DE MEEVAART & THE INDISCHE BUURT
AN EXPLORATION OF ORGANIZATION IDENTITY, ROLE, AND GENTRIFICATION

By the CoNexus Team

November 7, 2019

Executive Summary

This document details the engagement between De Meevaart and CoNexus consulting. De Meevaart contacted CoNexus for help in determining its role in addressing the ongoing gentrification occurring in the Indische Buurt neighborhood of Amsterdam. To help them do this, CoNexus conducted an action research cycle spanning 29 October, 2019 - 8 November, 2019. This cycle aimed to collect data from within De Meevaart's system, including the community it serves, as a means of driving energy towards a desired future state for the organization. This report includes the steps taken, approaches used, and findings of CoNexus's engagement.

CONTRACT AND SCOPE OF WORK

CoNexus and De Meevaart entered into a partnership to foster greater community cohesion in response to Indische Buurt's gentrification. The contracted agreement included: collection of data from De Meevaart staff, volunteers, and key constituents (done by CoNexus), primarily in the form of interviews; a stakeholder gathering; and a meeting with De Meevaart leaders to share and discuss findings and recommendations. CoNexus requested a total of six interviews with a representative slice of the organization (e.g. staff member, local newcomer/entrepreneur, volunteer, community member, local govt. member, key leadership member, or others as deemed important). All proprietary information, including interview transcripts, will remain confidential. No quotes shared in written or verbal feedback will be attributed to individuals.

Timeframe for activities:
- Interviews on Monday, 4 November, in the afternoon
- Stakeholder gathering on Wednesday, 6 November, in the morning
- Feedback meeting with key De Meevaart staff and volunteers on Thursday, 7 November, in the morning. De Meevaart conducted all outreach to interviewees and attendees of the stakeholder gathering and feedback meeting.

This report is part of a contracted agreement for CoNexus to provide a high-level summary of findings and recommendations to bolster De Meevaart's capacity to

continue its work once the contract has ended. All contributions from CoNexus are part of a pro bono engagement as part of the American University MSOD program. There were no fees for this work.

APPROACH AND METHODS

CoNexus used a process called action research to collaborate with De Meevaart to discover what dreams it could realize that would strengthen the organization's work and build its capacity by taking a small, significant step towards that dream. The action research cycle CoNexus followed began with a contracting meeting that resulted in the above contract, then moved into data collection, data analysis, a "value add" intervention, and a feedback meeting. For each step, CoNexus adopted an "appreciative stance" to its work with De Meevaart. This stance is built on the principles of appreciative inquiry, a theory used for organizational development (see Appendix).

Below is a description of each step of the engagement.

Contracting Meeting

CoNexus met with a leading volunteer at De Meevaart to determine what would be the most valuable piece of work we could do together. CoNexus facilitated a meeting that began with an assessment of De Meevaart's journey and dreams for the future. In the meeting, De Meevaart and CoNexus evaluated a small but courageous step towards that dream and how that dream might be pursued by De Meevaart after departure. We concluded with shared commitments to the conditions of success of the project, including needs for data collection.

Data Collection

While CoNexus began collecting observational data upon first arrival to De Meevaart, the majority of data came from eight interviews (two more than the initial contract) with members across De Meevaart's community. Each interview was one hour and included a small number of set questions as well as an improvisational approach that allowed interviewers to ask personalized follow-up questions that emerged from the stories and information provided. The interview protocol was designed to elicit stories about hopes

and dreams for the Indische Buurt community and views on De Meevaart's role in achieving them (See Appendix 4 for interview protocol).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of asking questions of the data received. CoNexus sought the data to understand De Meevaart's role in the Indische Buurt and the relationship between the organization's internal aspirations, culture, and processes; the hopes, issues, opportunities, and residents of the Indische Buurt; and the historic moment and socio-political context. We found that one core framework showed through this data: that the dynamics of the changing Indische Buurt neighborhood were reflected within De Meevaart. This framework also helped make meaning of the multiple conflicting metaphors about who De Meevaart is, ultimately leading to an understanding of De Meevaart at a choice point. A theory called Greiner's Growth Model was invoked to help CoNexus further understand the nature of the choice point De Meevaart faces. Essentially, as the residents of the neighborhood change, De Meevaart is in a moment in its life cycle in which it must decide who it is, who it serves, and how those choices might impact the neighborhood. Additional themes about the opportunities and strengths of De Meevaart also arose from the data (See "Findings" for a list of questions, themes, and metaphors).

Value-Add Intervention

The purpose of the "value-add" intervention was to focus attention and curiosity on the dynamics in the Indische Buurt that are also reflected in De Meevaart. We did this in an activity called "Mind map" in which participants named dynamics and themes present within Indische Buurt and visualized them on a map (See "Findings" for Mind Map). In a discussion afterwards, participants also explored opportunities in De Meevaart and Indische Buurt, committed to actions that would help De Meevaart move forward, and surfaced critical questions for De Meevaart to respond to in its search for it's most effective role in the Indische Buurt.

Feedback Meeting

The purpose of the feedback meeting was to present key findings from the entire action research cycle to De Meevaart, provide an opportunity for De Meevaart members to

interact with the findings, and determine a pathway forward. In order to do this, CoNexus led participants through two key activities, "Visual Explorer" and an activity in which participants were able to identify where they saw De Meevaart on Griener's Growth Model. From these activities, members of De Meevaart discussed the implications of their present choice point, "determining it's organizational identity in this moment." The meeting concluded with a surfacing of recommendations about how to go about determining organizational brand and also how De Meevaart might be even more effective in serving the Indische Buurt.

DATA FINDINGS

CoNexus used the data collected through environmental observation, interviews, and documents published by De Meevaart to get an understanding of the themes present in the current state and future dreams for both De Meevaart and Indische Buurt. Listed below, we share our findings.

Metaphors

We asked individual interviewees and participants of Wednesday's Value-Add Intervention for metaphors describing how they experienced De Meevaart and their deepest hopes for its future. Metaphors participants offered included:

- Living Room
- Fruit Salad
- Bee Hive
- Organized Chaos
- Ant Nest
- Way of Thinking
- Melting Pot
- Church under a Tree
- Building without Walls
- Birthplace of Ideas

Themes

CoNexus collected data with attention paid to overall themes. Listed below are themes that emerged from inquiries into De Meevaart's strengths:

- Gezelligheid
- Resources/Network
- Learning
- Opportunity of Gentrification
- Diversity
- Empathy
- Culture of Compassion/Hospitality/Respect

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- Participation
- Meeting Space/Building gives Power to Ideas
- Create What You Want to See
- Interaction Between Communities

- Facilitator
- Food/Connection

Mind Map

CoNexus conducted a Mind Mapping exercise during the Value-Add Intervention. From this, the major themes that emerged were identity, diversity, entrepreneurship, autonomy and independence. See Appendix 1 for a photo of the Mind Map.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CoNexus is aware that our role is to help build capacity for its clients so that they can continue to thrive beyond the length of the consulting engagement. Together, CoNexus and De Meevaart members created a list of recommendations to help De Meevaart determine its present and future role in helping the Indische Buurt address the opportunities and challenges of gentrification:

1. **To make the greatest impact on Indische Buurt, begin by concentrating focus on the internal questions of De Meevaart.** Much of the data collected reflected a focus on the neighborhood. The neighborhood and its changes are indeed reflective of what's happening inside De Meevaart. It follows that a shift of focus internally could help De Meevaart build its power. While De Meevaart can't make choices for the neighborhood, it can make choices about itself as an organization that will impact the neighborhood.

2. **Start where you are by defining the community that you currently serve.** If you were to say who your community is right now, who are they? Who does De Meevaart serve now? These folks are the most acutely aware of the potential of De Meevaart. How can they help you leverage your strengths as a way of moving forward into determining your future role in the community? Utilize your community to identify "who is De Meevaart?" and what it's current offerings are, and from there ask, "What does De Meevaart yearn to be?

3. Below is a list of the key questions that we heard in the data:

- What are De Meevaart's strengths it needs to bring forward?
- To whom is De Meevaart accountable?
- What is De Meevaart's role in helping the neighborhood feel whole?
- What might need to be let go to make space for new ways of being?
- What's your brand? Is this the brand you need to live out your purpose most powerfully/have the impact you want to have?
  - Brand: "A story that's always being told"- you have to be the author of that story and then align all the resources you have to being the teller of that story.
- To whom do you need to project your brand?
- What are the steps to answering these questions?

Begin by determining the steps necessary for finding answers to these questions. **Asking them with a collection of people in your community will help you determine a path forward at this moment in De Meevaart's life cycle.** Our recommendation is to explore these by collecting more data on these yourself.

4. **Developing a clear brand for De Meevaart will make it clear to people within and outside the organization who you are, what you do, and what you stand for.** Consider the concept of brand and how you might use stories to your advantage in discerning how you may wish to conduct your outreach with a greater sense of intentional authorship. What is the story you want people to tell about DM in this neighborhood? What's the invitation you wish to make?
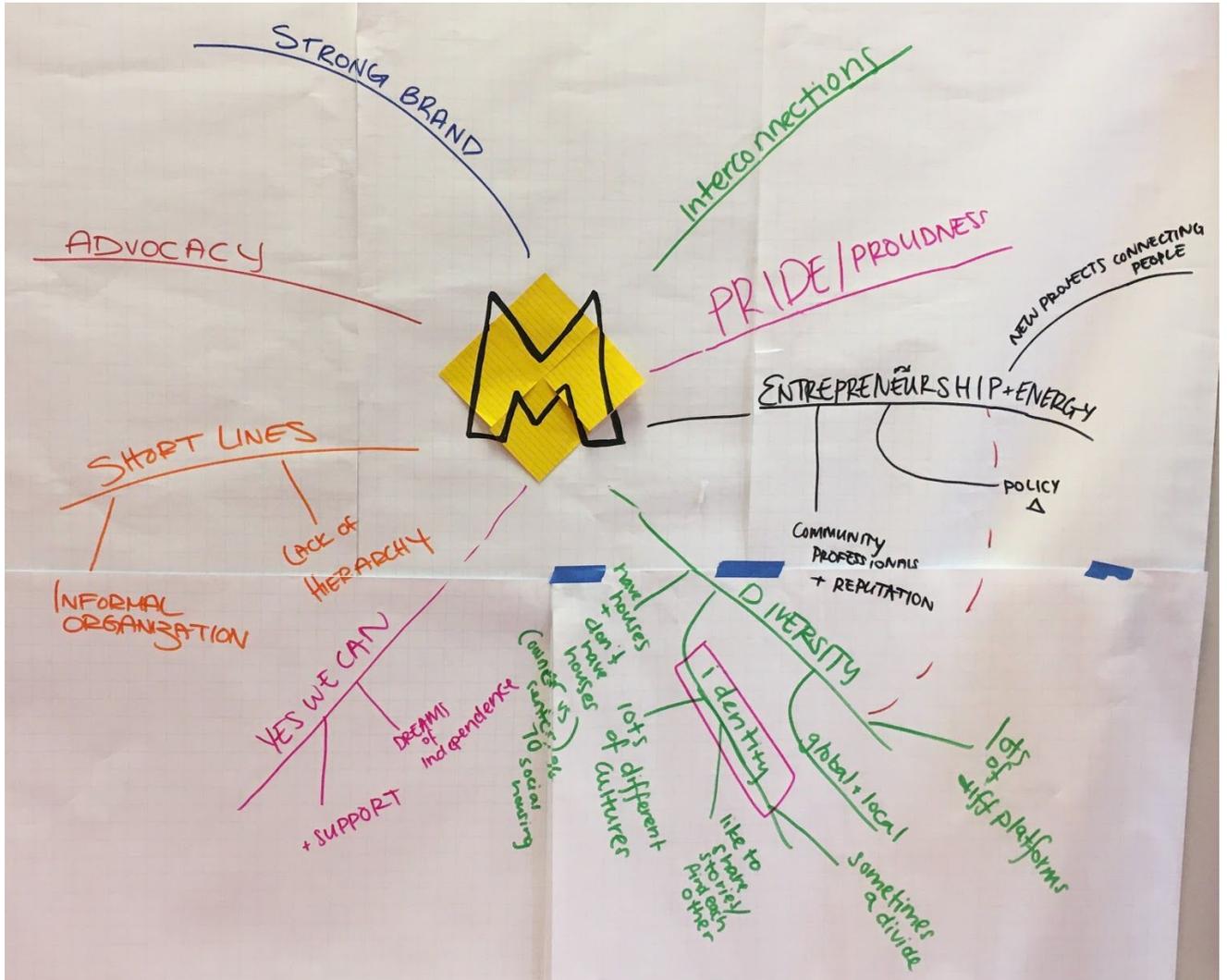
CONCLUSION

CoNexus and De Meevaart concluded with a commitment to next steps, including this report. Members of De Meevaart will be carrying this work forward through community conversations about identity, and CoNexus is grateful to have had the opportunity to learn from such a vibrant organization.
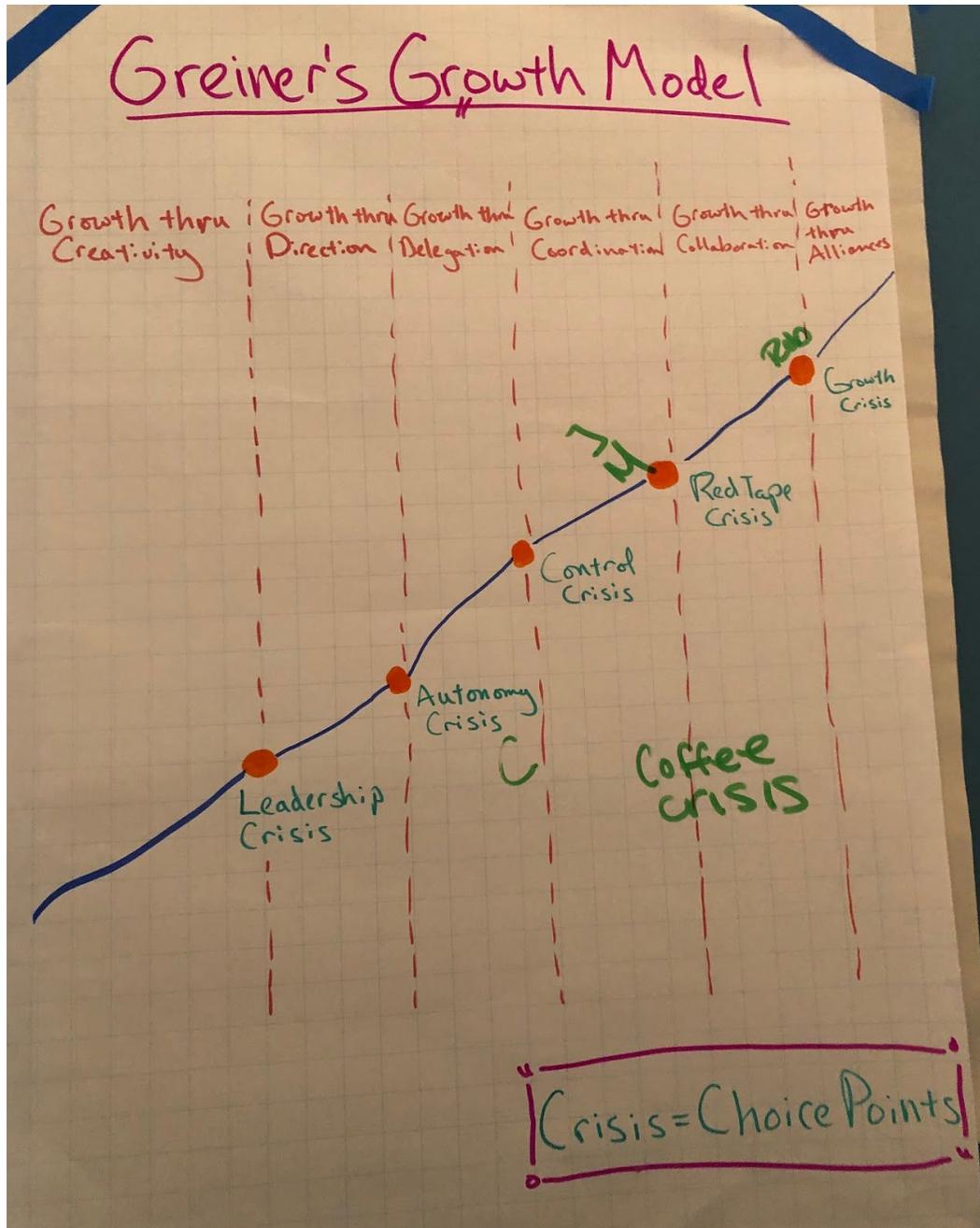
APPENDIX

Appendix I: Mind Map

Appendix II: Greiner's Growth Model

Appendix III: Visual Explorer

Description: Visual Explorer is a collection of various pictures. The goal is for participants to choose an image that answers a prompt, then describe why they chose that picture. As a facilitator you are seeking the meaning-making that participants assign to the images and recording the themes that emerge. This activity encourages collaborative conversation on difficult topics by using images as a proxy.

Preparation: Collect an assortment of pictures that are visually unrelated. Tip: have 5-10 more images than there are people participating. This will allow people to feel there are expansive choices and not feel a sense of scarcity at the start of the activity.

Instructions: Prepare a prompt question that highlights a curiosity you have that addresses the heart of a conflict. Set up the images at a table away from their usual working area. Instruct all participants to choose one image from the table in response to your prompt question. Have participants return to their seats. From their seats, ask each participant to share the image they chose and, as time permits, share why their image addresses your prompt question.

What typically follows is a group conversation processing the themes and ideas that were brought up as the images were discussed.

Goal: To encourage collaborative conversation on a topic of deep group conflict.

Appendix IV: Interview Protocol

Questions used during one-on-one interviews.

<div align="center">Interview Protocol</div>

Name:

Connection to De Meevaart:

How long have you been part of DM?

Connection to Indische Buurt:

How long have you been part of IB?

How much time do you have for this interview?

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with us. We're a team of students in a master's program in Washington, D.C. studying organization development. We're here this week to support De Meevaart in its work to help Indische Buurt become the best possible community for all of its residents. Today, we're going to ask you some questions about the potential you see for De Meevaart and Indische Buurt.

Because I value your time, if there are easy answers that can be found in any information you'll give me directly after this meeting (e.g. annual report), please indicate that in your response, and I'll follow up with you after the interview. I'm going to begin the recording now. Your direct responses will be kept confidential. Any feedback we provide with the information you provide will be anonymous, and we will only share general themes we hear from our interviewees.

Please ask me if you'd like a definition or rephrase of anything I'm asking. I'm going to turn on my recording device now.

- If there were a photograph of De Meevaart at its best, what would be in it?
  - **FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS:** How has De Meevaart specifically supported that X thing happening? What is it about De Meevaart's structure/ process/ system that's been able to make that happen?

- Tell me a story of when you felt at home in this community (in Indische Buurt)
  - Who helped you feel at home? What did they do to pull you in?

- We started with your image of De Meevaart at its best in 2019. What would the photograph look like in 2025?
  - **FOLLOW UP:** If that's the photo you desire in the future, what's the implication for De Meevaart's structure/ processes/ systems? What's Structure/ processes/systems would make that image possible?
  - "So we went on a water management tour on Sat. What struck us is that managing water is everyone's responsibility. What would the parallel of that be for something De Meevaart could do really well that would be important for everyone to do really well?

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Appendix V: Appreciative Principles

Appreciative Inquiry is an explorative stance CoNexus uses to maintain curiosity, see what is working well in the client system, identify why it works well, and inspire dreams for the future. Appreciative Inquiry is both a way of being and a way of doing. It seeks the best in people, affirms their strengths and successes, and explores ways to replicate those strengths into opportunities to add value to the improvement of a human system.

Appreciative Inquiry's 6 Core Principles

- Social Constructionist Principle: *Words create worlds*
  - What we believe to be real is reality. We create reality together with our words and thoughts.
- Poetic Principle: *Stories, metaphors, images*
  - Valuing storytelling inspires the best in people. Storytelling also has a powerful impact by invoking feelings, thoughts, facts and potentially deep meaning.
- Simultaneity Principle: *Change begins with the first question we ask*
  - Showing up is already an intervention. Expectations have an impact. Questions are never neutral; social systems move in the direction of the questions they most persistently and passionately discuss.
- Anticipatory Principle: *Mind compels the body to obey*
  - Our vision guides us. Vision is a picture of the future, which does not yet exist but which we consider to be better than the current reality, so it motivates us to pursue it. The creation of positive imagery on a collective basis reshapes the vision of the future.
- Positive Principle: *Heliotropic, directional*
  - Sustainable collective change requires a positive approach. Change that seeks light, joy, camaraderie, and excitement is contagious and inspires creativity.
- Wholeness Principle: *Who else? Whose voice?*
  - Embracing the system's complete potential expands possibility. It also honors the multitude of opinions, perceptions, knowledge, and experiences existing in the organization and creates a shared identity and direction for the future.

Appendix VI: Reflection Activity

A question I have …

An action I'll take leaving this workshop …

Something I learned …

An aha moment …