TIDES

Messy, Difficult, Necessary.

Four approaches to social impact in a complex world

It is rare for each of us, in our personal lives or in our social impact work, to pull back to take a big-picture and historical view. But analyzing the lessons of the past informs our work today and helps us identify opportunities for the future. For myself, reflecting on the five years that I have spent as the CEO of Tides has underscored the importance of continuing to "Dare Change" for social impact.

Pulling together insights and learnings from this chapter in my life, as well as decades of research, collaboration and partnerships—at Tides as well as at Stanford University, Juma Ventures, and more—I've identified four key learnings that I believe will be vital to bringing us into the future that we all want to build. A future that is more just, sustainable and prosperous for all. These lessons are not meant to be definitive, but rather to challenge us, in this moment, to push forward with tenacity in this complex time—even when the work feels difficult.

LESSON 1: We Must Embrace Bridging and Reject Othering

An essential part of moving toward shared prosperity is connecting with people and ideas that are different than our own. This concept is known as bridging. While bridging does not necessarily have an agreed-upon definition, its essence is the ability to come together as people, organizations and communities so that their capacities, uniqueness, and potential are honored and unleashed to help solve problems together. Bridging is a 21st-century skill necessary for building an inclusive future for all. It applies to us as individuals, organizations and communities, requiring that we step out of our bubbles to establish common ground with seemingly unlikely partners. Bridging is the opposite of "othering"—an approach that has become increasingly common as polarization has pulled us apart, creating a world of "us" versus "them." Anyone who has committed to bridging knows that it requires a lot from us. We are only just beginning to understand what is needed to effectively bridge the gaps between us. To start, our research and case studies have revealed three qualities that can enable us to get smarter, collaboratively, even as our world grows increasingly complex.

/ An eagerness to listen—and to recognize blind spots. By bringing together people with unique knowledge, experience and skill-sets, bridging, by definition, ensures that more voices are at the table. Cultivating an environment in which a wide range of views can coexist—in which a youth counselor can connect with a technologist—requires empathy, patience and withholding judgment.

/ A desire to bridge. Though you can't make people bridge, you *can* find and connect with people who are open and willing. That may require that you think twice about including people who have dogmatic views and approaches. Without willingness at the outset from all parties, and an openness to discover new possibilities and ways of working, there will be nothing to unite diverse people to join together toward a common social purpose goal.

/ A willingness to try, fail, succeed, learn, and shift strategies. Bridging means entering uncharted territory. At some point, a failure of some kind is almost guaranteed. To be successful, you need to be comfortable in an environment where both successes and failures lead to lessons, and lessons turn into new opportunities. Cultivating a mindset that honors the willingness to step up and try is critical. When no one has the answers, we must respect the learnings that come from being 'in this together,' even when the path to progress is anything but linear.

Throughout history, there have been myriad examples of bridging which have created meaningful social change that not only works but sticks. From the development of contraceptives to the creation of the National Park Service, real change was realized as a result of bridging across people, communities, organizations and sectors. While the outcomes seem clear in hindsight, the bridging process was difficult, necessitated compromise, and never without strife.

A recent example in which bridging played a critical role in social change is the significant victory for voting rights in Florida. In November 2018, Florida passed Amendment 4, which restored the constitutional voting rights of Floridians with felony convictions after they complete all terms of their sentence, including parole or probation. Because 60 percent of voters needed to vote yes for the proposition to pass, rallying likely supporters would not be enough. The effort's success—and the fate of 1.4 million people's right to fully participate in our society—depended on a campaign that bridged unlikely partners. That is why Tides grantee, the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition Education Fund, a project of Tides Advocacy, and sponsor of the campaign, brought together an extremely diverse group of supporters

that includes the American Civil Liberties Union, Christian Coalition of America, and Freedom Partners. While this group does not agree on everything, they did share this one, deeply essential common goal, bridging their differences to work toward it and truly transform the lives of people long excluded from democracy.

In order to solve the world's challenges, we must continue to strive to expand the definition of "us" and to foster true transformation through humanity and understanding.

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/ Photo by Elizabeth Johnsen for Opportunity Agenda

" Social change sticks when coalitions get too big to kill.

- Kriss Deiglmeier

LESSON 2: Build Coalitions—Don't Go It Alone

Creating meaningful social change takes time, persistence and analysis. It also takes coalition building—a crucial step on the road to meaningful social change. Bridging is often a critical element of coalition-building, though it is not always a requirement. Sometimes, all the players involved in a coalition are in general agreement from the start. Still, as I have studied modern social innovations, from microfinance, to fair trade, to emissions trading, one key finding has held true: social change sticks when coalitions get too big to kill.

My research has shown how the need to grow impact has necessitated coalitions that span sectors and communities. As each social innovation moved from idea to pilot to prototype into the diffusing and scaling phase, building a coalition became a key strategy for impact. This is true for many reasons. For one, coalitions bring together the strength of different entities to ensure the common goal is achieved. They also collectively amplify power: It is much harder to discredit, squash or ignore a large coalition than it is one small group of people.

What is true for social innovations is also true for broader social movements, whether that was women's suffrage or anti-apartheid, the environmental movement or the marriage equality movement. Social impact expert Charles Leadbeater's eight rules for successful movements begin with steps that a few lone visionaries can take, including crafting a message, raising awareness and gathering resources and tools. But after that, coalition-building becomes crucial—beginning with key stakeholders but extending to skeptics and even opponents. As Leadbeater says, "The real test for movements is not how many of the faithful you gather, but how many converts you make."

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The potential of collectively channeled effort is exemplified by Californians for Safety and Justice (CSJ), an initiative that was launched in 2011 with an aim to reduce the population of the state's overcrowded prisons and jails. In order to break the cycle of crime and incarceration, CSJ built a vast coalition through bringing new voices into the conversation, including law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and most notably, one of the nation's largest organized networks of crime survivors. CSJ has been able to successfully achieve a wide range of policy reforms and budget reallocations. Their diverse coalition has been able to push through resistance to change and have broadened their efforts to include advocacy on behalf of survivors and whole communities. One of CSJ's major successes was the passage of Proposition 47, which has helped break the cycle of crime and incarceration in the state of California by converting the sentences of many nonviolent crimes—including drug and property offenses—from felonies to misdemeanors. In 2017, California state officials reported a savings of $100 million, which is now being directed to programs to support victims, offenders and their communities.

Admittedly, coalition-building for social innovation, movements and direct service can make the work itself more challenging, as it requires welcoming the tension of diversity. The key here, as it is with bridging, is aligning on the goals, not the people, the identity or the organization, per se.

LESSON 3: Choose Outcomes

Solving social problems is a journey that is full of uncertainty, trial and error, and analysis. The good news, however, is that we are now living in a moment where we can understand more about what works, more quickly, and measure it with more accuracy, so that we are better able to get the outcomes we want.

We see what is possible in the private sector—in particular the tech sector—which now operates with unprecedented speed and precision. Access to real-time data, transformational analytical tools, global connectivity ... the list goes on ... enables them to achieve client, product, and service outcomes. The same real-time data, analytical tools and innovative insights for social outcomes can and should be moving with equal speed as in the private sector. Sadly, they are not. We are at a critical juncture. As a social purpose sector, we need to wholeheartedly adopt all the tools and data available to help us know if we are achieving the outcomes we seek so we can learn in real-time.

There is no doubt that solving social problems—inequality, sustainability, education—is more complex than selling products or services in the for-profit sector. Global, national and local history, structural racism and othering, vast inequalities, complex interdependencies and much more stand in our way to a better world. We have been working hard and with good intention for centuries, but up until now, we've lacked the capacity to know what was working, what wasn't, and what were the levers for change. Now we have the data, tools and capabilities to quickly learn about the outcomes we seek to achieve.

So how can we as a field make such tools, data and analysis equally available for social good? We must start with a fundamental shift in philanthropy, in the nonprofit and public sectors, in order to prioritize what it will take to *arrive* at outcomes. We need to face the truth that technology, data, and analysis in service of outcomes is core to how all organizations need to operate and should be funded as such. Quality accounting and finance are essentials for an organization; the same needs to be true for the data, analysis and insights that inform outcomes.

One example of what is possible when we focus data, analysis and insights in the service of our outcomes is the Crisis Text Line, one of the thousands of Tides grantees. Crisis Text Line is a free, confidential crisis intervention hotline that operates exclusively by text. By understanding its users and investing in technology to support them in real time, Crisis Text Line has fielded close to 120 million messages (and counting) since August 2013, connecting people in need with trained counselors who can help within an average of five minutes. It has become one of the world's largest health data sets, and the only real-time data set of its size in the United

States. By investing in a range of open data collaboration—including partnerships with ethicists and security experts—they are providing lifesaving insight for providers, policymakers, researchers, journalists and more.

I know this is a big lift. But I would argue that if the philanthropy and social impact fields do not invest more in available tools to understand outcomes, we are falling short to those we are working to serve. We must act—using all the insights we can gather about how we work and how we deliver solutions. It will help us better understand our goals, measure progress and accelerate our outcomes.

LESSON 4: We Must Seize the Future and Go All In With Innovation

We humans have always driven progress and improvement through innovation, creativity and adaptation. But today the stakes are higher. Stewart Brand wrote, "Once a new technology rolls over you, if you're not part of the steamroller, you are part of the road." Back in 1987, when he wrote this in his book *Media Lab*, about MIT's role in "inventing the future," I don't think any of us could have imagined where we would be today: With technological advances from AI to quantum computing, the consequences and speed of change is colossal, with potential for both social good or social detriment. The business sector is steamrolling ahead, and our capacity to innovate and adapt for social benefit needs equal intensity.

We in the field and work of social impact must step boldly forward and challenge ourselves and our organizations to move away from our comfort zones. It is up to us—as individuals, organizations and communities—to lead, engage and participate, or we will be part of the road.

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Of course, there are no silver bullets to the challenges of our time. Therefore, solutions are dependent on an aggregate of myriad innovations, big and small, incremental or disruptive. All have the potential for impact, especially in the world of social benefit. There are structural and behavioral innovations, and new products and services. The number and types of innovation options are almost endless, and that is a good thing. It requires an appetite for risk and a mindset of continuous improvement, for even when an intervention is working, you are constantly monitoring your efforts. After all, the world around us never stops moving.

One powerful example of an influential and evolving innovation is impact investing, which establishes the imperative for all of us, as individuals and organizations, to align all financial resources for impact, not just grant-making. This is a holistic shift—not only about the tools and vehicles that enable the change, but also about the norms around what an investment should be. While impact investing has grown in the past decade, it is still a small portion of investments both globally, and in the philanthropic sector. The potential to unleash billions of dollars for social impact, however, is enormous.

Just one example of impact investing at Tides is the *Years of Living Dangerously* campaign designed to elevate climate change as the key issue of our time. Years started as a TV series on Showtime viewed by tens of millions of people. It expanded to include a second series on National Geographic, shown in 171 countries and broadcast in 45 languages; a grassroots campaign, "Put a Price on it," to promote carbon pricing; and a national education initiative. By leveraging impact investing and philanthropic support in a relatively short time period, Years advanced a broad global awareness of the issue across multiple platforms, deepening understanding and promoting direct action.

We also see great potential in structural innovations, such as the corporate 1 percent model, which gives companies an "all-in" framework for community benefit. A special initiative with Tides, Pledge 1% is an organization launched to scale this idea, inspiring and supporting companies to commit 1 percent equity or profit, 1 percent employee time and 1 percent product to social benefit. In three years, Pledge 1% has grown to over 7,000 P1 pledge companies in over 100 countries, generating more than $500 million in new philanthropy. It is an example of incremental innovation that is building a global movement. Can you imagine the potential when giving back is the new normal, integrated into the DNA of companies of all sizes, shapes and services?

We need more innovation, not less. Yes, it can seem risky; yes, it sometimes doesn't work; yes, it is disruptive, but we have no other choice. We want to see real change for people and planet, and so we must innovate in order to create the world in which we want to live.

Making Bold and Daring Choices

In the challenging times that we are living through, the pursuit of social change really does require a fair bit of daring. I acknowledge that much of what I suggest above is messy, difficult work. If bridging came naturally to us as human beings, we wouldn't be in this crisis. If building coalitions didn't take so much time and reveal so much complexity, more people would likely try it. In this particularly charged moment, with so many concerns about our future, it is hard to pause and blend emotions, passions and commitment with what can often feel like boring tools, strategies and tactics. And of course, as noble the pursuit of innovation is, the road is full of uncertainty. Nonetheless, I have found that social change really sticks in a way that impacts people's lives and the environment when we use these four tools in some combination.

"Nothing in the world is worth having or worth doing unless it means effort, pain, difficulty…" wrote Thomas Jefferson. Struggle and even failure are a part of the "doing" Jefferson mentioned, and yet, as we discussed earlier, our missteps also teach us valuable lessons. Nevertheless, there is much reason for hope: In our own backyard and around the world, people, organizations and communities are making bold, forward-leaning choices and finding new ways of working that have significantly impacted people's lives. I imagine that we might be the envy of Jefferson by navigating uncertainty, marshaling our resources, and leading our sometimes-difficult lives very well by embracing the lessons upon us.

Kriss Deiglmeier was the Chief Executive Officer of Tides from 2014 - 2019, a global foundation and social venture accelerator dedicated to building a world of shared prosperity and social justice. Previously, Kriss was the Founding Executive Director for the Center for Social Innovation (CSI) at Stanford University.