives them little control and seems to mitigate against the types of practices which this research suggests are worth trying.

Several of those interviewed suggested adopting practices that have worked in their organizations within schools. For example, Ben suggested that open book management could be used to run a classroom, by giving the group ownership of the goals of the room. Why not try putting a student in charge of the “books” for a certain period, and ask them to present questions and data to the class, and to lead the class in trying to forecast and set future goals: “How many people got their homework in on time? How much did we learn last week? What are our goals for the coming week?”

Ben also advocates for using visioning in schools, both individually and for groups (such as classes). In his words, “Why not have a class write a vision for the semester? Now they’re learning how to write, how to collaborate, how to stand up for what they want, hopefully in a constructive way, the process is designed for that,” all as a part of creating “structures where the kid is honored for being the kid.”

Similarly, Lisa argued that we translate our understanding of management in the workplace into schools. As she put it, “how are we not taking those same principles in terms of motivational psychology, goal setting, positive psychology, and applying it to the learning environment in classrooms across the country at every grade level?”

Both Ben and Dave spoke about the damaging effect of wanting to be the “hero,” the one in a business or classroom that is indispensable. As Ben put it, “Part of work is feeling unimportant if nobody needs you, wanting to be the hero, but the hero role is actually super destructive and unproductive.” The visual systems put in place at Fermi, for example, are designed so that everyone knows what they need to be doing, with whom, and when they are expected to complete the work by; managers need not continually ask pairs of workers “how’s it going,” because the visual system also allows them to know the answer without asking the question.

One practical implication might be to ask educators to reconsider their role in the classroom in ways that foster independent learning and working. Too often we may be held captive by our desire to be the hero; for example Paul at ESC may be having a hard time passing on his institutional knowledge because of his fear of being supplanted – being the one person who knows everything may make him essential but it may hamper the success of ESC. Similarly, the desire to be the hero of the classroom, or to be the holder of knowledge and power (a desire which in part may draw individuals to teach) works to both empower teachers and disempower students. Can we teach in ways which Johnstone might see as less “colonial”?

Recommendations for Future Research

For my own part, the most exciting thing about this research is the range of questions and possible directions for future research which it opens up. At the most basic level, conducting follow-up research which looks at the actual practices within innovative organizations (whether or not those organizations have participated in this study) can help us understand the actual practices which such organizations engage in; comparing what those who lead such organizations say with the actual practices of the organizations can help us refine the conclusions we might draw from such research, and help us consider which areas explored in these findings might be easiest or most challenging to implement. Such research could also help us understand the lived experience of those who work within such organizations, or those who come in contact with them.

In terms of considering questions which this research might push us to ask regarding the world of formal education, this research prompts us to ask whether schools (teachers, administrators, curriculum designers, districts, etc.) should focus more time and energy considering the non-rational parts of learning, and in particular should focus on thinking about how to foster joy, dignity, and community in classrooms and schools as a way to strengthen learning.

This research might also push us to look at Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), which has gained prominence recently, from a broader angle. That is, the focus on SEL tends to be on the teaching of a range of self-regulating skills to students (CASEL, 2019). It might be interesting to consider how a focus on well-being, rather than simply a focus on the building of social and emotional skills, might lead to the fostering of such skills. Another way to put this might be to consider trying to determine which is the chicken and which the egg, between well-being and SEL.

Each component of well-being explored in this research might also be explored more fully. For example, what would it look like to try and eliminate fear from our classrooms and schools? To stop penalizing students for failing, and instead reward their ambition in attempting something large and meaningful? (Many teachers and schools pay lip service to the idea that schools should not penalize mistakes in learning, but few seem to consider how to change things so that this actually happens.) To share ownership of the curriculum with students, so that their own interests and learning drive their work, rather than a uniform curriculum? To foster systems thinking in the classroom, so that the classroom focuses on the big-picture goals of a class or project rather than on the minutia for which students are so often held responsible? What would responsive (rather than prescriptive) schooling look like?

Beyond considering the implications of this research as they apply to students, it seems equally important to also consider how they apply to teachers – too often teachers, feeling demoralized and disempowered within their schools, create classrooms in which students feel equally demoralized and disempowered. Many of the organizations in this study focus on service to all constituents, rather than simply focusing on customer service, which divides those on the inside and outside of the organization. What would it look like for schools to adopt this approach, and to treat teachers, students, and families as equally worthy of being served? It seems appropriate to consider how to try and eliminate fear from teaching, how to stop penalizing teachers for ambition that doesn't pan out, to share ownership of school governance with those teachers, how to foster systems thinking within schools so that teachers feel invested in and responsible for (and have some ownership over) the culture and direction of the school. What would a school that is responsive to its teachers in these ways look like? What might a joyful culture for both teachers and students look like?

Specific practices employed within individual organizations also hold promise for future research, as described in the previous section. For example, drawing on the work done by Fermi, we might ask how visual organization and pairing systems could be used to make classroom work more transparent, and to encourage continual peer-to-peer learning – this could be explored with students, teachers and administrators. We might also consider what it might look like (and how it might work) were we to decide that neither teachers nor students could work more than 40 hours in a week, and that at the start of the week the school team would lay out individual responsibilities.

Drawing on the work done at SmithFob, we might ask questions including the following: What might it look like to empower students by adopting a bottom-line change approach classrooms similar to SmithFob's? What systems or processes might be put in place in schools or classrooms to empower students to make changes? Similarly, how might teachers be empowered to advocate for school-wide changes? Could learners be given more formal opportunities to take over the teaching in the classroom, in the way that employees at SmithFob are? How might the SmithFob training compact be adapted for use within school settings? How might visioning be used by students, teachers, and groups within schools – classrooms, grade-level groups – to set goals and to determine the direction that future learning should take?

Drawing on the coaching that both StopIn and LearnGym offer, we might consider how to adopt a more coaching-focused approach in the classroom, using the types of questions asked by Lisa as a leaping off point:

> Where do you want to go? How happy are you? What do you want to do? What are your goals? How do we support you to align what you're doing every day to be on a track that will get you where you want to be in five or ten years? (12/4/2019)

On a more theoretical level, some of these questions might prompt us to consider larger questions about the purpose of schooling. Nel Noddings (2003) argues that such a reconsideration is overdue, and advocates for refocusing education on the promotion of happiness; the results of this study suggest that a different but related goal, the fostering of joy, might be worth considering as a goal of education, and worth exploring in research. How might education focused on creating joyful learning environments affect learning within those classrooms? Considering this question might also lead us in a more philosophical vein, and encourage us to consider what a deontological approach to schooling might look like. In such a project, educational choices would be made not out of a concern for outcomes but rather out of the rightness of the approach; we might term this a Kantian educational experiment – to treat individuals (both students and teachers) as ends rather than means within the classroom and to see what might result.

In terms of improvisation, future research might explore how improvisational principles and practices might guide approaches that facilitate the engagement with many of the questions already listed in this section. (Research by Keidan and Denyer, 2020, and Lobman, 2011, has just scratched the surface of these questions).

Similarly, while work by Vygotsky (1978) and Zittoun (2006) has begun clarifying the relationship between identity expansion and learning, and the results of this study are suggestive in this regard, more work remains to be done in this realm. Of particular interest might be considering the role of modeling and exposure to a range of possible future selves in terms of opening up individuals to identity expansion (topics which Phil, Ben, and Cheryl each discussed in this study).

Conclusion

As I have indicated, this research reminds us of what we already know – that fostering well-being offers a route to the success of individuals and organizations, as well as allowing for learning and identity expansion. This exploration of innovative organizations offers us a sense of how a handful of such organizations have found success by creating environments in which individuals feel seen, valued, empowered and happy. The fact that they have found success precisely because they have focused on nurturing these feelings should push us to consider how those within our own organizations feel, and to view their feelings (for better or worse) as symptoms of the type of culture which we have created and within which we work.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured In-Depth Interview Protocol

LEARNING, IMPROVISATION, AND IDENTITY EXPANSION IN INNOVATIVE SETTINGS

Introductory Questions
Name of individual and age.
How would you describe yourself in terms of race, gender, ethnicity?
Role in organization.
Describe your journey to where you are today.

Learning
How has that journey informed your thinking about learning within your organization?
What do you see as the role of learning within your organization?
How would you characterize the culture of learning here?
How does learning connect to your organizational goals?
Do you think of your organization as a "learning organization"? Why or why not?
What metaphor would you use to describe the workplace culture?
Would you have used a different metaphor in the past? / How has it changed over time?
What are the biggest challenges you face in terms of workplace learning?
What have been your biggest successes in this regard?
How can you tell when you have been successful in terms of learning?

Improvisation
What does the term improvisation mean to you?
What is the role of improvisation within your organization?
What is an example of improvisation contributing to your organization?
What do you see as the relationship between improvisation and learning in your organization?
What do you see as the relationship between improvisation and identity in your organization?

Identity Expansion
How do you think about organizational identity?
How do you think about the relationship between your employee's lives and identities outside of work and here at work?
How do you think about the relationship between your employee's individual roles at work (eg. engineer, programmer, HR manager) and their organizational identity?

What do you see as the relationship between learning and identity within your organization?

Appendix B

Consent Form

Study Number: 300268-UT

Exemption Granted: 06/21/2019

ADULT RESEARCH SUBJECT - INFORMED CONSENT FORM
LEARNING, IDENTITY CHANGE, AND IMPROVISATION IN INNOVATIVE BUSINESS SETTINGS

Principal Investigator: Joshua Keidan, Graduate Student, (248) 410-7908
Principle Investigator: Susanna Hapgood, Associate Professor, (419) 530-2139

Purpose: You are invited to participate in the research project entitled ***Learning, Identity Change, and Improvisation in Innovative Business Settings*** which is being conducted at the University of Toledo by Joshua Keidan under the direction of Susanna Hapgood. The purpose of this study is to investigate how learning works within innovative organizations, with a particular focus on understanding the interplay between learning, identity change, and improvisation.

Description of Procedures: This research study will take place over the period from May through December 2019. If you choose to participate in the research the researcher will conduct an in-depth interview with you. This interview will take from 1-1.5 hours. In this interview you will be asked to reflect on your role within your organization, the learning culture within the organization, and the roles that identity change and improvisation play within your organization.

Audio recording will be used during the interview to ensure accurate transcription of your answers.

Permission to record: Will you permit the researcher to audio record during this research procedure?

YES ☐ ______ Here NO ☐ Initial Here ______________________ Initial

Upon completion of the interview, you will also be asked to refer other potential participants who meet the study criteria. Such referrals are voluntary, and you need not give any referrals. If you choose to refer the researcher to other potential participants, you may also choose whether the researcher may use your name when contacting those potential participants.

Permission to disclose name to referred potential participants: Will you permit the researcher to disclose your name when contacting participants whom you have referred?

YES	☐ ______ Here	NO	☐ Initial Here	______________________ Initial

In addition, while you may have been referred to the participant by another participant in the research, your choice of whether to participate in the research will not be reported to the person who has referred the researcher to you.

After you have completed your participation, the researcher will debrief you about the data, theory and research area under study and answer any questions you may have about the research.

Potential Benefits: If you participate in this research you may benefit from reflecting on these aspects of your organization. Others may benefit by learning about the results of this research.

Potential Risks: There are minimal risks to participation in this study, including loss of confidentiality. However, the researcher will make every effort to prevent this from happening, including storing all data collected securely. All identifiers will be removed from the data, and pseudonyms will be used for all participants.

Confidentiality: The researchers will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you provided this information, or what that information is. The consent forms with signatures will be kept separate from responses, which will not include names and which will be presented to others only when combined with other responses. All data collected will be stored securely in Gillham Hall. Although we will make every effort to protect your confidentiality, there is a low risk that this might be breached.

Voluntary Participation: Your refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. In addition, you may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

Compensation: You will not be compensated in any way for participating in this study.

Contact Information: Before you decide to accept this invitation to take part in this study, you may ask any questions that you might have. If you have any questions at any time before, during or after your participation you should contact a member of the research team: Joshua Keidan, (248) 410-7908, Susanna Hapgood (419) 530-2139.

If you have questions beyond those answered by the research team or your rights as a research subject or research-related injuries, the Chairperson of the SBE Institutional Review Board may be contacted through the Office of Research on the main campus of the University of Toledo at (419) 530-2844.

Before you sign this form, please ask any questions on any aspect of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over.

SIGNATURE SECTION – Please read carefully

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, you have had all your questions answered, and you have decided to take part in this research.

The date you sign this document to enroll in this study, that is, today's date, must fall between the dates indicated at the bottom of the page.

___________________________	___________________________	____________
Name of Subject (please print)	Signature	Date
___________________________	___________________________	____________
Name of Person Obtaining Consent	Signature	Date

This Adult Research Informed Consent document has been reviewed and approved by the University of
Toledo Social, Behavioral and Educational IRB for the period of time specified in the box below.

Approved Number of Subjects:__________________