

Chapter 11—Creating a Collaborative Network-an Evolution of Social Networking

Extracted from the book “Vision – We are Re-Creating the World: A resource manual – “tool-box” – for revitalization and empowerment through grass-roots efforts and environmental awareness.”

There is a Vision - IAmSharing

I began to looking at the phenomena of networking on the Internet in about 1999 for my PhD research. In fact the primary theory that I used is called “actor-network theory”. Some of the findings of that research are included in this essay. The main idea for I Am Sharing is to evolve the tools that we have been given to gain greater benefit for humanity. The following is the development of this idea for a “collaborative network.” The reason why I Am Sharing has been chosen is because the inspiration for this came just one month after my father passed. This may or may not be the actual name for the first network that we create, but for the purposes of this essay and discussion, this is the name I will use.

I have been slowly evolving ideas and discussion about the I Am Sharing network. It was first conceived in February 2007. I posted an Alpha website, which I have included a screenshot of. Then, sometime in 2008, I created a Ning network) (April 2010 Ning decided to stop free services so that network will likely go down. The following are some of the ideas and concepts that have been written, including specific ideas and “mock-ups” of the various pages.

Introduction

Posted on January 5, 2009 at the “alpha” version of I Am Sharing at Ning.

Dear Friends,

There is a vision for IAmSharing - it's a vision of Love and the One. To that end, we must bring people out of the confusion of thoughts, beliefs, fears, and dramas and traumas of the world. There is "Only Love" as John Prine sings in the beautiful song with the same title. The process is one of "Building Bridges".

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I Am Sharing – The Conceptual Foundation of Creating a Collaborative Network

The title of my PhD dissertation is "Nature Tourism in Cyberspace: an examination of its geography and character in the network".

My work, experiences and studies have given me insights into the potential of the Internet to help the "little guy" and the disenfranchised. I see there is an opportunity to, in a way, follow the Wal-Mart model to extend services to rural places, but instead of selling people a bunch of stuff, we can empower them to make their entrepreneurial dreams come true (education, personal empowerment, etc), and improve the quality of life in small communities and for the people we reach.

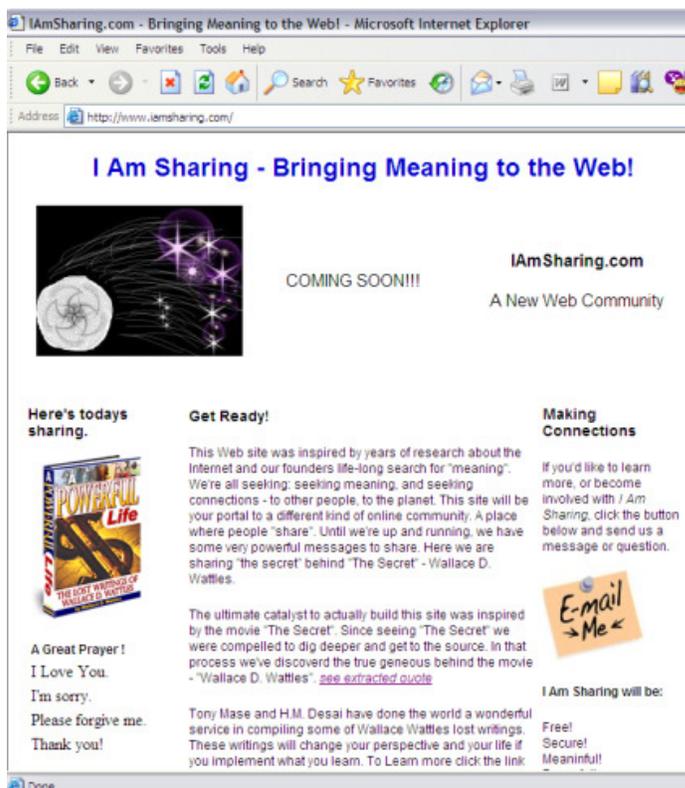


Figure C11-1: The sites "Coming Soon" notice was posted on May 29, 2007.

Our endeavor here is to capture a new audience that might have a desire to share a little bit more about themselves to a like minded community of people. The phenomena of

online communities (Facebook, Myspace, Orkut, Yahoo personals, True.com, Ecademy, etc.) are expanding, but the meaning or substance that they portray, in my opinion, is shallow.

David Peat, writing about Carl Jung’s theory of synchronicity suggests that “meaning” is the substance or the *bridge* between mind and matter – the glue of synchronicity. I believe “meaning” is truly at the core of what we are all searching for spiritually through our connections with people and the natural world. We accumulate “meaning” through the experiences of our lives.

My vision is to create a community of people who want to share their stories (successes?) with the world, or at least the community of like minded people within the I Am Sharing community. At the same time, and maybe more importantly, show their connections to people who have helped them accomplish what they have – and to tell their stories too. That is what I want to do.

My sister Laurie, whom only has footprints in the sands of the minds of our family was one of the most beautiful loving people I have ever known. The “tragedy” of her death has been instrumental in shaping who I am and what I am trying to accomplish. Also, my mother Marvel and my father Marvin have also shaped who I am and what I am doing. Of course, biologically they made me, but more importantly how they shaped me after I rediscovered my life at 21, but also how their passing has motivated me to become more than what I had imagined before.

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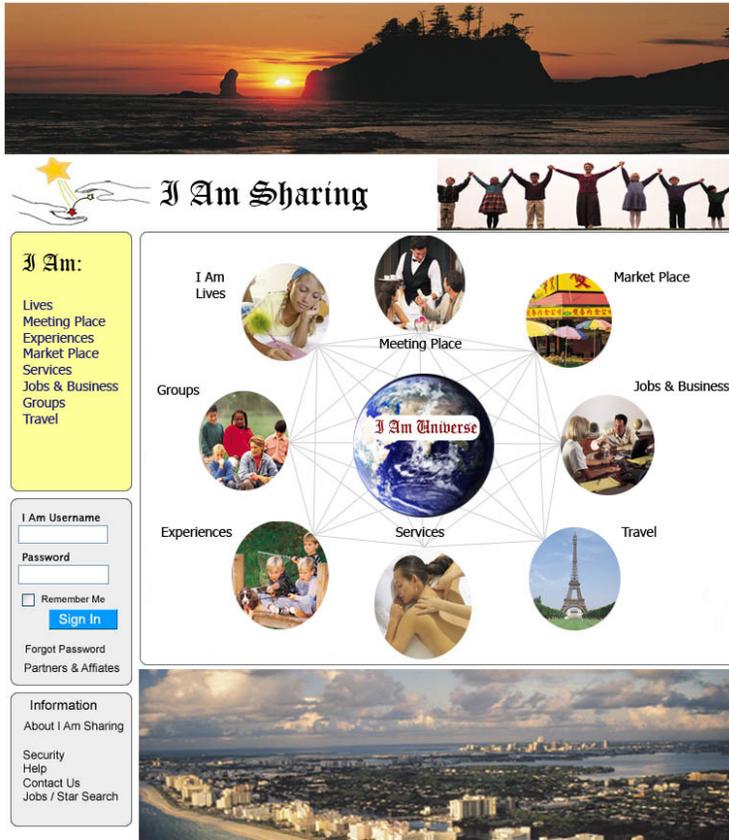


Figure C11-2: This is the first “Mock-up” for the main Web page created July 12, 2007.

My friends, mentors and heroes have also been instrumental in my journey. Finally, and maybe most importantly, my children. My motivation and passion to literally “change the world” came from the realization of their going through the age of enlightenment, or more accurately entering the nightmare of the world. I imagined the time when they would come to realize the current “realities” of the world and it made me profoundly sad. A message from somewhere then hit me – a spark of hope – that maybe I could change the world for them so they don’t have to face what I believed. Either way it will be good. If I change the world – FANTASTIC! If I don’t, I know that I died trying and I did the best that I could – either way I will have known that I at least did my part.

I am sure that every person has similar stories and desires. I want to create a place on the Internet where a community of people can do the same. And collectively we can become a “force to be reckoned with in the world”! The collective synergies may truly become a profound influence for good.

A number of other benefits can be realized. Individual's I Am Sharing pages can be their personal portal for showcasing their work, their business, etc. They can actually write their virtual biography. At some future date we can create the capabilities where they can publish their story in book form.

They can post their resumes, vitaes, portfolios, etc. so they only have one referral point when they want to showcase their work or apply for a job (currently I have found myself having to script long cumbersome emails each time I want to show someone what I have done). We can create a "templated" zone in the personal profile section where people could create several different resumes or presentations for these purposes. Additionally, through building a community or personal network inside of I Am Sharing they can build personal business referral lists to promote their businesses. This point should be brainstormed by our TEAM during our working session.

Some more discussion about the IAmSharing concept

The great "I AM" (Source, Allah, God, etc.) sharing through the creative intelligence of an evolving human experience - we are truly at a crossroads, with an opportunity to leave "digital footprints" of our experience and those who have touched us. Additionally, the second great "I AM" is you and me, which we have been taught (and many of us accepted) to think little of, otherwise we were not humble, or we were arrogant or conceited. I say poppycock. Read this quote from Wallace Wattles.

Excerpts from the compilation by Tony Mase & H.M. Desai © 2005

"That there is a powerful life; that it may be lived here; that it may be lived by any one, we are obliged to concede; and having conceded this we cannot fail to wish to live this life for rightly lived, it means health, wealth, power, and happiness."

- Wallace D. Wattles, "The Powerful Life"

"There are two kinds of people in the world, those who count and those who do not. The vast majority are of those who do not count. They are born; they grow to maturity; they eat, drink, sleep and work; they marry and are given in marriage; they laugh and are happy, and they are sick and miserable in turn; they die, and except as they leave behind them children to do as they have done it is as if they had never lived at all.

They are the children of circumstance, the creatures of environment. Their

lives are ordered for them by custom and habit; they think the thoughts and imitate the actions of those with whom they chance to be associated. They exercise no power beyond that which is common to their fellows; they leave not footprints on the sands of time. When the census is taken they are counted; but in so far as a really distinct individuality is concerned they do not count. It would answer as well to take their census in blocks of ten as one by one; or to reckon them by the hundred like sheep, for sheep have almost as much individuality as they. They may be more or less happy, more or less useful, more or less successful; but even though they gain wealth they do not count, for their riches do not give them a distinct personality."

{But hope prevails . . . }

"Over against these are the few who lead the Powerful Life. These are the real movers of things; they are known and felt. It is not that they are superior to the others in education or talent, for they are not; some of the most powerful people in the world show little of talent or genius and have none of what the world calls education, while some of the "educated" are ineffective. The power which makes people count is neither physical or mental; it is not conditional on strength of body or of mind. It is not a special gift; the effective ones are not so because they use a power which is denied to others, but because they use a power which others have but do not use."

- Wallace D. Wattles, "The Powerful Life"

This idea for I Am Sharing really began to become more clear when I did a "google" search for my sister Laurie (died May 30, 1985), my mother Marvel (Oct. 2004), and my father Marvin (Jan. 12, 2007). Except in the minds of their family and friends they didn't seem to exist. I felt compelled to change this.

Here were some ideas that I developed and have posted to attract people to I Am Sharing. These are just preliminary ideas.

What's Your Story?

We've all got one. So what's up? What are You proud of? Who are You proud of? Who helped You get here? What are You doing? What are You here to do? Where are you going?

So get busy - make the connections! Show the world what you've accomplished and who

helped bring you to this point. The Internet is not a play thing. It's a tool! It's already transformed the planet - but we've barely begun.

Just think about how the telephone transformed the world - simple voice communication, primarily 1 to 1 communication.

Now think about the Internet. Potentially, innumerable channels of communication open simultaneously. And what can we exchange: Voice, music, video, knowledge, data, information, Money! All at the touch of a button.

Whether we're willing to admit it or not each of us is the center of the Universe. Think about it - if you weren't here would anything exist? It's not so bad to admit. It's the Grand Paradox. At some point we all might contemplate how really small we are - disturbingly insignificant when one reflects on the infinite expanse of the Universe. And yet here we are. If You weren't here nothing would exist - at least for You - and also for Your world.

Put another way, if one views life from a religious perspective, then even though we are not significant in the whole scheme of God's (Source, or One) creation, we are significant enough that God made us (or whatever you believe – the creative intelligence underlying the totality of things). So, really we must be pretty important if God intended us to be here.

It all comes down to humility. We're not everything and we're not nothing. We're not too big, but we're not small either. We're as big as we believe we are. As put so eloquently by Lenny Kravitz “If you want it you’ve got it, you just got to believe – believe in yourself”.

And now, through the Internet we can show our influence on the World. Who have we touched? Who touches us? What we have done? What we have created? And maybe more importantly who and what is important to us?

I want to tell others stories together with mine. Because, ultimately the only reason that I am who I am and where I am is because of them. My parents, my family, my loves, my children, my friends, my mentors, my experiences, my beliefs and the pursuit of knowledge and truth. Some of my most profound connections to wonderful people have come about in just the last few months after the passing of my father and my viewing the movie *The Secret* – John R. Campbell (President Emeritus Oklahoma State University), Norman Borlaug (Nobel Peace Laureate 1970), Jamshid Gharaajedaghi (Author *Systems Thinking*). I asked myself, why am I afraid to contact people who I considered to be heros? My answer, I don't know, so I contacted them. Then I got to meet them.

All of these connections, loves, experiences, and my heroes are important and I want to tell their, and my story. And now I can. With the Power of the Greatest Communication tool that exists on the planet - the Internet.

So, don't be shy. Tell your story. If you don't want to share some parts of your life, don't. But surely there is something that you want to tell the world.

Then Make the Connections!

Section 2: History of the IAmSharing concept and more justification for its potential to revolutionize online “Social networking”

Historical development and evolution of the IAmSharing Collaborative Network Idea

The original regional development model was first created in 1997 for a Texas statewide initiative called the Texas Heritage Trail Program (THTP)

<http://www.thc.state.tx.us/heritagetourism/htprogram.shtml>). In 2006 the Heritage Trail Program received a U.S. Presidential award from President Bush.

Then in 2003, a small team of us developed the “pilot” TextBox project installing traveling information kiosks in seven Texas Department of Transportation Safety Rest Area

Facilities. Recognition from Texas State Comptroller for TextBox:

<http://www.window.state.tx.us/txinnovator/ti0402/>).

In 2004 the Dept. of Transportation launches the statewide wireless Internet at Safety Rest Areas. The contract was won by Coach Connect, and I was contracted, through my company AdventGX, Inc. to write the proposal that got Coach Connect the contract. Coach Connect was not paid any money and had to put 98 Internet systems across the state. This financial burden put the young company out of business.

In 2008 the project has now been given to Zoom Information Systems. I assisted them to win the contract. It is called the Wireless Internet Service and Equipment for TxDOT Safety Rest Areas and Travel Centers.

Other derivative projects launched based on these concepts

- Texas Education Vacation (Project of the Texas Travel Industry Association and Texas Education Agency www.texaseducationvacation.com)
- Education Central)Texas Engineering Extension, Texas A&M University www.ed-central.com)
- Far Flung Outdoor Center www.farflungoutdoorcenter.com (

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- Project 7—Van Horn, Texas (<http://www.project7.org/index.asp>, Project in Van Horn Texas, near the Blue Origin Space Port)

- Vestivo—(A subsidiary of AdventGX, that provides technology support of RV parks and resorts. <http://www.vestivo.com/>).

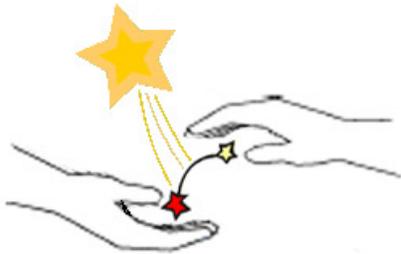
Samples of some news items when I was active with AdventGX, Inc.

<http://www.adventgx.com/news.asp?action=link&month=3&year=2005>

<http://www.adventgx.com/news.asp?action=link&month=8&year=2005>

I spoke at four conferences for the Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines

<http://www.adventgx.com/news.asp?action=link&month=4&year=2006#125> (Press release <http://www.primenewswire.com/newsroom/news.html?d=96422>)



I AM Sharing.com - Bringing Meaning to the Web!

First draft, July 29, 2007 – edited Sept. 2, 2008

Introduction

I realized some time back, and remembered the other day, what is missing in business and in the Web is “soul”, or “spirit”. For some reason we are afraid to show who we are. We start a business and “morph” ourselves into something other than our hopes and dreams. Corporations are the epitome of “lost soul-ness”. There is nothing human because the structure of the thing de-humanizes. I also realized that when we develop a Web site we create some artificial representation of ourselves. So there isn’t really much passion in what we present. What really makes us who we are is suppressed, is kept secret because we are afraid to show who we are.

I for some time have been living my life like an open book. I don’t care what people think of me (well maybe some, but I am trying to get over this). What I am I have to share

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because that is what is best in me: My loves, my passion, my fears, my frailties. My experience has shown me that those things, those secrets that I used to hide away in me are my greatest gifts. So, although we [the I Am Sharing team] will not really talk about this “up front”, I Am Sharing is a place to invite people to open up some, and let their real persons shine in the world. As we develop I Am Sharing, it will be subliminal because I don’t think the majority of people are ready for so much honesty, but I think secretly, most people are most interested in talking or sharing about themselves – and the people and things that they love.

I Am Sharing is also about creating a space on the Internet where we don’t just play games or waste time, (although we are also working on the I Am Sharing Game). It will be a place where people can come together, get access to some tools, and figure out how to collaborate and take their creative talents and make a difference in the World.

How will this be done you ask? I don’t know all the steps, just like the mountain climber doesn’t plan every hand and foothold to climb the mountain before he starts. He looks to the top of the mountain and says “I’m going to look down from the peak.” Then he begins the climb. And step by step, he makes his way to the top.

And this is about ‘Us’ or ‘We’ because this will be about a group of people sharing together their belief that together we can make a better world. We will tap into the power of the “Master-mind” that Napoleon Hill wrote about in Think and Grow Rich.

Functional Requirements for each of the “Areas” (See Figure C11-3 Main page “mock-up in the IAmSharing Network

IAmLives “profile” – every member has a basic profile (see “mock-up Figure ???)

- use a selection of templates with different designs
- use basic profile questionnaire in “staged” approach, capture information for each area depending on users desires to post materials
- more biographical – provide instructions on how to “tell their story”
- include other links to other networks (Facebook, Plaxo, Yahoo, Myspace, etc.)
- based on standard profile for simplicity purposes – use 3 columns
- encourages people to think about what they represent and their “real story”
- encourage links via the Web to real places, things, businesses, people, etc.
- designed in a way that could be turned into a virtual story book
- like Facebook use applications to introduce people but take them to more

substantive linkages

Meeting Place (see “mock-up” Figure C11-5)

- Personals
- Friendships
- Business
- Social projects
- Looking for someone
- Collaboration
- Bulletin Board
- Events

Marketplace

- Products
- Services (home, garden, auto, health, etc)
- Professional Services (writing, business, creative, legal, consulting, etc.)
- Artistic (music, painting, dance, writing, performance arts, creative arts, etc.)
- Featured Gallery

Jobs and business

- Focus on business connections and development
- Jobs, our postings and links to other services
- Feature adds – network members, businesses and services
- Post links to resources to help growing business
- Business planning
 - Entrepreneurial guides
 - Other members resources
- Feature: real estate, Craig’s List, Amazon, Google Ads

Creating a business

- capturing credit cards/paypal
- adding photos (products, services) and pricing
- capturing % for members and the Cooperative
- affiliates program revenue sharing

Making business associations

- geographical/regional

- complimentary businesses (e.g. bed and breakfast and guiding company)
- similar interest
- synchronicity

Groups & Clubs – Better tools for forming clubs

- how to find like minded people
- how to collaborate
- function similar – a hybrid between Facebook and Ecademy
- Develop online collaboration tools –

Discussion

Challenge: time, ease of access, productivity and communication

In order for IAmSharing to accomplish great things it will be necessary to create a platform that is efficient, supports effective time management, supports effective teaching and program development and one that is seamless and easy to use for all audiences, including: students, faculty, research staff and administrators. Additionally, this collaboration network needs to create a productive working environment and one that promotes communication.

Effective online collaboration: In order to achieve the highest quality educational experience, we have been working on learning tools that assist our students (user group(s)) to:

- find what they are looking for – easily!
- Provide access to content 24/7/365
- communicate efficiently and effectively (e.g. live, or at collaborators convenience)
- remotely work together
- not require a significant “learning curve” to utilize
- get access to the standard tools
- provide an engaging experience for network members

Our proposed approach will be to evolve and expand these existing collaboration networking capabilities. We propose the creation of a “collaboration network”. The emphasis of our approach will be to expand the utility of existing networks to provide ways for people to collaborate instead of just communicating (or social networking). We are aware that there are numerous tools that are available for effective coordination

(online learning environments). However, our observation is that these tools tend to be disparate and not combined to provide a complete collaboration solution.

We intend to utilize these existing capabilities but also to improve on them, initially by using the techniques outlined below. At the outset, an important realization is that are primary, first audiences are already “fluent” and totally adapted to an online environment. Thus, our ultimate audience is already well prepared to utilize the resources and platform (Internet) that we intend to use. They should also be instrumental in our efforts to extend our impacts and capabilities. Our primary aim is to improve collaboration, coordination and communication with an ultimate goal to substantiate the content and effectiveness without affecting usability.

- User feedback
- Network participants performance evaluation and testing
- multi-mode distance collaboration capabilities
- chat capabilities,
- video,
- document/presentation shared mark-up
- virtual environments (adapting gaming environments for more immersed user experiences)
- document sharing with ease of use as a focus (e.g. Googledocs, etc).
- team and project coordination tools (e.g. calendar, shared projects, etc.)

Preliminarily the IAmSharing will need to provide the capabilities to support:

- discussion boards, chat rooms, and other communication platforms
- tools supporting distance collaboration and project management
- potentially, virtual laboratories

As highlighted by the Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (Great Plains IDEA), one of the most significant challenges that will be faced by a collaborative network will be to coordinate and meld the relationships between the various institutions. Moxely and Maes stated emphatically that in their alliance is “an agreement on principles preceded agreement of policies”. Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1994) identified three fundamental aspects of business alliances that apply to higher education:

Successful alliances yield benefits for the partners and evolve progressively in their

possibilities.

Successful alliances involve collaboration (creating new value together) rather than mere exchange (getting something back for what you put in).

Successful alliances are supported by a dense web of interpersonal connections and internal infrastructures that enhance learning; they cannot be controlled by formal systems.

Travel and tourism

- Look at Expedia, Travelocity & Hotels.com (find travel site to partner with)
- Feature more “experiential” type stuff
- Google Earth
- Geographically and regionally organized
- Membership can help identify/recommend good experiences and providers
- Link up with Associations
- Bed & Breakfasts, America Outdoors, other affiliations
- Integrate with Wireless Internet and Community Network Project

Experiences – connect to AgeofExperientialism.com

- Members can share their stories
- Travel
- Transformative experiences
- Good News
- Announcements
- Projects that make a difference
- Our team identify things to feature. YouTube, Conferences, archiving
- Good causes fundraising
- Tell about someone they want to world to know about

Good News Feed

- Donate to IAmSharing
- 10% of all revenues goes to good causes – voted on by membership

Revenue Generation Potential – this area can be brainstormed

- Amazon
- Members pay for business presence

- Look at other Web sites that pay for referrals, and affiliates
- Online catalogue sales
- Distance learning, e-books, technical assistance
- Custom Web design
- Virtual tours

I believe there is significant earning potential to support small businesses, whatever they are selling especially arts, crafts, original works, etc. (e.g. <http://www.ethnicsupplies.co.uk/>). What the Network could bring to the small company would be helping them sell more of their products, more exposure, both via the internal network and through the increased presence of the Network to search engines, marketing development training, entrepreneurial training, etc. The Network shares a small portion of each sales.

Additionally, imagine the number of small artisans, musicians, tourism attractions, wineries, farmers markets with value-added products, etc., etc. that are struggling to get a few products online - doing a simple catalogue is not difficult to support for us, but for them it is a barrier to business growth, and one of their main "profit centers". It is also a great way to attract people to visit their businesses. We just have to make it easy for them. Not to mention a wealth of entrepreneurial training, that could become a part of a digital university. I already have lots of training material and have access to much more - basics could be for free, and advanced for fees, after we help them make money and have their attention.

I suspect Jeff Bezos is thinking of attracting small business and that is behind Amazon's "Free Web sites for everyone" (www.yola.com). It's the "teller machine" model, offer a service for free, get them dependent and addicted, then start hitting them up for money. But we won't do it that way because we will always bring them more value than they pay for. Synthasite is probably are trying to bring people so they support small businesses, then they will use Amazon's "affiliates" sales program model to share in the revenues.

Member Cooperative (see additional details describing a HCDC cooperative model based on supporting regionally reorganized rural places

- Vested members get "buy-in" they will get some designated portion of the "profit sharing".
- may need to be some hybridization from the traditional idea.

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- follow the Wal-mart model and serve geographically disadvantaged areas, but support a regional / community model
- Tourism
- Value-added agriculture
- Real estate
- Alternative Energy
- Quality of Life
- . Entrepreneurship
- Personal empowerment and transformation



Figure C11-3: Conceptual mock-up of I Am Sharing collaborative network “Home” page.

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Figure C11-4: Mock-up of I Am Sharing collaborative network "Member", or "I Am" page.

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Figure C11-5: Mock-up of I Am Sharing collaborative network “Meeting Place” page.

Section 3: The following section goes into more historical details and provides the genesis of the idea which is a direct result of my PhD research

Background - this is for the IAmSharing team to read to gain insights into the foundation of the concepts and inspiration for this endeavor - not to mention that this idea, and the search for the domain, came the first morning after watching the movie The Secret.

To the IAmSharing Cooperative - "the TEAM"

Ideas that came to me while doing research on the Internet for my Ph.D. dissertation – literally years of research and contemplation. The Internet is ever expanding. It is a mess. Our ability to access what we need or want is quite limited. In fact, if one tries to find out how big it actually is, there is no credible answer. However, the number of users has risen from 45 million in 1995 to over 1 billion in 2005.

It's like a huge "hay stack". Thus, if the tools for us to "find needles" are not improving at the same rate as the Internet's expansion, then the utility of the Internet is diminishing. However, if we identify particular user groups wants and desires and build user friendly tools to help them access those resources, and communicate with others like themselves, then we can actually convert diminishing utility to increasing utility, thus empowering our

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friends, customers and audiences to accomplish great things, or at least get something done that satisfies their needs.

The phone supports one to one communication - look how it changed the world.

The internet supports one to one, one to many (innumerable) communication, exchange of images, movies, dynamic content, knowledge, education, data, etc. etc. and money!

It will very easily, securely take money out of one person's pocket and put it into another's. In my humble opinion, at this point in our evolution, the Internet is like a box of blocks (as in a baby's toy).

The Internet, for the most part is not very user friendly. Each Web site people have to learn the navigation. People spend a lot of money for bad Web site design. One friend who is a long time user of E-Bay will tell you simply that - it's bad. In fact, they just went through a re-design - I suppose a multi-million dollar effort and it is worse, according to one of its most avid users.

We always need to keep our customers, our audiences capabilities and desires in mind.

USER-FRIENDLY!!! Easy to use!!! Get them what they want!!!

They are not our technology "monkeys" where we expect them to learn how to use our little gadgets to be able to use our service. We need to get into their minds, as best we can, and get them to want to join our community and use our services.

Background materials for the evolution of the IAmSharing concept.

Where do these ideas come from - Co-evolutionary Perspective and Actor-Network Theory. This discussion is an extract from my PhD dissertation. This is the literature review that discusses the understanding of the Internet, in a geospatial, or "cyberspace" scientific view (in the year 2000). The recommendations section of my dissertation also point to the creation of Web based services to support "online communities". This idea comes to fruition in a broader scale in I Am Sharing, as compared to what I was proposing for my dissertation - to service a nature tourism community.

Extracted from my literature review ----Nature Tourism in Cyberspace an Examination of its Geography and Character in the Network. Andrew N. Skadberg

Co-evolutionary Perspective

The co-evolutionary perspective suggests that there is a co-evolutionary process occurring
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between place-based and telemediated exchanges (Graham 1998). This perspective purports that there are complex articulations occurring between geographical spaces and places. Unlike the substitution and transcendence perspective, it recognizes that there is a communal aspect to human communications that cannot be simplified to the transfer of information and coordination of human activities (Graham 1998). These exchanges do not replace place-based worlds. Instead they embody complex global-local articulations between the “space of places” and the “space of flows” (Castells 1996).

The co-evolutionary perspective suggests that the production of material spaces interacts and evolves with the production of electronic networks and “spaces,” and exists in the same broad societal trends and social processes (Mosco 1996). This perspective notes that these new electronic realms created through new technologies produce complex interactions with geographical space and place. For example, the presence of nature tourism Web sites that intend to promote places represents the interaction of real material places and electronic spaces.

This perspective has arisen in the literature about telecommunications in cities and is further supported by the theoretical perspectives drawing on critical political economy (Graham 1998). Kirsch (1995) supports this alternative perspective and criticizes the use of overly simplistic metaphors that are commonly used to describe technology’s affects on space and time. He opposes simplistic terms like “global village” and “space time compression” and suggests they overlook the complex relationships “ . . . between capital, technology, and space, through which space is not shrinking but rather must be continually recast” (1995, 544). Questioning the idea of a shrinking world, Kirsch (1995, 545) suggests that technology does not simply annihilate space by reducing communication times, but instead facilitates the “ . . . production of new kinds of space.” In addition, there is an intimate relationship between technological development and society because when “ . . . technology is socially constructed, society is [also] in part technologically constructed” (Kirsch 1995, 445).

Although new information technologies allow greater flexibility in how businesses, tourists, and investors operate in space, the new technologies do not provide absolute mobility. “Time and space barriers become reconstituted and reformed within global geometries of flow, incorporation and exclusion” (Graham 1998, 175). Ferguson (1992, 79) further emphasizes this point, and states . . .

“mobility of commerce, organizations, information and people does not

make time and space irrelevant, rather, it highlights the extent to which these areas of experience have become more, not less, multilayered, interrelated, and complex.”

As Graham (1998, 174) suggests, new information technologies “. . . actually resonate with and are bound up in the active construction of space and place, rather than making it somehow redundant.” This co-evolutionary perspective is valuable because telecommunications networks have a history that goes back to the telegraph and the telephone. These historical examples provide a benchmark for understanding how new communications technologies and material places are in a “. . . state of recursive interaction” and that each shapes the other (Thrift 1996 as cited in Graham 1998, 174). Staple (1993) examined the complex interactions between global and local dynamics of both material places and electronic spaces. He suggests that the Internet is having a dual effect. It both compresses time and space barriers while at the same time it supports a fragmentation process at the local level. Instead of promoting a single cyberspace, the Internet creates a spatial realm that is resulting in a “. . . geographical explosion of place” (Staple 1993, 52).

The usefulness of the co-evolutionary perspective, as stated by Graham (1998, 174), is that “. . . it underlines the fact that materially constructed urban places and telecommunications networks stand in a state of recursive interaction, shaping each other in complex ways.” However, methodologically, this perspective has a major weakness in that it does not provide operational tools to conduct analysis.

Recombination Perspective: Actor-network Theory

Perhaps the more practical perspective, is the “recombination: actor-network theory.” It utilizes the actor-network theory of Callon (1986a; 1986b; 1991) and Latour (1993). This perspective views cyberspace as not one entity but rather a combination of many components. It consists of “. . . multiple, heterogeneous networks, within which telecommunications and information technologies become closely enrolled with human actors, and with other technologies, into systems of sociotechnical relations across space” (Graham 1998, 178). Thus, cyberspace needs to be examined as a “. . . fragmented, divided and contested multiplicity of heterogeneous infrastructures and actor-networks” (Graham 1998, 178).

Actor-network theory was initiated by Latour (1987; 1992a; 1992b; 1993) and Callon

(1986; 1991) in the field of social studies of the history of science and technology.

“An actor-network, then, is the act linked together with all of its influencing factors (which again are linked), producing a network” (Hanseth and Monteiro 1998, n.p.).

Actor-network theory is concerned with “. . . how decisions are made about what is known” (van House n.d., n.p.). According to actor-network theory, how people do things is affected by many interrelated factors, both technical and non-technical. These factors link together and construct a heterogeneous network (Hanseth and Monteiro 1998). The network not only consists of actors, but also of other entities (Hanseth and Monteiro 1998). Actors are “. . . entities that do things” (Latour 1992a, 241).

The term network is defined as “. . . group of unspecified relationships among entities of which the nature itself is undetermined” (Callon 1993, 263). Networks consist of a number of actors that have different possibilities to influence other members in the same network. The power of an actor depends on the position within the network. There is no structural difference between large and small actors, between a major institution or a single individual or even a thing (Latour 1992).

The intended product of the networks can be nature in form of scientific facts (Latour and Woolgar 1986; Latour 1987), or technology (Bijker 1994; Law and Callon 1992; Latour 1991), or society (Woolgar 1991). Actor-network theory assumes the indeterminacy of the actor. Neither the actor's size nor its psychological make-up nor the motivations behind its actions are predetermined (Callon 1986; 1991).

Latour (1993) attempts to transcend modernism and postmodernism’s dualism between subject and object, nature and society. Modernism and postmodernism explain knowledge and artifacts either by society (social constructionisms) or by nature (realism) (Miettinen 1997). According to Latour (1992b, 281), “. . . instead of being opposite causes of our knowledge, the two poles are a single consequence of a common practice that is now the single focus of our analysis. Society (or Subject, or Mind or Brain . . .) cannot be used to explain the practice of science, since both are results of the science and technology making.”

Following Latour, Miettinen (1997) believes that the significance of the concrete network of actors, instead of interrelationships between macro- and micro-phenomena, should be taken seriously into account.

Methodologically, one of the major approaches of actor-network theory is to follow the

actors (Latour 1991). This means not only to look at what they do, but also to be focused on what interests them.

Actor-network theory emphasizes the roles of non-human actors. It can be seen as a systematic way to bring out the non-human components that are often overlooked in accounts of scientific and technological achievements. With this theory, technology receives exactly the same explanatory status as human actors. The distinction between human and non-human actors is systematically removed. Actor-network theory considers that technical artifacts in practice play the same role as human actors (Hanseth and Monteiro 1998). However, one weakness of this theory is how to define the boundary of a network. Where does one network end and the next one begin? It seems that the question of how to limit the analysis can only be addressed on an empirical basis.

For this research the co-evolutionary perspective and the actor-network theory provided a valuable theoretical and conceptual framework for examining nature tourism on the Web. The presence of nature tourism Web sites represents the interaction of real material places and electronic spaces that is the focus of the co-evolutionary perspective. In addition, nature tourism on the Web represents a heterogeneous network of human and non-human actors, such as local communities, natural attractions, governmental policies, and the availability of technologies that support the production of virtual places in cyberspace.

Therefore the recombination perspective provided a theoretical basis for conducting an examination, while actor-network theory provided a more functional way to conduct the analysis of nature tourism in cyberspace. As identified by Latour and Callon, this research was conducted by following the "actors" (the nature tourism Internet Content Sponsors (ICSs)) in the "network" (the World Wide Web).

Introduction to the Conclusion of my dissertation

The IAmSharing Network can be seen as creating a community of users who are interested in providing any information that they like - however, the thing that sets us apart is the idea of "meaning" or "substance" in the content that is being provided. It is not just about making connections, the technology, or a play-thing. This can really be about people wanting to "tell their story", to expand their network, to advance their business. Or the other concept is "Virtual Auto-biographies". We do not have to think in a linear fashion any more, we can show the linkages of our network *live* - take people to their

connections, and important references.

The people in my dissertation research are very likely similar to the general population, so I think the results of the research can be similarly construed to represent people that we are trying to attract to IAmSharing.

Below are the conclusions of my dissertation which may give you some more insights - be glad that I am not asking you to read the whole document.

Excerpts from Conclusions

The nature tourism businesses on the Web are at different levels of maturity in the co-evolutionary process. The businesses are adapting and evolving both in how they use the Internet and how they try to be successful with their businesses. They are also learning how to use the Web as a communications medium and to collaborate or link with other businesses. What has been revealed in this research is that these businesses are at different levels of maturity in the co-evolutionary process. This maturity is expressed in three important ways, in relation to:

- (1) their businesses,
- (2) their familiarity and confidence in using the Web to help them be successful with their businesses, and
- (3) how they are affiliated with the nature tourism community(s) that appear to be evolving at a number of scales, including local, regional, and throughout the entire Internet.

.....

Several technical and non-technical components were identified that affect the performance of the nature tourism business actors (ICS, or Internet Content Sponsors) in the network of the nature tourism businesses on the Web. The results from the survey and the case studies revealed several important technical and non-technical components in the network that are important to the growth of the nature tourism businesses. The technical components are related to Web site development and general marketing.

The results of the case studies suggests that the nature tourism businesses owners are looking for assistance related to Web site development, including Web site design, Web marketing, and search engine ranking. The case studies also show that the ICS with the highest level of technical experience were the most confident with working within the network.

The assistance needed by these business owners/managers that are related to marketing include: (1) information about how to understand their target markets, (2) marketing “how-to’s”, and (3) how to develop collaborative relationships with other businesses, such as marketing cooperatives.

The non-technical aspects of this network were identified as important are (1) state policies and programs, (2) affiliations with Web-based communities, and (3) financial assistance.

In terms of geographical scale, there are five levels of networks.

The findings of this research suggest that there are at least five levels of networks that exist in this actor-network – nature tourism business owners across the U.S..

I. The actor and its immediate network. This is the lowest level network although its geographical representation may be extensive. This network is represented by the individual IChS, ICB, the real world community where the business exists, and the natural resources that are being utilized for providing the nature tourism activities, as well all of the related human and non-human factors in the network.

II. The second level networks are the Web-based communities that were identified by the survey and case study respondents. In most cases, these networks are related to the specific geographical region where these businesses are located. These businesses are using the Internet and the network as a means for communication and marketing.

III. The third level of network is associated with a larger scale of community/associations over the Internet and the programs that are being supported by the various states. This level is also associated with geographical regions most closely associated with individual states (e.g. the five states with nature tourism programs). This level may or may not be easily specifiable. In some cases, such as Hawaii and South Carolina there are fairly clear linkages between the businesses and a coordinating Web site. For Texas, however, there does not appear to be a single identifiable presence that ties the nature tourism businesses together. The Texas state-level network appears to be very loosely affiliated and is more difficult to identify definitively.

IV. A fourth level of community is created by individual ICS. This level of networks can have very broad geographic reach. This level appears to be quite similar to the second level networks because they are created by individual ICSs. The case studies revealed that the more mature business owners recognized another level of Internet community that

went beyond geographical boundaries. They suggested that the creation of links between themselves and many other businesses and organizations with a broad spectrum of affiliations was critically important to their businesses' success. These affiliations or Web-based communities may or may not be directly related to their nature tourism business. These affiliations could occur almost anywhere around the globe. Nonetheless, these virtual communities were defined to be a part of their business realm. These communities can be identified by the links from these businesses Web site and very likely have a very diverse and potentially large geographic scale.

V. The final level of network is that of the whole of nature tourism businesses on the Internet. This level of network is the most loosely defined. This is because it is in a state of continual change. New nature tourism businesses will continually be created, Web pages will be updated, new linkages will be added or dropped and the whole network is in a constant state of evolution.

That is the end of excerpts from the dissertation.

It is interesting to note that the findings actually point to the idea of "Six degrees of separation" which Kevin Bacon has taken some credit for proposing although there is no scientific proof that this idea is true. However, as you notice from my conclusions I identified 5 levels of network for nature tourism on the Internet. The 6th level would be the entire network which is ever expanding.

Thoughts on creating a Collaborative Network of Networks – and to form a working team for IAMSharing development

This is a message that was posted at a Ning Network site when it was announced that they would eliminate all free networks, April 15, 2010.

Dear Friends,

In all this clamor about the Ning changes, it may be a nudge from God to go to the next stage of development. I believe we should look at this as an opportunity, not as a tragedy. This is one of the great truths that I have found in every situation of my life, there is always a reverse pole, and both are necessary. And challenges usually present numerous opportunities.

I have about 5 free Ning networks, and because I can't afford to pay right now, I guess they will go away. The biggest is called I Am Sharing. I am also a member of 38 networks. Why? Most are actually all working for the same general goals, peace, harmony, awakening, a better world, etc.

I have spent a great deal of time and energy studying networking, in fact I wrote my PhD on it. And I have been working on ideas and strategies to bring people together to catalyze their collective energies. I personally think Facebook is a good thing, but I believe there is a real opportunity to evolve what we do with these technologies, beyond just "socializing". Below is a part of a document I wrote over a year ago.

This is only the introduction to a significantly larger document that actually describes the creation of what I call a "collaborative network". Please bear in mind, that what I am posting here is just a "rough draft", and not terribly refined.

I just share this to point to the fact that this change with Ning may be a blessing instead of a bad thing. It just depends on what we do with it. **Are we up to the challenge?**

By Andy Skadberg

Jan. 6, 2009

This paper is to stimulate discussion about creating a network of networks. THIS PAPER IS ONLY FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES!

Additionally, the end of the document aims to organize a small group of people to refine and develop the creation and foundations of I Am Sharing. The purpose is to further develop the idea and strategy. It will accomplish other goals a) to justify, and legitimize the need for something like I Am Sharing, and 2) to start to develop a systematic process for organizing ideas and a working team.

The fragmentation of due to the expanding of "social networking" - is it like "Humpty Dumpty"?

I am finding myself involved in many "networks" and am wondering about ways to combine our energies rather than have them stay in little "thimbles".

I would love to have other folks join in a dialogue - **how can we bring the collective energies to a group of these "awakening" networks to create a synergistic network of networks?** We are not competing, we are each complimentary to a larger purpose.

I Am Sharing a "collaborative network" intends to *help like minded people come together,*

SHARE, and also collaborate on projects, here in cyberspace, and then take them to world.

Now, in a competitive mind-set, people might think that I Am Sharing, iPeace, Architects of a New Dawn, and all the other social networks are competing. We are not (for more creative vs competitive see The Science of Getting Rich – Wallace D. Wattles).

I challenge us to discover how a group of networks might join together and create a "creative", synergistic network of networks to empower each to accomplish their visions. Each could stay focused on there specific piece of the puzzle (or ingredient into the pie) and we could all get a much larger piece of pie and accomplish our goals much more effectively and efficiently. I don't know all the steps for this to happen, but I do know, with the desire and vision to reach our independent goals, combined with our common, collective vision (peace and a better world) we will be shown the way - step by step.

The Collective Impact of these Networks

In the last year I have been invited to at least a dozen networks. This doesn't highlight the further fragmentation into "Groups" inside of all of these networks that are splitting people into, for the most part, uncoordinated specializations.

I can't help but imagine how much collective energy, and resources, are getting lost between these networks (and Groups, not to mention all of the other Web sites that have their own little networks).

The other day a friend and I looked at the electrical power network here in Colombia. It appears that every time they need more electricity they just run a new wire. The important point about this is that most of the energy is lost to resistance.

As it turns out this might be a metaphor for what is happening on the Web.

Other questions and thoughts

As a member of several networks, how do I manage my time, show my support and contribute in a way that demonstrates my support for their cause? - to demonstrate that I see their views as being crucial ingredients in the soup (or pieces in the puzzle)?

I would appreciate if others would tell me whether or not they experience the same dilemma as I am identifying with all of the causes, but not having enough time to adequately support them.

Another problem is that each network has its own unique language/jargon. I find myself, mentally, spread pretty thin as I try to understand to participate intelligently. I have to learn their specialized language. Unless I really identify with their cause I will not do this, *and I am a motivated networker.*

We don't want to squelch creativity or people's ability to be free with language/art/what they want to do, but we want to encourage ways to collaborate more freely.

"Can't see the forest for the trees". The combined power of these networks, and the people behind them, will be much more impactful if they work together, but alone they may have limited impact.

Creating a visual metaphor to deal with the chaos and complexity

I do believe that all of these networks serve one purpose, ultimately.

Metaphors can be a useful way to create a mental picture for understanding complex ideas. A possible starting place that I have come up with is to use a 3D Mandala (or spiral, lotus) to visualize the synergistic network of networks. The reader can find a 2D mandala in the Reverence for Life case study. The various "petals" of the flower could be the various networks and their unique foci, and the central column could be the core purpose (love, the spirit of doing good, making a better world).

I am open to other ideas!!!!

The other image is the puzzle diagram that I have been using, but I don't think it contains the same power. However, the points about holding the pieces of the puzzle together are important, at least in my experience from an organizational standpoint.

The next stage of this process would be to identify the ways to coordinate and share across networks – what are the common themes, or language that everyone can understand and identify with.

Important issues can possibly set a basis for “ground rules” –

- Vision, Execution, Roles & Responsibilities, Rewards
- Communication (internal & external)
- Outputs, Harmony (conflict resolution)
- Process management, Progress evaluation

Actor-network theory:

Might provide a methodology for tracking the activities and actions and formation of the network, or networks.

Network Collaboration – Pods & Modules (diagram below)

Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing
Business Architecture. Jamshid Gharajedaghi.

Hidden Connections: Fritoj Capra

“And true change has only come from small groups of thoughtful, committed,
citizens” (Mead, neo.org)

Modeling or imaging the character of the network

If we use the capabilities of the Internet for tracking the movement and flows of
connections and transactions through the network we can see what it looks like as it
grows and envision what it is metaphorically.

A Challenge:

Not everyone is as passionate, and patient, about figuring out how to contribute – but
they have something to share. However, too many invitations, and bad experiences,
wasted time, etc. will burn them out. How do we make it easy and effective for them to
find their place?

IAmSharing - Some background materials, Systems Planning approach and its theoretical toundation

From “What is IAmSharing Really About?” posted at IAmSharing.

IAmSharing is open to people sharing whatever they want. But, another important aspect
is about using our time efficiently and effectively. I believe "social networking" is great,
however, my time is also extremely valuable. So the intent of I Am Sharing is to create a
place that compliments social networking, but also leads to the accomplishment of
greater things, as efficiently and effectively as possible. To that end, it is our intention to
bring together people who are interested in more than just socializing. People who believe
we can overcome the challenges we see in the world, if we come together.

Although I would love to see the membership of I Am Sharing be in the millions, it is not
the point. Also, I don't think the key is about seeing how many friends I can get. It is more
about the quality of my relations, not the quantity.

Anything that I have ever accomplished has usually been as a result of collaboration in a small group. Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon.com is purported to have a philosophy that is very powerful. A quote attributed to him is "if it takes more than two pizzas to feed a team, then the team is too big."

Now, Andrew Carnegie had a "master-mind" of fifty (for more on the master mind see "Think and grow rich", by Napoleon Hill). My vision for I Am Sharing is to create a place that facilitates the creation of empowered groups (or master-minds) of people who have a cause they want to accomplish.

To facilitate this we will be providing information, guidance, tools (online), success stories and of course the networking tools to assist people who want to make a difference in the world.

We are not competing with other "social networks" nor are there any conflicts. All in the universe is complimentary and collaborative, the challenge is to see this in our own "human" perceptions.

*An overview of systems thinking adapted from Anders Vesterberg
(<http://www.vesterberg.se/systems-thinking/>)*

What is Systems Thinking? Systems thinking comes from a rigorous scientific discipline called General Systems Theory, which was developed in the 1920s. The theory centered on the natural world, the living systems therein and the common laws governing those systems. Its major premise was that such laws, once known, could serve as a conceptual framework for understanding the relationships within any system, and for handling any problems or changes encompassed by that system. Consequently, the theory emphasized the value of viewing a system as a whole, of gaining a perspective on the entire "entity", before examining its parts.

The framework is based on the belief that the component parts of a system will act differently when the systems relationships are removed and it is viewed in isolation. The only way to fully understand why a problem or element occurs and persists is to understand the part in relation to the whole.

*A possible model for refining an understanding to create a collaborative Network of Networks – **only for conceptual purposes, we do not want to get lost in this process***

From Gharajedaghi, 2006 Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture.

Derived from our experience and observations of existing social network evolution we can develop a clearer understanding of how to develop a more *member benefits based* model for networking. We can process this information via systems analysis, iteratively moving through “function”, “structure” and “process” within a “context”, which was the process that Wolfram (2002) suggests is at the core of all complex natural phenomena that develop effortlessly (Gharajedaghi, 2006).

We propose that this same perspective—a new conceptual framework in which we focus on the dynamic and accelerating nature of the social networking phenomena.

The value of this iterative process allows for constant evaluation and modification, establishing “validity of assumptions, then compatibilities and/or conflicts are identified and dissolved” (Gharajedaghi, 2006). Re-conceptualization of variables is necessary when conflicts are dissolved. This iterative process results ultimately in an integrated design and process that can also evolve as we seek to develop more effective, efficient and collaborative networking.

A set of interdependent variables forms a circular relationship. Each variable co-produces the others and in turn is co-produced by the others. Which one comes first is irrelevant because none can exist without the others. They must happen at the same time. Failure to see the significance of these interdependencies is to leave out the most important aspect of the challenge of seeing the whole. Therefore, to handle them holistically requires understanding each variable in relation to the others in the set at the same time. This demands an iterative inquiry.

Iteration is the key for understanding complexity. Stephen Wolfram (2002) demonstrates how an iterative process of applying simple rules at the core of nature's mysterious ability to produce complex phenomena so effortlessly.

Iteration of structure, function, and process in a given context would examine assumptions and properties of each element in its own right, then in relationship with other members of the set. Subsequent iterations would establish validity of assumptions, then compatibilities and/or conflicts are identified and dissolved. Dissolving conflicts may require re-conceptualization of the variables involved. Finally, successive iterations will produce an integrated design.

For example, to appreciate the human heart holistically, we must understand its function, structure, and process. Starting with the function, we simply note that the output of the

system is circulation of the blood. Therefore its function must be that of a pump. Structure of the pump consists of four muscular chambers and a set of valves, arteries, and veins. And the process, which must explain how the structure produces the function uses alternative contractions and expansions of the chambers to push the blood through arteries and then pull them back into the chambers through the veins by suction.

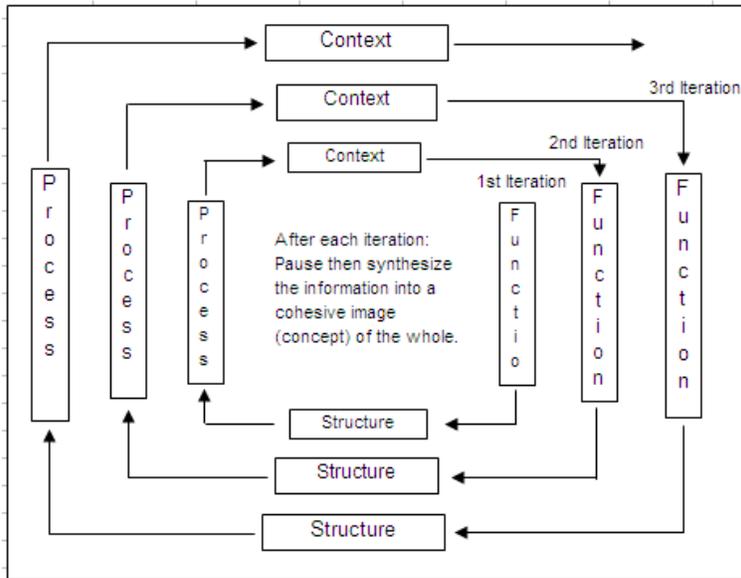


Diagram C11-1: Function, structure, process within a context iterative process—adapted from Gharajedaghi, 2006.

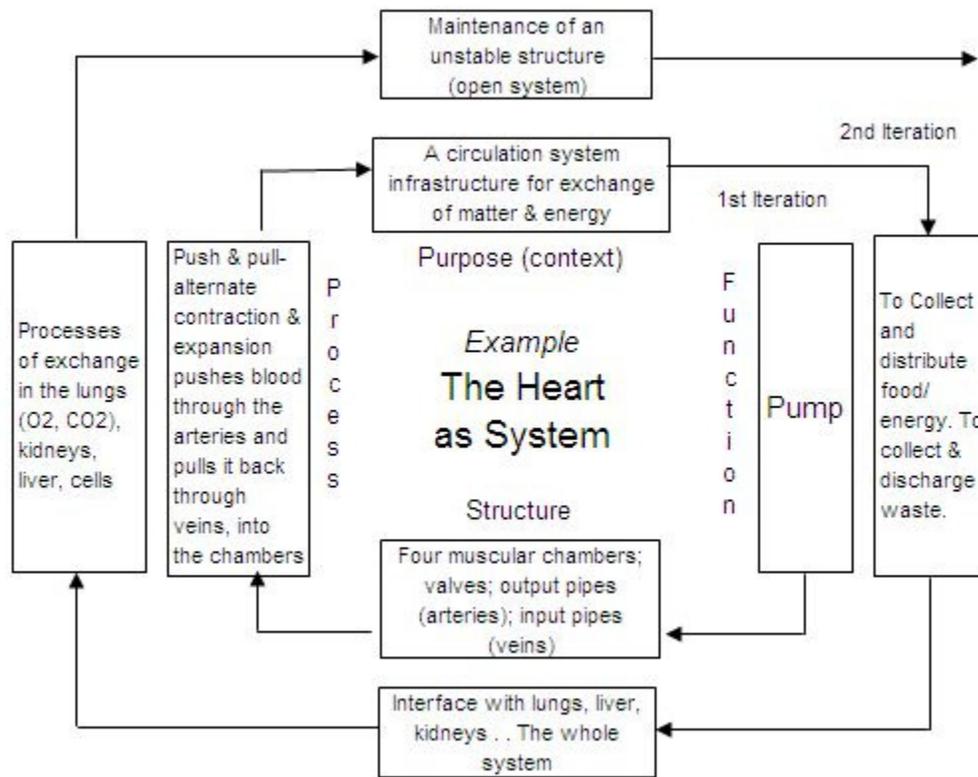


Diagram C11-2: Function, structure, process within a context iterative process— for understanding the heart as a system, adapted from Gharajedaghi, 2006.

Now we need to pause to relate our understanding of function, structure, and process together to appreciate why the heart does what it does. By placing the heart in the context of the larger system of which it is a part, we might conclude that the heart is at the core of a circulatory system. The purpose of the circulatory system is to exchange matter and energy between the body and its environment. This closely links the heart with Autopoiesis, the self-generation of living systems.

The principle of iterative inquiry is reinforced by Singerian experimentalism: “There is no fundamental truth: realities first have to be assumed in order to be learned.” (Singer, 1959), Successive iterations would yield a greater understanding and more closely approximate the nature of the whole. These iterations, then, are like a reverse zoom lens through which we see the system we are trying to understand as a working part of successively bigger and bigger pictures. We stop enlarging the view when we no longer gain useful insights as we go around.

The First partial “Tentative” Iterative Schema for IAmSharing

DRAFT - This document will be continually updated and changed, it is a work in progress.
 For more information for implementing these strategies contact Andrew Skadberg

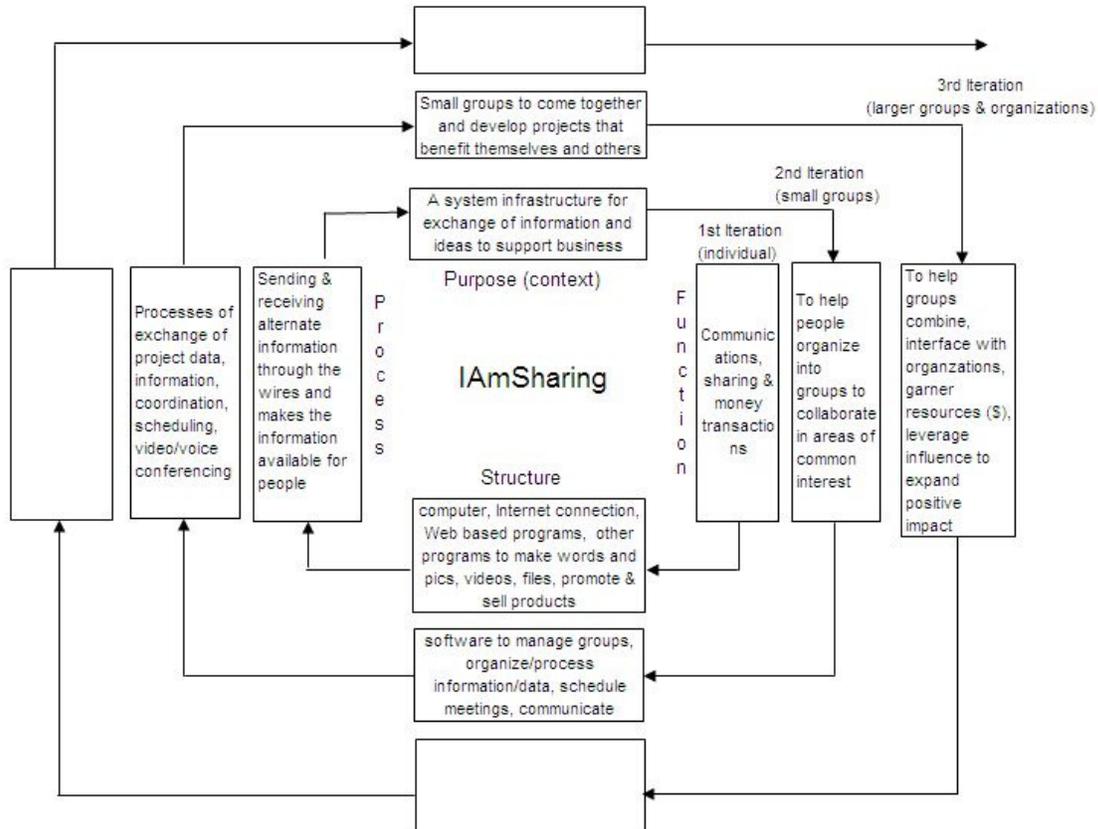


Diagram C11-3: Function, structure, process within a context iterative process— for creating the I Am Sharing collaborative network.

Diagram provides an tentative example of how we can use this systems approach to conceptualize the functions, structure, process and purpose of the collaborative network. This is only an example as this would need to be accomplished with the I Am Sharing master mind group.