CHARTING DEMOCRACY

NAVIGATIONAL AIDS FOR SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZING

Knitting and Weaving Social Fabric:
The Art of Smart Network Building for Communities

"Give me one point of which I can be certain and I will draw you a map of the universe.. **- Permenides**

By Ed Democracy

We now live in a global village electronically interconnected via the internet & satellites. Networking is a common concept and everyone has some general idea of what it means. However, when it comes to translating one's general understanding of the concept of a network into a design, a plan, and, ultimately, a functional, sustainable, actual entity which facilitates communication between communities of people then our knowledge gets put to the test. Network weaving is an art. There is also a science of networking developing to complement that art. People have made network an art, no doubt, for all of human history. However, when science develops theories which translate into common practice, it can complement an art and make it more accessible to more people. There is truly amazing and beautiful work being done to do just that. This column will, hopefully, introduce you to the network of network weavers and knitters. On one point you can be certain, the better we, the people, can develop the art of network weaving, the more of our own innate, natural power can be stored locally for the benefit of ourselves, our families, and our communities.

In **"Building Sustainable Communities through Network Building"**, by Valdis Krebs and June Holley, you will find a very accessible, and, hopefully, useful guide to knitting and weaving networks. Valdis Krebs and June Holley are NOT ivory tower eggheads. They are interwoven in communities of practice applying the theories they have mastered and practicing their art. What follows is an excerpt from their paper:

Communities are built on connections. Improved connectivity is created through an iterative process of knowing the network and knitting the network. Improved connectivity starts with a map – knowing the complex human system you are embedded in. A network map shows the nodes and links in the network. Nodes can be people, groups or organizations. Links can show relationships, flows, or transactions. A network map is an excellent tool for visually tracking your ties and designing strategies to create new connections. Network maps are also excellent 'talking documents' – visual representations that support conversations about possibilities. Transformation that leads to healthy communities is the result of many collaborations among network members. Scientists describe this phenomenon – where local interactions lead to global patterns – as emergence. We can guide emergence by understanding, and catalyzing, connections. Instead of allowing networks to evolve without direction, successful individuals, groups and organizations have found that it pays to actively manage your network.

KNIT the Net
A vibrant community network is generally built in **4 phases,** each with it's own distinct topology. **1)** Scattered Fragments **2)** Single Hub-and-Spoke **3)** Multi-Hub Small-World Network **4)** Core/Periphery
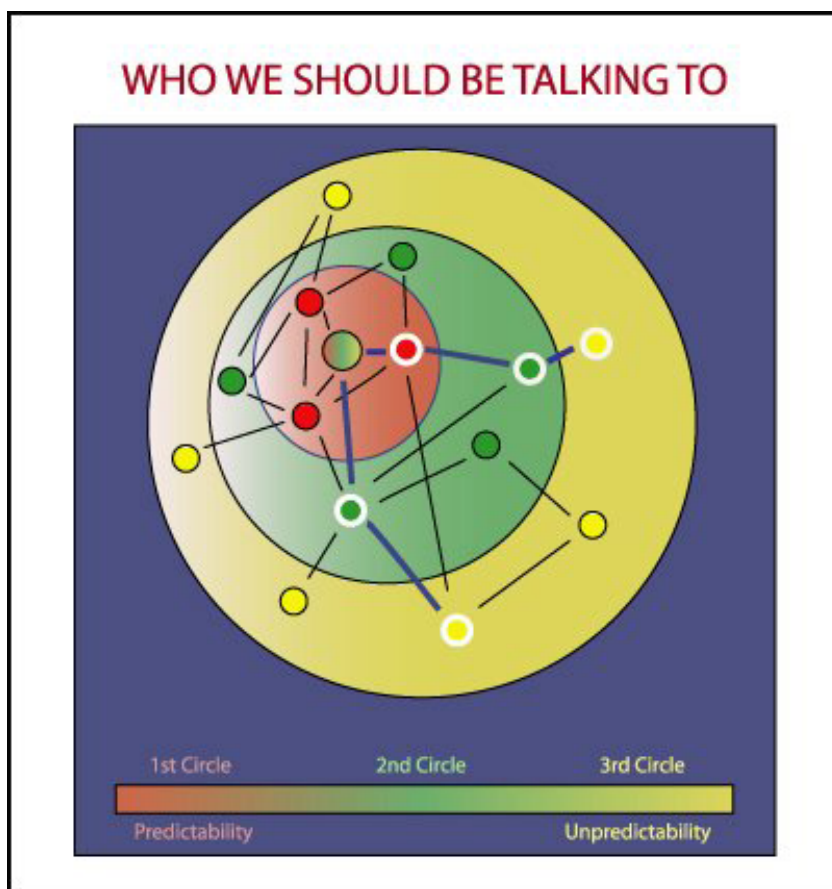
WEAVE the Net
Without active leaders who take responsibility for building a network, spontaneous connections between groups emerge very slowly, or not at all. We call this active leader a **network weaver**. Initially a network weaver forms relationships with each of the small clusters. During this phase a weaver is learning about each individual or small cluster – discovering what they know and what they need. There are **two parts** to network weaving. **One** is relationship building, particularly across traditional divides, so that people have access to innovation and important information. The **second** is learning how to facilitate collaborations for mutual benefit. Collaborations can vary from simple and short term— entrepreneurs purchasing supplies together—to complex and long-term—such as a major policy initiative or creation of a venture fund. This culture of collaboration creates a state of emergence, where the outcome—a healthy community—is more than the sum of the many collaborations. The local interactions create a global outcome that no one could accomplish alone.

Network weaving is not just "networking", nor schmoozing. Weaving brings people together for projects, initially small, so they can learn to collaborate. Through that collaboration they strengthen the community and increase the knowledge available in it. As we have seen **weaving a network requires two iterative and continuous steps: 1. Know the network** – take regular x-rays of your network and evaluate your progress. **2. Knit the network** – follow the four (4) phase network knitting process. All throughout this process network maps guide the way – they reveal what we know about the network and they uncover possible next steps for the weaver. Starting with a disconnected community, network builders can start weaving together the necessary skills and resources to build simple single hub networks. This will be followed by a more robust multi-hub network, concluding with a resilient core/periphery structure – maximized for learning and implementation.

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WHO WE SHOULD BE TALKING TO

1st Circle   2nd Circle   3rd Circle

Predictability   Unpredictability