The Fifth Paradigm

The fifth organizational pattern is a combination of the circle or council for collective clarity, the triangle or project team (hierarchy) for action and the square or bureaucracy for accountability, structure, and stability and the network for rapid sharing of information, inspiration and linking all the parts together.

At the center, always, is our purpose. Typically, a core team will gather in a circle around a purpose, which will be based on meeting a need that is felt in our life contexts. As we gather around the core purpose, we begin to form relationships with others in the circle that, as we map the connections, start to show up as a network. But while these relationships can help us all with our individual work, they do not necessarily allow us to manifests our shared purpose in the world, which will typically involve making things happen. The first step might be to develop actions to sustain the core team. So individual members take responsibility for different aspects – like organizing meetings or raising funds – other members step up in a support role and this leads to the formation of triangles. The triangles will be dictated by the central purpose. Hierarchy forms in response to central purpose – not somebody’s ego!

Once the core team is sustainable, the next step is typically to open up the conversation to the wider community that feels the need that informs the purpose at the centre of our circle. A triangle, from the core team, might then get together to call a larger-scale assembly, which might become a circle of supporters for the larger project. The inner circle is reaching out to the next level, which will in turn reach out to a wider community, creating concentric circles rippling out into our society, each circle connected to the others by triangles animating action informed by the core purpose.

The pattern of core purpose, circles, triangles and networks repeats again and again. Another typical finding is that as the core team goes out into the community and the conversation expands, the core purpose is informed by a broader perspective and is adjusted accordingly, to accommodate the next level of scale and action.

It is important to understand that what we are describing here is not a deliberately designed model, but the description of a pattern that has emerged naturally and spontaneously throughout the global hosting community as we have collectively developed our work of hosting in ever-larger and more complex adaptive systems.