



ATTRACTORS
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Every month **Attractors** shares tips and tools from human systems dynamics. In this month's edition, Glenda Eoyang reflects on
NETWORKS

Networks are becoming the skyscrapers of the 21st century. Just like those breathtaking buildings of the past, networks use state-of-the-art resources and design principles to meet the needs of a growing business segment. The early 20th century needed tall buildings to support expanding industrial and managerial demand in the narrow spaces of cities around the world. The early 21st century needs information architectures to support wikinomical markets and information resources that grow exponentially. The answer for today appears to be the NETWORK.

Our clients, friends, and colleagues see the power of networks, but they are not intimidated by them. We all realize that even the most powerful network emerges through massively entangled and iterative, one-to-one interaction. We recognize in ourselves and our communities the power to build and sustain networks that are both creative and resilient. Networks provide exactly the qualities that we need to reach our goals and improve our performance:

- Sustainability
- Variety and coherence
- Dissemination of innovation
- Shared resources and learning

Sustainability. A foundation client of HSD Institute had invested well in community capacity development, but its leadership wanted to encourage individuals and organizations to sustain themselves in the future. Rather than continuing to select and fund specific efforts, the foundation hoped to establish an ecology of interdependent agencies that would exchange value for value in relationships of shared learning and growth.

In response to this goal, a network was established that identified players, tracked their resources and needs, and supported open and enthusiastic communications. In fact, the effort began by recognizing and celebrating the fact that an underground network of support already existed. A project was established to make the shadow network explicit and to strengthen and extend its connections.

Variety and coherence. In April I wrote about the CAN DO Minnesota Network. It is a state-wide, informal organization of people who feel passion and responsibility to improve services and outcomes for people with disabilities. Concerned people came together into a network structure because traditional institutional solutions failed them. When a problem is simple, when differences are few, when one size fits all, then bureaucracy is a perfect solution. Unfortunately, that is not the situation for people with disabilities. They are not a homogeneous group. Each one has unique strengths and challenges, so each one needs a unique solution.

On the other hand, government is not equipped to provide customized support for every person who needs it. The CAN DO team saw a network as an innovative and effective solution.

They share a common goal, define their passions and responsibilities, and share information over the internet and in face-to-face Action Conferences. Individuals with resources and ideas meet individuals who have needs and offer opportunities. Each pair who find each other through the network establishes its own, unique way to respond to highly variable conditions. Still, as a whole, the CAN DO Network has an identity and an on-going focus for work.

Dissemination of innovation. People around the world engage in efforts to transform conflict into productive action. Each one comes to the work with personal and professional insights and expands their capacity through learning from every new encounter. If they worked in isolation, then each would re-create the wheel. Not only would they learn more slowly, they would burn out faster without connections to sympathetic others.

Werner Institute at Creighton University sponsored a conference on complexity and conflict in early June. They invited me to share basic principles of HSD as a way to bridge between conflict and complexity as well as between theory and practice. Over the three days, we observed a new

network emerging as scholar practitioners in HSD and conflict shared insights and opportunities. The organizers have established an on-line network to sustain the teaching/learning opportunities that were generated by our wonderful face-to-face networking opportunity. This network will help us continue to innovate and to disseminate innovations.

Shared resources and learning. The network of HSD Institute Associates supports shared learning and growth. With over 100 Associates, the Network includes multiple nodes of activity. Clusters of people come together around topics such as education, evaluation, project management. Other clusters form around projects such as developing training, preparing presentations, writing papers, or doing research. Still other groups take advantage of location to have regular face-to-face encounters. While each functional group is unique, they all provide opportunities to give and receive value. We also support on-line mechanisms for communication and connection.

The HSD Institute recognizes the power of networks in an economy and a culture that is driven by information. We've used that knowledge to develop a new website, which will launch on July 1, 2008. The purpose of the website is to support the network of people who are curious about or are committed to human systems dynamics. Our expectation is that the new website, with its new features, will support the sustainability of the research and practice of the field, will enhance both the variety and the coherence of our diverse constituencies, will help develop and disseminate innovation, and will continue to strengthen our community of shared resources and learning. Please join us on-line to explore the power of the HSD skyscraper of the 21st century.

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