



Integral CORO Community Empowerment



Executive Summary of an Integral Research-to-Innovation Initiative in India

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Overview, Objective and Outcome

This thesis was a research journey to innovation. Particularly it concerned how CORO (Committee of Resource Organization), a Mumbai-based grassroots-led organization, continuously creates new knowledge and thereby empowers individuals, communities and the society at large.

On this journey, the achieved innovation was the co-creation of a first integral model for CORO Community Empowerment. Fighting against injustice and discrimination, it was crucial that CORO's integral approach was also collaborative. Thus transformative, institutionalized empowerment education and collective knowledge creation were argued to be the key to enhance CORO's impact of integrally empowering the community.

The thesis was written during a transformative internship with CORO and Trans4m Center for Integral Development. The internship ended with the “Umeedon ki Udaan Festival of Compassionate Leadership from Grassroots Up” on the occasion of CORO’s 25th anniversary of the organization. CORO coordinated and organized the festival together with 52 other organizations. More than seven thousand people were present at this 2-day celebration, which brought together business, government and community leaders and social change makers.

Structurally, this innovation journey followed a 4C trajectory leading from my own personal Call together with CORO’s Calling, in other words my burning desire and their current burning issue, to the Context, then to Co-Creation of an integral model and to the final Contribution, the integral community development model.

Thus the Call, an inner challenge of the integral development agent as well as the perceived outer call of CORO, constituted the first part.

Call – Initiating Empowerment: Embarking on a Journey towards Collective Knowledge Creation

To embark on this Research-to-Integral Innovation journey, the origins of the Inner Calling were explored by crafting my own personal story. As the story was continuously unfolding, it was focused on my passion for sharing and creating knowledge, women empowerment and burning desire to contribute positively to issues of humanity in the field of integral international development – a desire that led me to join CORO.

Subsequently, the story of CORO was narrated. The evolution CORO showed that very functional processes have been established. However, most of those processes and accumulated knowledge remained implicit. While the circumstances have greatly changed over the past 25 years, the generational transformation in leadership was shown to reveal knowledge creation in past, present and future. Narrating the start, development, achievements and drawbacks of CORO, it was discovered that CORO was standing on the verge of entering a new period of their organizational development. Additionally, throughout the story of CORO, the current burning need was uncovered to reflect more deeply on its knowledge creation processes, as a necessary prerequisite to move on to its next evolutionary phase towards more participatory knowledge building processes.

On the basis of the existing CORO knowledge creation process, both CORO and myself, explored how the Integral Worlds approach, developed by Trans4m Geneva, could guide and support us in entering a new developmental phase.

Context – Exploring the Context: Uncovering Sources of Empowerment

To continue the Research-to-Innovation journey, it was crucial to deeper understand the lay of the ‘CORO/MMF land’. Henceforth, building on the challenge identified, the Context surfaced how an integral knowledge creation model and process in consideration of CORO’s background, existing situation and future needs may look. The attempt was to reveal and appreciate implicit knowledge, while envisioning potentials. The levels of ‘inside’, including individuals as well as the organization, and ‘outside’ world, meaning the community, society and globe at large, have been differentiated. Albeit a distinction between many more subcategories would be possible, two levels helped to reduce complexity. In addition, individual members of CORO were prone to define their identity to a large part over and above that of the organization. In other words, and in terms of the four sets of contextual imbalances identified by Trans4m – transcultural, transformational, transdisciplinary and transpersonal – together with the need to alleviate these, it was the last one that occupied pride of place in the CORO instance.

This approach to transcending such individual pre-emphasis was achieved by establishing an Innovation Ecosystem, comprised of a small group of core CORO leaders.

The reflection took place in a four-step process: firstly, by exploring “what is” to identify the best of the existing valuable knowledge and empowerment tools. We identified for example thorough community relationships and the broad base of community wisdom as such existing knowledge strengths. Secondly, we moved to envisioning a possible future, describing “what could be” and emerge. Specifically, at this point, how CORO can unfold its constructive culture. Thirdly, consideration was given to structure such a possible future in order to define “what will be”, in terms of CORO’s future strategy for the next 25 years, to then, fourthly “sustaining acting on what will be”. It was discovered that CORO has a large potential to contribute to its ‘outside’ in respect to its strengths in relationships and activities. As CORO was currently moving to a new organizational life phase, speaking in terms of changed issues CORO is tackling as well a new generation of leadership, a redefinition of its origin may help to increase CORO’s impact in form of raising critical consciousness on an individual, organizational, national and global level. However, the aspect of systems, knowledge and structures as well as partially inspiration had to be activated to ensure a multiplication of impact.

As it is very typical for activists’ organizations, a structural, systematical perspective was insufficiently developed. In the first 25 years of CORO’s evolution, the focus on community building, and impactful activities was highly justified. When turning to the next phase, a new emphasis had to be set, directing the focus to knowledge creation in order to evolve further. A system and process of integrative knowledge creation would not only make CORO’s valuable knowledge explicit, but also continue to foster communal, societal and global learning ecologies. Hence, in the next part of this Research-to-Innovation called “Co-Creation”, such a model of sustainable, collaborative, integral knowledge creation was co-created.

Co-Creation – Re-Empowering Community Empowerment through the Co-Creation of an Integral Model

In the third part, an Integral Model of Community Empowerment and Collective Knowledge Building was co-created with the ecosystem group, using Critical Theory as a vehicle for social emancipation and transformation, process-wise, as well as the field of community development, content-wise. Critical Theory, aligned with community development, provided a valuable fundament for liberation and social transformation; furthermore CORO has been rooted, since its inception, in the philosophical perspectives of Dr. Ambedkar and Paulo Freire, both key Critical Theorists. Freire stressed that the participants must play an active role in the process. Thus, it was essential that an integral model of collective knowledge building and community empowerment was co-created together with the CORO team in order to alleviate the suffering of the people it served. Further the co-creation assured that the model was socially constructed and took account of multiple interconnections, uncovered power relations as well as being emancipatory in its orientation. Thereby CORO's integral model explicitly focused on promoting liberation. CORO members, grassroots leaders and empowered women thus became continuous re-creators of the valuable CORO knowledge and wisdom. Only thereby, the model could truly be understood, co-owned and developed further in the future by the CORO members.

Building on the existing knowledge creation strengths, particularly the broad foundation of community wisdom, grassroots and experience-based, implicit knowledge, a large number of interviews were conducted with women from the Mahila Mandal Federation, fellows and CORO members. The interviews indicated a first potential shape of an integral CORO community empowerment and knowledge creation model.

Furthermore responding to previously uncovered imbalances, the model aimed not only to make implicit knowledge explicit, but it intended to be 'lived'. The attempts were that the ecosystem would see the integral model as their own; thereby a platform for continuity and renewal was built to ensure the model's sustainability and allowed its enduring innovation.

Throughout Co-Creation the CORO Model of Integral Community Empowerment was refined to move towards the respective envisioned outcome. Starting from the aspect of Vitality and Resilience, the goals were healthy community relationships. Evolving further, Creativity and Consciousness were to awaken community cultures. In the next step through Knowledge Creation and Innovation, community learning ecologies were established, while Capacitation and Participation fostered sustainable community livelihoods. Discussions with the ecosystem team as well as theoretical considerations guided the evolvement of the model.



Integral Model of CORO's Community Empowerment

While unpacking this four-folded model together with the community and releasing the so-called 'GENE-ius' rhythm – that is Grounding in community vitality, Emerging through creativity and consciousness, Navigating through knowledge creation, and ultimately Effecting through communal participation – in and with the community, a co-created model of CORO's integral approach to Community Empowerment emerged as a spiral focusing on collective social knowledge building. Thereby, it remained crucial that such a model was truly co-created with the CORO community to unleash its effect on the community and reach the goal of increasing the organization's impact by ten times. In liberating and emancipating the community knowledge, the integral model with its focus on collective social knowledge building may assist CORO's transition towards a new organizational stage.

While CORO had emphasized 'integrally empowered individuals', the challenge in this new phase was to actualize a 'holistically empowered community' by making full use of its implicit knowledge and community wisdom through an integral way of collective knowledge creation.

The vitality realm led towards a redefinition of CORO's origin and identity. Through the creative and conscious emergence, community cultures were to be awakened in a constructive and inclusive way. Making implicit wisdom explicit, as well as integrating grassroots and

academic knowledge were a key structural necessities when empowering innovativeness from within the community. The thereby created knowledge was both locally applicable and globally accessible. In consideration of capacitation and participation, the intentions were to make this knowledge sustainable, act on it and develop it further. Overall, it was crucial that the Integral Community Empowerment had a dynamic, spiraling, ever-evolving underlying process.

The CORO's logo "drives" the model. The logo illustrates the energy and spirit of change through collective action of the people. Thus, the logo functioned as a wheel for social change and an ever-evolving spiral towards achieving the impact goals, remaining closely aligned with CORO's context.

Moving to the next Contribution part, we explored how the model of integral CORO community empowerment and its chakra spiral were actualized to guide CORO towards a higher level of consciousness.

Contribution – Fully activating the CORO Spiral and Transforming Community Empowerment

First actualizations of CORO's Integral Community Empowerment model took place at the academic session 'Conference on Collective Knowledge Building' at the 25th anniversary of CORO and grassroots leadership festival in the end of October 2015. At this session the "The CORE of CORO – From CORO to 'Integral CORO Empowerment'" Brochure was shared and sent to all institutes and universities which participated.

In the brochure, CORO and its history were presented. The globally tested holistic approach of Integral Development was introduced and locally applied to CORO. The resulting co-created integral model of CORO Community Empowerment showed how CORO is building knowledge and will continue to do so collectively in the future.

Additionally, the model helped to build the strategy to continue the 25 years of CORO's success. In the first 25 years of CORO's work, empowerment of the individuals had been at the focus. Initially starting from spreading literacy, CORO deepened its engagement towards underlying community problems like gender discrimination and especially domestic violence. As greater problems can only be solved through collective action of individuals, organizations, communities and world at large, CORO was increasingly acting through a collaborative approach. In consequence, full-fledged and institutionalized empowerment education was argued to be the key to the new phase of CORO's development. Thus, the focus in the coming years may be on collective knowledge creation and transformative education to integrally empower the community.

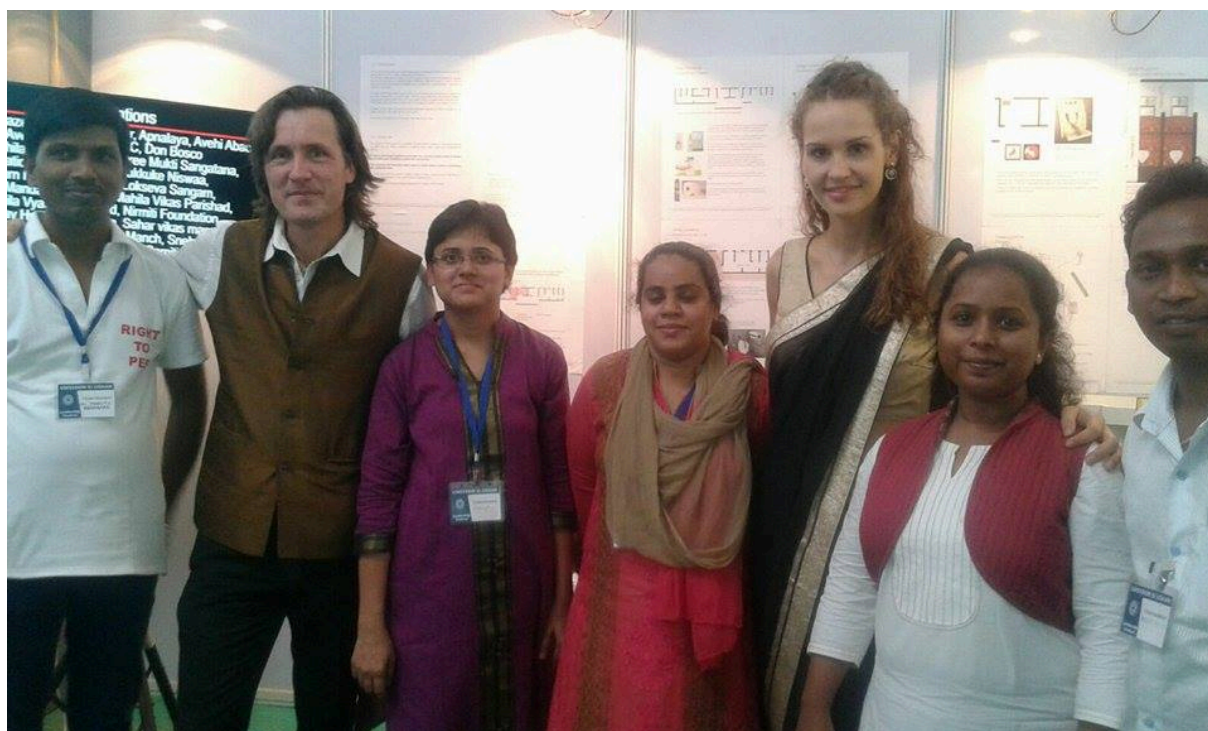
Henceforth, the importance of a social innovation center, "CORO Center for Integral Community Empowerment (CORO-CICE)", was stressed. Such a center could grow, almost organically, out of the initial innovation ecosystem, which was built up during this transforma-

tive project. Furthermore, continuing follow-up steps and actions were proposed. Thereby, the integral community empowerment model was sustainably anchored within CORO as an institutionalized process and entity.

Outlook: Co-Creating the CORO Future

Even though the Contribution constituted the last part of this Research-to-Innovation, the integral development of CORO was to constitute a spiraling, ever evolving process, which would not end at this point. Hence, the dynamic integral CORO model developed is to be seen as an invitation to an ongoing journey towards a new part of CORO's success story where it integrally empowers the community through collectivizing knowledge creation.

The ongoing partnership between CORO and Trans4m was building on those first achievements. Also, CORO is currently establishing a Center for Grassroots Leadership. Together with Trans4m and CORO, a student group from the University of St. Gallen will map out an initial integral design of such a center. Furthermore, Supriya Jan, RTP activist, core CORO member and also a crucial person of the innovation ecosystem team, may continue the development of CORO's integral approach in her master's thesis. The story continues and may lead eventually to the establishment of an integral CORO university.



At the Right to Pee Stall of October 30/31st, 2015 Grassroots Festival