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Koenig, Oliver [Hrsg.]: *Inklusion und Transformation in Organisationen*. Bad Heilbrunn : Verlag Julius Klinkhardt 2022, S. 41-64



Quellenangabe/ Reference:

Sharpe, Bill; Ash-Harper, Zahra: Producing inclusion with three horizons - In: Koenig, Oliver [Hrsg.]: *Inklusion und Transformation in Organisationen*. Bad Heilbrunn : Verlag Julius Klinkhardt 2022, S. 41-64 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-260556 - DOI: 10.25656/01:26055

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-260556>

<https://doi.org/10.25656/01:26055>

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Producing Inclusion with Three Horizons

Abstract

This chapter brings together work from the established field of futures practice and futures studies with emerging practice in inclusion. The futures practice – Three Horizons – is becoming widely used when organizations seek to bring about fundamental change. The inclusion practice is being pioneered by the second author of this text in her work developing inclusion programmes with organisations and individuals. Bringing these two practices together is a new contribution within the broader field of participatory futures and inclusion.

Dieses Kapitel verbindet einen etablierten Ansatz aus dem Bereich der Zukunftspraxis (Das Drei Horizonte Modell) mit der neuen Praxis des „Producing Inclusion“. Das Drei Horizonte Modell wird häufig eingesetzt, wenn Organisationen grundlegende Veränderungen anstreben. Die zweite Autorin dieses Textes leistet mit ihrer Arbeit zur Entwicklung von Inklusionsprogrammen mit Organisationen und Einzelpersonen Pionierarbeit auf dem Gebiet der Inklusion. Die Zusammenführung dieser beiden Praktiken ist ein neuer Beitrag im breiteren Feld der partizipativen Zukunftsforschung und Inklusion.

1 Introduction

This chapter introduces two practices into the field of transformative inclusion management and reports on an exploratory project in which they were used together for inclusion work within an organisation.

The first practice comes from the field of futures and is called Three Horizons (Curry & Hodgson 2008; Sharpe 2020; Sharpe u. a. 2016). Three Horizons is a practice that brings people together to develop their agency towards the future. It provides a structure for dialogue about change from an established everyday pattern of life – the first horizon – that is experienced as no longer fit for emerging conditions, to a new pattern – the third horizon – which will replace it, via the transitional zone of the second. The first author of this chapter, Bill Sharpe, is a futures practitioner and is developing and promoting Three Horizons as a tool for organisational and systems change.

The second practice is being pioneered by the second author of this chapter, Zahra Ash-Harper, and she has given it the name 'Producing Inclusion'. This lies within the wider field of inclusion practice and has been developed over more than a decade in practical work to help organisations develop their approach to inclusion.

To bring about systemic change in any specific case it is necessary to address three levels: the personal, the organisational, and how they both relate to the wider social context. Three Horizons is oriented towards the organisational and social levels, and how patterns of life are reproduced by those who embody them. However, in itself, this practice has no methods to address the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that determine which voices will be heard.

In contrast, producing inclusion works with the personal level in its organisational and social context to enable individuals to develop awareness of their own experience and role in the status quo and the possibilities of transformation. While working across levels, this practice does not in itself have a language or structure for the organisational journey of change.

Bringing these two approaches together offers the possibility of creating a practice that links all three levels of work. In this chapter, we explore this by addressing two questions that were developed through reflection on the practical project undertaken together:

- How does producing inclusion make organisational futuring using Three Horizons legitimate?
- How can futuring in Three Horizons make inclusion transformative for the organisation?

In answering these questions, we found that each practice supported the other in a mutually reinforcing way.

The structure of the chapter is as follows:

Section 2: Gives the context of the project and introduces the two practices of Three Horizons and Producing Inclusion.

Section 3: Records a reflective dialogue between the two authors on how we experienced the relationship between our practices on the project.

Section 4: Records the perspective of the participants.

Section 5: Conclusions: revisiting the questions

Our summary finding is that the two practices are mutually supportive and reinforcing, and create a new standard for any futuring process in how we involve those who are marginalised or excluded in our own context of life and work.

2 Inclusive Futures – Context and Practices

2.1 Project Context

The work reported here is based on a research and practice project undertaken by the authors with Watershed, Bristol.

Watershed, located in the centre of Bristol, UK, is the leading film, culture and digital media centre in the South West region and at the heart of Bristol's cultural life. They produce accessible and inclusive cultural experiences that fire up the imagination and bring people together. Watershed is one of few truly cross-art form organisations in the UK with a track record of innovation and risk-taking over nearly four decades, and recognised internationally as a leading centre for film culture, technology practice and talent development programmes.

In all their work, they seek to produce open collaborations and create opportunities which bridge expertise, imaginations and boundaries to promote new ideas and enjoyable experiences. As they express it: “Diversity is inherent in our approach to supporting a thriving cultural ecology. However, the case for inclusion is a matter of social justice and institutional responsibility which we commit to progressing with greater urgency” (Watershed 2021a).

But despite their rich connections across many communities, Watershed is aware that they are still not fully representative and inclusive. So they were ready to respond when, in the midst of the COVID pandemic in 2020, the UK National Lottery issued a funding call (National Lottery 2020):

“We want to find out how to help communities move towards recovery and renewal after the impact of COVID-19 and draw on all the creativity we've seen in communities and across civil society. So we're funding organisations to look at how things are changing, what is needed in this transition, and what is possible in the future.”

Watershed Bristol responded to this call and received funding for its project “Towards Equitable Futures” (Watershed 2021b) with the following questions at the centre of the exploration:

- What does progress look like when we challenge the notion of (exploitative) growth and value the creation of (regenerative) depth?
- What are the community behaviours that welcome difference while bonding us together?
- How can we act as stewards of our assets (economic, social and cultural capital) while we repurpose them in service to communities?

The project was led by the authors of this chapter, who had not worked together before, but each had a long history of working with Watershed: Zahra Ash-Harper pioneering her role of ‘inclusion producer’, and Bill Sharpe as a futures practitioner. We worked closely with a small team from Watershed to design and lead a

series of five workshops over a period of six months. About a dozen people from within Watershed and from their network were chosen as participants to bring into the process a microcosm of the system to be transformed. Those who have been most marginalised within their communities – on account of colour, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation or age (i. e. under 25) – were deliberately over-represented. As this was for us a first experimental process, the boundaries of the invitation to participate were kept to those who were able to be ‘comfortable being uncomfortable’, and ready to work with each other’s experience of hurt. This reflected our starting assumptions that this type of work would require doing the inner work of processing the experience of exclusion and bringing that into positive relationship with the organisational and structural journey of change.

2.2 Three Horizons and Producing Inclusion Practices

Three Horizons, used as a structure for dialogue, involves working with a simple framework of three lines that each represents a pattern of behaviour in the area of interest (figure 1).

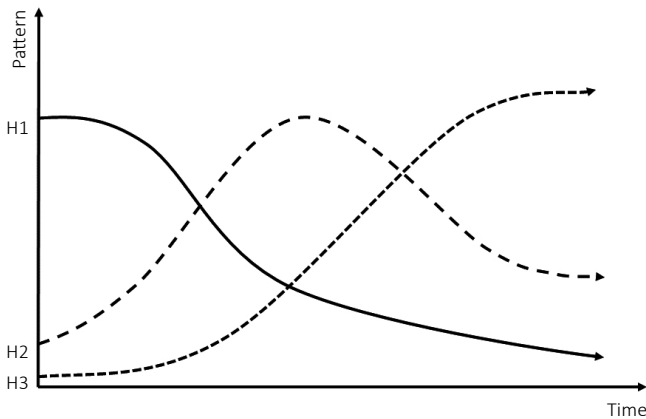


Fig. 1: Three Horizons (www.h3uni.org CC BY-SA 4.0)

It does not rely on any formal notion of a pattern or system, but works with people’s everyday understanding of the way life goes on in more or less repeatable ways from one day to the next. The horizontal axis represents time stretching from the present towards a future time appropriate to the range of the project. The vertical axis indicates the relative prevalence of the horizon patterns, and the framework shows an established first horizon pattern giving way over time to an emerging third horizon, via transitional activity in the second horizon.

Described in this way the horizons represent change in linear time, but the power of Three Horizons lies in how each horizon corresponds to an experiential quality of the future in the present. Extensive experience using Three Horizons in many dialogues across a range of contexts has shown that people connect intuitively with these horizons as three different orientations towards the future in the present moment. They can connect with them as three different ways to experience being in the world, as three qualities of the future in the present.

Our first horizon experience is of maintaining the everyday patterns of life. We get up in the morning and go about our lives in familiar ways, expecting others to do the same. These patterns range from the personal rhythms of home life for which we are responsible, through the organisations of which we are part, to the many patterns of life extending to a global scale that link us at every level of society. These patterns repeat themselves over days, weeks and years, for better or worse. We are either responsible for them, rely on others taking responsibility for maintaining them, or some combination of the two. In Three Horizons practice we often describe this orientation to experience as the managerial perspective, since it is the role of the manager to take responsibility for getting something done. So, for example, when we flick the light switch and the light doesn't come on, we check whether we need to take responsibility (change the bulb) or whether we call the electricity utility and report an outage, expecting them to fix it.

The third horizon quality is the visionary perspective, a picture of a possible future held in the imagination from which we may take a stand to pioneer change. Again, this can range from the personal, such as a vision of a future career, to an ambition for a world-leading business, or, as in the topic of this chapter, the goal of a more inclusive organisation. The experience of a vision is something that we stand for, that informs our actions in the present to a desired future.

The second horizon quality is entrepreneurial, an orientation to action in the present, grasping the possibilities of the moment to drive through change, disrupting the first horizon and capturing momentum towards the third, ready to take a risk of failure. We all recognise entrepreneurs, in social life and business, who are ready to jump into the action and try things out. Second horizon innovations compete to enrol others into becoming the third horizon.

The Three Horizon framework helps us organise a productive conversation amongst these three perspectives for the purposes of bringing about change from the first to the third horizon. But, if we want to bring about change, the central issue is who 'we' are and what relation we hold to the patterns of life in the area of concern and to those who maintain them. If all the voices relevant to change are already fully involved and respected in the process, Three Horizons practice can provide what is needed for the participants to envision their third horizon and develop transformative innovations to get there.

However, there are many situations where the dominant pattern of the first horizon, as reproduced by those who embody it, is one of ignoring, excluding or suppressing voices that should be heard. In such cases, Three Horizons work can reveal exclusion but cannot, of itself, remedy it. It creates a space for the dynamics to be explored but needs appropriate practices to deal with them. There are four characteristics of situations where this applies, where, under the prevailing conditions, the people who are excluded cannot include themselves:

- They lack the power to change the relevant patterns of behaviour which reside in the people of the organisation that needs to change, and who maintain its current behaviours;
- It is not possible for those excluded to create an alternative that will replace the existing organisation, unlike the situation typical in market innovation which celebrates the ‘creative destruction’ of the old and its replacement by the new;
- Those who have experienced exclusion are holding pain and trauma and need to develop trust that their experience will be recognised by those in the dominant system, and that a process of change is possible;
- The recognition of exclusion requires the people in the organisation concerned to become aware of, and accept, their own role in creating the experience of exclusion. This can be very painful and can easily generate defensive reactions.

Clearly, a new kind of work is necessary to enable the people who are, and understand themselves to be, marginalised to bring what they celebrate most in themselves into a new environment. This is what we mean by ‘Producing Inclusion. It is a practice whereby the ‘under-heard’ can bring their own, embodied, third horizon of themselves into the first horizon context, and do that safely. What this means for each individual emerges through the process itself, starting from the experience of being marginalised in the situation of concern.

The practice of producing inclusion creates a space where such exclusionary aspects of the first horizon can be safely challenged; where all those involved in the process can be brought into a shared creative journey towards an inclusive third horizon, each participating with integrity, standing in their own truth. We summarise this as “bringing all the voices into the room”. Only then does Three Horizon work become legitimate. Without this, any futuring done by the organisation is in danger of perpetuating the unexamined processes of exclusion as experienced by those excluded.

Often, in Zahra’s experience, organisations do inclusion work but without incorporating the findings into the canon of organisational memory. They achieve some change in individual practices but these are not fully sustained and carried forward by the organisation as a whole. They can then all too easily be neglected or forgotten. Such work must be documented, fully owned by the organisation, and made present in its life in order to move on from past to future thinking. This

chapter is our contribution to the new canon of inclusion as a social practice and as an academic discipline.

2.3 Project Process

In exploring how we should bring together our two practices, it was clear to us that the focus of the project on issues of inclusion meant that we needed to place Zahra's practice in the foreground and use that to guide how the Three Horizons futuring work should be brought in to support it.

Zahra's professional approach is inspired by a belief in each person's uniqueness, the strength that comes from self-knowledge and sincerity of feeling, and our capacity for action as we move together in empathy and love. In this she is drawing on a cultural heritage rooted in the heart as well as the head, as expressed here by Audre Lorde (black American poet and activist for justice 1934-1992) in "Poetry is not a luxury":

"[A]s we become more in touch with our own ancient, non-European consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes. ... As they become known to and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas. They become a safe-house for that difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action." (Lorde 1977, 25).

In the Watershed project, the aim was to develop a '*slow*' inclusion methodology in which innovation could be driven by and through the collective discovery of people of difference. The linchpin of our project was an extended and intensive period of collaborative research and development between everyone involved to cultivate the kind of lasting and authentic relationships that are at the heart of truly transformational inclusion work. Valuing difference, we put the uniqueness of the participants at the centre; we adopted mutual care and radical kinship as our compass; and we embraced uncertainty, complexity and curiosity to co-create a project that sees genuine inclusion on the cultural landscape as a form of social innovation.

The workshops were carefully planned with a purpose, but how they unfolded in the moment was open and spontaneous. We worked as a group and also in twos. Each person was partnered with another, and that pairing lasted throughout the series of workshops. This was in response to realising that despite the fact we had a group dynamic, we did not have the checks and balances held in a relational way. The pairing meant that each participant had somebody who would check in with them, who was paying attention to them within the sessions and could say, afterwards, 'How was that for you? You seemed a little bit upset.' Or, 'Are you

okay?’ Somebody who essentially was following their journey in a very specific way, with solidarity.

People were paired according to their experience: with enough in common to understand and empathise with each other, yet enough difference in expertise and perspective to bring the conversation to life. That was the point – to make the pairings dynamic.

Using group discussion, conceptual exercises, games, storytelling, and working one-to-one to explore difference and common ground, Zahra as Inclusion Producer nurtured trust and mutual respect between the participants. There were consistent rules of behaviour based on principles such as “Let’s leave what’s outside the room outside the room, and be present here together.” “What somebody shares is a gift being offered to the group.” “Nobody shares the story except the teller.” No challenging of individual perspectives was allowed: “Listen with solidarity and respect, leave a space around it and move on.” “Don’t make the past wrong when looking to the future.”

This way people felt safe to go on a journey of healing before they even knew they were ready for a journey. Zahra was monitoring and adapting carefully throughout to find the appropriate pace and level of progress so that no one was set up to fail and the system of togetherness had appropriate failsafes. For example, there was a moment when Bill was leading an exercise and Zahra sensed a frequency change in the energy in the room, a little bit of anxiety amongst the participants. When people started to interrupt one another, Zahra, who was not even leading the session, asked if she could take a moment to ground everybody, and re-centre everybody. And that process reassured them that there was somebody monitoring that energy and that behaviour. They felt safe to be reminded again of the rules of engagement, and it brought the energy of agitation right down. We also recognised what had happened and talked about it in the group. People said ‘Thank you’ for that little intervention, and so we just went back to business.

The aim was to create the conditions for change through an understanding of self and others. A common language evolved as a sense of community grew over time; it became easier for people to show their vulnerability and recognise it in others, drawing them together.

The Three Horizon process was adapted for this work. The usual method takes place in two main stages. In the first stage a Three Horizon map is built of the situation the organisation is facing in the wider social context, and in the second stage this is turned into a plan for action. The map is usually built in the following order:

- Horizon 1: In what way is the current system showing signs of strain, lack of fit to emerging conditions, or failure?
- Horizon 3: What visions are we and others holding for the emerging future?
- Horizon 2: What innovations can we see already underway that might be growth points for the future?

This ordering helps people name and put down the issues they are holding in H1, then open up the potential of a future vision, before exploring the space of innovation in H2. However, in this work, we came to learn that if we started with the problems of H1 it would create a focus on the organisational problems and would place the members of the organisation in a defensive position. By starting from a place of hope we were able to build faith into the process and have faith in positive outcomes. Mang and Haggard in their work on regenerative development have coined the phrase 'working from potential not problems' as a simple heuristic (Mang & Haggard 2016). We took this as guidance and developed a journey in the order H3, H1, H2.

- Horizon 3: Imagine Watershed serving the cultural commons in the future you hope for, what would that look like at its best?
- Horizon 1: What do you need to leave behind to go on this journey?
- Horizon 2: What experiments would you do to start on the journey to the vision?

Each of these steps was introduced within the overall work of inclusion held by Zahra. The Horizon 3 question followed work in which the participants had been asked to identify times in the past when they felt they had been at their best in some relationship with Watershed. They had also been led through a process of thinking about situations in which they experienced being most fully themselves, while being fully in flow with others. This prepared them to answer the Horizon 3 question in a way that would reflect a genuinely inclusive future.

How, and how well this process worked is considered in detail in the dialogue between us below, and in the interviews with participants. But before moving on, it is important to say that there is no method here that can easily be codified, no recipe to follow. The design must be bespoke and specific to the situation and to the particular individuals. Following 'best practice' is not enough, for producing inclusion is an intuitive art and not a science.

Thoughtful preparation was vital long before the workshops could take place. A Watershed team worked with us (Zahra and Bill) in advance to decide what form the project should take, and we spent many hours in online conversations getting to know each other and how we might cooperate.

It is also important for anyone embarking on similar work not to have unrealistic expectations on the outset. Becoming inclusive takes time because there are no easy answers with quick results; it is not a question of tweaking the system but rather of embracing complexity with care and in a creative way. There will always be a time-lag, a period of absorption as new ways of working evolve, perhaps in the face of resistance. The organisation's responsibility continues after the formal process: to stay open and support the space where inclusion can happen. But also, each person must take part with their whole self; as Zahra says, "it's important to take up space or it will never shape around you." That is the individual's responsibility.

3 Practitioner Reflective Dialogue

3.1 Introduction to the Dialogue

After the workshop series was finished we (Zahra and Bill) held a series of on-line conversations in which we explored the productive relationship between our two practices, asking ourselves the question, how exactly had this cooperation been successful in the workshops, and why?

The dialogue form has been retained to show how the conversations developed over time. This not only respects Zahra's preference for the vernacular, but it is also in the spirit of the convictions expressed: difference is to be celebrated, and inclusion must recognise the uniqueness of each person.



Fig. 2: Zahra (Foto copyright: Zahra Ash-Harper)

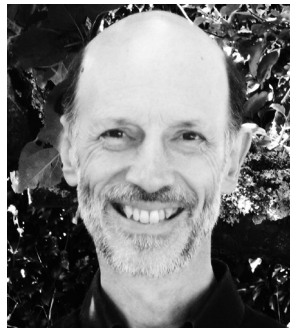


Fig. 3: Bill (Foto copyright: Bill Sharpe)

The contrast between us, Zahra and Bill, in age, gender, and racial heritage is obvious. Look further and the similarities are equally evident: both of us are experienced facilitators in our own fields; we both have the intellectual curiosity to search for the truth with an impassioned commitment to a better future where all the voices can be heard in the making of that future; and each of us is on a quest for personal integrity of being and acting in the world.

However, our experiences have been very different, and it is this fact that goes to the core of why inclusion work is necessary. As has already been said, *Three Horizons* has aimed from its conception aimed to 'bring all the voices into the room'. In this sense, Bill represents those voices that have traditionally always been included, that is, the ones with influence and authority who shape policies. Zahra, on the other hand, is the voice of the voiceless, those who – even when admitted to the room – have rarely been heard. Zahra brought a voice accented by its absence that often feels foreign. Therefore, it was fitting, that Zahra's reflections took centre stage, that Bill did more listening, and together they formed a common dialect.

4 The Dialogue

Bill: Let's start by looking at how Three Horizons has helped your inclusion work. I was thinking you must have set up rooms of people doing these sorts of exercises thousands of times before, and yet now you are doing them differently. In what way did the new framework offer something useful?

Zahra: It created more structure that allowed me to be more experimental. I don't always have a sense of where the participants can go, and it's slow work in a very aspirational, open-ended process. In the past, I've had to be quite careful and know the people very well before I could push them on to more ambitious work. Whereas here, the framing is a safeguard with consistent rules of engagement. It's like punctuation, where each session has a full stop to work towards. I used to have to roll with it, and roll with it. That worked well with the right organization, but I could see this working better with more organisations at different levels and paces.

Bill: For the participants, the process involves difficult conversations, because they have to go beyond their organisational roles, which may be part of the problem. To be engaged at a personal level of growth and development, they need a "transformational space" that is safe?

Zahra: Right, it's like a small nursery pool where fish lay their eggs, where there's not a lot of ripples in the water, not too many outside forces within it, only what's been left in that pool. And that allows the little fish to grow in a healthy way. So in the same way, I can see the readiness in people that's actually present and not set them up to fail. In the right conditions people can integrate their past and present experiences, and see the work others are doing, too, as they open up in front of the group. And I think that makes them a lot kinder and more understanding to each other. Also, I could quickly assess when to raise or lower the challenge levels as appropriate, as we moved through the three horizon stages. The structure meant I could develop tools very quickly. It brought a new quality to the inclusion work.

Bill: You've said that having a framework also gave you yourself more support. Before using Three Horizons the burden was left on you because the organisation and individuals didn't go on the journey. And you had to keep producing inclusion without shifting the system, and it burnt you out. Now you can be an enabler of a journey from which you can then detach. I think that's what I heard you saying.

Zahra: Yes, that's absolutely right. That started as soon as we met, because you were so grounded in what you wanted to do. You, and your thinking as reflected in Three Horizons, created a safe ground where I could experiment. The formal structure made it clear to me where the inclusion conversation would go. And it also made clear to me that the *antithesis* of

structure was necessary, because it's a very personal and heartfelt journey that people go on; a dialectical balance was not just needed, but it was also my duty to find the celebration, the play, the personal.

Three Horizons requires people to speak directly, not hedge the difficult issues. So the core focus has to be opening people up in a space that is safe enough for personal transformation. And that space, or shape, must be flexible, like a parallelogram that can fold and change its angles, but the structure is still there. People can enter it from lots of different angles because each journey is unique; there are multiplicitous possibilities in the shape of that transformation. As each person plays their part, change happens together, and individuals become a cohort working towards a similar goal.

What came through really strongly for me was the earnestness of the difficult conversations. People spoke from a place of real authenticity, saying in effect 'this is just what I can offer'. They were offering from a perspective that was different and *good*, rather than different and *correct*. And I would say that it was the lack of liberal posturing that kept a lot of the brown people in the conversation.

Bill: Did this work so well because of who is in this particular organisation, or because of the way the process was built?

Zahra: It was partly the way the staff had been supported beforehand to think non-defensively; partly the trust that I've built up in the community of difference – they didn't know exactly what was going to happen but they trusted that no harm would come to them for no purpose; and particularly, that we'd set up the rules of the space quite consistently e.g. nobody shares the story except the teller. People were expected to allow others to speak their truth without that impinging on their own capacity to speak honestly. They weren't allowed to respond, we just moved on. So people who'd had confrontations before were able to put those things aside and hear each other out. It was very impressive.

Bill: Wasn't this more to do with your own best inclusion practice and the trust you'd built up, rather than the approach we've been building?

Zahra: Yes, both helped, but it's true that for some people structure can be a crutch, a refuge, that can inhibit the conscious recognition of things that are active unconsciously. In those times Three Horizons was not very helpful. We always need to get back to personal accountability.

Bill: One thing that's really important to me, which directly informed the use of Three Horizons was the idea of mutuality: the productive tension between being-for-self and being-as-part-of-the-whole. We encouraged people to identify times when these two modes had come together for them in the organisation and then project those experiences into a vision of a

shared future – identifying that as a path of growth. How effective was that idea of co-creation in your working with them?

Zahra: Here's another metaphor for you! It was like stained glass. People looked into the organisation through their own piece coloured by their experience, sometimes positive, sometimes darker. Then as they listened to others in the group, they could see through someone else's lens, and the parts they couldn't love, others were loving. And it led to a more kaleidoscopic 3D understanding of what it feels like for different types of people to be in the same building. It was fascinating, exciting and empowering because all the experience – positive and negative – was validated, nothing wasted. It put things on the record and brought forward some of the erased elements of inclusion conversations from the past.

Bill: Zahra, there's such a richness in all you share in these conversations, that I don't know what I'm going to do with it all! What are we trying to write? The most useful thing would be, what would you say to other inclusion producers about how Three Horizons has informed your practice?

Zahra: I think the most useful thing is the other way around – not how does Three Horizons support inclusion, but *how inclusion makes futuring legitimate*. The Western legacy is that of white men designing things – even products for UN charities and humanitarian work – because they have the means and the leisure to think about the future. It's those people with the means that need to allow inclusion facilitators into the door of the conversation.

Bill: Yes, it's a circularity: Three Horizons can help lift the practice of inclusion, but only if inclusiveness makes it legitimate.

Zahra: Inclusion is all about knowing; and being known is vulnerable. The gift that marginalised people gave us was trusting us to provide a safe place for them to express their hopes and dreams. They were willing to be known, which allowed us to work with them. Now, usually, an institution doesn't know people like me very well, because they're always trying to make us work to their ends. So the more we understand their ends, through a process like futuring, the more we can decide where to be. The problem has been that the boundaries of this work have excluded some people, breaking the circle. We're trying to *complete* the circle by allowing the organisation to be vulnerable and known by the participants, and in turn to know them so that they can contribute to their own futuring. An organisation must have a desire to learn; it won't get anywhere without curiosity.

Bill: When I'm curious about something I can't express it, almost by definition. That's why I'm curious about it. Nobody is managing to express clearly how to bring the inner and outer perspectives together. I'm feeling that there's something here almost within reach. The most important thing for me is truth, and how to bring the personal truth and the impersonal truth back

together. That's what I've committed myself to live as a practice and as my contribution.

Zahra: The really important part for me is writing the record. I love the canon of knowledge, the thinkers of the past. But the *inclusive* past has no canon, only an erasure of 400 to 500 years. Audre Lorde said white empiricism's stroke of genius was to de-legitimise all other types of knowledge. So the white man doesn't hear our pain, or even his own. He will only be convinced by *his* method of knowledge, which is data. What we say matters, but it must be backed up and referenced in data. We need a shared and honest recollection to do proper futuring. By recording what we did, we are not just trying to build a methodology; we want to get to the heart of why it worked, and what we learned, what people learned about themselves.

Bill: Yes, because here we are still engaged actors in the change.

Zahra: In a workshop when change suddenly happens in the moment, people can get frightened and revert to old, known, bureaucratic behaviours, like "Put it in an email". I used to be seen as the problem if I carried on the process when the fear came up. But Three Horizons, which speaks the language of change management, is a supporting structure when inclusion is scary about your own internal world. And by starting with people's vision of the future, based on their *best* experiences in the organization (as we've mentioned before), Three Horizons gives them hope and confidence to continue. There is time for all of us to acclimatize to the process and learn to be ourselves, safely, together.

Bill: You made a lovely comment about how getting people to love the whole world is hard. But we brought people into a room and asked them to love each other, and we activated it.

Zahra: Yes, it's personal connections that are key. Too often we ask people too much, like caring for the planet. Whereas, if you come to love your local park or allotment you can gradually extend that to a love of nature. So, too, with inclusion. The love in front of you is what can be parlayed into a more general attachment to what that personal relationship symbolises in a larger sense. Helping people to lose their fear of their immediate community helps them see the value in community, equitable community, as a whole. Actually, I think that people are changed by people, not by thoughts alone. You can change hearts, and you can do it in different ways, but I think the quickest way is always one person at a time. In a safe space, a really equitable space, where people can see each other's value, and know that their own value is significant too, it's much easier to start a deeper catalytic process of inclusion.

Bill: Tell me about when you were so excited after a workshop and you said, "That's the first time I've really done the inclusion work I wanted to do".

Zahra: Yes, I had designed the process and it had gone so well. It was as if the world of work was aligned with my ethical realities and collaborative intentions. I was in the flow. My colleagues and I made the social dynamics work to good purpose, and it felt like a poultice to life feeling so lonely in its complexities. To lead with purpose has been a dream I think I'd given up on. Finally I felt seen and allowed in my nature, not just "that inclusion person" who does her stuff and then they can carry on being whoever they are. We held our nerve for one another as a team, and I saw the team doing things I do, mirroring my ethical leadership, but with autonomy. I felt pride in handing over a torch. I felt for the first time in a truly mixed community of people, known and valued.

We're doing it, we're doing what I call inclusion, Bill!

Bill: You've brought your own journey into your awareness, and that's what allows you to be very direct, like a surgeon whose knife hurts to heal. I think you can only safely evoke in others what you have faced in yourself. But what did I do in all this? Only what I normally do – be very attentive and capture very carefully – because you were creating all the conditions that allowed what we wanted to happen.

Zahra: You brought a serious curiosity and interest in my practice and showed respect and deference for it, saying, "Zahra is going to help me in this, coach me in this". It gave me the conditions to do my best work, because I had a thinking partner who understood that complexities and difficulties are part of the process, and both good and bad experiences are things we can learn from. My perception was allowed, and if I had been frozen out then, I would still be in service, rather than in collaboration. I live out inclusion by my behaviour. So do you, whether you're fully aware of that yet or not. I've learned from your world my whole life. And my world is the difference that has not been fully understood in this world. You value my contribution and learn from it, and that helps others value it, too.

Bill: It's a privilege to be on a journey with you as I try to take a step forward in what I call 'bringing the personal truth and the impersonal truth back together'. What I used to contribute no longer seems enough. Futures work comes out of the corporate sphere, where you work within one organisation on a particular task. And although that involves the people dynamics, it is fundamentally a cognitive convening. But increasingly I'm working on climate change, or social issues, where there's no one in charge. It's what we could call an *existential* convening: people are exploring, 'Are we together or not? Do we have a common ground? Can we act together?' And this sort of work calls for a very different approach, in fact, it needs to start with your kind of practice where *people* are the focus. It needs a convening of all the voices in a shared inquiry in which the task is revealed

by the participants. It's a human convening. I don't want to let people down, but I feel I don't have the wisdom for the task in front of us.

Zahra: Thanks for sharing that with me. I don't think either of us has gotten into the heart of this place yet. Perhaps you're over-attentive to making a process of rigour and standing because you're used to task-oriented work with a clear outcome. But in inclusion practice nothing is fixed in stone. It's very natural, very comfortable for me to be unsure, and to have to trust myself in figuring out what I believe should be done. Just because something has worked well before doesn't mean it would happen the same way with all my participants. I've learned so much that is useful from the phrasing of Three Horizons, and I really hope that you can learn from the phrasing, the terminology, the vernacular of my work. There's a softness and humanity to the personal side which can bring the internal into the external.

Bill: You embody the work you do. The danger in me practising this sort of work without fully absorbing it is that I will replicate the very patterns that have led us to where we are: I am an embodiment of that world. And therefore I'm questioning – how do I make this foreground/background reversal? How can inclusion practice help Three Horizons?

Zahra: Rather than talk about Three Horizons, I'll question you in the way I do my inclusion work, which is first to ask about your experience. How does it feel different to come to the end of a piece of Three Horizons work as a facilitator in this model, as opposed to your old model?

Bill: It feels unfinished, as if we'd stopped before I delivered the result. I thought that one more workshop would have found what path this organisation could now take in the cultural life of the city, how it would develop its role in the cultural ecosystem in an inclusive way. I thought the new inclusivity would flow very naturally into new patterns as people changed their mode of behaviour.

Zahra: I think you mean, there's a limitation to the embeddedness of this process in the future, because you've not managed to blend these two practices together. How does that leave you feeling with regard to what we've done?

Bill: It leaves me feeling unclear about what has been accomplished, and whether it will endure in a useful way.

Zahra: Fascinating, we need to share this with people who want to bring Three Horizons and inclusion together. There's always a sense of the unfinished, because there's always more to be done, more equity needed, more people to engage. At every stage there's a sense of imperfection for me that I have to get used to putting down, almost a lack of satisfaction. Can you describe the satisfaction you felt in the past?

- Bill: I can think of two highlights, one in the business world and one in a community centre, where we came to a different qualitative understanding that allowed people to interpret what was going on and act much more appropriately. You feel you've delivered some insight.
- Zahra: Whereas, in this work is there a sense that not everything was said? You hadn't heard all you would usually expect to hear?
- Bill: Maybe something else: the sense after a workshop that it all seemed a bit mundane. And you said, "Well, it may be mundane, but we've never done it". Yet I was left wondering, what can I capture from all this that will be of relevance to the journey people need to be on? I didn't feel I'd been doing in any deep sense what I would normally have been doing.
- Zahra: Yep, there we go, right. It didn't feel the same. And it may, in fact, feel mundane, but I like the word 'mundane'. The mundane thing is never unnecessary. It's essential work, but it isn't sexy. That's what makes it so irritating.
- Bill: It really came home to me in our early conversations the degree to which the mundane can be hurtful to people of marginalised experiences. I'm really conscious of that.
- Zahra: You're so right, the way basic social rights in interaction are overlooked is really hard for me to excuse. The small good moments matter, a chance to be yourself, the right to answer for oneself. And that's where our practices come together: in trying to encourage people to bring more of *themselves* into their work, being mindful of themselves in a process together. Centring that togetherness is an essential part of what we must do. A second question I'd like to ask is, how did the unknown enter into your work before, and has that shifted since?
- Bill: I would specifically ask people before a workshop, what are the sources of uncertainty for you in the future? Scenario work, for example, is designed to hold that uncertainty in productive ways, because it's a resource. It's why the future is so open. So that is my practice: teaching people to love uncertainty.
- Zahra: Now let's talk about the new way of working. We experienced once how fear could arise in someone who did not feel safe in our process at the time. The uncertainty was something we were not able to hold as useful. So we reversed the process to create more certainty, by starting with the third horizon. Was that change in Three Horizons necessary because of the change in the kind of work it was being used for? How do you understand that?
- Bill: Good question, good question. It's a contrast between a task-oriented and an existential uncertainty. To undergo transformation you have to be like a caterpillar, letting go of the certainties that kept you alive and told you

who you are, and discovering new relationships. And that is a scary process, an existential risk and crisis.

Zahra: Yes, in inclusion work we are seeking to create solidarity where divergence has reigned supreme. It's not just a dialectical process of different ideas or policies; it's quite different *people* who need to manifest a future that relies on each other rather than one that centres individualism. This is critical. The organisation needs to realise that the value system they thought was holding people together was insufficient. The individuals have to accept that they themselves were not contributing to a better future. And the facilitators must realise that shaking the ground beneath them all is quite a lot to manage and carry!

Bill: I think we're both seeing now this reality: that 'cognitive', old-style convening takes for granted the human context of the work and focuses on the task. But 'existential' convening reverses that and puts the human system of solidarity in the foreground as what's being worked on. Unless that is done, the marginalised voices cannot be brought into that futuring work. And therefore the output will be different in kind, and the steps on the journey will be different.

Zahra: Yes, I think you're accepting that there's always going to be a bit of unfinished uncertainty, because of the nature of the work. I like the imperfection of the process, to be honest with you. It's human, and reflects the kind of work I do. And there's always a bit of magic that comes as a result of that. What I've realised is, my art is people; that's my understanding of the world – in relationship. It's an art form for me.

Bill: How do you see your role as you lead people through the inclusion process?

Zahra: Each person is on their own journey. I'm a rope that can stop them falling when the going is steep. But it's for the person to attach that rope for themselves. They have to want to do it, have to see the value in the process. I can't be a demagogue, a cult leader type – it would be quite unethical. That's why the process must be transparent, so that people can ask questions, give feedback and engage their own critical thinking. That rich diversity of input is what keeps the process human.

Bill: Yes, that's why I tell people that Three Horizons is a tool not a theory, just as an artist's paints and brushes are not a theory of art. The purpose of the exercises or games is not to provoke people to think in a certain way, but to be *aware* in a certain way. That's the opposite of a cult.

Zahra: I think of what I do as adding a few drops of water to an already filling pool. With a few questions or a little provocation, people start to open up and the pool spills over until a cascade begins. Then, over time, it's their own gravity that brings forth that massive deluge.

Bill: That's what I find – set things up right and trust the process.

Zahra: It's very humbling when real change begins; I rediscover in myself through others the belief in the goodness of people that I hold sacred and dear. Often the tensions that arise between individuals come just because they're different, with different needs. Neither is actually right or wrong, but by just being themselves *they are wrong for each other* at that time. That's when it takes love and trust to move on to a reconnection where reason and rationale become less important.

Each of us tries to understand and organise the world by looking through our own lens, which simplifies what we see. But by using love as a tool, this lens can be widened to take in more of human complexity. People are changed by people, not by thoughts alone but by the heart. Love is one of those things that is not clearly understandable; it lets us leap over the boundaries of right and wrong, dialectic and division. It enables us to imagine a future where we're together again, where we find each other again, so that we can start to imagine that future into being.

That's the journey we're on in our work. We have to enable everyone to be fully present and engaged as their own true selves, so that they can develop a common understanding of inclusion that is different from the one I began with, or you began with. And that's what makes it equitable. By the end, we are *all* changed.

5 The Participant Perspective

After the project, Bill and Zahra interviewed four of the participants separately, three from inside Watershed and one from outside, to gather their reflections. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, in a thoughtful and constructively critical way. Each interviewee had found value in the process, despite the impact of the Covid pandemic which meant that all of the sessions had been held virtually over Zoom. Moreover, each person had had to overcome anxiety about what might come up in the workshops, as well as frustration at first at the apparent slowness of proceedings, or an inner resistance to some of the interactions. These feelings began to fade as the work gathered momentum.

The questions were mostly very open-ended, of the nature of – *What did we learn from the project? Have we learned what you want us to know?*

All agreed that the project had been hugely successful in bringing a diverse group of people together. The way the 'safe space' had been designed made it feel that there was a role for everyone within change. People were able to contribute into the conversation a fuller experience of what it means to be, in all its personal truth and vulnerability. From the organisation's perspective this set "a new benchmark" for the way we might bring people together. It was felt that Watershed had a

shared reference point now – a shared set of experiences and language to draw on collectively that could enter the organisational memory. In future “we can go back to *let’s remember who we are*; and we know that *WE* more fully than we did before”. From the individual’s point of view, the learning that was gained was a greater self-knowledge born of listening to others. One person observed that it was “almost more of a meditation at times” than conversing, because the goal for the most part was to listen. That freed people up to take part equitably, to be “properly and honestly present”. Another one realised how much trust and togetherness had grown between them when the start of a meeting was delayed, and they sat in a comfortable silence that no-one needed to fill.

People spoke of an increased awareness of their own emotional state, for example, how the stress of conflicting demands in a job can affect working relationships. Latent ideas had emerged more clearly, too, as the process helped individuals step back a little from their normal roles and responsibilities; this brought a sense of renewal and a clarity about the contribution each could make to the shared culture. Being paired with someone throughout the sessions was seen as a very positive experience, a “culturally important and significant exchange,” a way of knowing in practice what including the whole person means. “It was one of the best bits.” A conspicuous concern, voiced by more than one interviewee, was how to hold themselves to the standard set by the Equitable Futures project. It was a high bar to aspire to; so much had been learned in that safe, co-created space, but to apply it all in the ordinary workplace was a different matter. “Knowing the right way is terrifying.” “Can I live up to it?” At the same time, there was an understanding that the project had been a *joint* enterprise, one that cannot be repeated as a lone endeavour. It was about who was there in that moment. However, what an individual *can* take away from the experience is a new sensitivity which helps to recognise something that is happening as a “flame to fan, or a space to protect”. Then the high standard “does feel easier to live up to, like being tuned in and prepared to respond”.

Heightened awareness, increased determination, and the knowledge of having experienced true inclusiveness in action brought confidence, too. Even with a history of disagreement, two people were able to come to a deeper appreciation of each other such as “you know what, we could probably move mountains!”

A more specific question Bill posed to each interviewee was about Three Horizons. He wanted to know whether it had been helpful. What had it added to the inclusion work? “It gave us a longer view”, was one response, making the people in the room part of a broader picture of societal change. “It gives a visual pattern to the notion of change that’s really helpful. It is not a job to be done but an ongoing negotiation between where we’ve been, where we want to be, and where we are right now.” Other answers were less positive: the use of Three Horizons was over-complicated and the graph a distraction; introducing Three Horizons with

the third horizon vision was “full of good things that I didn’t have time to grasp”. In order to be more effective the practice needed a simpler but fuller explanation than it had in the time available.

Three Horizons had already helped the Watershed team in the past to locate itself as an H2+ (see Handbook Introduction) arts organisation struggling to get first horizon funding (Leicester & Sharpe 2016). It had made clear the power structures at play, for “it helps you understand the world”. But not until it intersected with inclusion practice did its personal relevance become clear: the more empathy you have for others, the more of your power you have to give away. “Empathy and trust in a room is a way of re-negotiating power.” This came as a revelation following a workshop experience, and threw light on the journey towards an equitable future. It was a case of cognitive learning being taken to heart.

Other questions asked how such work could be taken further both within the organisation and beyond. In response came a call for the Watershed team to unite behind its core function as a “Trojan horse of social inclusion”. As an independent cinema and BFI Regional Film Hub Lead Organisation it supported film-makers, early career curators, community groups and creatives from all cultures and backgrounds in the city and beyond, and its bar was a hub of democratic debate after film showings. This was inclusion in practice. But the organisation was divided into parts that were too separate and not supportive enough of each other. It should be more fully integrated with culture at its heart, for “what is culture but about ourselves and our identities?”. Equitable Futures had ‘got the creative juices flowing’ and clarified this need to re-focus the organisation.

Two respondents were keen to de-centralise Watershed’s dominance in the local arts scene by seeding similar ventures elsewhere in the city, or by trusting representatives of other ethnic communities to take more responsibility and support its processes. Such ideas had been stimulated by the project but were not a direct outcome; while it had been hoped at the outset that new policies would develop naturally out of the inclusion work, that had not happened. It was disappointing, but there had simply not been enough time to get that far. Expectations of collective decision-making had been unrealistic: at least another round of workshops would have been needed.

The next question to ask, then, was what *are* the results we can point to? How might we know we have done what we set out to do?

It was felt that “notions of input and output – that sort of notion of success – doesn’t suit this way of working at all”. The results are on the inside in how we pay attention to others and to ourselves. “Maybe we should have framed the work as *how do we approach the future with love as a community*, and then tried to take that back to our different organisations”. A sign of progress would be if we could hold ourselves and others in the process and spread this approach. “What if the toolbox

was equitably distributed? It would be exciting to hand over the means of production, rather than just run the course again with new people – train the trainers.” A last question asked was if there was any advice people could give to others who might want to embark on a similar project. *Give it more time*, was the clear answer. It takes time to build up trust and empathy and to grow in togetherness. Also, work with as few constraints as possible, even if that means foregoing grants, for the work needs to be open-ended and experimental. If it is answerable to funders it cannot do true exploration: “You need to be allowed to get things wrong”. There will always be a sense of incompleteness, for the work is never done. As Zahra reflected, the question *Can I live up to it?* is a refrain we wake to every day. Or, as Bill put it, “*Can I live up to being human?* – that’s what we all suffer, isn’t it?”.

6 Conclusion

Imagine a space where culture and community transcends
the lines and limitations it constricts itself to.
Imagine a space that always has space even when the physical space isn’t there.
Imagine a space where humans are brought together not just
by their commonality but by their proud differences.
A place for fragmented communities, and outsiders to share their stories and ...
Alexie Segal, creative writer, project participant (Segal 2021)

We started the project without any model of how we might bring our practices together, and each workshop was a fresh experiment as we moved from alternating our leadership of sessions to a more fully integrated approach. It was only through our reflective dialogue for the writing of this chapter that we were able to reach the two questions posed at the start that sum up our understanding of where we arrived:

- How does producing inclusion make organisational futuring using Three Horizons legitimate?
- How can futuring in Three Horizons make inclusion transformative for the organisation?

From the perspective of Three Horizons practice, Producing Inclusion generates *legitimacy* for the organisational futuring work by the way it brings those people who have been excluded fully into the process of change – enabling participation by the whole person, standing in their own truth. Without this, any futures work done by the organisation is in danger of perpetuating the unexamined processes of exclusion as experienced by those excluded.

From the perspective of inclusion practice there needs to be a way of helping the people involved see how the current pattern limits inclusion, and how to bring about a repatterning to an inclusive future. We have reflected that some people

have no background in organisational change and the presentation needs to be sensitive to this. Recognising this need, Three Horizons offers a very simple and accessible framework in which the pattern in question can be brought into view and made malleable by those who are involved in maintaining and changing it, those currently included, and those excluded. We characterise this as Three Horizons contributing *authenticity* to the work of inclusion by connecting it to the organisational challenge of transformative change.

Thus, there is a positive reinforcement between the two practices of producing inclusion and Three Horizons in a dynamic process of inclusive futuring, as represented in figure 2:

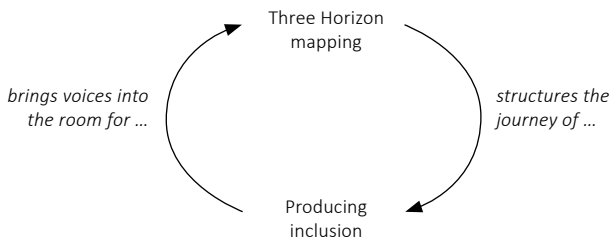


Fig. 4: The Inclusive Futuring Dynamic (own representation)

We believe that, seen in this way, we have created an appropriate approach to futuring if the outcome is to be truly equitable, as it takes the commitment to produce inclusion as its foundation.

We have written this chapter as an account of personal experience as professionals, responding to the request from Watershed to bring our practices together to support their journey towards an equitable future. We found that our own journey through the project was itself one of inclusion, growth, and transformation. We each found our own truth growing in response to the other in a deepening friendship, enabled by having a shared focus that the structure provided. In this we came to our simple conclusion that inclusion is not a project to be completed, but a truth to be lived.

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