

Interview of Steadman Harrison

Visual Explorer® in Africa

By Chuck Palus

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Agenda

What has been the value of VE in Africa? What is different about VE in Africa vs VE elsewhere? What is universal?

When was the first time or two you used it in Africa? What did you learn?

What have been the impacts of VE in Africa? Specifics? In general?

What other stories or snippets stand out?

Who else has good VE in Africa stories?

Do the Western-ish images work?

How do you customize VE in Africa?

Steadman: Okay. I love that first question, what has been the value of Visual Explore in Africa? You followed up with some questions about is it specific to Africa, or is it universal? That was a great segue. Okay, so the most important thing that Visual Explorer has done is break the mental models of what an adult learning experience should be when they come to a training. In Africa at large, I learned in my very first year in 2005-2006 that you could walk into any hotel and find a half dozen to a dozen workshops. People called it workshop-itis. The NGOs were buying thousands and thousands of workshops from everybody that had a consultancy, time management, leadership 101, whatever those things are.

We were competing in this ocean of a market against all of this noise. People came to our workshops and didn't find a PowerPoint waiting for them, instead, found these images that were often times almost like breadcrumbs leading them into the classroom. I loved setting Visual Explore up before a program. I almost always set it up in such a

way that it was the first thing that the participants saw. I had to compete with hotel staff and cleanup crews. I think I've told you some of those stories before about things getting cleaned up before I was able to use them, and someone handing me this wonderful stack of images after I had taken lots of time to put them out in perfect order. Yeah, it broke the mental models, and people said, "Oh, this is not like a normal workshop. This is different." That was the most powerful effect. It broke the expectation set, and we were able to jumpstart workshops.

Chuck: Great. What was the mental model they came in with?

Steadman: The mental model they came in with was that they were going to get a three-ring binder and have a PowerPoint presentation from a subject matter expert. The idea that they were going to very quickly dive into a dialog with a very simple framing question like, "What is leadership?," or, "Where are you coming from?" on a flip chart, that was, yes, a shock to most people, and the fact that we lingered. We spent 45 minutes on this exercise where people were talking to each other rather than being talked to from the front of the room.

Chuck: Is that also a big mental model about who's talking to whom?

Steadman: I definitely think so, yeah. I think, again, maybe even more so in Africa, and also India and other parts of the world, people feel like they're paying to be talked to. So they come expecting wisdom to be imparted from the front of the room, and that this person who has a credential is somehow going to take what's in their head and get it out and put it into theirs so that they're better for it. There's a rote learning history that's there as well in Africa. Children are taught to memorize exactly what the professor says and be able to regurgitate that. That frame has carried over, and you get long lectures and long-winded speeches from facilitators that truly aren't facilitating and are trying to teach knowledge.

You said, "What is different about VE in Africa versus else where?" I think another value of Visual Explorer is that it cuts across language and culture barriers. I think that's universal, but you have to remember, especially in Africa, people are typically bi or trilingual at a minimum. They usually have their tribal language, which they learn first, which is their heart language, which they quickly move beyond, especially in writing. They have a regional language, which is second. They have a tribal language, then they learn Swahili or Amharic, which is the large regional language. Then thirdly, they learn English as the working language. You just have to think about how far removed English is from their heart language and from the things that they learned growing up. In a country like Ethiopia you have 88 tribes. Each of those have their own language, but they're also some of the most diverse cultures on the planet. You can read magazines or pick up books on Africa and see just how crazy-different those cultures are.

What Visual Explorer does is it quickly transcends language barriers and culture barriers. It brings something to the table that allows the person to speak from their own perspective, use their own words, and, often, revert to their own comfort zones in terms of languages, so they don't stay in English. If they're in a group that all speaks Swahili they defer to Swahili, or if they're in a group that all speaks Oromo they all drop

down to the local tribal language and they speak in Oromo. It's great that it frees people up. I've loved walking around rooms before where we might have 40 people in a training, and you can imagine six, seven tables, and you might have three or four languages being spoken simultaneously in the classroom in Africa.

Chuck: Do you ever have situations where people at the table don't have any languages in common, and they're using VE?

Steadman: I have not witnessed a place where there is no language in common. I have certainly seen people leveraging VE in a room where maybe two or three languages are spoken and people don't speak each other's languages. I think about going to Mozambique, and the majority of the room speaking Portuguese, a good group speaking English, a good group speaking French in one electoral training. People would still watch and attend to the VE being described in a language that they don't understand, and they're following it, so they're able to actually follow along.

As a facilitator, I feel like I have been able to bridge language gaps because I can watch a group debriefing Visual Explorer, say, in Hebrew or in Arabic or in Amharic, and I can chime-in with reflections in English and catch people off guard. The reason is because you've experienced the flow of the conversation enough, and you know that they're describing the image. I can chime in with something like, "You know? That's one of my favorite images. I love this about it." It feels like I am able to somehow understand exactly what they're speaking and saying. You get enough of the language in terms of details about leadership or other things that you start to feel like you can actually chime on multiple levels, and that's an interesting interplay.

Chuck: Very cool. One thing I think I'm hearing is that there's more channels for communication and empathy with Visual Explorer?

Steadman: Yeah, absolutely.

Chuck: I hear you being empathic with people even though you don't share a language, you share visual imagery.

Steadman: I think it's helped, now that you say that. I hadn't thought about cultures across generation divides. I remember we weren't really accustomed to working with youth. In some of our very first youth programs, you can imagine, we used Visual Explorer as the first go-to tool. Hearing young people talk about the way in which they saw leadership through the images that they chose and through the conversations that Visual Explorer allowed gave me a much deeper understanding of what it was that the next generation coming up understood and saw, how they saw hierarchy, how they saw, particularly, things direction, alignment, commitment, which we can come back to. Yeah, that empathy was certainly stirred up in talking to youth for the first time. I thought of myself as younger, and so suddenly I was hearing conversations and understanding things from a new perspective, and VE was the medium for that.

Chuck: I've been in these kinds of multicultural groups where language isn't shared as a first language, and one thing I often notice is that there's a lot of hesitancy and formality. Sometimes a few people tend to dominate. People will defer, people are insecure or they're shy because they don't speak very well. All these things, in my experience, sort of tend to flatten, and then what happens you get a lot of people that just don't participate, or they participate very little. Can you say, is that your experience, and does Visual Explorer help address that?

Steadman: Most certainly. I think in the African culture it's even a steeper hierarchy effect, so when you walk into a room eye contact defers to the person who's at the top of the org chart. If you have a minister, not in the religious sense, but minister of finance, everyone is looking visually at the minister of finance. Even as you come in and you sit down, people position themselves and stare at the person who is the most senior in the room. There is this expectation that the person who is facilitating will address that person first, linger in terms of their eye contact or conversation or dialog with that person, defer to them to answer a question either first or last, depending on the questions being posed.

Yeah, what happens with Visual Explorer, when you introduce it early in a program, is that that gets shattered, that ability to keep an eye on your senior leader, because you're in a small group you're not in a row. You're holding an image, you're speaking to the image, it's captivating. That melts away, and it sort of retrains the brain. Even as you come back to a next step in the exercise, people don't go back into that habit. They actually linger in this flatter organizational structure and space where they hear each other. They share their air time better.

Chuck: Nice. Yeah, so what about the Western style of the images? We've talked about this. In spite of our attempts to make them global, but they have this Westernized bias, and then you take these to Africa. I think a lot of us would assume that you're in danger of insulting people or confusing them. Tell me about that. Are the Westernized images a problem? Then, I'm also aware that you've chosen other images and customized VE for local context, so say something about that too.

Steadman: I think that the thing that we noticed early-on was when we brought the original Visual Explorer image deck to Africa, people gravitated towards imagery that they saw in their day-to-day world. You may remember the image of the donkey with its legs tied, that's actually something I had never seen before. I might use it as a Westerner because I can make all sort of connections to it, but people in Africa chose that because it's something that they had experienced. They chose an eagle with a fish in its hand because they've seen that. They weren't as interested in things that were outside of their own experience set. That stood out to us, and we wanted to inject more imagery that actually connected with the day-to-day lives of people in Africa.

I think we've done that with some of the more recent versions through CCL Labs. I was reflecting on this because you had put it as a question, "Do the Western images work?" I would say they work, but they work in odd ways, and I like the oddity. I think that it's actually fun as long as you don't allow it to diminish your respect for the user of the card or the image. As an example, there's one where you have a microscopic image of, I'm sure it's like a ... Oh, what's the bug, or dust mite? You see this dust mite blown up. I

remember hearing somebody say, "So this bug is hungry. She wants to grow bigger." They were describing, sort of empathizing with this bug and connecting it back to leadership in a way that I would have never imagined. Yet, it made sense. It actually found its structure, it found its place. It had its own rhyme and rhythm.

There was another image early-on. I think that it had a young guy with a blue sky behind him, and he's jumping with a skateboard. Someone said something, "That man is dropping from the sky without a parachute." There were things that puzzled them or presented curiosity or had some interesting way of interpreting it that I would have never seen or heard, but they made meaning of it. That, I think, was the powerful effect of it. It wasn't what I would expect to hear, but it served the purpose.

Chuck: I remember a story, I don't know if you told me, there's a picture of crayons in a box, and the woman was offering those as a stack of colored bowls?

Steadman: Right. Seeing them as something completely different then we would see them as just because we know what sharpened crayons look like, right?

Chuck: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Steadman: Or Fruit Loops, I remember people describing Fruit Loops as all kinds of things. It was clear to us that they were Fruit Loops in milk. They were never making the connection of Fruit Loops in milk.

Chuck: But that wasn't a barrier.

Steadman: Right. They still made meaning, and would even select the image, which surprised me.

Chuck: I'm just thinking it's amazing to compare that to other things we do in the classroom where we worry so much about a mistake or a misunderstanding or misspelled word, or now even the gender of our language is tricky, you know? Then so to compare it with this in which, like, "Oh, hey, you don't actually have to worry but all that. It works itself out."

Steadman: That's right.

Chuck: Amazing. [crosstalk 00:16:52]. Yeah, go ahead.

Steadman: It's interesting to me how people want to choose two and three and four images, and actually have to work through the restraint to only select one. Whereas in a Western context, some of our senior leaders struggle to find the one image. I think in the African context people struggled to only use one image. They want to pick up a half dozen.

Chuck: We often say that Visual Explorer has a projective aspect to it so that people are projecting their own meaning onto like a screen or a canvas. Really, it's not so much about the image, of course, it's about what it pulls out of people. Is that also the case in Africa?

Steadman: Yeah, maybe even more so. I hear people wanting to jump so fast to a story because the picture almost frames a story for them. They see a boat on water, a bigger boat in the distance, and they have this intricate narrative about what's going on with the small boat and the big boat and the people on them, and trying to slow them down to actually talk about what they see in the image. One is a sail boat, one is a steam boat. The ocean is raging, whatever those things are. They want to talk about the narrative, they want to talk about the story that immediately seems like it's been written. It seems to have taken shape and been there for a long time, and they're there just to interpret it for us. Slowing them down to actually look at the image is harder in the African context, I think, in many ways than in the Western context.

Chuck: Interesting. It's a very storytelling kind of world, I think. Is that so much different than the West? Is it accurate to say that there's something culturally different in which stories are more prominent in Africa than maybe in the West?

Steadman: I'm going to lean a little bit on some expertise here. I've certainly trained many more than 10,000 African friends, many more than 10,000 Western friends. There is definitely a difference in the readiness and availability of story to the African mind compared to the Western mind. We'll often ask people to select an image, and when they're constructing the meaning of it they're tying it to some experience that they've passed through. The filter is often, "I had a boss that was like this," or, "In my last job this happened, and I connect it to this." The African stories are rich and varied, and they don't feel like they have to be constrained to their own personal experience. There's a playfulness to it, and it's powerful.

It's a great thing that you get to experience someone almost creatively making something up. To my ear it might, at first, have sounded almost childish, but I think playful is the better understanding. They're not constrained by experiential limits or the things that we pass through. Yeah, our Western friends, Global North, sort of struggles to frame the big story, whereas the African struggles to actually press the story into the constraints of normal experience.

Chuck: Yeah, fits that in. The purpose of VE, we think, is to help people be understood by each other, and to create some meaning in common that wasn't otherwise there. I just want to press this because I was taking it for granted, but I want to check. Is that also what happens in Africa? Are people able to use these images to make themselves understood by each other, and then to create something in common that wasn't there before? I guess the alternative would be that somehow they're talking past each other, or these are just sort of decorations on sort of their everyday life that don't really matter. Does this actually get any work, I guess is what I'm saying?

Steadman: Yeah, it does get work done. I think maybe the method that you and I may know really well, I take it for granted that you know this, perhaps developed out of a need to give a little bit more structure. Let me just walk us through that real quickly and then explain what I mean by it. We use Visual Explorer like we have in classrooms in the West or in North America. We ask people the question, "What is effective leadership? Choose an image." We walk them through our star model so they have time to talk at a table group. Almost immediately following that, not universally, but nearly universally, in

other words, all of our facilitators and trainers know to link this next step. We teach direction, alignment, commitment very briefly, usually not using a Venn diagram. I know that CCL in the north, or Global North, prefers the Venn diagram version of DAC, but we teach it using the three-legged stool.

Then we get people up on their feet, and we have them map to direction, alignment, commitment as a three-legged stool. Initially, I have to say, I confess, one of the reasons I did this was to get my images back. A lot of my friends wanted to tuck their image into the materials and keep it, and I needed to be able to reuse the deck multiple times. Initially, I was thinking, "Well, this is a great way to have them map, but I also get my images back." Then the mapping process was where the meaning to direction, alignment, commitment really took place. I learned quickly that people could frame whatever their narrative was or whatever their story was somehow back to this idea of direction, vision, alignment, resources, bringing people together, sorry, and the goal orientation, getting the job done, getting across the finish line.

I would just say that that became universal. People are able to do that step, and say if it had to do with all three, or if it had to do with one particularly. That was a powerful step. That was really profound thing that we learned. You can imagine after tens of thousands of takes on that you learn about non-government organizations and where their strong leg is, weak leg is. You learn about government organizations, where their strong leg and weak legs are. You learn about private sector, corporate world, particularly in the context of Africa, where their strengths and weaknesses are. That's been a huge gift in terms of compiling a lot of data over a lot of years into to the facilitators' minds that repeat that exercise.

Chuck: Cool. I think, actually, a little bit of a dive into DAC might be appropriate here because you've tied it closely to VE. It's kind of a core move in the whole repertoire. I see maybe some synergy there because we like to think that DAC helps deconstruct leadership a bit for people because people have these preconceptions of what leadership is. Sometimes if you just use the word leader and leadership you get a stilted answer. We've found that if you talk instead about the outcomes, direction, alignment, and commitment, then they say, "Oh, that's what you mean." It puts them in a different space, as we like to say, it doesn't always have to come from the leader, so it opens the space more.

Then, of course, VE is something that opens the space more I believe, right? It's a little bit harder to get stuck in a stereotype of leadership if you're picking from these images that include food and animals and so forth. Could you just say a little bit about the DAC model in Africa, maybe in parallel to all this? Does it do those sort of things? Does it open it up in that way? Then, if you could just sort of include Visual Explorer in that because it sounds like you're actually using the two in tandem to reconstruct leadership for people, or help them construct if for themselves.

Steadman: Yeah. I mentioned at the very outset of this conversation the mental model shift that VE provides for people just coming to a classroom, breaks the mental model that they're going to be spoken to from the front of the room. I think, as well, I'm open about the fact that there's a mental model shift that we want to take place. I talked about it as front-of-the-mind, sort of back-of-the-mind. In other words, I talked about the fact that I

can take a microphone and put it in the face of anybody in an African market in a capital city, and what I'm going to hear is, if I ask the question, "What is leadership?" Politics, power and position, politics, power and position, those are going to be the front-of-mind mental models. I think if we went to Washington D.C. today and I said, "What is leadership?" to somebody out on the mall, as an example, they're going to think about politics, power and position as well. Even in the Global North, Western world I think that's true.

Then what Visual Explorer allows us to do is actually get at a deeper mental model, the outputs of effective leadership. When people come around common work, do we see things like direction, alignment and commitment, vision, getting people on the same page, getting across this finish line goal orientation? Those are unlocked by way of Visual Explorer. They have these deeper mental models. They don't think position, politics, power. They actually do think direction, alignment, commitment, and they're able to map to that. The other thing that is really powerful with this is when they map their image, which they can't forget. In other words, I've gone back, and I've asked people five and 10 years after a program, "Hey, you remember the program you came to. Do you remember that exercise Visual Explorer with the images? What was the image that you selected?" And five and 10 years later people can describe in vivid detail that image. Well, what they also remember is direction, alignment, commitment because they mapped to it.

There's this sense in which Visual Explorer provides for us, I think I said this yesterday, a neural glue. It makes it sticky in a way that you can't take it away from the individual. Once I've taught DAC, and I put it down in a big triangle on the floor, and people have mapped their image to it, if they map to all three they can see D, A and C, and they can see where they actually map to. If they said it was all about vision they can actually understand that three-legged stool as an output and visualize for the rest of their life direction, alignment and commitment. They hold on to it. It becomes sticky in a way that can't be taken away from them.

I think we've repeated that exercise, again, to probably more to half a million people, well over 500 thousand by now. I was talking to European Center for Electoral Support, and realizing that they've trained almost 200 thousand people with our direction, alignment and commitment and VE models without us. Well up over 750 thousand plus people now, likely, have used this same methodology and been having direction, alignment, commitment burned into their brain using VE as a tool.

Chuck: Mainly in Africa, Middle East?

Steadman: Yeah, predominately Africa.

Chuck: Predominately Africa, fascinating. What are the other questions I have there?

Steadman: You asked some questions like, "When was the first time that I used VE in Africa, and what did learn?" Some funny things. [inaudible 00:29:57] Uganda, we had 40 NGOs that showed up for a workshop with Patricia O'Connor, David Day, myself, my wife, Alissa. I

remember like it was a monsoon. Water was not only pouring down outside, but it was actually pouring down the inside walls of the classroom that we were in, so our flip charts were getting wet and falling off the walls. Visual Explorer had been placed on tables and, in some cases, on the floor. We were having to pick it up off the floor because it was getting wet. I remember just the difference with no power and realizing that we had to use flip charts, so it wasn't just that it was a good methodology for bookmarking, but a really powerful tool in a low-power environment. Just protecting Visual Explorer became a trick. I had all these waterlogged decks after that one experience.

I remember, and you've heard the story before, of going to [inaudible 00:31:02] in Kenya. It was probably the second training that I had ever delivered independently on my own, so very limited experience. I was really proud to say early in the classroom experience that our work proudly involves everybody and engages everybody equally. I had only just finished that statement, and a blind man walked into the room with a guide to sit him down. Visual Explorer was the first thing that I was going to go to. I had this gut-wrenching feeling that I was going to be excluding this man by using Visual Explorer.

I quickly shifted gears, and asked the person who was with him accompanying him to kindly describe images until he found the one that he wanted. Then, the group described that image in much more detail, and this man was actually in tears by the end of that exercise talking about the gift that it had presented him to have the opportunity to, not only select images, it was two images that he selected, and then have those described to him, something that he always wanted, but rarely had the opportunity to slow down and hear from other people.

Chuck: Very cool. Yeah, that's a great story, and whenever I hear you tell it there's always some nuance. That's great. We had written that up else where, but I'm going to recycle it into this. Yeah, Steadman, other stories ...

Steadman: ... have to try to do to avoid tools that I didn't have enough of. Visual Explorer, even if everybody had to choose one of the images that were there, worked for 120 people. I carried that out longer, and it was just a really powerful exercise. It worked well. Dave Altman said, "Go deliver this program to this group of NGOs in Addis Ababa. It'll build character. It'll build confidence." It really did. It built both character and confidence as a result. VE was my saving grace in that because I could scale it up very quickly.

Chuck: Other stories, colorful stories?

Steadman: One of the questions you asked was, "Who all has these stories?" I would say all of our African facilitators and practitioners have them. I think one of the most unusual stories that I've had was going to the Somali region of Afar, A-F-A-R. This was passing through to the east in Ethiopia. We had to go out where there actually were no roads. I had to drive for about a full day across rivers, and got a chance to have my first real off-roading trip. We were going to train a program called Leadership for Educators in the Afar region. This was a group of people who lived in tribes in and clans. They were pastoralists, so they were always on the move. They were coming together sort of in the

capital region for this program. I had Garrett with me, who was going to serve as translator. He spoke the local Somali dialect and language.

We got there, and I expected to be able to write-up flip charts and have him translate that into Afarian, or the Somali dialect that we were working in. We learned very quickly that they were completely illiterate. It's sort of heartbreaking. These were educators. These were teachers, but they were completely illiterate in that region. I had three days of training that I was supposed to deliver, and suddenly I'm realizing that nothing that I write on a flip chart is going to be understood.

I took a step back. I thought of all the stories that I could tell and all the experiential activities that I had sort of tucked away in the back of the truck and things like Visual Explorer that didn't have languages. I also used leadership metaphor explorer just without the tags being highlighted. The two visual tools were sort of significant day-one, day-three activities. I told about 20 stories, and it was a group of 25 people that were the recipients. It was a training the trainers. It was evaluated, and in the course of two weeks they had scaled that up to 2,800 people, and told those stories and, actually, retold their own narratives of Visual Explorer.

You can imagine without the picture being there people sitting and saying, "I chose this image, and this is what it looked like, and this was the meaning that it had. Then he chose this image, and this was the story that he told." They didn't even have the images to actually reflect back to, but they were telling the story of Visual Explorer, and telling the stories that we had told in narrative form to 2,800 people. You see how these things can overcome and unlock and reach people everywhere, and it gives a great deal of dignity to even people who don't have written language skills like you and I have.

Chuck: Wow, that's a great story. I love that. Other stories? I'm trying to think of the time you and I have done some stuff together.

Steadman: Yeah, I'm usually good with being primed. I think of a lot of storied, brother. I love places where Visual Explorer looked really unique and powerful in place. The first program we ever delivered in Israel, we rented-out, I didn't rent it out, but our host rented-out a museum. On the top of a building in Jaffa, the little town that's just south of Tel Aviv, we decorated the upper floor, which was open, and you could look out at the Mediterranean. It had, on exhibit, all kinds of sculpture and artwork. All of the different sizes of Visual Explorer that we have, so we had pocket-sized card decks, like the poker-sized card decks. We had postcard-sized decks, and then 8 1/2 by 11 decks. We just collaged those all over the rooftop of this building. You can sort of imagine the sunlight and the Mediterranean air and all this artwork and sculpture around, and the images themselves just sort of came alive in that environment.

I've had the unique ability to lay Visual Explorer out in some fun places. I remember a castle-like structure at Saint Andrews in Scotland. I think you've seen the pictures before. The lighting was just really unique. At the headmasters conference the hundred oldest schools came together, and we used Visual Explorer with the headmasters to discuss leadership and education. Yeah, just, again, lighting and unique spaces like that as a backdrop or the tool itself.

Maybe one of the most impressive things, and CCL struggled was it going to work, we had at ASTD myself and Jennifer Martineau, Lyndon Rago co-hosted a session. Ken Blanchard was in the room next door competing for people. We had almost 1,500 people show up for our session. It was this massive auditorium, and we had asked for round tables. We had round tables of 12. We had four sections. We had paper on the floor right down the middle, and as people came in we had them post comments along this time line. Then we had Visual Explorer, the leadership metaphor explorer, values explorer and social identity. We, basically, were able to serve 1,500 people, rotating them through those four in groups of like, I don't know what that was, about 400-plus. It was really remarkable to sort of be able to quickly describe the activity, and then see them sort of self-manage in a huge group. We learned from that what was possible.

I remember training 2,000 people in Gambela. The way we got the 2,000 people to come together was that we would give these women, who were sort of our recruiters, 30 bandanas all the same color. You can imagine a woman goes out with 30 yellow bandanas or 30 orange bandanas, red bandanas, blue bandanas. They recruit women in the community to come back with them. Everybody stays together because they have their colored bandanas in common. They move round a park where we have seven different stations, and Visual Explorer is one of those stations. It's laying out under the mango trees, and people are able to self-facilitate and walk through Visual Explorer coupled to direction, alignment, commitment.

I've gotten to see that tool used in scale in auditoriums where we just placed one image underneath a chair. We often say the image chooses you. If you don't like the image, trade up with somebody that is, perhaps, in your row, or there's a couple of extra images down at the end of the row if you want to trade them up. Just to watch an auditorium really come alive in rows where people aren't used to being able to talk, but suddenly they're seated on the back of the chairs, and they're turning around and forming their own clusters. The problem is pulling them back into subject matter expert mode where they're seated and attentive to the front of the room again. The volume goes up and the energy goes up on the room, and you transform a space where 2,000 people are seated. I've seen that multiple times. It starts to hit you that, wow, it's probably well over a million people that we've trained with these methodologies, and that's pretty heady.

Chuck: Amazing. What I'm hearing is some of the aesthetic qualities associated with this tool. It's not just that the images themselves are pretty pictures, but you're actually referring to the environment and that somehow the images resonate with the environment. It makes use of the environment, they take up space, requires browsing. You're almost setting up the environment as if it was a art museum or performance art, actually. It sounds like performance art. It's [crosstalk 00:42:51] it's visual.

Steadman: You seen first hand. When I say that I put them down like breadcrumbs, I've done that multiple times where I would put images in a row leading into a room. Somebody walks down a hallway, and they may have multiple choices of where to go, and the images capture their attention. You see people forming around them and talking about them. I think it was probably at a ILA meeting that you and I did that in Barcelona and caused a big stir. People wanted to put the images up, and we didn't even take credit for whose

they were. We just watched as people sort of self-managed themselves and figured out what to do with them.

Chuck: Do people ever create their own version of Visual Explorer or riff on it? Sometimes we've had people tear images out of magazines. We've had people draw, we've had people go to art museums. We've discovered you could put other things in the middle. You could sort of mimic some of the Visual Explorer stuff by using other objects and so forth. Anything like that?

Steadman: Oh, yeah. Object Explorer or Memento, I think we've use the frame and maybe done it a little differently, we got the form more powerful. Going into an art museum and just asking people to take an image with their phone is a great way. Actually, using phones and the power of everybody's got a camera with them, and asking people to take a picture from an outside walk, and then creating the same sort of meaning-making around that exercise is a great tool.

Chuck: You've done that in Africa?

Steadman: We've done that in Africa, yeah. We've done that in places like the UN halls, as an example, and German Development Fund where there was a lot of artwork on the GIZ hallways. A great story, I loved this one. I was at World Vision in Washington, D.C. I told people to go out and select an image and bring it back to the classroom for discussion. World Vision had a lot of beautiful images on their walls of children, water work, things from around the world that looked a lot like our Visual Explorer images. In fact, I have a picture of me holding a VE image up against a picture of an ox plowing a muddy field. It was almost the same image, but two different oxes, two different muddy fields. Well, two of my participants took pictures off of the walls of World Vision and brought them back to the classroom to their tables, and I loved it. I didn't argue with it at all, and it was great, it was powerful, and it fit well with the occasion.

Chuck: Beautiful. I'm remembering our experience with the African Union, which was a real treat for me to be there and be doing some of these things with you. I think all of the kind of things we're talking about were present. I remember in particular that there were a few of us facilitators. We were actually doing discovery work, so this was not like classroom, per se, but this was discovery for organizational change, which, maybe, is worth noting that we used the images that way. It was a little intimidating because there were so few of us and so many of them. We were stepping into the middle of something, and it's fraught with concern, and people would actually challenge us and our authority. I remember, then, being able to sort of make a left-hand turn and say, "Hey, okay, we're going to look at some imagery and talk about it." I remember it settled people down, it invited them in. It helped people laugh. It just diffused things. I felt, all of a sudden, part of the group, not bothering them.

Steadman: Yeah, I remember, actually, watching. You were facilitating, and it was probably one of the first of those exercises. We walked into a room, and people were quickly coming in and sitting in these, the rows with up, literally, like amphitheater style. They had microphones in front of them where they could press the button and speak, and they loved the power of the microphone. I was rapidly trying to push the microphone down

flat on the table so that people wouldn't use them, but some guy in the back was pressing his microphone and asking you questions. You were starting to get salt and peppered from all these different angles about why we were there, and where the African representation was, and why we weren't doing in French simulcast.

Chuck: Right.

Steadman: Yeah. That was tricky, but you're right, moving to the images quickly got them up on their feet, out of those desks, and broke that mental model of what they were going to experience and how they were supposed to behave.

Chuck: Yeah, right. That was very powerful. It was like we were sort of trapped into a mold of some kind, and we were momentarily sort of stuck. Yeah, I think now we do something different, and it got us out of that stuck place.

Steadman: One of the things that is worth maybe visiting real quickly before we close is just we've talked about Visual Explorer and the link to DAC, the framing question, "What is effective leadership." It might seem that that is the only way in which we use it. I would say it is predominately the way in which we use it, but I often use Visual Explorer in a variety of individual, group, organization and societal-level programs. I think you and I came up with the frame of "From here towards" at a program in Barcelona in a incubator space working with a lot entrepreneurs that had come together. We'll use tools like Visual Explorer to ask, "Where are you coming from? Where are you now? What's current state? What's future state?" Those three frames are often a key feature. What's the biggest challenge that a group is facing?

I love all the different framing questions and the way in which we can pull it out to help diffuse or even address the big elephant in the room. Sometimes there's a problem that people are having a hard time naming, and we can use it to name the problem. To talk about culture, dependent, independent, interdependent cultures, we've paired it up with that frequently. Just a lot of different ways in which it's been utilized and the framing questions have morphed to meet the need.